



NORTHWEST PARENTS' CORNER

Winter 2006

*A quarterly newsletter of parenting tips,
reflections, and ideas*

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Teaching self-care

Throughout our lives we all face times of stress, loss, challenges, and uncertainty. We feel anxious when we are scared, when we don't get what we want, when we feel rejected, when we feel hurt, when we feel powerless. How we choose to handle those feelings is up to us. Unfortunately, many adults find comfort in unhealthy choices such as alcohol or drug abuse, over-eating, or over-spending. The media reinforces these negative forms of self gratification with ads suggesting that your anxiety will disappear with a simple purple pill, or that buying a fancy car will make you more sexy and attractive, or using a particular brand of alcohol or cigarettes will cause you to be surrounded with happy, smiling friends. Well-meaning parents inadvertently encourage unhealthy forms of self-comfort when a child is upset and they offer food as a reward, or a shopping trip to make up for a disappointment in the child's life. While it's fine to treat a child to something special, it shouldn't be used to avoid feelings and working through the problem.

The gift of positive time-out:

Beginning at a young age parents can train their children how to manage stress in positive ways by teaching them valuable life skills that will help get them through the toughest of times. Instead of making "time out" a punishment when a child is upset, offer it as an opportunity

to spend time alone doing something that will make him/her feel better. Suggest, "Why don't you go into your room and draw a picture (listen to music, read a book)? When you feel better we can talk and come up with solutions to the problem." Parent educator, Jane Nelsen says "Positive time-out teaches the valuable life skill of learning to take time to feel what you feel, and to calm down until you can behave in more constructive ways". Even when the problem can't be fixed, the time spent performing self-care is invaluable.

What makes your heart sing?

Everyone needs something special in his/her life that "makes their heart sing" - a talent, skill or passion. Help your child discover and develop a special activity that gives them joy and satisfaction. Perhaps your child loves music or art; writing stories or poetry; sewing, crafts, building models, organizing a collection. Knitting is a calming activity and is being used in conjunction with yoga for meditation and relaxation. Some people prefer more active ways to work through stress... skiing, running, swimming, taking a walk, caring for and playing with a beloved pet are all ways of taking a positive time-out, self-comforting, and building a stronger sense of self worth.





Virtual Addiction

On November 16th HYSB sponsored a community seminar with Dr. David Greenfield, a clinical psychologist and nationally recognized authority on Internet abuse and over-use. Parents and young people enjoyed his frank, sometimes humorous account of the technology in our lives that is, as he says, “here to stay.” With Internet use, email, computer gaming, “MySpace”, gambling, Instant Messaging, shopping and even “virtual” trading, Americans are developing a growing dependence on technology for news, communication, and entertainment.

When is it a problem?

Greenfield reports that like any drug, the internet can become habit-forming, even addictive. If your children’s Internet use (or your own) begins to interfere with other life functions in any way shape or form, (e.g., impacting school, work, family life, relationships, etc), it may be indicative of a larger problem. In addition, using the Internet as a means to regularly alter one’s mood, can also be a sign of a developing dependence.

It is important to note that it is not the actual time spent on-line that determines if someone has a problem, but rather how the time spent impacts your life. The question needs to be asked, what other activities is it taking you away from participating in?

Lost in cyber-space:

Dr. Greenfield noted how easily time is distorted online, where fifteen minutes quickly turns into a half hour or more. One site leads to another and before you know it you’ve been “lost on-line” for hours! The very unpredictability of the Internet is another strong attraction. Similar to the “rush” of using a slot machine, not knowing when it will “pay off” elevates the level of dopamine in the brain. You don’t know what you’re going to get, when, how much, etc.

Young people are attracted to the social networking and new form of instant communication that occur on-line.

With it comes an increased degree of impulsivity. People do and say things on-line that they wouldn’t normally do. Furthermore, the ever-changing screens and constant barrage of information raise the threshold for stimuli, making other activities (like math homework) pale by comparison!



How to manage it:

Dr. Greenfield reports that the only way to *deal with* computer use is to *manage it*. Again, Internet use is not inherently bad but it needs to be balanced along with other aspects of life and responsibilities. He cites a few simple rules to follow:

Know what your children are doing on-line – who they are talking to, what they are doing, what sites are they going to. Just as you would know their social circles and activities outside the house, the same applies for on-line interactions.

Familiarize yourself with the computer – the workings of it, etc. Kids

have adults beat when it comes to technology, but more knowledge is power in this case.

Have “electronic free days” and be firm about it.

Keep computers in family areas - you can't put computers in kids' bedrooms and expect to monitor their use.

Set time restrictions for use both in time allotment and time of day, reserving time for “unwinding” without electronic stimulation.

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that parents limit their kids' “screen time” - all electronics with screens - TV, videos, computers—to no more than two hours a day.

Hidden Dangers:

Dr. Greenfield was joined by his colleague, Michael Shelby a computer forensic expert who informed participants about some of the latest scams and dangers of Internet use, and how to avoid falling prey to these schemes. One scam originating overseas involves enticing kids to click onto a site to view a funny picture or joke,

which is harmless in itself, but what they don't know is that while they are viewing the picture, a keystroke recorder is being installed onto your home computer. So the kids sign off, and later on Mom and Dad sign on to do their online banking, all the

while their keystrokes are being copied onto a computer overseas, giving thieves access to their passwords and account information. The money is transferred out of the country and the culprits are



long gone before anyone even knows it has happened! The best protection against this clever scam is for parents to have a completely separate computer that kids are not allowed to use. Another protective measure is to download a virtual desktop and perform Internet work from that page, so that when you shut down for the night, unwanted invaders are not saved onto your actual computer!



Baby, it's cold outside!

And your family may be eligible for winter heating fuel assistance! Low income households may be eligible for help with the cost of heating fuel through the Connecticut Energy Assistance Program. For example, a family of four with a total household income less than \$53,591 and liquid assets less than \$10,000 for homeowners (\$7,000 for renters) may receive between \$200 and \$675 in fuel assistance. Contact the Social Services agent in your town for more information.



When Skittles Aren't Skittles

In November presenters from the Wheeler Clinic and Mountainside Treatment Center informed parents of the new wave of teen drug abuse... drugs found right in the medicine cabinet! An emerging category of substance abuse includes prescription meds when not taken as directed (for pain, anxiety, sleep disorders, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder) as well as over-the-counter medicines. Misuse or abuse can lead to physical dependence, overdose, and even death. For more information, please visit the CT Clearinghouse website:

www.ctclearinghouse.org or,
www.SAMHSA.gov

Upcoming programs from HYSB "Family Solutions"

All programs are free of charge. For further information on any of these programs please call HYSB at 824-4720.

An Afternoon of Relaxation -

A parent/child workshop to learn the art of self-care! Guided relaxation, yoga breathing & poses, and aromatherapy with Robin Gilbert, Kripalu-certified yoga instructor. For parents and their children age 12+. Sunday, January 21st, 3:00-5:00pm, at **Lakeville Town Grove Recreation Building**. Wear comfortable clothing and bring a mat, if you have one.

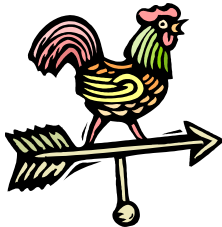


Understanding Adolescent Behavior -

A program for parents, teachers and others whose lives involve adolescent children. Discuss typical adolescent behaviors and expectations as compared to those that are of concern. Tuesday, January 9th, 7:00pm, at **Kent Center School**.

Who's Ruling Your Roost? -

A workshop for parents of children ages 2-7. Discussion will include, misbehavior and positive discipline, setting limits and holding to consequences, understanding temperaments, maintaining your long-term goals in the midst of crisis. Thursday, January 11, 6:30-8:00pm, at **Housatonic Day Care, Salisbury**.



"Hot Topics" -

A facilitated discussion group for parents. Share strategies, discover practical solutions to everyday problems, understand typical behaviors in child development, know when to be concerned. Thursdays, 6:30-8:00pm, at **North Canaan Elementary School**.

January 18th—*Misbehavior and Positive Discipline*

January 25th—*Taking Responsibility for Chores and Homework*

February 1st—*Family Communications*

February 8th—*Peer Pressure*



Positive Discipline for Prevention -

A five week course and discussion group for parents of children ages 2-12. Help children develop strengths and skills to resist negative influences. Wednesdays, 6:30-8:00pm, February 14, 21, 28, March 7, 14, at **Housatonic Valley Regional High School**. To register, call Foothills Adult Ed at 1-800-300-4781.

Housatonic Youth Service Bureau

P. O. Box 356, Falls Village, CT 06031

860-824-4720

- Crisis intervention & counseling
- Parent support
- Information & referrals
- Resource library
- Seminars & workshops
- Quarterly Newsletter
- Special events & guest speakers

Located next to H.V.R.H.S. in the Pupil Service Center. All services are free.

Consultations are confidential.

Appointments are flexible