

My Stress Is Making Me Anxious!

Managing Your Child's Stress, Anxiety and Self-Regulation

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Strong Adult-Child Relationships' Link to Academics:

- 1 year-olds less likely to cry, worry, or disrupt play with a stranger
- Toddlers are better problem solvers and are more sensitive to peers' needs
- Fewer behavior problems
- Greater initiative and self-control
- Higher cognitive development and greater sense of mastery
- Higher competency and better math scores in females
- Increased empathy, greater motivation, enhanced social development and self-esteem, less gender-stereotyped beliefs, stronger sexual identity and character

Self-Esteem

- Self-esteem is:
 - a learned attitude about ourselves and our self-worth
 - vital to the development of healthy individuals, and vital to the health of children and family
 - important to children AND adults; parents and teachers with high self-esteem tend to have children with high self-esteem (low self-esteem works the same way, too!)

Building and Nurturing Self-Esteem

- Regardless of where they are in their own sense of self, self-esteem is not a constant
- Learned since early childhood; later experiences in life may have increased a sense of self, yet other experiences may have chipped away at this sense of self
- It can be broken and regained at any time in life

Competence: Industry vs. Inferiority (Childhood, 7 to 11 years)

- Main Question: "Am I successful or worthless?"
- Children at this age are becoming more aware of themselves as individuals.
- They work hard at being responsible, being good, and doing it right.
- Critical for the development of self-confidence.
- If children are encouraged to make and do things and are then praised for their accomplishments, they begin to demonstrate industry by being diligent, persevering at tasks until completed, and putting work before pleasure.
- If children find they are incapable of meeting their parents/coaches/teachers expectations, they develop feelings of inferiority about their capabilities.

Fidelity: Identity vs. Role Confusion (Adolescents, 12 to 19 years)

- Main Question: "Who am I and where am I going?"
- The adolescent is newly concerned with how they appear to others.
- As they make the transition from childhood to adulthood, adolescents ponder the roles they will play in the adult world.
- Adolescents are confronted by the need to re-establish boundaries for themselves.

People With High Self-Esteem Demonstrate:

- Honesty
- Responsibility
- Compassion
- Love
- Trust
- Hope
- Self-confidence
- Integrity
- Helpfulness

***This is the type of child we want to have,
RIGHT?!?***

Behavioral Characteristics and Peer Acceptance

- “Socially acceptable” children tend to be described as:
 - Active, outgoing, alert, self-assured, helpful and friendly
 - Show interest in others, act in prosocial ways and are confident but not arrogant (Newcomb, Bukowski, Pattee, 1993)
- Unpopular children also have distinctive characteristics:
 - Socially isolated children are physically unenergetic, lethargic, or apathetic (maybe due to chronic illness, are psychologically introverted, timid, and withdrawn (shy, no self-confidence)
 - Children who are domineering and aggressively hostile are described by their peers and teachers as noisy, demanding, attention-seeking, rebellious, and arrogant (Taylor, Davis-Kean, & Malanchuk, 2007)

Mental health does not discriminate

The Role of the Hero Child

- “Overachiever”
- Earns high grades
- Very involved in extra curricular activities
- Seeks approval – very rarely, if ever gets in trouble
- Private (and perhaps unknown hope) is that they will be “good enough,” “smart enough,” and “responsible enough” to overcome various circumstances at home.

*We as adults – and often times *especially* as helpers may reflect and find that we identify with this archetype.

The Problem(s)

Stress → Anxiety → Exhaustion → Burnout →
Depression → Self Harm or Risky Behaviors

Rushed Child Syndrome

- Connection between the dramatic rise of anxiety and depression in children and adolescents with the decline in play and rise in schooling in a 2010 article for Psychology Today (Peter Gray, Ph.D. professor emeritus at Boston College and author of the widely used Psychology textbook)
- Increase in high school students cheating and lack of joy in learning due to the pressures they face (Deborah Stipek, dean of the School of Education at Stanford)
- Race to Nowhere, documentary in response to concern at seeing her 12-year-old daughter suffer panic attacks and a stress-induced illness in the face of non-stop academic pressure.

Signs of Being Overscheduled

- Child is:
 - Tired all the time
 - Irritable
 - Bored without a schedule or without TV/computer

Does this sound like the characteristics of the child with high self-esteem? Or the child with low self-esteem??

Psychological, Physical, and Financial Tolls

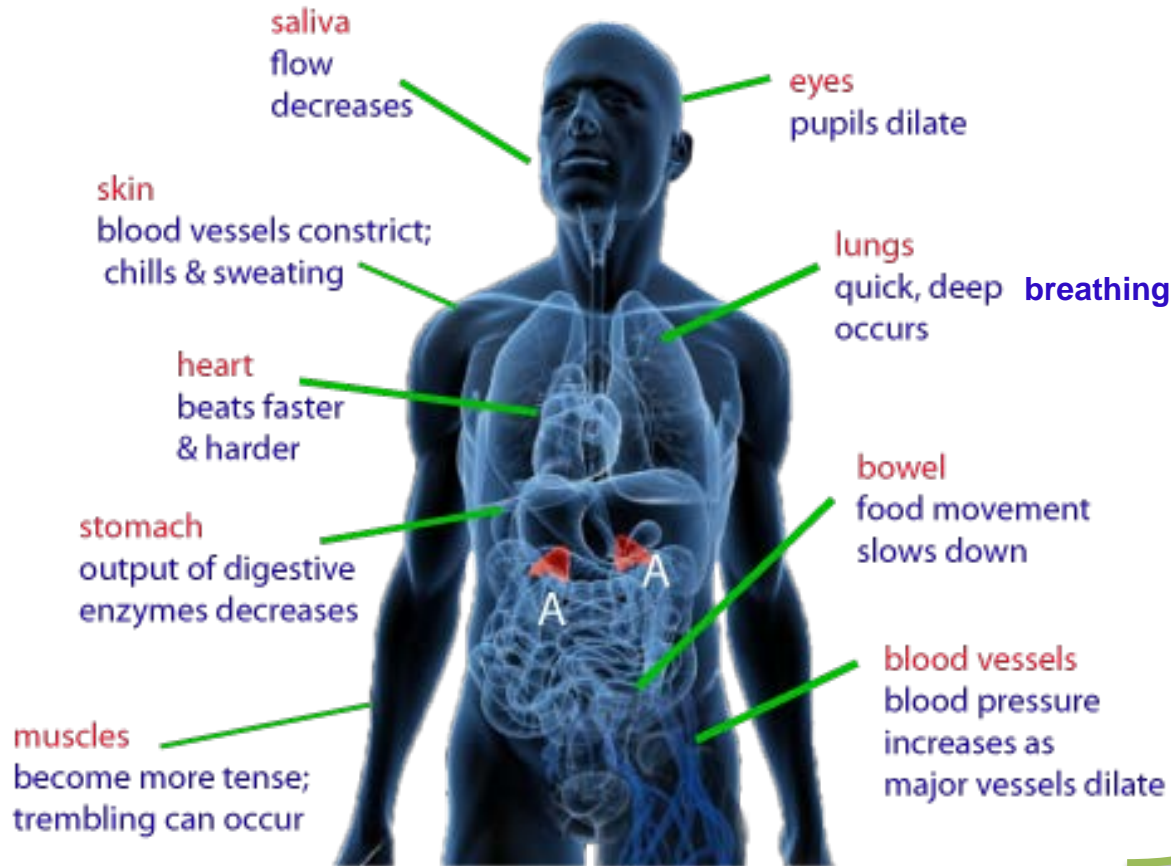


- Research shows that 75% of Americans say that they experience extreme stress at least one day a week on average.
- Stress takes a major toll on both psychological and physical well-being.
- People become moody and hostile, some depressed.
- Performance levels drop, focus deteriorates.
- Avoidance is common with highly stressed individuals.

American Institute of Stress

The Tremendous Toll of Stress on People's Health

Fight or Flight Response



- High blood pressure
- Infections and illness
- Weight gain
- Digestive problems
- Insomnia
- Skin conditions
- Asthma

Exhaustion



- The body has run out of the reserve of energy and immunity
- Mental, physical and emotional resources suffers
- The body experiences “adrenal exhaustion”
- **Exhaustion phase leads to burnout**
- Symptoms :
 - ✓ Overwhelming physical and emotional exhaustion
 - ✓ Feelings of detachment
 - ✓ Sense of ineffectiveness and lack of accomplishment
 - ✓ Over identification with work to the exclusion of other activities
 - ✓ Irritability and hyper-vigilance

Signs of Depression Specific to Children/Youth

- Students who are depressed may show other warning signs or symptoms:
 - lack of interest or motivation
 - poor concentration
 - low mental energy caused by depression
 - increased problems at school because of skipped classes
 - self-harming behaviors such as cutting or eating disorders

Harmful Reactions to A Child's Stress

- Some people don't really understand about stress and depression.
 - They may react to a depressed child's low energy with criticism, yelling at the person for acting lazy or not trying harder.
 - They mistakenly believe that depression is just an attitude or a mood that a child can shake off. It's not that easy.
- Although it's important to be supportive, trying to cheer up a student or reasoning with him or her probably won't work to help depression go away.
 - Depression can be so strong that it outweighs a child's ability to respond to reason.
- Sometimes even people who are depressed don't take their condition seriously enough.
 - Some children feel that they are weak in some way because they are depressed. This is wrong — and it can even be harmful if it causes a child to hide their depression and avoid getting help.

Neurobiology and Cortisol

- Early Stress of a child: less brain activity, lower cognitive performance
- More Stress: slower brain progression
- Chronic stress: fewer connections and cortisol hormones
- Cortisol hormones: released during stress response
 - Short bursts are ok (avoiding accidents)
 - Brain shouldn't be soaking in cortisol because it kills brain neurons

Neurobiology and Immune System

- Process:
 - Genes control cortisol response →
 - Stressed children can't control responses as easily →
 - Can affect immune systems →
 - Kids are sick more often
- *Genes that regulate cortisol response can be turned on/off depending on how caregivers' parent; AKA, this can be reversed when our environment changes!

Neurobiology and Oxytocin

- Oxytocin: “love” hormone (synthetic form is Pitocin)
 - Neglected children do not show oxytocin release during maternal contact
 - Children with low oxytocin tended to be anxious

Neurobiology and Abused Girls

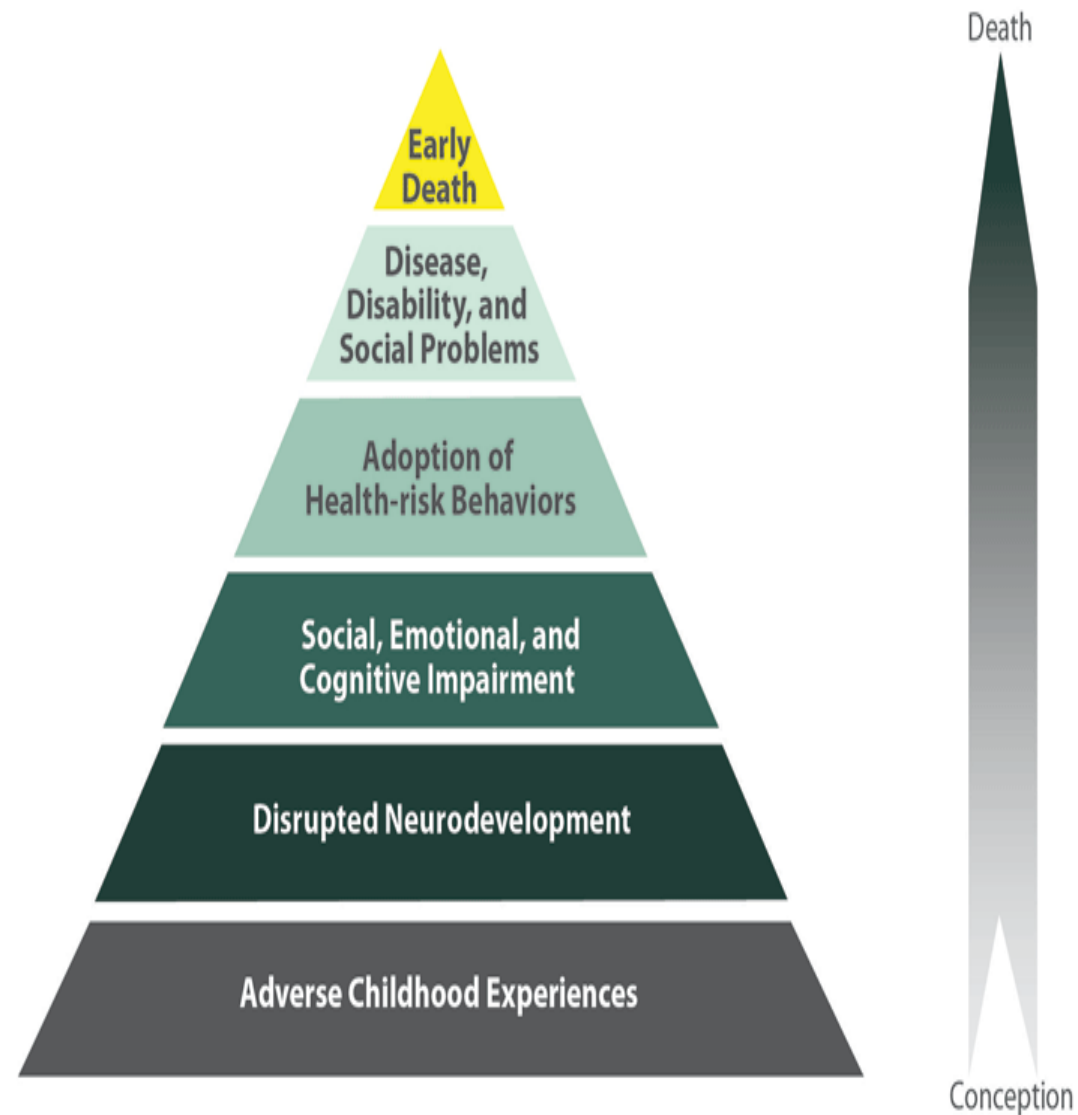
- Example: Abused girls
 - Cortisol didn't fluctuate
 - Oxytocin goes up when cortisol should
 - Could be explanation for high teen pregnancy (love hormone released when protective coping skills/cortisol should be instead)

STRESS & LEARNING

Trauma is stress (fight, flight, or freeze) "frozen in place."

It is being locked into a pattern of neurological distress that doesn't go away by returning to a state of equilibrium.

Trauma promotes ongoing disability.



Mechanism by Which Adverse Childhood Experiences Influence Health and Well-being Throughout the Lifespan

Can you “see” your child through a Trauma Lens?

Avoidant (Flight)

Withdrawing
Fleeing class
Daydreaming
Seeming to sleep
Avoiding others
Disengaged
Hiding/wandering

Disruptive (Fight)

Acting out
Aggressive
Acting silly
Defiance
Arguing
Hyperactive
Screaming/yelling

Disengaged (Freeze)

Numbness
Refusal to answer
Giving a blank look
Feeling unable to
move or act
Refusing to get
needs met

Stress

- Stressors—unavoidable external events that cause an emotional or physical reaction
- Stress—body's reaction to demand
 - **Distress:** bad kind of stress that floods us with pain and anxiety; when prolonged, it affects school performance, health, and personal relationships.
 - **Eustress:** good kind of stress that fills us with excitement and anticipation. It helps fuel our desire to achieve.
- All individuals have internal strengths
- Resources and support systems must be found to cope

The Solution(s)

One size doesn't fit all!!
(Even if they're your child!)

How Successful People Deal with Stress

- Successful people have **well-honed coping strategies** that they employ under stressful circumstances. This lowers their stress levels regardless of what's happening in their environment, ensuring that the stress they experience is intermittent and not prolonged.
 - The *University of Rochester Medical Center* study researching burnout found that a partial remedy lies in...
 - Engaging effectively with others by focusing on the present interaction.
 - Attending workshops to provide mindfulness, meditation, relaxation exercises, interpersonal communications and supportive talking circles.
- *These activities can help reduce stress and burnout while enhancing resiliency.**

Methods for Building and Maintaining Self-Esteem and Healthy Stress-Management

- Taking care of emotional, physical, social, and intellectual needs
- Establishing boundaries
- Setting realistic self-expectations
- Seeking out people who treat them with respect
- Becoming involved in activities and interests that provide successful experiences
- Taking time for personal reflection or down time
- Assume responsibility for thoughts and actions
- Respect personal rights
- Behave according to personal standards and values
- Affirming themselves (negative self-talk → positive self-talk)

Practical Parent Education (2006).

Helpful, Practical Take-Aways

- Create a safe place
- Become a safe person
- Understand support
- Relaxation techniques
- Stress management activities
- Identify emotions
- Change self talk
- Use assertive communication
- Process and plan
- Model boundaries
- Ask for help!

Recognize Your Role

- **Make an effort, Show an interest!**
 - People are better able to deal with tough circumstances when they have at least one person who believes in them, wants the best for them, and in whom they can confide.
- “I would ALWAYS ask my threat assessments and no harms if they can name an adult at their school that they feel like they can go to or talk to, that they trust. Some could do it and some could not.”

Create a Safe Place

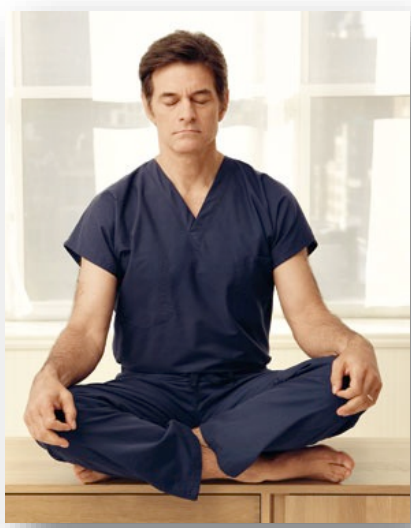
- Find a “safe place” that offers the child a specific timeframe and rules to have a “no judgement/shame free” place to communicate with you
 - “Colors corners” (like Inside Out)
 - “No judgement” quiet corner
 - Connect through specifically allotted day/time for one-on-one activity or play

Become a Safe Person

- Connect through activity or play
 - Be attentive and present when children are in my presence
 - If we aren't supposed to text and drive, why should we be distracted on our phones or computers while we are interacting with children?
 - Client story of that being the change for the abused child learning love
- Make brief statements and wait for a response
- Honor the need for “timed” silence
- Share your own experiences
- Convey admiration for the child/youth
- Look for pain behind aggression
- Let him know that “real men” do cry and talk about feelings
- Be quiet and *really* listen
- Understand that what works for you doesn't necessarily work for your child

Support for the Other Person's Needs, Not for Yours

- **Pursurers**
 - Seek togetherness when anxious
- **Underfunctioners**
 - Become less competent under stress
- **Overfunctioners**
 - Tend to take charge in tough times
- **Distancers**
 - Want emotional space when stress is high
- **Blamers**
 - Others responsible for problems



Relaxation Techniques

- Even if it is just a few minutes of time to yourself scattered throughout a busy day, you can use that as a respite to perform a simple deescalating technique called relaxation exercise.
- To do this, close your eyes and clear your mind.
 - Form a calming mental impression using all of your senses. Imagine not only walking on the beach but the sound of the ocean and the feel of the sand on your feet. Feel the cool breeze and breathe in the fresh salty smells. Breathe in deeply into your abdomen and say to yourself, “Breathe in relaxation.” Use each inhalation as a moment to become aware of any tension in your body. Breathe out from your abdomen and say to yourself, “Breathe out tension.” Use each exhalation as an opportunity to let go of tension.
- Promise yourself that you’ll go back to this mental place each day as you wake and as you fall asleep, and then anytime you need a calming break during the day.

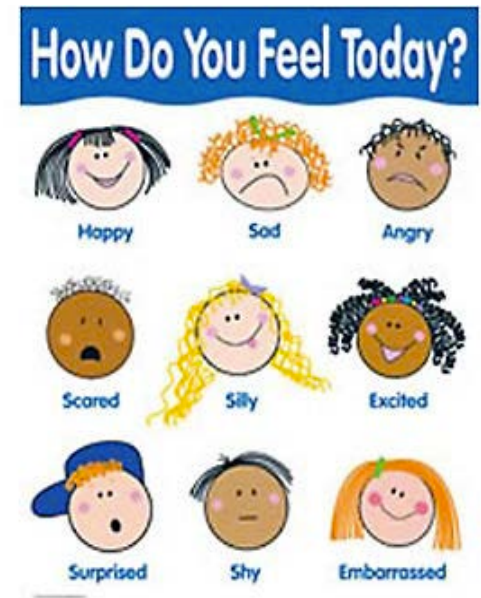
Stress Management Activities

- Glitter Jars
- Mermaid Pillow
- Water Painting
- Inside/Outside Mask



Understanding CORE Emotions

- We have lots of emotions that often times children (and adults) have trouble identifying
- Identifying an emotion helps to de-escalate the feeling and situation
- Identifying the CORE emotion gets to the heart of the problem and is important for the feeler AND the helper to solve the problem
 - What are the 3 core emotions?
 - How are they often displayed through behaviors?
 - How do males and females differ?



Negative Self Talk to Positive Self Talk

- I don't need to prove myself in this situation. I can stay calm.
- I can keep my cool.
- I'm the only person who can make me mad or keep me calm.
- Time to relax and slow things down. I can pause if I get uptight or start to notice my cues.
- My anger is a signal. I need to pause and relax.
- Nothing says I have to be confident and strong all the time. It's okay if I feel unsure or confused.
- It is impossible to control other people and situations. The only thing I can control is myself and how I express my feelings.
- It is okay to be uncertain and insecure sometimes. I don't need to be in control of everything and everybody.
- If people criticize me, I can survive that. Nothing says that I have to be perfect.
- If this person is angry, I don't need to respond by also getting angry.
- When I get into an argument, I know what to do. I can take a pause at any time.
- It's nice to have the other person's love and approval, but even without it, I can still accept and like myself.
- People are going to act the way they want to, not the way I want them to.

Assertive Communication

I-Statements

- Describe personal thoughts, feelings, or experiences in first person singular
 - Advantages:
 - not threatening
 - promote openness
 - focus on problems rather than personalities
- “I feel _____ when I am _____ and I would instead like to feel _____ which can be accomplished by _____.”

Process and Plan

- What is it you're wanting? Help me understand... I wonder what's going on...
- What are you doing? (Try to get child to describe the behavior) – I've noticed... your jaw is clenched, fists are closed, face is red, etc. It looks like you're feeling _____. (Let child confirm or correct)
- Is this helping or hurting? (Self-evaluation)
- What's your plan? (Give choices if child needs help) Some people have tried...

The Problem With PRAISE

Praise focuses on:

- perfection rather than progress and improvement.
- a right or wrong outcome rather than a meaningful experience.
- good or bad decisions rather than the decision-making process.
- pride or disappointment rather than acceptance and support.
- trains children to depend on constant feedback regarding what a “great job” they are doing.
 - shatters rather than builds a child’s self-esteem.
 - believe that what others think is more important than what they think about their choices, actions, accomplishments and mistakes
 - jeopardizes the child’s ability to develop their own internal compass to guide the decision-making process.
 - fractures the relationship between parent and child.
 - “I approve of you when you ... “
 - “I do not approve of you when you ... “

Instead, Use ENCOURAGEMENT

Encouragement focuses on:

- Creating a way to self-assess their lives, choices, attitudes, actions and behaviors, preferences and progress.
- Figuring out what is important to them, which will make it possible for them to create a satisfying and meaningful adult life.
- Spending less time asking the outside world to measure their worth as people.

Empowerment vs. Praise

- You worked hard!
- You deserve it!
- You are so proud of yourself!
- How do you feel about it?
- You figured it out for yourself!
- I trust your judgement!
- You can decide what's best!
- I have faith in you to learn from mistakes!
- I love you no matter what!
- Sounds like you have a plan!
- That's tough but I bet you figure it out!
- You really made a difference!
- You're determined to get that done!
- You worked really hard on that!
- Thanks, that was a big help!
- All A's! You get a big reward!
- I'm so proud of you!
- I'm glad you listened to me!
- I like what you did!
- You did it just like I told you!
- You are so pretty!
- You really know how to please me!
- Great! That's what I expected!
- Good job!
- You are such a good child!
- You did great!
- So pretty!
- I love that drawing!
- You are always on time!

Practice Boundaries

- Listen to what a child asks of me and allow them to create their own boundaries that are respected
 - I always ask my son if I can hug or kiss him. Sometimes he says no, but he also more readily asks for hugs when he's ready for them
 - I hope I'm instilling that he has a right to say no even to his own mother when he's not comfortable or ready and that boundary should be respected if he is truly loved
- Ensure children that they have the right to stand up for themselves and the responsibility to stand up for others who need their help
 - Become comfortable with being assertive and an advocate by practicing in a role play scenario so your child already has line rehearsed they know they can say.
 - Let your child create their solutions! (Taylor example)
 - *This means it's up to adults to model boundaries in our lives, also!

Methods for Caregiver Modeling

- Taking care of emotional, physical, social, and intellectual needs
- Establishing boundaries
- Setting realistic self-expectations
- Seeking out people who treat them with respect
- Becoming involved in activities and interests that provide successful experiences
- Assume responsibility for thoughts and actions
- Respect personal rights
- Behave according to personal standards and values
- Taking time for personal reflection or down time
- Affirming themselves

*We have the power to reclaim our lives at any time, and we have the responsibility as caregivers to nurture and maintain our boundaries for our children.

Communication Among Adults Is KEY!

- Sometimes teachers and counselors don't know if a behavior is different for a certain student so communication to a parent is very important to share what they see.
- The parent might say, “Oh, I know, he's always been that way.” Or “I had no idea, that is not like her!”
- Show your child that asking for help takes **STRENGTH**, not weakness, and **WE ALL DESERVE SUPPORT!**

Professional Treatment Modalities

- *Professional counseling should be sought immediately and appropriate therapeutic treatments should be used consistently when a child is showing signs of depression.*
- Registered Play Therapists: trained in understanding patterns in children's behaviors that are demonstrated through their play in a non-threatening, supportive environment
 - Child feels a sense of power in their environment, control over their choices and behaviors, and support in who they are as a person through the unconditional positive-regard given by the play therapist which ultimately allows for natural healing in the child
- Filial Therapy: specialized training for parents of younger children
 - allows a parent the ability to:
 - learn play therapy techniques to use at home to better understand their child's communication in play
 - comprehend the functionalities in their child's worldview
 - improve connection in significant dynamics such as parent-child communication, trust-building strategies, and boundary setting

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SMU Center for Family Counseling

SMU welcomes individuals of all ages to receive low- and no-cost clinical services in our state of the art counseling clinic. Our services are conducted by students in the Master of Counseling program and supervised by licensed faculty and staff of SMU. Clinical services offered to the community include individual therapy, couples therapy, family therapy, play therapy, group therapy, school counseling, career counseling, trainings, substance abuse screenings and evaluative reports, and supervised visitations.

Visit www.smu.edu/familycounseling for a full listing of our services and resources. To schedule an appointment, call **972-473-3456**.

SMU-Associated Clinic Locations in the Community:

- Center for Family Counseling (Plano)
- Resource Center of Dallas (Downtown Dallas)
- Student Opportunity Center of FISD (Frisco)

End-of-Training Thoughts

- What stands out to you as something you learned today?
- What was reinforced for you today that you already knew?
- What is one goal you plan to implement immediately into your life?
- How will you know if you are successful at implementing that goal?

THANK YOU!

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