

# Parenting Matters

Quarterly Newsletter

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For Colorado Parents

## TAKING THE STRESS OUT OF CHANGE

By Lloyd J. Thomas, Ph.D.

One of the truths about this world is that everything changes. The only dynamic that doesn't change is the process of change itself. Coping with change always increases our level of stress. The stress response is designed to aid us to cope with change, be it positive or negative change.

Some changes are predictable and allow us to adapt rather quickly and without much stress. Other changes just come at us unexpectedly and dramatically increase our stress response. Life altering changes are inevitable and normal. We know that there is a direct correlation between how we adapt to stress and our health.

In his book, "Finding Peace," Jean Vanier writes, "We can find the road to hope and peace in our world if we open ourselves to change ...and break down the walls around our hearts." Here are 15 simple but important tips for opening yourself to all the changes that inevitably occur. Perhaps some of these tips will help to open you to adapt to change and "break down the walls around" your heart. They might also help you restore a sense of calm and peace of mind.

1. Predict & plan for change when ever possible.
2. Address changes issues before they become overwhelming.
3. Write down and prioritize personal and work-related goals and tasks.
4. Be sure to take time for daily physical activity.
5. Do not skip meals, eat slowly while sitting and rarely (if ever) resort to eating "fast food."
6. Delegate household chores to other family members or hire someone to do them.
7. Take regular short breaks to practice abdominal breathing, muscular relaxation, or meditation.
8. Modify all negative thought patterns,

and silence your internal critical dialogue. We know that what you say to yourself makes a great difference in your stress level.

9. Accept that change is constant and inevitable. It is usually a sign of growth.

10. Learn to recognize the types of life changes that increase your stress level and what your specific stress "triggers" are.

11. Learn the warning signs of too much stress, (e.g. anxiety, disturbed sleep patterns, irritability or unexpected mood swings.

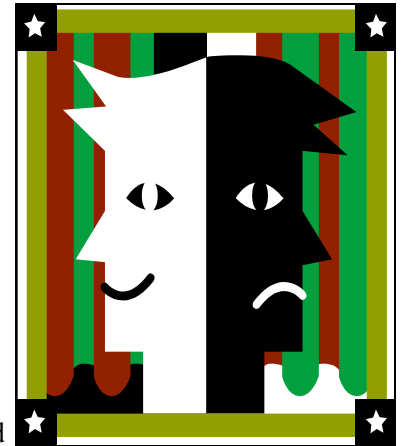
12. Develop and maintain a strong support system of family and friends you can turn to when major changes occur or your stress level becomes too high.

13. Identify and practice healthy strategies for dealing with the changes and stressors that you can influence/control.

14. Strengthen your "resilience skills," that help you cope well with changes that you regard as "hardship."

15. Be compassionate and patient with yourself. Treat yourself as you would a loved child. How well you deal with change/stress is not a reflection of your character.

You probably already have a large number of skills to manage your changes and your stress level. If you are still alive, you have already managed well the changes in your life before. It is also important to keep in mind that during times of great change and extreme stress or crisis, you need to consider getting professional help.



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## Parenting Matters

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PARENTING MATTERS, PREVENTION WORKS

## Being Physically Active as a Family

By Karl Tandberg, B.S.

Children today are less fit than previous generations. When children are not doing enough physical activities they have problems with weight and high cholesterol which can lead to serious heart problems. It is not very likely that a child will suffer a heart attack or a stroke, but we have to start taking care of our bodies as a child to prevent heart problems in the future. The same situation exists for all ages. We need to start taking better care of our bodies (American Heart Association). The following are benefits to physical activity:



- Keeps weight under control
- Improves blood cholesterol levels
- Prevents and manages high blood pressure
- Prevents bone loss
- Boosts energy level
- Helps manage stress
- Releases tension
- Improves the ability to fall asleep quickly and sleep well
- Improves self-image
- Counters anxiety and depression and increases enthusiasm and optimism
- Provides a way to share an activity with family and friends” (American Heart Association)

Parents have a great responsibility for their own health and for their children’s health. Your behavior, attitude and the opportunities you give your children will have an influence on their present and future health. Here are some tips to get you started:

- Be a good example. When your child sees you exercising or doing physical activities they are more likely to do them also.
- Limit how much time your children spend watching TV and movies, playing videos and computer games. Two hours a day is enough. The rest of the day should be spent doing something active.
- Use family together time to do a physical activity. For example, go on a hike, go swimming, go on a bike ride, or play a game such as soccer.

- Get your children involved in work around the house that requires them to be physical: mowing the lawn, raking leaves, taking out the garbage, etc.
- If you can afford it, get your children involved in local sport teams or get them lessons.
- If you need to go somewhere that is close and it is safe, walk or ride bikes.
- Give birthday or other gifts that encourage physical activity. For example, buy your child a jump rope, baseball and glove, or a membership to YMCA. You can find good deals on fun activities for your children and family at yard sales and thrift stores.
- Allow infants to move around whenever possible. Do not leave them pinned up in strollers, car seats, and playpens all day. (American Heart Association)



By following some of these simple tips, you can help yourself and your family become more physically active. Physical activity is a great way to relieve the everyday stress felt in families. As you improve your self-image, relieve stress and tension, improve your health and increase enthusiasm and optimism in your life with physical activity, your relationships with your spouse and with your children will improve. The time you spend together as a family doing physical activity will also provide ways to bond with your children and have some cheap family fun. Spend some time with your family and feel healthier too!



# Helping Your Teen Choose a Career Path

By Chryste Weitzel M.Ed

Parents can play a significant role in helping their teens make informed decisions about their future. This begins with encouraging your teen to begin early in seeking out possible careers and to explore all options (there are more than 20,000 existing occupations!).

- Have your teen start with the question “Who am I?” and “What do I enjoy?” instead of “What should I do with the rest of my life?”
- Discuss interests, strengths and weaknesses. Look for patterns in hobbies, volunteer work, extracurricular activities and academic interests. Talk to your high school guidance counselor, career counselor, employment center, library, or college admissions office to find assessments that measure values, interests, skills and personality. Most of these assessments will identify occupations and careers that are compatible. Have your teen go through the lists of possible careers and start to create a list of what occupations sound interesting to them.
- Remind your teen to be aware of what is going on around them during the day. If they see something that looks interesting to them, ask the questions: What are people doing? Would this type of work interest me? How did they get there? What education (if any) is necessary? What is their day like? ....continue to add to the occupation list.
- Help your teen research online, read books (yellow pages of the phonebook!), and find videos or programs about careers and explore different positions that are available within a given field of interest. Research the future job outlook for careers in these areas; is this a growing and expanding field? what do the salaries look like? will there be job opportunities in this area in the future? is this an area that is declining?
- Once your teen has focused on several areas, contact people in those areas and set up informational interviews, explore multiple options. Seeing and interviewing someone at work in an occupation in a real life work setting can help your teen imagine

themselves in the same position and help them assess whether this is something they would really like to do.

(Check out [http://www.quintcareers.com/information\\_interview.html](http://www.quintcareers.com/information_interview.html) for questions for an informational interview).

- Encourage your teen to look for part-time jobs in the field, internships or volunteer work so they can get more hands-on, behind-the-scenes experience to see what is really involved in working in that field.
- Determine what kind of training or education is required for entry into chosen fields and begin to discuss employment, college or trade schools.
- If your teen decides to go to a four year college remember that most schools don't even require students to choose a major until the start of the third year. The first two years are intended as a time of exploration, when students are encouraged to try different things and see what interests them most.

### Great websites to visit:

You can look up the training, earnings and career prospects of hundreds of different jobs in the U.S. Department of Labor Statistics' along with a description of what these workers do every day: <http://www.bls.gov/oco/home.htm> or <http://online.onetcenter.org/>

<http://mappingyourfuture.org/planyourcareer/careership/> is a free career exploration guide for middle school and high school students.



## Job Loss Affects Children, Too

By Trisha Gedon, Oklahoma State University

Losing a job or steady income can seriously affect the adult who is no longer working. However, job loss affects everyone in the household. Sometimes grownups become so preoccupied with their job loss they forget that these tough times have an emotional and financial impact on their children as well, said Debbie Richardson, Oklahoma State University Cooperative Extension Service parenting assistant specialist. "Unemployment is undeniably stressful for adults, but it can be downright scary for children," Richardson said. "Children depend on their parents for emotional security. When parents are tense, upset and inattentive, much of this feeling of security is gone. Communication is key when it comes to telling your children about your job situation and how it's going to affect them."

The following are some tips that will assist parents in helping their children:

- You can help your children best by helping yourself first. Try to get a handle on your own stress.
- Provide your children with information about the family's situation in a way that is age appropriate. Do not keep the income loss a secret from children, despite the urge to spare them.
- Recognize symptoms of stress that may affect your children, including sleeplessness, diarrhea, withdrawal, headaches or angry outbursts. Parents who do not feel they are effective in helping their children are encouraged to talk to the children's teachers, school psychologist, clergy member or mental health professional.
- Eat balanced meals, get adequate rest and plenty of exercise to guard against health problems.
- Try to keep other major changes at a minimum. Too many changes at once can be overwhelming. However, some changes, such as a move, may be unavoidable.
- Help your children focus on the positive aspects of their lives.
- Hold a family discussion on how the income loss affects available money for extra activities and allowances. Discuss how each person will help control family spending. Spend time together as a family doing low-cost or no-cost activities.



## CFERT RESOURCE LIBRARY

The CFERT Resource Library offers books, curricula, videos, pamphlets, brochures, and PIP Tips. To access resources, go to: <http://cfert.colostate.edu>, or contact: Chryste Weitzel (970) 491-3904 [chryste.weitzel@colostate.edu](mailto:chryste.weitzel@colostate.edu)

New Library Resource Review:

This Emotional Life (PBS DVD)

Hosted by Dr. Daniel Gilbert

This three-part series explores ways to improve social relationships, learn to cope with depression and anxiety and become more positive, resilient individuals. The series host, Harvard psychologist and best-selling author of *Stumbling on Happiness*, Professor Daniel Gilbert, talks with experts about the latest science on what makes us "tick" and how we can find support for the emotional issues we all face.

Each episode weaves the compelling personal stories of ordinary people and the latest scientific research, along with revealing comments from celebrities such as Chevy Chase, Larry David, Alanis Morissette, Robert Kennedy Jr. and Richard Gere.

Professor Gilbert, whose research examines why people so often mispredict what will make them happy, says, "Science has revealed three important facts about happiness: You can't be happy alone; you can't be happy all the time; you can be happier than you are. Our three shows examine each of these three facts."