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HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS
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Whether you're 22 or 92, most people recall adolescence as an adventure. From changing hormones to homerooms and every conceivable emotion in between, teen years are inevitably unique. With developing bodies and increasing media pressures, it's not surprising when many teens feel unsure of themselves. Yet despite a higher desire for peer opinions, your level of influence with your adolescent is still critical.

Self-image is something we take with us throughout our entire lives. As we mature mentally and emotionally, we develop a more complex and sophisticated self-image, including our interests, talents, relationships, uniqueness, dreams, and values. However, during the early teen years, the image in the mirror can comprise the bulk of our self-image.

DO LOOKS MATTER?

Truth: Appearance isn't everything. However, feeling satisfied with our looks does matter. Adults might become easily frustrated by a pre-teen's sudden interest in their looks. It's difficult to balance the tightrope between feeling confident in our appearance while not becoming overly concerned with the superficial. It's helpful to remember that pre-teens and teens are adapting to an ongoing new reflection in the mirror. They're experimenting with hairstyles, fashion choices, and makeup to learn how they

feel about this new self. All teens are looking for a way to belong, whether that means blending in or standing out.

SELF-IMAGE SOLUTIONS

Parents and adults can offer support, acceptance, and encouragement during the adolescent years. Send the right message with these helpful tips.

- **Compliment** - Attraction is more than surface deep. Be sure to encourage your teen's physical appearance, such as: "That color looks great on you" or "Your eyes brighten up your whole look." Remember to balance these simple statements with compliments regarding their character strengths, too. Acknowledging these traits help promote a healthy self-image.
- **Navigate** - Appearance matters not just to ourselves but others as well. Consider dialoguing with your teen about the message that certain styles might convey to others.
- **Model** - Most importantly, a healthy body image is caught more than taught. How you view yourself sets the tone for your teen. Do you model positive self-talk? Do they catch you looking degradingly at your aging, changing body? Instead of focusing on what you don't like about yourself, celebrate what your body can do. Continue developing the character traits you want to grow in yourself.





STAYING FIT

What's In Your Food?

Nowadays, going to the grocery store makes buying whatever we want to eat simple and fast. With our busy schedules, many of us opt for quick alternatives and stock up on prepared foods. Unfortunately, the less involved we are with making our food, the less we know about what is going into our bodies. Just read the ingredients list on some of your favorite products and you might find yourself wondering, "What is that?"

SNEAKY ADDITIONS

Food additives include anything that is added into food. Some are directly and intentionally added, such as Xanthan Gum and Sodium Nitrite. Occasionally, there might be others that are indirectly added, including trace amounts of items from processing or storage. The goal of additives might be to increase shelf-life, to improve texture and appearance, or to enhance nutritional amounts in a given food.

Additives range from extra salt and sugar to chemically based color enhancers.

INGREDIENT PARANOIA

There are many benefits to the advanced food technology that we currently have. It might not be helpful to become obsessed with knowing every ingredient in your food, but it can be helpful to take time to monitor what you are buying. If you need to cut down on sugar or salt, or want to become more involved with making your own food, the following suggestions can be a good start:

- **Add Your Own** - Buying plain might seem boring, but it gives you the control to flavor it as you want. Add your own local honey to plain yogurt or measure your own salt to add to your plain popcorn. You can even buy plain cereal and make it more exciting and nutritious by adding fruit.

- **Make Your Own** - Condiments seem to have a long shelf life, which sometimes can mean there are lots of ingredients in there that you do not need. Try making your own salad dressing or using fresh herbs to flavor up a meal.

- **Grow Your Own** - Why not try planting a few vegetables, fruits or herb plants? If you do not have space in your yard, look for community gardens or go to Farmer's Markets where you can speak to the person who grows/makes the product directly.

The most important thing is to familiarize yourself with ingredients in your favorite foods and know which ones you are ok eating and feeding your family. Health is in your hands!



THINKING WELL

Grasping Addictive Behaviors



"This is your brain. This is your brain on drugs. Any questions?" If you're over age 35, odds are you can still hear the sizzling eggs in that commercial. The "Just Say No" campaign brought substance abuse awareness to America's doorstep. However, sometimes addictive behavior is less evident. A person could become addicted, controlled, or compulsively obsessed by many things. Obvious addictions to drug and alcohol use might be easier to spot. However, there are similar addictive behaviors associated with gambling, exercise, entertainment, work, sex, mobile devices, social media, and eating.

THE FACE OF ADDICTION

What exactly are addictive behaviors? When an activity, substance, object, or behavior becomes the major focus of a person's life, to the exclusion of good self-care activities, one is walking the path of addiction. Any practice that physically, mentally, or socially harms the individual or others is classified as addictive behavior. Individuals controlled by addiction will often: hide their behavior, experience relational tension, exhibit drastic physical changes, and feel out of control while on or near their particular "drug of choice."

THE HARDWARE FACTS

A common misconception is that addiction

is merely a matter of will-power. "I can stop whenever I want," is a frequent mindset. Yet the truth is that addiction actually changes and hardwires your brain.

Dopamine is the neurotransmitter in your brain acting as the pleasure and reward messenger. Addictive behaviors mimic this neurotransmitter, fooling the brain into having more dopamine. This creates the "high" feeling people experience. Other situational factors contribute to the learning and reinforcing of certain choices that is hard to break. Over time, the brain is overworked, requiring more stimulation to reach the same level of pleasure.

GOOD NEWS

While it's true that addictive behavior does alter your brain, there is hope. Addiction is treatable. A combination of counseling, lifestyle changes, and/or medication are tools used to find freedom from addiction. If you or someone you know are showing signs of addictive behaviors, take a courageous step today to seek help from a mental health professional, medical doctor, or religious leader. Addiction may be one chapter in your story, but with successful management, you can write a whole new ending.



COUNTY FOCUS

A Personal Note From Helen Dolan



Greetings, all! This will be the last County Focus article that I will write for EAP Sentry. After 26 years with the County of Santa Clara as a Marriage and Family Therapist and the Manager of the Employee Assistance Program, I will be retiring soon. The end of August 2017 will be my last day at the EAP office. Know that EAP services will continue to be provided by our excellent staff. Consider this my Retirement Thank you note.

Privilege is a word often associated with public service and I understand that now. It's exactly how I feel. I feel privileged to have worked with thousands of County employees and family members often in your most difficult times. You have allowed me in to your private lives when you struggled with a death or loss; faced a painful divorce; worried, worried, worried about your children's welfare; struggled with an impaired employee; faced conflict or job stress; battled alcoholism/addiction; crumbled beneath the weight of depression; coped with unwelcome medical news; or just felt alone, different or apart. I remember you and your stories and I thank you for allowing me to help.

I have worked hard - sometimes successfully, sometimes not (you know who you are!) - to walk with you through those difficult times. Sometimes my job was to help you have a difficult conversation; sometimes to normalize your experience; sometimes to empathize with your pain and explore healing options; sometimes to help you think; sometimes to help you feel. Sometimes, I just listened. Always, I tried to understand you and walk with you through your hard times. We say at EAP "Don't Go Through It Alone" for good reason. Life is

easier when we connect with others.

Now, just so you know that this counseling relationship swings both ways, I have learned so much from all of you. Your courage, creativity, resilience and humor in the face of pain inspired me especially during my own difficult personal times. You reached out for help during your difficult times and so did I. Thank you for helping me be a better person. I will take some of all of you with me in my heart as I move on. I'm a work in progress. Then again, aren't we all?

I teach a class at the County called "Retirement. Ready or Not?" I'm about to find out if I can practice what I preach! Here's a checklist:

Ready to retire? Yes, gulp.

Sad to say goodbye to EAP Staff, friends, colleagues, Steering Committee members and especially beloved clients? Yes.

Grateful for CalPers, Deferred Compensation and Health Insurance provided by sustained efforts of County organized labor and management? Yes.

Relieved to soon sleep in and lose the

commute? Yes.

Anxious that my future will be purposeful? Yes.

We say at EAP "Don't Go Through It Alone" for good reason. Life is easier when we connect with others.

Hopeful that my career has been of service to others? Yes.

Ready to welcome the next chapter of my life filled, I hope, with more time with my precious family and friends, travel, reading, the performing arts, walking and, did I mention, sleeping in! YES!

I'd welcome your "Happy Retirement" wishes at helen.dolan@hhs.sccgov.org

The County of Santa Clara's Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is a labor-management sponsored, confidential, professional resource that provides counseling, assessment and referral services to County employees and their families who want help in solving personal and/or work-related problems.

When people are suffering from problems, it is easy to lose perspective. Life may seem confused and difficult for a time. Work performance may be negatively affected. If you have any questions or to schedule a counseling appointment, please call EAP at (408) 241-7772.



COACH APPROACH Locus of Control

Who or what controls your life? Mention the term “locus of control,” and you might get some strange looks. Simply put, one’s locus of control is the amount of power they perceive having over their life events. Someone with an internal locus of control believes they can influence and change their outcome, while an external locus of control finds outside forces - such as a God, fate, the government, or employers - responsible.

DOES THIS MATTER?

You might be curious if all this locus talk is legit. Studies have found that people with a higher internal locus of control made healthier choices that correlated with a better mental and physical quality of life. These people tended to take more responsibility and action around eating a balanced diet, exercising regularly, and avoiding unhealthy choices. On the other

hand, those individuals who believed they had little to no control over life, experienced higher rates of addictive behaviors, depression/anxiety, and ate a poor diet.

DEVELOPING AN INTERNAL LOCUS OF CONTROL

A core value of a responsible person is taking proactive steps in their life. Learning the art of a strong internal locus of control is possible. Consider these tips to begin taking control of your life.

- **Perspective** - What do you focus on? Let’s face it – We can’t control everything, whether it is the economy, weather, or what people think of us. Instead, shift your thinking to focus on what you can control. Be proactive in things like: what you read, your skillset, your diet, sleep schedule, financial priorities, and how you treat others.

- **Commitments** - Be mindful to honor your word, both to yourself and others. When you notice a mistake, own it. Don’t assign blame or make excuses. Practice accepting responsibility for your actions, feelings, choices, and circumstances.

- **Verbiage** - Words matter. Pay attention to victim vocabulary, such as: “I can’t,” “This always happens,” and “If only.” Try replacing these with empowering statements, like: “I can,” “I will,” or “I’m working toward.”

Remember, no matter the circumstance, one always has a choice. Even if you cannot control a situation, you get to determine how you’ll handle it. That small realization is a powerful step to establishing a strong, internal locus of control and the lifestyle you desire.



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