



Volunteer Emergency Families for Children

NORTHERN VALLEY REGION

Family Newsletter

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Notice to Parents

Medical Care: When you have a child with medical issues, here are three points to keep in mind:

First, call DSS if you feel the child needs medical care. DSS will arrange, or ask you to arrange, for an appointment with the physician they designate. We cannot take the children to our own physicians without prior approval. Of course, if it is an emergency, take the child to the emergency room and notify the DSS caseworker or worker on call **as soon as possible**.

Second, If the child has been prescribed a medication and you notice an adverse reaction, please **first** call DSS before stopping the medication so that they may consult with the child's doctor. Changing dosage or stopping prescribed medication without a physician's approval could become a liability issue for both you and DSS.

Third, no matter the children's ages, always dispense their medication for them rather than having them do it. Some years ago, we had a teen in another area who was permitted to handle her own meds and who overdosed on her antidepressant. She ended up being all right but, rather than going through an incident like this, take charge of all medications of children in your care. If an older child will not cooperate with your dispensing the medication, call your social worker.

In-Service Training: *Internet Crimes Against Children Awareness*

Bridget Diehl will hold a DSS in-service training session to which VEFC parents are invited. The topic is "Internet Crimes Against Children Awareness" which will be presented by John Chapman.

The training will be held at **Perkins Restaurant** on **October 23** from **6:00 to 9:00 pm**.

Reservations are necessary. RSVP to Bridget Diehl at 955-5172 by October 15.

Parenting with Boundaries

by Stephanie Tracy, LCSW

It takes all the creativity, courage and patience that a parent has to set and enforce boundaries. With teens, who are dealing with peer pressure, the struggle for identity and independence, and surging hormones, the task is especially difficult. How much freedom and autonomy to grant and which issues are worthwhile are constant challenges. When the teens are in your care for a short time, this is even more difficult.

The journey of the teen in your care continues after he or she has left your home. Failure is, in part, unavoidable, but challenges sweeten success. No one can know how the balance of success and failure measures out until the journey is complete. As a foster parent, you are part of the teen's journey through life. As long as the journey continues, there is hope. There is no way to smooth all the bumps, anticipate all the challenges, or detonate all the land mines beforehand. However, there are aspects of the journey that appear to be universal.

Demonstrating respect for the teen and setting firm boundaries may directly or indirectly deter criminal activity, illegal drug and alcohol use, negative peer pressure, delinquency, sexual promiscuity, and low self-esteem. Three major areas that are crucial to the parent-teen relationship are *connection*, *monitoring*, and *psychological autonomy*.

Connection: If the parent-teen connection is consistent, positive, and characterized by warmth and kindness, stability is more likely. Teens with positive relationships with the adults in their life struggle less with depression and have higher self-esteem. Relationships characterized by kindness are important to produce a healthy teenager. You know that teens in foster care most likely have not had the experience of a positive and warm connection to a parent. However, the short time that the teen is in your home may begin this process.

Monitoring: The monitoring process is crucial to successful parenting. Teens whose parents know who their friends are and what they do in their free time are less likely to get into trouble than

their peers. In the context of a warm, kind relationship, parental monitoring of teen activities comes across as caring rather than intrusive.

Psychological Autonomy: Encouraging the development of psychological autonomy in a teenager is the third area that is important. Psychological autonomy is nurtured when parents genuinely respect the teen's ideas (even when the ideas are contrary to their own), encourage the expression of original ideas and beliefs, and validate feelings. The opposite of psychological autonomy is psychological control. This is characterized by changing the subject, making personal attacks, withdrawing love, or inducing guilt to inhibit intellectual and emotional expression by the teen that is not the same as the parent's way of thinking. Teens who report that their parents are likely to use techniques associated with psychological control are more apt to struggle with depression and to exhibit anti-social behavior.

The combination of connection, monitoring, and psychological autonomy may sound simple, but directions can be frustrating to navigators when they are lost. Translating general ideas into specific behaviors and then into patterns of interaction can be a challenge. If the teen is already entrenched in less productive patterns of interaction, the task of establishing a positive relationship characterized by kindness with a teenager whose favorite phrases are "you just don't understand" and "leave me alone" can be daunting. While it is true that one of the main developmental tasks of adolescence is to separate from parents, there is still no substitute for the parent-teen relationship.

Some activities that can help to foster these three areas of the parent-teen relationship are:

- 1) Engaging in recreational activities with teenagers is a way to connect regularly in a pleasant setting. Spending leisure time together also gives parents a window on the monitoring process. It cuts down on the amount of free time kids spend without supervision, and discussions about friends and other activities tend to come up easily.

Parenting with Boundaries (continued)

2) The monitoring process is difficult in that it is a delicate balance between too much and too little, and it requires the energy to set firm limits when it would just be easier to let things slide. It requires continued vigilance on the part of parents to ensure that they know where children are and what they are doing. It also requires that parents enforce consequences when family rules are broken. Although discipline is genuinely unpleasant for all involved, attention to monitoring activities and providing consequences for inappropriate behavior on a daily basis will alleviate major heartache later.

3) Family rules and boundaries can provide a sense of stability to teens who are struggling to decipher relationships, roles, and even their own personalities. Parents should remember that the goal of teens—"independence or bust"—keeps them from admitting that having parents set firm boundaries is actually reassuring. Having something steady, firm, and predictable in a head-spinning world is like being handed a map with NORTH plainly marked. Clear boundaries and standards are the gauge by which all other information is measured.

Some of the difficulty of enforcing rules can be eliminated by engaging teens in the process of setting the rules and assigning consequences before the rules are broken. The temptation to react emotionally when the rules are broken is alleviated, since it is by the authority of the family, not the authority of the parents, that the rules were established. Helping to set the rules may not dissuade teenagers from breaking them sometimes, but it can help parents to avoid a power struggle with their teenagers.

Another problem in parent-teen relationships is the confusion of psychological control, the opposite of psychological autonomy, with discipline. Demanding a certain level of behavior of children does not exclude allowing, or even encouraging, them to think and express opinions different from one's own. Too many parents get caught up in focusing on controlling the teen. They believe that controlling the way their teenager thinks will translate into controlling what he does. By using guilt, withdrawing love, or invalidating feelings or beliefs, the parent

hopes to make the teen see things the parent's way, ensuring compliance with parental expectations.

Interestingly, boys are more likely to report that their parents squelch their psychological autonomy than are girls. Whether this is a difference in the way parents actually relate to teenage boys versus teenage girls or whether it is a difference in perception of boys versus girls is unclear. When a teen has a problem with delinquency, parents tend to respond to it with more psychological control as time goes by. This appears to set up a vicious cycle, as teenagers respond to both lack of monitoring and the presence of psychological control by acting out, or becoming more delinquent. If parents can break this cycle by treating delinquent behavior with increased monitoring rather than attempting to control it by inducing guilt, withdrawing love, or other means of psychological control, teenagers are more likely to respond with better behavior.

Parents would do well to concentrate on a three-pronged approach to managing the journey. First, a positive relationship with the teen is essential to success. When parent-teen interactions are characterized by warmth, kindness, consistency, and respect, the teen will evidence self-esteem and improved mental health. Second, being genuinely interested in activities allows parents to monitor behavior, which is crucial in keeping teens out of trouble. Parents who set firm boundaries and high expectations may find that their children's abilities to live up to those expectations grow. Third, parents who encourage thought and expression may find that they are raising teens that have a healthy sense of self and an enhanced ability to resist peer pressure.

Parents who give teens time, boundaries, and encouragement to think for themselves may find that they actually enjoy the adventure through adolescence.

Some VEFC Stories

All names in these stories have been changed.

Lynn and the Browns: Lynn was placed with VEFC parents the Browns because of “failure to thrive”: At two months old, she weighed only eight pounds. The Browns, a retired couple, lovingly attended to this tiny girl. Lynn gained two pounds in her first week and delighted everyone with her big smiles!

Lynn stayed with the Browns for 18 days, until a long-term foster family could be found.

Jimmy and the Blacks: Social workers were concerned that Jimmy was receiving inadequate supervision with his family during the summer. They placed him in a respite home for a week to give them time to help the family come up with options.

Jimmy was not an easy placement. The Blacks said that they had been warned by the social worker that he “would be in your face” and, while he did not violate their personal space in that way, his social skills were poor. He was not used to being disciplined. They gave him a time out, which caused major complaints on his part. He was fine, though, once the time-out was over.

Jimmy talked constantly and loudly and lied frequently. He would say “no” when told what he should do and, in many ways, seemed like a toddler in his emotional and social development. He was sneaky: He would behave okay when watched but, when the family was out of the room, he would do the very thing he had been told not to do. The Blacks had to be careful to watch him around their puppies because he was not gentle with them. He did not click particularly well with the Black children, although they were gracious about accepting him into their home.

Mr. Black spent a large part of his days off one-on-one with Jimmy, but he never felt that he could relax with him. Near the end of the week, Jimmy said that he was ready to go home, but he also said, “I am going to tell my parents that I had fun.”

The Blacks said they were reminded that hosting VEFC children is not always easy and that the experiences the kids go through can cause behaviors that are difficult to work with. They thought about the question they frequently get, “How can you let the children go?” and knew that, in this case at least, it wasn’t at all hard to see Jimmy go home! It was rather a relief from his unending loud chatter and the need to constantly supervise him. Mrs. Black emphasized that he was not a “bad” kid, but a tiring one. They thought again about how important it is to be part of VEFC and to help children whose needs are great. They thought about the idea that “when we were serving and helping Jimmy, we were serving Jesus.”

Jane with the Smiths: Jane’s mom is a stripper and her dad is on the run from the law with a warrant out for his arrest. Jane has been sexually abused by her mom’s boyfriends. Jane said to Mrs. Smith, her VEFC parent, “My mom will always put the guy first,” and has a great deal of anger toward her mother. Her mother once moved to Colorado so that they could avoid DSS involvement.

Jane is now pregnant by a 24-year-old man and came to stay with the Smiths before leaving for placement in a group home, where she will stay to have her baby. She is very angry about this. She spent her time watching TV at the Smiths. Mrs. Smith tried to talk with her about taking care of her baby, but Jane insisted that, if she was happy, then the baby would be happy. That would be the best thing—and did not include going to the group home!

Anne with the Greys: Anne is a 16-year-old runaway teen who had been sexually abused by an uncle. She had been placed with the uncle because she could not live with her mom, who was in an abusive relationship. She was pregnant by a 25-year-old boyfriend when placed with the Greys and was soon to be emancipated. Instead of watching TV, she could usually be found reading, which the Greys encouraged. When called to supper, she would say, “Can I just have ten more minutes? I am almost done with this chapter!” She was excited to get her GED.

VEFC Stories (continued)

When she found that the boyfriend who got her pregnant had a criminal record, she said, "We're done. My baby comes first." She was determined to make something of her life and to care for her baby, and Mrs. Grey gave encouragement and counsel to her as she talked about how she would accomplish this. Anne gave birth 36 hours after leaving the Grey household.

Julie and Amy with the Drews: Julie and Amy, 9 and 11, came to the Drews after being removed from their home because of neglect and endangerment. Their mother is a young woman who is severely mentally handicapped and who has no parenting skills with which to help her two young daughters, who are only two of her ten children. Mom and her girls have been living with her boyfriend, a man who has a son in his late teens. The son has become a boyfriend of young Amy, age 11. They are sexually active and Amy's mother encourages this relationship. Though the girls are only in third and fourth grades and are diagnosed with learning disabilities, the social worker says that their intellectual capabilities are far above their mother's.

When the girls were placed in the Drew home, they began to learn things that most children learn at a very young age. Mrs. Drew taught them how to wash themselves, that they needed to flush the toilet and wash their hands. They needed to learn better eating habits. Both children were overweight and were used to eating unhealthful foods. They asked Mrs. Drew, "How can we be healthy?"

Under Mrs. Drew's tutelage, they began asking for carrots as a snack instead of chips and high calorie foods. She tried to teach them social skills, because they had no idea of how to act appropriately in public. They did not understand right from wrong, but rather acted on any impulse they had at the moment.

Contrary to what they had experienced at home, the girls learned that fighting was not the norm at the Drew house. The Drew children were able to illustrate working out their differences in nonviolent ways. This was a new thought to Julie and Amy, who fought with each other every day. The children had been taught by their mother and others that DSS workers were "after them." They were told that DSS would make Julie go to live with her father, who had molested her. Mrs. Drew explained that they were removed from their home to keep them safe and that the workers wanted what was best for them.

As time went on, the younger child decided that she liked her new kind of life and did not wish to go back home, but Amy, the older sister, wanted to go back to be with her boyfriend. The Drews agreed to go to long term foster family status for a month after the VEFC placement period to give DSS time to find a foster family who would take both girls so that they could be together. Mrs. Drew still provides moral support by phone with the new foster mom.

VEFC Orientations

Pat Spory will hold three orientations this fall::

September 13 at Stephens City Mennonite Church
September 21 at Calvary Church of the Brethren, Winchester
October 4 at Winchester Church of God

If you know any people who may be interested in becoming VEFC parents, please encourage them to attend one of these sessions.

Call Pat Spory for more information (540 636-9858)

Humor: Why God Made Moms

Answers given by elementary school children to the following questions:

Why did God make mothers?

She's the only one who knows where the scotch tape is.

Mostly to clean the house.

To help us out of there when we were getting born.

How did God make mothers?

He used dirt, just like for the rest of us.

Magic plus super powers and a lot of stirring.

God made my mom just the same like he made me. He just used bigger parts.

What ingredients are mothers made of?

God makes mothers out of clouds and angel hair and everything nice in the world and one dab of mean.

They had to get their start from men's bones. Then they mostly use string, I think.

Why did God give you your mother and not some other mom?

We're related.

God knew she likes me a lot more than other people's moms like me.

What kind of little girl was your mom?

My mom has always been my mom and none of that other stuff.

I don't know because I wasn't there, but my guess would be pretty bossy.

They say she used to be nice.

What did mom need to know about dad before she married him?

His last name.

She had to know his background. Like is he a crook? Does he get drunk on beer?

Does he make at least \$800 a year? Did he say NO to drugs and YES to chores?

Why did your mom marry your dad?

My dad makes the best spaghetti in the world. And my mom eats a lot.

She got too old to do anything else with him.

My grandma says that mom didn't have her thinking cap on.

Who's the boss at your house?

Mom doesn't want to be boss, but she has to because dad's such a goof ball.

Mom. You can tell by room inspection. She sees the stuff under the bed.

I guess mom is, but only because she has a lot more to do than dad.

What's the difference between moms and dads?

Moms work at work and work at home and dads just go to work at work.

Moms know how to talk to teachers without scaring them.

Dads are taller and stronger, but moms have all the real power 'cause that's who you got to ask if you want to sleep over at your friend's house.

Moms have magic. They make you feel better without medicine.

What does your mom do in her spare time?

Mothers don't do spare time.

To hear her tell it, she pays bills all day long.

What would it take to make your mom perfect?

On the inside she's already perfect. Outside, I think some kind of plastic surgery.

Diet. You know, her hair. I'd diet, maybe blue.

If you could change one thing about your mom, what would it be?

She has this weird thing about me keeping my room clean. I'd get rid of that.

I'd make my mom smarter. Then she would know it was my sister who did it and not me.

I would like for her to get rid of those invisible eyes on her back.

Happy Mother's Day early!