



Volunteer Emergency Families for Children
Family Newsletter
of Warren, Frederick, Winchester and Clarke

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Mark Your Calendar:
April 1, 2006
Family Appreciation Dinner

This year the Family Appreciation Dinner will be held at Trinity Lutheran Church in Stephens City.

The women of the church will prepare and serve a roast beef dinner with homemade desserts. The cost of the dinner will be covered by Thrivent for Lutherans.

Special Entertainment
will be provided
(See article below)

And there will be
Door Prizes galore!

Placements

December: There were 11 requests for placement. Six of these were served; five found alternative placements.

January: There were seven requests for placement. Three of these were served, two found alternative placements, one was inappropriate, and one ran away before placement could take place.

The next meeting of the
Northern Valley
Region Council:

March 1, 2005 at 12:00 noon
Nineveh Presbyterian Church

Lunch will be served.

Special Entertainment for
Appreciation Dinner

Christopher and Maria Clymer Kurtz, a couple who have been serving as a VEFC family since the summer of 2004, are providing entertainment for our annual Appreciation Dinner.

Accompanied by their guitars, their light voices blend together in a mellow sound as they sing a variety of folk and love songs. Much of their music is original, and all of it is music which will be enjoyed by all ages.

If you don't make it to the appreciation dinner, you might hear them play on an occasional Saturday night at *the exchange*, a coffeehouse at 218 Loudoun Street in Winchester.

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Ask Stephanie: On Understanding Teenagers

QUESTION: *I'd like some help in understanding if my 15-year-old son is "normal." Sometimes I'm not sure if I'm doing and saying the right things to help him. He also spends a lot of time alone in his room.*

—**Bewildered Mother of Teenager**

ANSWER: Often parents and foster parents are not sure what is "normal" behavior for teenagers. It is difficult to separate what teens do from parents' feelings and wishes for their child. Those providing foster care for teens sometimes expect the teens to have a multitude of unsolvable problems. I prefer to look at what works well for teenagers and how their behavior may be meeting a need for them. I will explain here the steps an adolescent must take to become an adult.

All children must take specific steps on their road to becoming adults. For most, there are four or five such stages of growth where they learn certain things: infancy (birth to age 2), early childhood (ages 3 to 8), later childhood (ages 9 to 12), and adolescence (ages 13 to 18). Persons 18 and over are considered adults in our society.

Of course, there are some children who will try to act older than their years. But, for the most part, everybody grows in this same pattern. Parents learn much about taking care of their babies and young children. At the hospital or with the doctor, they might pick up information about what to feed them or how long they should sleep. Later, school staff may remind them about the importance of talking and reading to young children. Parents can also see how their friends or relatives treat their kids.

The same thing cannot be said about learning to talk with teenagers (adolescents). It seems that everyone, even teachers and neighbors, have problems understanding them. Giving up, you might turn to doing and saying the same things your parents did with you. But those were other times.

You can begin to understand this age group if you look at its place on the growth sequence. Notice how it is right next to the adult stage: the last step before being an adult. This is a time for adolescents to decide about their future line of work and think about starting their own families in a few years.

One of the first things they must do is to start making their own decisions. For example, adolescents can begin to decide what to buy with their own money or who will be their friend. To do this, they must put a little distance

between themselves and their parents. This does not mean that you can't continue to "look after them" or help them when needed. You should, as much as possible, let them learn from the results of their actions.

Adolescents also need to be around other adults, both male and female. These can be relatives, neighbors, or teachers. Of course, they should be positive role models. Your teenagers can learn from them about things like how to fix the car, getting along with others, or ideas for future jobs. Finally, don't worry if they want to spend time alone. Adolescents can spend hours daydreaming about their future life. They might be planning the things they can do or will buy when they grow up. Remember, to travel far, one begins with the first few steps.

To help understand "normal" behavior in teens, I will give an overview of the developmental tasks, or steps, involved in the social and emotional development of teenagers. These steps are based on the Eight Stages of Development developed by psychiatrist Erik Erikson in 1956.

According to Erikson, the socialization process consists of eight phases—the "eight stages of man." His eight stages of man were formulated, not through experimental work, but through wide-ranging experience in psychotherapy, including extensive experience with children and adolescents from low as well as upper and middle social classes. Each stage is regarded by Erikson as a "psychosocial crisis" which arises and demands resolution before the next stage can be satisfactorily negotiated. The foundation of a house is essential to the first floor, which, in turn, must be structurally sound to support the second story, and so on. These steps must take place with satisfactory learning and resolution of each crisis if the child is to manage the next ones satisfactorily.

During the fifth step (from about age 13 or 14 to about 20), the adolescent learns how to answer satisfactorily and happily the question of "Who am I?" But even the best-adjusted teen experiences some role identity diffusion: most boys and probably most girls experiment with minor delinquency; rebellion flourishes; self-doubts occur.

Erikson believes that, during successful early adolescence, the following tasks are accomplished: the teen's time perspective is developed; the young person acquires self-certainty as opposed to self-consciousness and self-doubt. A teen often wants to know the exact

answer to a question and says that he can easily detect hypocrisy. These satisfy his need for his own certainty and address doubts about the world around him. She experiments with different roles shown by clothes, make-up, friends, and constantly changing plans for the future. She actually anticipates achievement and achieves.

In later adolescence, clear sexual identity is established. The teen seeks someone to inspire him and gradually develops a set of ideals that are socially desirable. Erickson believes that, in our culture, adolescence affords a “psychosocial moratorium,” particularly for middle- and upper-class American children. They do not yet have to “play for keeps,” but can



experiment trying various roles and, hopefully, find the one most suitable for them.

You may compare your teen to this information and see places where he or she has not yet completed the task. That means that the teen must accomplish this at some point. For example, having a time perspective is something we do not expect a five-year-old to grasp. We may explain the days until vacation as “five sleeps.” However, with a teen, the expectation for him to wake up for school on his own devices or suffer the consequences is a reasonable expectation.

The range of normal is broad for teens, and it helps for parents to understand that there are tasks to be accomplished rather than comparing one 15-year-old to the next one.

—Stephanie Tracy, LCSW

VEFC Stories

Teen Brothers in Need of VEFC Care

Gary (17) and Jimmy (14) are brothers. Their parents are divorced and they lived with their mother. Their father, an alcoholic, lives with his parents.

The boys’ mother left them in order to travel out of state to be with her boyfriend, who was going through repeated surgeries. She did not insure that the boys were in a safe place during her absence; the boys simply moved from place to place. Finally, they were removed from a home after drug abuse was reported there. (The boys’ mother had a history of drug abuse.) The boys were then placed with the Smiths, a VEFC family.

Gary: During his stay, Gary spoke of the violence he previously experienced when he lived with his father and his father’s parents. The parents seemed to enable his father’s dependency by providing a place for him to live without insisting that he hold a job. An uncle, also violent and unpredictable, lived in the home as well. Gary’s father criticized him for not having a job. When Gary then confronted his father about his lack of employment and his alcoholism, his father threw him across the room.

While living with the Smiths, Gary went to Court with them when their son received his driver’s license. He heard from the judge all about the dangers of driving recklessly and of underage drinking. On the way home, the family talked about the judge’s warnings. Gary

spoke of riding in cars that were speeding in excess of 100 mph. When Mrs. Smith commented that he must not have much concern for his life if he rides with people who take such chances, Gary said that his father and his uncle were with him at the time. Gary does not yet have his license, but he does have his learner’s permit. He admitted that he has driven alone without the license.

Gary attended school while with the Smiths. Mrs. Smith helped Gary with his algebra, which he is in danger of failing. His plans to graduate this year are in jeopardy because of his truancy and failure to complete assignments. Gary plans to enter the Navy when he turns 18 this summer, but his entrance is partially dependent upon graduation from high school.

Jimmy: Jimmy was having problems in school, mostly because of truancy and failure to do assignments. He was told that there was no way he could pass and would have to repeat the grade he was in.

Jimmy was a confirmed smoker, having smoked since he was nine years old. He also has asthma, which compounded the smoking problem. DSS saw to it that he was well supplied with candy and gum to give him an alternative as he struggled not to smoke. He had an inhaler to control his asthma.



At the VEFC home: Both Gary and Jimmy took part in activities at the Smith's home and at their church. Jimmy was concerned about attending church with the family because he was bored when he had attended another church in the community. The Smiths took both boys to a Saturday evening dinner program at their church. They were able to sit with the youth group and to get to know people.

The next morning when it was time to go to church; both boys were ready to go with no problem. Jimmy even wanted to go with the youth group to a supervised activity in one of the members' homes, so Mrs. Smith accompanied him. Jimmy enjoyed having lunch with the youth and playing foosball, air hockey and ping pong.

The boys were clearly used to fending for themselves. When Jimmy went grocery shopping with Mrs. Smith, he was permitted by DSS to use his food stamp card to buy food. He was very good at comparing prices and looking for the best buy as he purchased snacks and drinks.

VEFC Stories

A Happy Ending to a Sad Beginning



Amy was initially removed from her home and placed in long-term foster care because of severe physical abuse. X-rays showed old fractures where her arm bones had been bent inward, and bruises were evident. She was three months old.

Amy first came to the Browns for respite care when she was six months old. At this time, she would cry to be picked up and would quickly go into long screaming fits if not immediately attended to. She was very difficult to calm down. Mrs. Brown was very appreciative of the help she received from her teenage daughters in caring for Amy.

Over the next year, the Browns continued to provide respite for Amy's foster family. With experience, they learned that they had to schedule around her and make her their complete focus when she was with them. They fell in love with her and delighted in her

Gary plays drums in the school band. Mrs. Smith spent some time with Gary at the piano. Gary showed aptitude and picked it up quickly. Jimmy was good at learning how to build a fire in the family's wood stove. He frequently assisted in bringing in wood.

Both boys enjoyed playing video games with the Smith's son. Sometimes they became excited and shouted inappropriate words. When Mrs. Smith reprimanded them, Jimmy suggested that they get a jar and "put coins in it every time we say a swear word. Mom made us do that when we had a loud argument one time." He then suggested that the money gathered should go to the church.

After a week's stay in the VEFC home, Gary and Jimmy were ordered by the court to stay with his father, a confirmed alcoholic. This decision was against the recommendation of the social worker, who predicted that the boys would be back in their custody soon.

progress. Mr. and Mrs. Brown became another set of grandparents for Amy.

Recently, Amy's foster mother went to the hospital to give birth to her new baby. Amy stayed for almost three weeks with the Browns to give the foster family a break. The Browns have learned how to handle Amy's neediness; if they speak in a soft voice and point a finger at her early on, she doesn't go into a tantrum as she used to. Also, she is learning how to entertain herself some of the time.

Adoption into her foster family, rather than returning to her biological family, is now the plan. The biological family has never explained or in any way owned up to the abuse which Amy suffered, so parental rights are going to be terminated soon.

Amy returned to her foster family—soon to be her permanent family!—following her stay and met her new baby brother.

A Little Humor

The New Birds and the Bees

A little boy asks his father: "Daddy, how was I born?"

Dad responds: "Ah, my son, I guess one day you will need to find out anyway. Well, you see, you Mom and I first got together in a chat room on AOL. Then I set up a date via e-mail with your Mom and we met at a cyber-cafe. We sneaked into a secluded room, where your mother agreed to a download from my hard drive. As soon as I was ready to upload, we discovered that neither one of us had used a firewall and it was too late to hit the delete button.

"Nine months later a blessed little Popup appeared and said, 'You've got male.'"



Around the time a little girl would be walking home from school, her mother noticed it was thundering and lightning, and decided to pick up her daughter so she wouldn't get wet. As her mom drove past her to turn around, she noticed that, every time the lightning flashed, the little girl would stop and smile brightly at the sky.

When her mom got back to her, she asked, "Honey, when I went past you were smiling up at the sky. Why were you doing that?"

The little girl replied, "Well, Mommy, Grandma told me that lightning was God using the flash on his camera, so I wanted to be sure to give him my best smile."



A man came to the Lord and he said, "Lord, how long is a million years to you?"

The Lord replied, "It's like a minute."

Then the man asked, "Lord, what is a million dollars like to you?"

The Lord replied, "It's like a penny."

So the man thought for a minute and asked, "Lord, may I have a penny?"

The Lord looked at the man and answered, "In a minute."



A Sunday School teacher was telling her class the story of the Good Samaritan, in which a man was beaten, robbed and left for dead. She described the situation in vivid detail so her students would catch the drama.

Then she asked the class, "If you saw a person lying on the roadside beaten and bleeding, what would you do?"

A thoughtful little girl broke the hushed silence with-"I think I'd throw up!"



Parental Frustrations

Children seldom misquote you. In fact, they usually repeat word for word what you shouldn't have said.

The main purpose of holding children's parties is to remind yourself that there are children more awful than your own. Grandchildren are God's reward to you for not killing your children.



Church Bulletin Bloopers

Ladies, don't forget the rummage sale. It's a chance to get rid of those things not worth keeping around the house. Don't forget your husbands.

The Fasting and Prayer Conference includes meals.

The peacemaking meeting scheduled for today has been canceled due to a conflict.

Don't let worry kill you off—let the Church help.

For those of you who have children and don't know it, we have a nursery downstairs.

Barbara remains in the hospital and needs blood donors for more transfusions. She is also having trouble sleeping and requests tapes of Pastor Jack's sermons.

Irving Benson and Jessie Carter were married on October 24 in the church. So ends a friendship that began in their school days.

At the evening service tonight, the sermon topic will be "what is Hell?" Come early and listen to our choir practice.