



OUTREACH & EXTENSION
UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI
LINCOLN UNIVERSITY

Vol. 3, No. 2 • March/April 2001

Life Times

A bimonthly publication to enhance the quality of life of individuals, families, and communities

In This Issue



Youth

Helping busy teens eat well 2

*Linda Rellergert
Nutrition Specialist*

Words that hurt 3

*Rosilee Trotta
Urban Youth and Family Specialist*

Parents and teens tackling tough times



Betty Reinsch, LCSW/ACSW
Human Development Specialist
ReinschE@missouri.edu

Teenagers and their parents can face many difficult situations. Scott P. Sells, Ph.D., of the Savannah Family Institute, conducts workshops across the country on ways to help parents and teens facing tough situations. He offers great insight into understanding teenagers and how we as parents react to them. These are some potential stumbling blocks for parents dealing with teens, according to Dr. Sells.

- **Teenagers are extremely literal.** They will argue about the interpretation of rules or consequences. Therefore, rules and consequences must be clear and written down.
- **A mandatory rule is one the teenager must obey.** If the rule is not clearly stated, it becomes optional and ineffective.

Set only rules that you are determined to enforce and that can be clearly stated.

- **Parents often want to correct every negative thing the teenager does at one time, rather than focusing time and energy on the most important issues.** Pick your battles, decide what is most important and focus on one thing at a time.
- **If the consequence does not match the seriousness of the behavior you wish to change, the teenager may have little motivation to change.** Think carefully about consequences before setting them.
- **Parents who don't follow through on a consistent basis or who function "off the cuff" by changing rules and consequences as they go along are not giving their teen consistent guidelines to follow.** If the rules and consequences keep changing, how will the teen know what is really expected?
- **If rules and consequences are not predetermined in a contract format, both parents and adolescents get confused as to what was said and how the rule is to be enforced.** Have your teen work with you to set rules and consequences, then write them down.

(Continued on page 4)



Extension's Mission

University Outreach and Extension serves Missouri by extending research-based knowledge and high-quality educational programs to address the high-priority needs of citizens at the local level.



Youth

Ways parents can help

Frances M. Berg, in her book *Children and Teens Afraid to Eat*, writes, "For us to raise healthy children of all sizes . . . children and teens need to receive consistent messages that encourage them to eat well, live actively, feel good about themselves and others. When these positive messages come from health providers, teachers, family, peers and the media . . . then weight and eating problems can be diminished or prevented."

As a parent, these are some things you can do to help:



Resist your parental desire to nag. All children need to feel unconditional love and acceptance. Nagging teens about eating and weight often has the opposite of its desired effect. Respect teens' desire to be healthy – and find resources to help them learn about healthy eating and ways to be active.



Be the role model that your kids need. Research shows that children *really* do as they see, not as they hear. To help your teen move toward a healthy weight, avoid fad diets and weight loss schemes; enjoy balanced choices from the Food Guide Pyramid and make physical activity one of your family's most important values.



Offer regular family meals and make nutrition-to-go available. Today's teens lead busy lives, and they may not always be around at mealtime. Stock up on grab-and-go options, like string cheese, low-fat yogurt, bananas and bagels. Make family meals as convenient, tasty and stress-free as possible – so teens will want to be there.

(Continued on page 4)

Helping busy teens eat well

Linda S. Rellergert, MS
Nutrition Specialist
RellergertL@missouri.edu

When it comes to the eating and fitness habits of American adolescents, the current picture is not so good. Our teens are eating more fat and less fruit, drinking more soft drinks and less milk, and dieting more while walking less than earlier generations. Health professionals are alarmed about the increases in both obesity and eating disorders among young people. In July 2000, *Newsweek* magazine labeled today's young people as Generation XXL.

Health statistics show that the number of overweight American youth has doubled since the 1970s. Even more alarming is the increase in children who are clinically obese rather than just a little overweight. Medical conditions that used to affect only adults, like Type II Diabetes, are also being diagnosed in young children.

At the same time, adolescents feel much pressure to be unnaturally thin, or to develop a muscular physique that is unrealistic and impossible for most people to attain. Many teenage girls are trying to lose weight, often using extreme measures such as taking laxatives or vomiting. The rate of eating disorders is rising for both boys and girls.

For normal growth and development and for optimum good health in the future, teens need to eat foods packed with essential nutrients like protein, minerals, and



vitamins. However, the diets of most young people are sadly lacking in some of these essential nutrients, calcium and iron in particular. Insufficient iron intake can cause anemia, fatigue, and may even lead to a decrease in IQ scores, according to a recent British study. Low intake of calcium and calories puts teens at risk for stress fractures and makes them more prone to osteoporosis later in life.

Today's teenagers are adopting some of the poor eating and activity habits of the adults they see around them. They get too many empty calories and too little physical activity. High-fat, fast-food meals, super-size soft drinks, sedentary video games, and computers are all adolescent health hazards.

Helping our teens develop better health habits will take creative input from parents, educators and community leaders, writes Dayle Hayes, MS, RD, member of Eat Right Montana (a coalition promoting healthful eating and active lifestyles). She continues, "Teens need more family meals and kitchens filled with power snacks. At school, they need tasty *and* healthy food choices and plenty of fun physical activity. From all the adults around them, teens need positive role models and realistic advice for their busy lives."



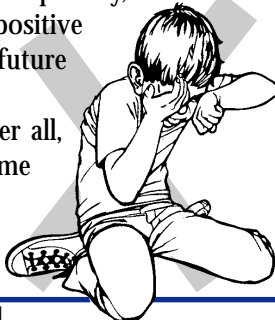
Stop and listen to the words you use with your children, especially when you're upset. Chances are there is room for improvement.



Here are just a few tips:

- ◆ **Tell your children frequently that you love them.** Give lots of hugs.
- ◆ **Watch your face and tone of voice, especially when being critical.** Body language is even more powerful than words.
- ◆ **Be constructive when correcting behavior.** Emphasize that it's the action that is bad, not the child.
- ◆ **Listen without judging.** If you want children to share thoughts and feelings, they must feel safe to do so.
- ◆ **Accept your children's individuality.** Just because they think differently than you do, doesn't mean they're wrong.

We are unlikely to ever reach perfection as parents, but we are certainly capable of improving our skills. With the New Year, a good resolution might be to use positive and constructive language when communicating with our kids. Not only will we see them grow in confidence and capability, we will delight in the positive treatment our future grandchildren experience. After all, habits do become habit-forming!



Words that HURT

Rosilee Trotta, LCSW
Urban Youth and Family Specialist
TrottaR@missouri.edu

I have a poster in my office that pictures the face of a sad little girl with tearful eyes. If just the face were visible, one would be left pondering the cause of grief in a child so small. But big, white words shout out from the poster's background and leave no doubt to the child's expression. "**STOP USING WORDS THAT HURT,**" they demand . . . or, perhaps, they merely implore.

I'll bet there's not a single reader who has trouble relating to that message. Most of us can remember incidents of things said in our childhood that still hurt when we recall them. *Why, then, as parents do we seem doomed to repeat the very things we vowed never to do?*

Part of the reason, of course, is that we are not perfect. Know, however, that your children neither expect nor desire perfection from you. The most we can hope for is to be "good enough," and that seems to meet the KSOA (Kids Standard of Approval).

A second reason we violate the Golden Rule is that we operate on autopilot much of the time. We often say to our children what first pops into our heads. We say to them what was said to us. Why? Because the words we use have become a habitual way of reacting to stressful situations. If we were called "stupid" when we spilled the milk, we are very likely to call our



children "stupid" when they drop a dish, spill juice or knock over the cat food.

In many ways, habits make our life easier. They keep us from thinking about everything we do and everything we say. The problem with habits, though, is that they can become *habit-forming*. As a result, we often keep making the same decisions over and over again, even when those decisions are not in our best interest or in the best interest of people we care about. We keep saying "stupid" because it's easier than coming up with more positive statements that are not familiar to us. Being positive, especially when we are angry, will require some thinking, some energy, some time.

Joseph Conrad states in *Lord Jim*. "A word carries far -- very far -- deals destruction through time as the bullets go flying through space." Words can hurt and hurt deeply. They can impact others, especially very vulnerable others, for years to come. In fact, the words you say to your children, coupled with your actions, will be the greatest influence on how they feel about themselves and about others, maybe for life. "Children find in the eyes of parents and teachers mirrors in which they discover themselves."

Parents and teens tackling tough times

(Continued from page 1)

Both of you will then have more than a vague recollection of your agreement.

Parents also need to understand how they may react emotionally to things their teen may say or do, sometimes known as "button pushing."

Statements such as, "You never let me do anything," or "You don't love me" can be hard to hear, inducing self-doubt and feelings of uncertainty. They also get the parent off-track and put the adolescent in control of the discussion.

Body language, gestures and tone of voice are some of the most powerful tools an adolescent may use to play with someone's emotions. Unfortunately, if parents respond to these barbs by losing control of their emotions, it gives the adolescent a great deal of power.

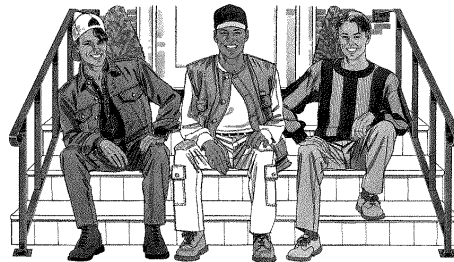
When parents and their teens face tough times, it is essential that the parent keep emotions in check. If this becomes impossible, it is better to take a break, a time out for both of you to allow emotions to cool. Keep the focus on the broken rule

and the consequences that have been agreed to in advance, rather than hurt feelings.

It's important to sit down and talk with teens about limits and consequences at some time other than during a crisis. It may take several sessions of calm talking, then thinking about limits and consequences, before parent and teen can reach agreement. But once they have decided together, then it is up to the parent to enforce the limits consistently and carry out the consequences.

Being a parent is a difficult job sometimes. Yet remember that a parent/child relationship is built on love, which requires parents to set and enforce limits. Teens need to know those limits can and should change as they mature and can handle more responsibilities.

Setting and keeping clear, consistent rules and consequences, as well as keeping emotions under control can help both parents and teens get through the tough times.



Helping busy teens eat well

(Continued from page 2)

In addition, parents can be powerful advocates for change in schools.

Expand access to power foods.

Most schools offer students limited choices in cafeterias, beverage machines, and other food sales. Innovative programs in many school districts have demonstrated that teens will make positive choices when healthful options are tasty, convenient, competitively priced, and "cool."

Expand opportunities for physical activity.

Studies show that physical activity declines dramatically as children get older. The availability of traditional PE classes is also declining. Since regular, moderate physical activity is essential to maintain a healthy weight, teens need fun activities for all sizes, shapes and abilities.

For more information:

Check out books by Ellyn Satter, MS, RD, CICSW, *Secrets of Feeding a Healthy Family* (1999) and *How to Get Your Kid to Eat* (1987), especially chapter 12 on "The Individualistic Teenager." Also, Frances Berg's *Children and Teens Afraid to Eat* (2001).

Life Times

LifeTimes is written by University Outreach and Extension specialists for individuals and families living in East Central Missouri. This newsletter is provided by your local Outreach and Extension Council. **Articles may be reprinted for educational purposes only. Please credit as follows:** By (author's name), (author's title), University of Missouri Outreach and Extension.

Regional Specialists:

Content Editor

Linda S. Rellergert

Linda S. Rellergert
St. Charles Extension Center
260 Brown Road
St. Peters, MO 63376
636/970-3000
E-mail: RellergertL@missouri.edu

Consumer Education

Patrice Dollar, 636/797-5391
Sandra McKinnon, 636/456-3444
Suzanne Zemelman, 636/970-3000

Environmental Design

Rebecca Blocker, 573/756-4539
Sharon Laux, 314/516-5240

Human Development

Maudie Kelly, 573/438-2671
Teresa Mareschal, 636/970-3000
Betty Reinsch, 314/615-7605

Nutrition

Cynthia Fauser, 314/615-2911
Linda Rellergert, 636/970-3000
Mary Schroeffer, 636/583-5141

Urban Youth & Family

Rosilee Trotta, 314/615-7637

Coordinating Editor

Roxanne T. Miller, 314/615-7607

Design: Kathy Maddox

Web: outreach.missouri.edu

No special endorsement of any products is intended, nor is criticism implied of similar products not mentioned.