

PRESSING ON...

"I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus." Philippians 3:14



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Discernment and Kindness

A CALL FOR PARENTS TO HELP TEENS REDEEM THEIR USE OF TECHNOLOGY



■ by Jessica Parks, MSW, LCSW



How do we engage with our teens in growing in online discernment and kindness? Here are some ideas:

- Model kindness in your behavior toward others, online and offline.
 - Model good boundaries with your technology. Put your phone away during meals and conversations. Put your phone in a separate (non-bedroom) room to charge at night. Discuss ways that you use social media to connect with others.
 - Ask them to show you how to use the privacy settings on Facebook or other social media sites. Allow them to be the expert. You will likely learn something new, and you will get a sense of whether they understand how to protect their privacy.
 - Allow for continuous, open, frank discussion about their social media use. Ask about their online lives as you do the other areas of their lives. For many teens, their online lives are an extension of their offline lives and are extremely important to them. By asking about their online lives, you may connect with them about their friendships, interests, and struggles.
 - Monitor their social media use (there are many apps for that). Delay access to social media. Limit the amount of time they spend. They will not like this. Talk with them openly about your expectations for responsible use of the internet and social media, and BE HONEST with them about how you will encourage this. The internet is a big place, and there is a lot of good in it. However, there are many areas that present challenges that are especially difficult for the adolescent brain (whose prefrontal cortex – required for complex decision-making- is still developing) to navigate. Impulse control is limited for teens, and they may post pictures or information online that they later regret. Monitoring is collaboration between parent and teen to limit these kinds of mistakes.
- Run social media scenarios with them and ask them what they would do. Some examples: when someone posts pictures of a party on Instagram to which a classmate was not invited; when someone calls a person names on Facebook; if they view inappropriate content; etc. Jump in and collaborate with them. Highlight ways they could show kindness and love in those scenarios.
 - Encourage face-to-face communication over online communication. Model and help your child hone the social skills necessary to communicate respectfully with others in person.
 - Talk with them about the ways they can live out their faith online, in the spirit of Colossians 3:17 "And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him (NRSV)."
 - Keep this dialogue going.

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We see them everywhere: teens on their phones. They appear glued to them, seemingly unable to put them down. After all, kids 18 and under represent 1 in 3 internet users worldwide (UNICEF, 2017). Parents often worry as they see their children enter the silent world of social media. It's a world they may not fully understand or be able to access. What does it mean to parent an adolescent in these modern times, where much of teen social interactions take place in a virtual world?

Opportunity to foster discernment and kindness

As parents, we have an opportunity to foster technology use in our teens that honors God and furthers his kingdom. It turns out, teens are typically drawn to social media because of the social connection, community, independence, learning, and leisure needed for their development. Although social media are notorious for being fertile ground for bullying, sexual behavior, and magnifying stresses, social media are also places where teens can go to do what teens must do: connect with one another, challenge one another, and grow together. Parents can help their children to connect in healthy ways and engage in fruitful discussion online and offline through fostering a spirit of discernment and kindness.

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What to do with the Wintertime Blues



“Why art thou cast down, O my soul?”

Psalm 43:5

■ by Debi Mitchell, MS, LMFT

Many recognize the Wintertime Blues' name as “Seasonal Affective Disorder,” or “SAD.” This Major Depressive Disorder recurs regularly, according to the seasons, usually correlating to the amount of sunshine and cold. The ability to function and number of depression symptoms identifies each individual's severity level.

Those with SAD suffer some specific symptoms: sleeping too much, eating too much, craving carbohydrates, and gaining weight. Many experience a desire to stay home and isolate.¹

“If I had more energy, I could have a life! All I want to do is sleep.”

“Why can't I just be a bear and hibernate for the winter?”

“I gain a ton of weight every winter and work hard to lose it every summer.”

These familiar refrains echo through the lives of SAD sufferers. Seasonal Affective Disorder attacks our ability to live life as usual, but we can win those annual battles using these coping skills.

What Can I Do to Feel Better?

We exist as three parts: body, soul, and spirit. We reduce symptoms, increase joy, and live a fuller life when we fight the battle with SAD from all sides.

Body

- Buy a lamp specifically made to mimic sun's rays and use it regularly for at least 20-60 minutes every morning. Multiple levels of sunlamps are available at different costs. One client uses her lamp as her work's desk lamp, and she quickly noticed a difference!
- Exercise regularly. Exercise increases endorphins- our bodies “pleasure chemicals.” Be sure to plan and use ways to maintain it

“I also pray that you will understand the incredible greatness of God's power for us who believe him. This is the same mighty power that raised Christ from the dead...”

Ephesians 1:19-20, NLT

Cont'd from p1 - Screens & Teens

Redeeming your teen's use of technology

Fear keeps many parents from allowing their teens to engage in social media use. It is up to individual parents to decide what is right for their children. However, social media use presents a unique opportunity to engage teens in development of the discernment and empathy that will be required of them lifelong. As Romans 12:2 instructs, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect (NRSV).” If our teens are going to use social media, let us equip them to use social media in ways that look radically different - radically loving, kind, and pure. ■



Jessica Parks is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker and sees clients in our Lombard, Orland Park, and Plainfield, IL locations.

UNICEF. (2017, December 11). UNICEF: Make the digital world safer for children – while increasing online access to benefit the most disadvantaged [Press release]. Retrieved from https://www.unicef.org/media/media_102303.html



during SAD times. Between the increased desire to sleep and poor weather, even habitual exercisers can drift from routines, especially when we exercise outdoors. Some gyms make monthly terms available. Try using an accountability and/or exercise partner- “A person standing alone can be attacked and defeated, but two can stand back-to-back and conquer. Three are even better, for a triple-braided cord is not easily broken” (Ecclesiastes 4:12, New Living Translation).

- Create menus with good nutrition in advance that won't bust the budget. Good nutrition provides vitamins necessary to maintain good attitudes. With the seasonal increased costs of fresh vegetables & fruit, in addition to decreased energy for cooking, winter can become fast-food time.
- Consider asking your doctor for blood tests checking certain vitamin levels, like Vitamin D. Many physicians encourage the use of a Vitamin D supplement during winter months, especially in the Midwest. Be sure to talk to your doctor; Vitamin D levels need to be monitored by a physician.

- If necessary, consider talking to a physician or psychiatrist about taking an antidepressant. Many SAD sufferers take antidepressants seasonally -- generally beginning approximately 1 month prior to the normal seasonal start as antidepressants generally take 2-4 weeks before we feel the benefits.

Soul

- Practice mindfulness. Books, articles, classes, apps and more exist to teach and help us practice living in the present, while balancing the negatives with the positives.
- Practice challenging negative thoughts. Skewed or twisted thoughts exist for us all, and our thoughts impact our emotions. Romans 12:2 challenges us to be “transformed through the renewing of our minds,” meaning we change as we change our thinking to match God's.
- Consider Christian counseling. An objective professional helps to recognize patterns & thoughts becoming skewed. Proverbs 11:14 states: “Where there is no guidance, a people falls, but in an abundance of counselors there is safety” (NKJV).

Spirit

- Keep a “Blessings” or “Thankfulness” journal throughout the year. When we write what is good about our lives when we can see it more easily, we can read back and gain hope & happiness. We find peace when we think about “...whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things” (Philippians 4:8, ESV).
- Remember we fight a spiritual battle. SAD, like any depression, attempts to break our connections and isolate us, even from God. When we feast on the Bible, prayer, and worship, we increase our connection- our intimacy- with God and feel less alone.

SAD tries to win every year. We tire of fighting. But don't give up! When we trust in Christ, God's Spirit lives in us and gives us the power to really live. ■



Debi Mitchell is a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist and sees clients in our Schererville, IN location.



CLIFFSNOTES ON COMMUNICATION

■ by Kathy Krentkowski, MA, LCPC, LMHC

The most common problem that brings couples into counseling is unproductive communication. It's not so much that people do not talk. Rather, people talk at one another, and there is an absence of true listening. Many times the true content and meaning of what is being said gets lost and no one searches to find it.

How well are you communicating?

Healthy communication consists of talking and listening. This requires the need to fill two roles:

1. The Speaker – What do we want the other person to hear and know?
2. The Listener – Are we listening to understand what is being said?

When working to communicate well, it is best to pick one role and stick to it. You cannot speak and listen at the same time.

The Speaker

The speaker begins the conversation. A good way to begin is by asking the person you want to speak with if it is a good time to talk. This shows you honor their time and invites them to talk, rather than demanding they talk. If it is not a good time, ask when would be.

"Honey, is this a good time to talk with you about our budget?" (If not), "When would be a good time?"

The speaker speaks for themselves, not others or the population at large. Try to communicate your thoughts and feelings by using "I" statements.

"I feel confused as to why we seem to be running out of money. We set an amount for entertainment and you have been going over that. I think you are not sticking to the budget."

The Listener

The listener has the important task to give understanding. In order to do this you will need to temporarily put your own thoughts and feelings to the side so you can commit to listen and really hear what the speaker is saying. This may take, literally, an act of God. Perhaps David needed help listening when he prayed, "Set a guard, O Lord, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips! (Psalm 141:3). Listening occurs through mirroring, checking, curiosity, validating, and empathizing.

Mirroring: Once you have heard the speaker share with you their thoughts and feelings, respond by letting them know what it is that you heard, and then check it out to see if you're correct.

"Let me see if I heard you correctly. What you're saying is we are running out of money and you think it is related to me not sticking to the budget. Is that right?"

Checking: Checking for accuracy is very important. When you mirror what you are hearing, you allow the other person to hear their own words come out of your mouth. They can then let you know if you heard them correctly, or if they need to clarify. The task of mirroring is to work to get as accurate of a picture as possible. If the speaker needs to add or correct you, they can do so.

"Yes, that's most of it. I think you are spending too much on entertainment, more than what we agreed on. I don't think it's all your fault, but this is one area where I have seen a problem."

Curiosity: After the speaker has let you know that, yes, in fact, what you have heard is what they are saying, become curious of their perspective by asking if there is more they would like to say. Remember, you are listening to understand, not to judge what you are hearing as "right" or "wrong". Becoming curious will help you avoid the mistake of responding before really hearing and understanding. King Solomon shared his wisdom in the proverb, "If one gives an answer before he hears, it is his folly and shame" (Proverbs 18:13).

"Is there more you want to say about that?"

Once you have listened, try summarizing, just to be sure you have a clear line of communication.

"So if I have heard you right, you are concerned that we are running out of money. You think we are not sticking to our budget, specifically, that I am spending too much on my entertainment and not sticking to what we agreed on. Did I get it all?"

Validate: The next step is to let the speaker know that what they are saying makes sense. This is a tough step because sometimes it seems absolutely implausible that anyone would think or feel the way they do! If, however, you remember that each person is unique with individual thoughts and feelings that matter, then you can honor them by letting them know that you can see where they are coming from. You do not have to agree with someone in order to validate their perspective. Validating can be done in many ways:

"I can see where you are coming from." "I see your point and it makes sense." "I get it."





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Empathy: If you are able to empathize, then you are able to imagine what the other person is feeling.

"You must feel frustrated with me." Check to see if you're right. "Is that right?"

The speaker will confirm or correct. And they may choose to say more.

"Yes, and I feel scared because I fear we won't be able to pay our bills and this will continue to be a problem for us."

If you have no idea how they feel, ask them.

Finally, once a line of communication has been established, and the speaker feels heard and understood, the listener can ask, *"May I share my perspective?"*

Communicating this way is like playing a game. You take turns and see where it goes. Each role is needed, and you switch parts until you feel you have come to some understanding. The relationship is the winner. The reward is feeling safe in your relationship to talk about difficult issues, greater understanding, and often respect and feelings of closeness in your relationship. ■



Kathy Krentkowski is a Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor and a Licensed Mental Health Counselor and sees clients in our Evergreen Park, IL and Schererville, IN locations.

New Staff



Marissa DeGroot MSW, LSW
Licensed Social Worker
Orland Park & Tinley Park, IL locations.

We are pleased to announce that Marissa has joined our professional staff! She provides individual, couple and family therapy to children, adolescents, and adults. Her experience consists of working with individuals struggling with depression, anxiety, eating disorders, trauma, self-harm behavior, suicidal ideation, mood disorders, personality disorders, and substance abuse.

Marissa has a remarkable compassion and dedication for helping people find and create their meaningful life. Marissa utilizes a non-judgmental stance and therapeutic rapport to build a healing therapeutic environment. Her perspective involves the incorporation of an individual's inherent strengths along with evidence based clinical approaches.

Marissa earned her Master of Social Work degree at Dominican University, River Forest, IL and a Bachelor of Social Work from Olivet Nazarene University, Bourbonnais, Illinois. She is supervised by Kim Pronaitis, MA, LCPC.