

LIVING VALIANTLY

Parent Newsletter from the Counseling Department

Spring 2014

It's About Relationships

By Sue Yockey, VCES Counselor

As a counselor, relationships have always been important to me, both personally and professionally. A recent experience helped me even more to understand the great value relationships have in our lives. I was comfortably sitting on a hard, smooth bench intrigued by the words I heard. I was attending Sunday Mass and intently listening to the homily—which is the reflection the priest shares to help the gathered souls understand the readings of the day. The priest uttered these words: “It’s not about rules; it’s about relationships.” I don’t normally write things down, but without thinking twice I reached into my purse, felt for a writing tool, pulled out a receipt, and jotted down the simple, thought-provoking sentence he so eloquently expressed.

Thoughts began to race through my head. “People need to follow rules. Following rules helps to build one’s character. How could games be won if there were no rules? Children need to listen. The Ten Commandments are rules God wants everyone to live by.” Just then I was distracted as a young child sitting nearby began to fidget. I say young, but she looked about 9 or 10 years of age, so she should have the discipline to sit quietly and listen. Then it struck me. That was a thought (or, I’m embarrassed to say, a judgment) coming from a rule and not from a relationship. I recalled growing up with the phrase, “Children are to be seen not heard.”

Yet, this distraction was very loud to me. I closed my eyes to block out the diversions and return to my pious listening. The priest continued, “It’s not about rules; it’s about relationships. In order to have relationships with people you must spend time with them.” I pictured in my mind family, friends, coworkers, parents, students, and the list goes on. All those who danced through the waves of my brain were characters who brought a smile to my face. They were members of my “Easy-to-be-in-relationship-with Club.” They were people I choose to spend time with, to laugh with, to cry with, and all the multiple ways to share life with. As I continued on in thought I realized there were also Children of God whom I scurried past, I went out of my way to avoid, and those I refused to love because they did not follow the rules. As I thought about it, some of these were those I am most closely connected to. I was faced with the fact that judgment kills relationships.

The homily was finished and the handshake of peace was about to begin. The rule of shaking the person on your left, your right, the one in front, and the one behind flashed before my eyes. Within this peaceful moment I had the thought, “How can I give peace to that youngster who distracted me from prayer?” Just then she turned to me, looked me in the eye, smiled, and said, “Peace be with you,” as she extended her kindness to me in the form of a handshake. I returned her gentle heartedness and love. “Peace be with you,” I whispered as a tear swelled in my eye. “Are you ok?” she asked. “Yes,” I said.

God is present in our connections with others. Relationships are about sharing the presence of God with one another. They are about blessing one another with a smile, a gift, a handshake, a kind word, or a prayer. These interactions with God’s children can happen in the silence of a moment or the garble of an argument. If the motivation behind the interaction is love, then there is no room for failure – only forgiveness. It’s not about rules. It’s about relationships. Create valuable, positive, relationships that will last forever.





Teaching Healthy Boundaries in a Changing World

As we already know, the middle school years are filled with many changes. Middle school students are in a significant phase of moral development, while also realizing that rules are somewhat arbitrary. Besides the physiological changes occurring, they are in a phase where peer pressure increases, they begin to show interest/have crushes on peers, friendships change and boundaries are about to be tested. Understanding this allows us to give our children the tools to make good choices, practice values and navigate a world where boundaries are shifting, peer relationships are changing and the social demands are high.

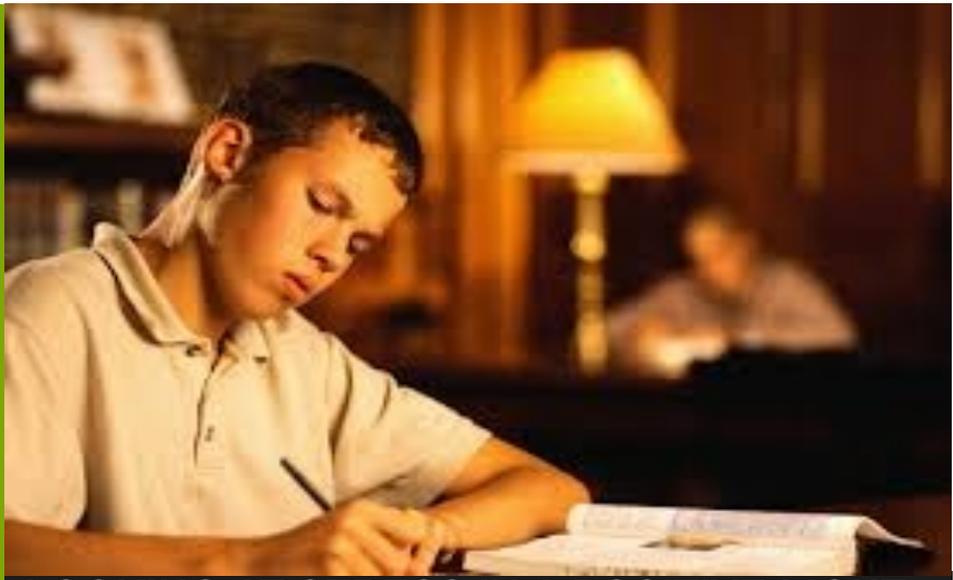
By teaching our children about healthy boundaries, we are teaching them how to tell others about how they want to be treated, what they are willing and not willing to do. They are able to practice self-control, self-respect and the respect of other people's boundaries. It gives them the opportunity to put the values we teach them into action. It is better to build that foundation now, before they are faced with much more difficult choices that will come with the high school and college years.

Suggestions on teaching healthy boundaries

1. **Live it-** Remember that children seldom do what they are told, but often do what they see. So, practice healthy boundaries in your own life. Take a look at yourself, your relationship with your child and with others. How do you demonstrate healthy boundaries? Are your expectations clear? Do you follow through with consequences or let things go?
2. **Talk about it-** Are your values something theoretical or do you talk about how you are putting them into action? How do you maintain boundaries around your values? Keeping a conversation going allows you and your child to be mindful of situations that challenge you both to act according to your values and tests your boundaries.
3. **Be a consultant-** As your child navigates middle school and juggles a strong need for approval and acceptance from peers, they will find themselves in situations that are challenging. Try not to solve their problems or jump in unless absolutely necessary. Act as a parent consultant. Simply give guidance and allow them to own and practice the skills needed to solve their own issues.
4. **Healthy Boundaries + Clear Expectations -** In order to let others know how you want to be treated, how you plan to treat others and what you are willing or not willing to do, you will need to be clear about expectations. Setting clear expectations creates a sense of security and a "road map" for your child. Modeling healthy boundaries certainly includes clear expectations and following through on consequences.

Stress-relieving Tips

- BREATHE DEEPLY
- PHYSICAL ACTIVITY— just 30 minutes a day, 3-5 days per week
- SPEND TIME OUTSIDE
- EAT A BALANCED DIET. Reduce carbs to keep you more awake and alert.
- REDUCE caffeine, sugar, alcohol and nicotine intake.
- PRAY, MEDITATE
- SLEEP. Eight hours per night will make you more productive in the waking hours.
- THINK POSITIVELY. More on that in the next issue.
- SEEK SOCIAL SUPPORT
- HUG A LOVED ONE
- LAUGH MORE. Laughter truly is one of the best medicines
- SEEK A PROFESSIONAL counselor, priest, or support group
- DELEGATE! Ask for help when you need it.
- PRIORITIZE. Make a to-do list.
- SCHEDULE WORRY TIME. Focus on the things you can control.



LOOKING AT STRESS IN A POSITIVE LIGHT.

We've been told time and time again that stress is the ENEMY. Stress is bad. Stress is dangerous. Stress will break down our body's defenses and make us sick. However, recent studies are asking us to look at stress in a different way.

There's no denying the studies that show the link between stress and an increase in illnesses such as obesity, diabetes and heart disease. And most of us have probably experienced the scenario where our bodies shut down the moment we finally get a break (i.e. spring break, summer vacation). We end up sleeping the day away, bundled up under blankets with a pile of tissues next to our pillows, while the rest of our family are out enjoying the beach or skiing down the slopes without us.

Stress can be hard on our bodies, and it can cause us to lash out in frustration at the ones we love. But stress has its benefits too. Stress motivates us to get work done, helps us in performance situations, alerts us to potential dangers, and allows us to fight off threats. Now studies are showing that perhaps a simple change in perspective could help us deal with our "negative" stressors in a healthier, more positive way.

One particular study, done at the University of Wisconsin, asked whether or not people perceived stress as harmful to their health, and looked at how much stress they experienced over the eight-year period of the study. The researchers then compared those results with the death records of their sample. They discovered that those who experienced a high level of stress were 43% more likely to die *if* they viewed stress in a negative light. Those who viewed stress in a positive light had no increased risk of dying regardless of how much stress they experienced.

Therefore, it was concluded that a *negative belief* about stress might be the underlying risk factor for stress-related health issues, *more so than the actual stress events themselves!* In other words, if we simply think our stress will kill us, then it becomes 43% more likely to do so. If, instead, we think positively about stress and believe in it as our body's natural way of preparing us for an event, then we are much less likely to take on those harmful physical symptoms typically associated with stress.

Further studies at Harvard found similar results and concluded that changing how we view stress can also change the way our bodies physically respond to stressful events, allowing us to respond in healthier ways.

We can't always cut all of the stress out of our lives, and even though it is still important to make room for down-time and self-care, perhaps another simple strategy to add to the tool kit is to start viewing our stress as a positive force in our lives, something to make us better rather than worse.

Perhaps stress doesn't have to be the enemy after all.

*Watch this Ted Talk to learn more about this new idea:

http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend

Summer Resources

Saturday Academy: Study skills, speed reading courses
www.saturdayacademy.org/classes-camps/class-listings/by-grade

Sylvan Learning Center- Study skills
www.sylvanlearning.com/tutoring/study-skills

Jesuit High School- Study Skills for grades 6-8, high school courses
www.jesuitportland.org/page.cfm?p=1852

Seeing My Time Program (Mary Dee Sklar)- Organization and time management boot camp
<http://executivefunctioningsuccess.com/seeing-time-group-course/>

The Children's Program- *Skills for High School Success* and *Skills for Middle School Success*
www.childrensprogram.com/content/complete-list/

Contact Us

VCES Counselor
Sue Yockey
503-718-6519
syockey@valleycatholic.org

VCMS Counselor
Teisha Parchment
503-718-6503
tparchment@valleycatholic.org

VCHS Counselor
Kelsey MacIntyre
503-520-4701
kmacintyre@valleycatholic.org