

CONNECTING

Healthy Information from the Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center  July / August 2002

Trusting Your Teen

Trust is the foundation of the relationship between parent and teenager, yet trust also seems to be the greatest source of conflict between parents and teens. Trust means “to place confidence in or rely on another” or “to rely on the character, ability, strength, or truth of someone.” Erik Erikson, a developmental theorist, wrote that establishing trust is the first developmental phase. When parents respond consistently to an infant’s needs, she learns to trust; to trust that her needs will be met and that adults are trustworthy. Trust is just as important in adolescence, but now the question becomes “Do my parents trust me?” Teenagers hope that their parents will have confidence in their character and their abilities. Feeling trusted is the key to their sense of self-respect.

It is difficult, however, for parents to have confidence in their children’s abilities when the world seems so unsafe and adolescents are still learning self-control and sound decision-making. A fundamental need for parents is to be able to protect their children from harm. When their children reach adolescence, parents are confronted with the reality that there are so many things they can no longer protect them from. Parents want their teens to be completely honest, follow all the rules, and tell them everything so they can feel less anxious about their safety. This goes counter to the developmental task of adolescence, which is to establish independence from parents. At this time their attention and

concern turn to the outside world and away from family. Teens work hard at keeping their parents out of their lives, and this includes sneaking around and keeping secrets. For parents of adolescents the developmental task is to let go, gradually pull back, and give them more and more say in their own affairs. Parents have to accept that a great deal goes on in their teenagers lives that they have no control over.

Parental worry and anxiety often get in the way of communicating the trust teens need to feel from their parents. Parents may feel that they have not done an adequate job yet and realize time is running out, so they attempt to get their child to shape up with lectures, scolding, and punishment. These tactics communicate a lack of confidence in their child and hurt more than help. Parents may have had difficulties in their own adolescence that cause them to overreact and project their fears onto their children, leaving teens doubtful of their own abilities and feeling guilty for causing worry. While some worry is natural and unavoidable, it is important to shield children from parental anxiety because it causes self-doubt and lost confidence.

When parents communicate that they trust their teenager, it builds self-confidence and self-respect. It also fosters healthy guilt. Teens who know that their parents trust them don’t want to let them down. Trust is a strong motivation to follow agreed upon rules. Teens often say, “My parents don’t

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Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center – The 1980s and 1990s

As part of the Center’s celebration of our 30 years of service to central Iowa, the May/June issue of Connecting described the first decade of the Center’s history. In this issue of Connecting, we describe the growth and evolution of the Center during the past two decades.

In the 1980s and 1990s, the Center added more than a dozen counselors and three support staff positions, including office manager, billing coordinator, and director of development. The new counselors included pastoral counselors, marriage and family therapists, clinical social workers, mental health counselors, and pediatric psychologists. They brought specialties such as human sexuality, career counseling, premarital counseling, chemical dependency assessment, mediation, and art therapy to the Center.

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trust me anyway so why should I try.” When parents and teens have a good trusting relationship, they won’t want to disappoint each other.

Trusting does not mean being gullible. Ann Caron in her book Don’t Stop Loving Me talks about vigilant trust. Vigilant means “keenly watchful to detect danger or trouble.” Vigilant trusting means caring and involvement. It means being aware of your teen’s activities, moods, friends, attitudes, beliefs, and general well-being. It means talking to your child, his or her friends, teachers, and other parents. It means knowing what is going on in the local teen social scene. The more parents know what is going on in their teens’ lives the more likely they will be able to guide them and help them negotiate these difficult years. Talk with your teens about the stresses and pressures they face and communicate trust in their ability to make the right decisions. But remember, teens will be able to see the difference between genuine interest in what they are doing and prying which will be interpreted as trying to control their behavior.

It is especially important to provide parental expectations and guidance and to nurture moral development. Teens want limits, though they won’t admit it, because limits assure them that they are not alone. Rules and expectations should be discussed and agreed upon together. Good two-way communication is the best deterrent to risk-taking behavior. Be interested in and respectful of their perspectives. Remember that teens are still fragile and easily shamed. Moving into the outside world is exciting, but adolescents feel more exposed and vulnerable than they ever have. Praise and commend them. Let them know when you think they have done something well.

It is also important to realize that trust is going to be broken. Because teens are going to experiment, it shouldn’t be a surprise when they break the rules. When this happens, parents need to be prepared to trust again following discussion and agreed upon consequences. Trust is not something that teens can prove to parents that they deserve. It is something parents provide and no matter how many times they break that trust it is critical to trust again. Research shows the recipient of trust eventually becomes dependable. Starting over with a clean slate also teaches forgiveness.

Letting go of our fundamental responsibility as parents requires trust. Trust in ourselves that we have in fact done a good enough job of parenting. Trust in our children that they can for the most part manage independence well. And trust that the relationship with our child is strong enough to survive the inevitable difficulties, problems, and failures that will occur.

Susan Ackelson, M.S.W., L.I.S.W.
Licensed Independent Social Worker

Gerontology Counseling

Linda Simonton, M.A., M.S.W., L.I.S.W., who recently joined the Center staff, helps people facing the challenges associated with their parents’ aging and health-related transitions. As parents become older, sicker, or in need of assistance, counseling can help by:

- Redefining **relationships** with parents and other family members, especially brothers and sisters, to prevent or reduce conflict.
- Sorting through **feelings** such as guilt, loss, and sense of responsibility.
- Defining personal **limits** about how much or how little to do and determining ways to **share** responsibility with other family members and community services.
- Developing a **workable plan** that pulls everything together and reduces the stress of figuring out what to do next.
- Meeting every-day **challenges**, such as need for changes in living arrangements, by obtaining information, exploring all options, considering consequences, and then deciding what is practical, affordable, and best for everyone.

► For more information, call Linda Simonton at (515) 274-4006.

C.O.O.L. Corner

C.O.O.L. Corner is written by the pediatric psychologists of the Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center.

Taking care of basic needs consistently.

Reminding your children that you love them.

Understanding developmental needs and the perspective of the child.

Safety – security – stability.

Time spent with your child working, playing, learning – just being together!

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Also in the 1980s and 1990s, the Center expanded its services beyond counseling to include consultation, education, groups, and events. Center staff members consulted with a variety of churches, schools, and businesses. The Center’s educational offerings in the 1980s and 1990s included a residency program in psychotherapy, a pastoral care specialist program, an annual clergy day, and various workshops for mental health and religious professionals. In the 1990s the Center created a cancer support group and two men’s groups (Souljourners and Manifest). Special events sponsored by the Center in the 1980s and 1990s included “The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People” with Stephen Covey, “Dance of Anger” with Harriet Lerner, “Leadership” with Edwin Friedman, and Women Helping Women luncheon.

Throughout its history, the Center has been supported by the faith and dedication of its board of directors. Numbering 20 to 25, the Center board has provided leadership, guidance, consultation, nurturance, and support of the staff of the Center in many ways that have allowed the Center to serve people from all walks of life. In more recent years, the Center has also had a Foundation board of directors. This board was formed to oversee the Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center Foundation, which was created in 1995 through a generous gift from Dick and Jan Westcott.

Other important milestones for the Center during the past two decades include reaccreditation and a move to a new office space. In 1987 the American Association of Pastoral Counselors (AAPC) reaccredited the Center as a service center and approved our training program. Reaccreditation and approval was again earned in 1993.

The Center moved to our current space, 39th Street and Ingersoll in Des Moines, in 1984. In 1991 the Center opened a satellite office in the Altoona Christian Church and in 1995 in the Indianola Trinity Presbyterian Church. In 1996 the Center rented a four-office suite across from Valley High School in West Des Moines in response to continued growth.

Look for information about the present and future of the Center in the September/October issue of *Connecting* – the next 30 years!

Cancer Support Group

The Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center’s Cancer Support Service offers a monthly support group for people living with cancer. The support group meets on the second Wednesday of each month at West Des Moines United Methodist Church. You must pre-register in order to take part. If you would like more information about the support group, call the Center at (515) 274-4006.

Connecting Available Through Email

Please let us know if you would like to receive this newsletter through email rather than having a paper copy sent to you. To be added to our newsletter email list, email skuhn@dmpcc.org and indicate in your message that you would like to receive *Connecting* by email. Make sure to include the name and street address to which we have been mailing the newsletter so that we can remove your name from our newsletter postal list.

2002 Manifest Events

Manifest workshops focus on topics that are significant in men’s lives and are rarely talked about. The workshops involve presentations and discussion. The richness of the workshops comes from the shared experience of the participants themselves. Manifest workshops are held on scheduled Saturdays from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Manifest weekends provide opportunity for men to discuss their journey as men, while creating a sense of community. Retreats are held in a rustic, outdoor setting that provides a sense of connection with nature. They begin Friday evening and conclude Sunday noon on scheduled weekends.

August 3, 2002 Manifest Workshop – Men and Their Fathers

September 20-22, 2002 Manifest Weekend

October 18-20, 2002 Manifest Weekend

Upcoming Manifest Workshop (August 3): Men and Their Fathers

The relationship between fathers and sons is powerful. Dad’s influence and teaching are nourishing to the soul of a son. It has been stated, “Only a father can affirm a man’s masculinity and make him feel like a man.” Many sons grow up not feeling their father’s blessing and affirmation. They feel they have not measured up to their father’s hopes and expectations. Men carry a sense of failure or shame as a result of this. “Men and Their Fathers” will provide participants the opportunity to explore the relationship with their father, to gain insight and understanding into how this relationship may continue to influence them, and to give and receive affirmation in a group of caring men.

► For details, visit the Manifest website at www.manifest.themenscenter.com or call Lowell Houts or Mike Sears at (515) 274-4006.

Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center Foundation

A will bequest is one of the simplest ways to remember family, friends, and charitable organizations. Bequests can be made in many ways including:

- a specified dollar amount
- a percentage of your estate
- the residue of your estate after all other bequests, debts, and taxes have been paid

We encourage you to consider a bequest to your favorite non-profit organizations, including the Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center. For more information on bequests, talk to your attorney, tax professional, or investment professional, or visit the Leave a Legacy web site at www.leavealegacyiowa.com. To find out more about supporting the Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center Foundation through a bequest or another type of planned gift, call Stephanie Kuhn at the Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center (515) 274-4006.

Autumn Class – Object Relations Theory

► For information about this class for mental health professionals, go to the Center’s web site, www.dmpcc.org.

www.dmpcc.org

Visit the Center’s website for information on Center counseling services, Center staff members, support and interest groups offered by the Center, special events taking place in the coming months, and classes the Center offers to mental health clinicians and clergy.

CONNECTING

is a publication of the Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center, an independent, interfaith, not-for-profit organization. For nearly 30 years, the Center has been providing counseling and educational services to individuals, couples, and families for the purpose of enhancing emotional, spiritual, and relationship health. The Center has satellite offices in West Des Moines, Altoona, and Ankeny.

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Des Moines Pastoral

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