

# Encouraging **Your** Wellness

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A question asked from a client, website visitor or class member is answered for all to see.

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Tips on keeping your relationship strong.

## **Positive Parenting— Role Modeling—It Belongs in the Parenting Toolbox**

Many of you know that I regularly teach a class on Positive Parenting where together we build a toolbox of positive parenting strategies for use with our kids. One of the tools I emphasize in that class is ROLE MODELING. I firmly believe that what our kids see us do is far more impactful than the words they hear us say. So, you would think I would have this one down, right? Well, let me confess. Recently (so recently, actually, that I had already started writing this column on role modeling...) I was driving my daughters home from school and some errands. It was a Friday, and I was somewhat on auto-pilot, when I suddenly spotted a police officer taking radar. (Are you ready for it—Here comes my goof!) I said to myself, but unfortunately out loud, “Oh a cop! Slow down, Pam.” I thought nothing of both of my daughters sitting in the backseat, when my eleven year old, very perceptive daughter said to me, “Okay, only follow the rules when someone is watching!” I was shocked! In that split second, my daughter had received the message from my actions that we only do what is right when someone of authority is watching us. I had actually just role modeled this for her. Luckily, my daughter is articulate enough to immediately challenge me on this and let me clearly know what message I was sending her. Otherwise, I would have sent this message without having ever known it. It allowed me to look really closely at the messages that I send to my kids, and how I need/want to change some of those messages. I hope my example also prompts you to look more



## **Achieving Healthy Self-Esteem**

Self-esteem, or how we feel about ourselves, is NOT a fixed state. It is variable over time, situations and life cycle. You may have felt very poorly about yourself in high school, and actually grew up to be someone you like and feel good about. Or, you may have felt really good about yourself until you went through a painful divorce or loss in your life, and now suffer from feelings of low self-worth. I see many clients in my practice who suffer low self-worth and we specifically work to create habits or patterns that are more consistent with those of persons with healthy self-esteem. Cognitive Behavioral therapy has been shown to be very effective at changing the way we *think* so that we can change the way we *feel*. First, let's look at the types of thought patterns that tend to erode self-esteem. All or nothing thinking. When you see things as all good or

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## Dear Readers,



Anyone else getting Spring Fever? This time of year always brings it for me—I enjoy saying goodbye to a long winter and look forward to all the newness Spring can bring. I hope this issue of **Encouraging Your Wellness** finds you happy and staying healthy. And, as always, I hope you find this newsletter informative as well as inspirational in helping you be the person, parent, and partner you want to be. Happy Reading!

Do you remember the movie Pay It Forward? Although there were parts of this movie I really wish the writers would have done differently, I truly LOVED the concept the little boy created about paying it forward; putting good out there into the world. Recently, I was working with a family where a teenager commented that she was intentionally hurting her parents because they had hurt her. She wondered if I wouldn't do the same? I shared with this client that I don't really believe in getting even, mostly because it just puts more negative out into a world that already has enough bad. I shared with her that my goal was to act in a way that put more good into the world—or at a minimum, not any more bad. What if we all worried less about getting even, and instead tried to have others match our kindness and compassion for one another? How about trying your own pay it forward experiment this month, and see how good it feels to everyone. I

*Do you model anger management the way you hope to see your children manage their anger?*

## Role Modeling...Cont'd from page 1

closely at your inadvertent messages. Here are some places to begin.

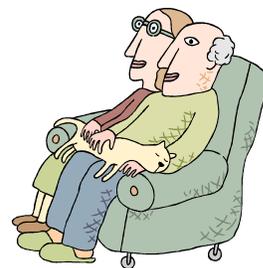
- **Lying:** Do you tell little “white” lies to others for your convenience? Do your kids hear you calling into work “sick” so you can go have a day of fun? How about telling a friend that you aren't free when you really aren't doing much of anything? Or telling your spouse untruths to avoid a conflict or explanation? When kids hear us lie, no matter how small, they get the message that lying is okay under certain circumstances, and they will begin to create their own justifications for lying—like to stay out of trouble.
- **Moods:** How do you handle the stress of your day? Do you withdraw, yell, take it out on others? How about when you are angry? Do you model anger management the way you hope to see your children manage their anger? Grief—do you pretend you are not sad and stuff your feelings inside rather than allow your children to see you upset? Kids learn all about emotions from us so think carefully about **SHOWING** them how you handle your feelings (if it is healthy) so they can learn to do the same.

## Achieving Healthy Self-Esteem Cont'd from page 1

all bad, your thinking tends to be distorted and unrealistic. For example, “If I don't succeed in this task, I am a total failure.” **Mental Filtering.** In a given situation, you filter out the positives and dwell on the negatives. This distorts your view of a person or a situation. For example, “I made a mistake at work and now everyone will assume I am not qualified for my job.” **Converting Positives into Negatives.** You reject your achievements and other positive experiences by insisting they don't count. For example, “I only did well in college because it was so easy.” **Jumping to Negative Conclusions.** You jump to a negative conclusion when little or no evidence supports it. For example, “Those people laughed when I walked by, they must be laughing at me.” And possibly most damaging, **Self put-downs.** You undervalue yourself and regularly put yourself down. When your mental messages to yourself throughout the day are critical and hurtful, you are

## Couple's Corner—What Can We Learn from 40 years of Marriage Research?

When therapists want to create new interventions in marital/relationship therapy, we often turn to the works of Dr. John Gottman, a well known psychologist who has conducted extensive research in the areas of marital stability and divorce. He has studied couples for over four decades, and claims that he can predict with 93% (or more) accuracy relationships that will survive, and those that will end in divorce, within minutes of observing the couple in an argument! I will briefly share what patterns Dr. Gottman identifies as problematic. First, a harsh start-up. When a partner begins negatively or accusatory, the conversation goes downhill quickly. Absolute words such as “always” or “never” typically close off constructive dialogue that could lead to effective problem solving. “You never help out.” “You always criticize me.” are examples. The harsh start-up reinforces negative interactions. Dr. Gottman has labeled four negative interactions as The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse and states that they usually enter a relationship in the following order: **criticism, contempt, defensiveness and stonewalling**. Dr. Gottman clarifies that criticism is not the same as complaints, and that every partner will have complaints about their spouse. Criticism is an attack on the character of your partner. Criticism is transformed into contempt when it is expressed as sarcasm, eye rolling, ill-spirited humor, cynicism, and mockery. Gottman states that when contempt appears, so too does the third horseman, defensiveness. It is natural to become defensive when you perceive that you are under attack. Gottman’s fourth horseman is what he calls stonewalling in which one partner tunes out the other and refuses to say anything. I have heard this complaint expressed many times while conducting couples therapy. One spouse will say that the other becomes mute and problems cannot be solved when that happens. The so-called “mute” partner will reply, “Why should I say anything since you attack anything I say? I feel it’s better not to say anything at all.” These beliefs and their accompanying interaction patterns are major obstacles to happy marriages. Dialogues become monologues filled with frustration and anger when one member of the couple refuses to talk. If these 4 horsemen are present in your relationship, it will take intentional effort to replace these negative interactions. But doing so can restore hope and happiness in a relationship that has become frustrating and unsatisfying. I hope you’ll consider it.



*When your mental messages to yourself throughout the day are critical and hurtful, you are actually brainwashing yourself to believe that you are of no positive worth.*

### Role Modeling –continued from page 2

- **Work Ethic:** What messages do you send to your kids about work ethic? Do you make them do their chores before any free time, yet your chores remain undone after several episodes of your favorite show? Do they hear you talking about work in a way that shows you will not do your best for a boss that you don’t like? (Translate: Kids don’t always like their teachers, but we still want them to do their best on their homework and tests)
- **Relationship Skills:** Are you role modeling a healthy relationship with your spouse or co-parent and are you modeling effective relationship skills with other people? Are you demonstrating effective conflict resolution skills, or shouting and crossing boundaries to get your point across? Are you keeping harmful secrets, or modeling effective open communication?
- **Car Behavior:** You know you’ll *tell* your children to never text and drive, or maybe even to never have a cell phone out while driving. Are you also saying this with *your* behavior? How about road rage—do you model keeping control of your temper while driving?

I hope role modeling is something you re-evaluate from time to time, we might all need a tune-up like I did!

### Achieving Healthy Self-Esteem Cont’d from page 2

actually brainwashing yourself to believe that you are of no positive worth. If you were to tell your child that they were fat, ugly, useless, dumb, less important than other people, etc., it would not be hard to see why your child suffered from low self-esteem. But that is exactly what you are doing to yourself with pervasive negative self-talk! If you engage in these self-esteem bashers, it’s time to change your ways. Become aware of the previously mentioned patterns and actively work to stop them. Use hopeful statements such as, “I can handle this situation.” Forgive yourself—everyone makes mistakes and they are not permanent reflections on you as a person. Tell yourself, “I made a mistake, but that doesn’t make me a bad person.” Focus on your strengths and on the positive things you have achieved. Use an affirmation such as, “I am capable” or “I am beautiful like I am.” If you have trouble changing these patterns, seek help. Your self-esteem is worth it!



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*If you are in need of individual, couple or family help, call me. Together with you, I will design a treatment plan that helps you achieve your goals and gets you on the road to feeling life more fulfilled. I specialize in working with teens, adults and children who are struggling with depression, anxiety, low self-worth, past experiences of abuse, and who are believing there must be more to life than what they are currently experiencing. I look forward to speaking with you.*

**Dear Pam,**

*My husband and I have allowed our 5 and 7 year old children to sleep with us since they were born. Now that we are ready to have our bed back to ourselves, our children are having a terrible time moving to their own rooms. Any suggestions? - T and C*

No wonder your kids are putting up such a fuss! All the sleeping comfort and coziness they have ever known is being messed with! This is not a change that can happen abruptly. They will need time and lots of encouragement to make this transition happen. First, make sure you pick a time when you can lose a little sleep and have the energy to be firm and consistent, or you'll set yourself up for failure. Next, explain to your children why it is becoming a problem. (The bed is no longer big enough for all of you, you are not getting enough sleep, they are getting older and kids who are older sleep in their own rooms, etc.) Then, develop a transition plan. This can happen in a number of different ways. They can transition from the bed in your room, to the floor in your room, to the hallway outside of your room, etc. until they make it to their own bedrooms. Or, you can transition by alternating—one successful night in their room earns them one night in your room, followed by *two* successful nights in their room earns them one in your room, etc., until the norm is their room and the exception is your room. Your kids are not likely to be on board without lots of encouragement and incentives along the way. You will need to send the unwavering message that you believe that they can do it. This means when they cry, scream, kick, show intense fear, and refuse to go to bed, you must stay calm and consistent in your message that you believe in them and KNOW they can do it! No backing down, or the next transition will be twice as hard. Offer incentives, such as "After your third calm night in your room, we will celebrate by \_\_\_\_\_" Habits are hard enough to change when we don't like the habit, but your kids perfectly like sleeping with you so the habit will be extra hard for them to change. Be patient, but stay firm. If your child wanders into your bed at night, gently walk them back to their room with love and encouragement.

