



A Healthy Outlook!

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Co-Parenting

You Be the Judge...

When parents are experiencing a family transition such as the end of an adult relationship where there have been children, the thought of parent education may appear to be very unappealing. However, co-parent education isn't parenting 101; rather, co-parent education is about how parents who no longer are together as adults can parent their children. Most parents who are separating from a partner really may not want to have a lot of contact with their co-parent. At the same time, there really isn't a choice when you think about the importance of parents communicating about their children. How can we turn the business of co-parenting into a constructive businesslike relationship?

The Business of Co-Parenting

When you have a business partner, you have specific goals and specific tasks. With co-parenting, your goal is providing your children with the best opportunities to have a relationship with each parent and feel loved by each parent. Your specific tasks and goals are about how to address the needs of each child in your family. These needs are determined by your child's age, temperament, gender, and relationship with each parent. [When you have a business partner, you are polite and demonstrate respect. Co-parenting should be the same.] You are on time and should let the co-parent know if you will be late. You should not make assumptions but check

out plans and ask for permission when it comes to entering the co-parent's home. You should stick to the topic on the agenda and should not bring up additional topics, including anything personal.

Skills to Be the Best Judge

Only you and your child's co-parent, in most cases, know your child the best and love him/her the most. "You be the judge," means that you and your co-parent make the decisions about your child, not the judge who is a total stranger to your child and doesn't want to make that decision. You can save a lot of money, time, conflict, and pain by following some of these "rules for co-parenting."

- ☞ **Obey rules of civility:** speak one at a time and speak respectfully (no sarcasm, interruptions, judgmental statements, or yelling). Agree beforehand that if rules are broken, parents will have the right to end the call. In that case, parents should state that they need to end the call and agree to resume the call at another time.
- ☞ **Set aside a time** to speak as co-parents once a week at a time when either the children aren't with you or when they are asleep.
- ☞ **Stay focused** on discussing the children, and only the children.
- ☞ **Do not interrupt** the co-parent; check to make sure he or she is finished speaking.
- ☞ **Speak from your perspective** about a specific situation.

☞ **Give** your co-parent the opportunity to respond.

☞ **Focus on how your child is coping**, how his relationship is with each parent, how his behavior has been, how he is doing with transitions, such as friends, school, activities, and any concerns either parent has.

You are giving your children a gift by making a commitment to constructive co-parenting and following through in a way that supports your children being kids, not having to worry about how parents are going to get along in each aspect and at each event of their lives. ■

Written by Risa Garon, LCSW-C, BCD, CFLE, Executive Director of the National Family Resiliency Center, Inc.. They are located at 451 Hungerford Drive, Suite 225, Rockville, MD, 20850 as well as in Columbia, MD, 21044 and can be reached at 301-384-0079. Printed with permission.

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Learning Difficulties and Strategies:

For children who have undergone treatment for central nervous system tumors

Learning problems are not uncommon in children who have undergone treatment for central nervous system tumors. Many factors can contribute to learning problems for children who are undergoing or have previously been treated for a brain tumor. Factors may include: tumor location, cumulative doses of treatment, younger age at the time of treatment, or gender (females are more sensitive to radiation side effects). School performance can also be impacted by frequent absences, social stigma, and limited alertness due to low blood counts.

Many children benefit from special testing accommodations. Intervention is important to ensure that executive functioning (e.g. memory, planning, decision-making) and transitions between tasks, are addressed. Children may require additional educational support to enable them to achieve their maximum potential. Learning can be impacted in the following ways:

Memory

Signs and Symptoms: word retrieval issues; recognition difficulties.

Coping Strategies: Using repetition and verbal cues or hints; reducing sensory overload; decreasing distractions; breaking activities down into steps; color coding materials; chunking information; involving all senses in the learning process; making use of visualization, webbing or categorization.

Attention Deficit Disorder

Signs and Symptoms: Concentration issues; poor organizational skills; impulsivity; distractibility; inattention; ability to hyperfocus at times; social aggressiveness; difficulty tolerating change; illegible handwriting or coordination issues; difficulty following instruction; fidgeting, squirming and chronically underachieving; speech or

language delays. Many children outgrow the hyperactivity and some of the other associated issues when they reach puberty.

Coping Strategies: Positive reinforcement for appropriate behavior; keeping a routine; providing directions that are concise and clear; having the child keep an assignment book to monitor progress in completion of tasks.

Auditory Processing Disorder

Signs and Symptoms: Problems with auditory attending skills; slow or delayed response to auditory stimuli; short attention span; may have inconsistent responses;

difficulty answering questions that start with “wh”.

Coping Strategies: Use shorter phrases when giving directions; speak at a slower rate or pause to allow the child to process the information; repeat key words; teach your child to self-advocate by asking for help when they do not understand; self-monitor attention; learn sequencing techniques; have the child repeat information by using sequencing (first, next, last); reduce background noise; simplify information to reduce sensory overload; and make sure comprehension is okay before changing subjects.

Health Benefits of Kindness

Numerous scientific studies show that acts of kindness result in significant health benefits, both physical and mental. Here are some key points:

- Helping contributes to the maintenance of good health, and it can diminish the effect of diseases and disorders, serious and minor, psychological and physical.
- A rush of euphoria, followed by a longer period of calm, after performing a kind act is often referred to as a “helper’s high,” involving physical sensations and the release of the body’s natural painkillers, the endorphins. This initial rush is then followed by a longer-lasting period of improved emotional well-being.
- Stress-related health problems improve after performing kind acts. Helping reverses feelings of depression, supplies social contact, and decreases feelings of hostility and isolation that can cause stress, overeating, ulcers, etc. A drop in stress may, for some people, decrease the constriction within the lungs that leads to asthma attacks.
- Helping can enhance our feelings of joyfulness, emotional resilience and vigor, and can reduce the unhealthy sense of isolation.

- A decrease in both the intensity and the awareness of physical pain can occur.
- The incidence of attitudes, such as chronic hostility, that negatively arouse and damage the body is reduced.
- The health benefits and sense of well-being return for hours or even days whenever the helping act is remembered.
- An increased sense of self-worth, greater happiness and optimism, as well as a decrease in feelings of helplessness and depression, is achieved.
- Once we establish an “affiliative connection” with someone — a relationship of friendship, love, or some sort of positive bonding — we feel emotions that can strengthen the immune system.
- Adopting an altruistic lifestyle is a critical component of mental health.
- The practice of caring for strangers translates to immense immune and healing benefits.
- Regular club attendance, volunteering, entertaining, or faith group attendance is the happiness equivalent of getting a college degree or more than doubling your income.

Source: Luks, Allan. *The Healing Power of Doing Good: The Health and Spiritual Benefits of Helping Others*. New York: iUniverse.com, 2001.

“Some people dream of success...while others wake up and work hard at it.”

— Author Unknown

Visual Impairment

Coping Strategies: Provide preferential seating; make sure lighting is adequate; keep text simple and increase size and/ or make bold if needed; provide tactile experiences (especially for young children); consider multi-sensory approaches to reinforce learning; use high contrast materials; use acetate filters (yellow) which can give stereoscopic enhancement; incorporate assistive technology; eliminate clutter; use tape recorder; stimulate use of remaining vision.

Article provided by Jeanne Young from *The Childhood Brain Tumor Foundation*. For further information, they can be contacted at 877-217-4166 or 301-515-2900. You can also find valuable information at their website: www.childhoodbraintumor.org

Support Groups

Do you have a family member with mental illness? The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) has multiple groups available to offer help and support to those with mental illness as well as to their family members. Get more information at www.namimc.org or call 301-949-5852.



Nutrition Notes: Is the Amazing Acai Berry Really Amazing?

By now, we have all heard about this “revolutionary” fruit! Depending on which article or advertisement you read, the benefits from the acai (pronounced ah-sigh-ee) vary.

The good news... unless you have a severe pollen allergy or have a known sensitivity to acai or similar berries, the acai berry is a healthy and safe fruit to consume.

I have gathered a myriad of information about the acai berry. My goal is to review the various health claims that have been made and to share scientific research that has been identified.

Can acai berries boost weight loss? The acai berry has been touted in some weight loss products; few studies have tested the benefit of acai in promoting weight loss. Research does support, however, a diet rich in antioxidants — which fits the acai berry bill. There is no doubt that berries or other fruits are a key part of any healthy diet promoting weight loss. The jury’s still out on whether there is something special about acai’s ability to shed those excess pounds.

Is the acai berry healthy? Acai contains several substances called anthocyanins and flavonoids. Anthocyanins are responsible for the red, purple, and blue hues in many

fruits and vegetables — such as blueberries, red grapes, red wine, and acai. Anthocyanins neutralize enzymes that destroy connective tissue. This helps to stop connective tissue from damage and helps repair damaged proteins in the blood vessel walls. Acai fruit pulp is very high in antioxidants — even higher than cranberry, raspberry, blackberry, strawberry or blueberry.



NOTE: So far though, the acai berry has no known health benefit that is any different than that of the similar fruits previously mentioned.

What are some other health benefits from the acai berry? The high antioxidant

contact helps increase the body’s resistance to certain types of cancer by fighting against free radicals. Acai is a good source of fiber, which is a key element in healthy digestion — also fiber is linked to lowering cholesterol and lowering the risks of some cancers.

Why is the acai berry used in beauty products? Some cosmetics and beauty products contain acai oil in them. Acai oil is a powerhouse of antioxidants. What makes acai oil a safe alternative to other tropical oils in beauty products, such as facial and body creams, anti-aging skin therapies, shampoos, and conditioners, is that when acai oil is processed and stored long term, its antioxidant level continues to remain high.

Does the acai berry help regulate cholesterol levels? The acai berry does have very high amounts of essential fatty acids and omegas which have shown to lessen LDL and maintain HDL cholesterol levels. Acai has been found to be a rich source of organic vegetable protein that does not produce cholesterol during digestion.

This vegetable protein is easily processed and transported to muscle tissue. The fatty acids in the acai berry are similar to those in olive oil. Studies in Mediterranean populations linked a reduction in heart disease to high intake of olive oil. In addition, acai is also rich in carbohydrates which provide the body with energy.

To summarize...yes, the acai berry has many health benefits. There is insufficient evidence to show that the acai berry provides greater health benefits than many other fruits and vegetables and their derivatives. The acai berry and the various forms are more costly than other similar fruits and vegetables.

To maintain good health, let’s go back to some basics! A balanced diet, high in variety and moderation with a splash of exercise is just what the doctor ordered! Have a wonderful and healthy school year! ■

Article written by Marla Caplon, R.D. L.D. Division of Food and Nutrition Service, printed with permission.

Meeting Mistakes

It can readily be said that many of us spend an awful lot of time at meetings. At times, these meetings can seem wasteful and mind numbing. However, they are generally necessary in order to help coordinate work within groups and can offer a place for you to shine — or not. There are a few major meeting mistakes that you never want to make.

They include the following—

❖ **Being unprepared**—if you get an agenda beforehand, read it; call the leader of the meeting and ask for background information; figure out what you can bring to the table in discussion. If you're the leader, make sure all technical aides are working, confirm meeting room size, availability, and provide an agenda in advance when possible.

❖ **Showing up late**—being late damages your image and is disrespectful of other people's time. If you're the leader, you should never make the group wait for you to stroll in.

❖ **Being a meeting hog**—don't talk just to talk—speak when you have something to say, be blunt, be brief, be done. If you're the leader, it's your job to facilitate the flow of the meeting—don't let anyone hog the time.

❖ **Sitting silently**—not participating can look badly to others. Try to engage in some conversation and make at least one suggestion. If you're the leader, encourage participation—ask for questions, comments, opinions.

❖ **Expressing rude body language**—No sleeping, slouching, sighing, hair tossing, chair spinning, leaving the room, eating loudly, rude gestures or facial expressions. As the leader, manage anyone being rude—don't tolerate disrespectful behavior.

❖ **Arguing or putting down others**—Disagreements are fine, but don't expose mistakes in a condescending way or ignore their points. If you're the leader, you need to be professional when you disagree and not disregard people.

❖ **Leaving your cell phone on**—If you need to bring a phone, set to vibrate so as not to disrupt the meeting. If you're expecting a call, let everyone know in advance.

❖ **Chewing gum**—The sound of chewing gum can be rude, annoying, and is unprofessional. ■

Adapted from an article on CareerBuilder.com, 9/10/07

Ask the EAP

Q. If I use the Employee Assistance Program (EAP), who will know that I have used it? Can an administrator phone the EAP and get information about my use of the program?

A. No. Strict confidentiality and anonymity will be maintained. No personal information will be released to anyone, with the exception of issues related to life and death (homicide, suicide, child abuse, sexual abuse). An employee may request that we release information about their own use of the EAP, but the request must be written, informed and voluntary.

Do you have a question for the EAP? Send us your questions via Outlook or through the Pony to Jeff Becker.



A Healthy Outlook!

To help employees with troubling issues before they become overwhelming.



EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE
SPECIALISTS: Debbie Tipton
Robyn Rosenbauer
Jeff Becker

EAP at Gaither Road
2096 Gaither Road, Suite 205
Rockville, Maryland 20850
phone: 240-314-1040
www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/departments/eap

Important Notice: Information in *A Healthy Outlook!* is for general information purposes only and is not intended to replace the counsel or advice of a qualified health professional. For further questions or help with specific problems or personal concerns, contact your employee assistance professional.

You may contact us or send your questions and comments to Debra_Tipton@mcpsmd.org

Please note that e-mail is not necessarily confidential.



Upcoming Events

January — Thyroid Awareness Month
American Association of Clinical Endocrinologists
www.thyroidawareness.com

Third Week of February — Random Acts of Kindness Week
www.actsofkindness.org

March — National Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month
Prevent Cancer Foundation, Alexandria, VA 22314
800-227-2732
www.preventcancer.org/colorectal

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