



A Healthy Outlook!

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ASSERTIVE Communication: 20 Tips

Most of us know that assertiveness will get you further in life than being passive or aggressive. But few of us were actually taught how to be assertive. Here are some helpful tips.

1. **Choose the right time.** Imagine you are dashing down the hall on your way to a meeting. Lisa passes by. You call out, "Can you have the Microsoft project out by Tuesday?" Because you haven't scheduled a special time to bring up the issue, Lisa has no reason to think your request deserves high priority.
2. **Choose the right place.** Discuss important issues in a private, neutral location.
3. **Be direct.** For example, "Lisa, I would like you to prioritize the Microsoft project." Whether or not Lisa likes your request, she respects you for your directness.
4. **Say "I," not "we."** Instead of saying, "We need the project by Tuesday," say, "I would like you to finish the project by Tuesday."
5. **Be specific.** Instead of, "Put a rush on the Microsoft project," say, "I would like the Microsoft project finished and on Joe's desk by 9:00 Tuesday morning."
6. **Use body language to emphasize your words.** "Lisa, I need that report Tuesday morning," is an assertive statement. But if you mumble this statement while staring at the floor, you undermine your message.
7. **Confirm your request.** Ask your staff to take notes at meetings. At the end of each meeting, ask your group to repeat the specifics that were agreed upon. This minimizes miscommunication.
8. **Stand up for yourself.** Do not allow others to take advantage of you; insist on being treated fairly. Here are a few examples: "I was here first," "I would like more coffee, please," "Excuse me, but I have another appointment," "Please turn down the radio," or "This steak is well done, but I asked for medium rare."
9. **Learn to be friendly with people you would like to know better.** Do not avoid people because you do not know what to say. Smile at people. Convey that you are happy to see them.
10. **Express your opinions honestly.** When you disagree with someone, do not pretend to agree. When you are asked to do something unreasonable, ask for an explanation.

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Ask the EAP:

Q. I was a previous client of the EAP. Can I use the EAP again?

A. Yes. While we are a short-term counseling service, there is no limit to the number of times you can access the EAP. However, if it seems like you are coming back for the same problem multiple times, this might indicate that a longer-term resource might be helpful to you. You can discuss that with the EAP counselor who would be happy to help you with some resource suggestions.

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Assertive Communication

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11. **Share your experiences and opinions.** When you have done something worthwhile, let others know about it.
12. **Learn to accept kind words.** When someone gives you a compliment, say, "Thank you."
13. **Maintain eye contact when you are in a conversation.**
14. **Don't get personal.** When expressing annoyance or criticism, comment on the person's behavior rather than attacking the person. For example: "Please do not talk to me that way," rather than, "What kind of jerk are you?"
15. **Use "I" statements when commenting on another's behavior.** For example: "When you cancel social arrangements at the last minute, it is extremely inconvenient and I feel really annoyed."
16. **State what you want.** If appropriate,



ask for another behavior. For example: "I think we should sit down and try to figure out how we

can make plans together and cut down on this kind of problem."

17. **Look for good examples.** Pay attention to assertive people and model your behavior after theirs.
18. **Start slowly.** Express your assertiveness in low-anxiety situations at first; do not leap into a highly emotional situation until you have more confidence. Most people do not learn new skills overnight.
19. **Reward yourself each time you formulate an assertive response.** Do this regardless of the response from the other person.
20. **Do not put yourself down when you behave passively or aggressively.** Instead, identify where you went off course and learn how to improve.

Adapted from an article written by Tom Phillips, a licensed clinical social worker, in the *Therapists Newsletter*. Used with permission.



Improve Health Through a Holistic Approach

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that the key factors influencing an individual's state of health have not changed significantly over the past 20 years. Fifty-three percent of the factors influencing health and wellness still come from the decisions people make about their lifestyle and personal habits, followed by 19 percent due to the environment, and 18 percent due to heredity.

Holistic health is an approach people can take to enhance their wellness. It emphasizes the connection of mind, body, and spirit. The holistic lifestyle is gaining more popularity each year, as the principles offer practical options to meet the growing desire for enjoying a high level of vitality and well-being. These options include the following:

Meditation—Studies have shown that meditation can counteract the fight-or-flight response that floods the body with the stress hormone cortisol. It also reduces hardening of the arteries and blood pressure, slows the heart rate, and has a positive, sustained effect on chronic pain and mood disorders, including depression and anxiety. It also has been found that patients who meditate experience less operative bleeding and, by meditating 15 minutes twice a day, they reduced their physician visits over a six-month period.

Yoga—Yoga is a 5,000-year-old art that emerged from India. Today, over 15 million practice some kind of yoga to address their physical, psychological, and spiritual needs. Yoga realigns body posture, releases muscle tension, strengthens the body, aids in concentration, steadies the emotions, and calms the mind. A recent study among women, ages 20–70, showed that yoga postures significantly increase bone density in the spine.

Massage Therapy—Massage therapy is the scientific manipulation of the soft tissues. There are a number of different types of massage, and sessions are generally an hour long. By stimulating the skin, all of the internal organ systems are affected and muscle tone and circulation are increased. Massage also increases the oxygen capacity of the blood, helps posture, and enhances skin condition. It also disperses the accumulated by-products of muscle action that irritate muscles and nerve-endings and promotes overall health by boosting the body's own processes.

Acupuncture—An important part of Chinese medicine, acupuncture has been practiced for more than 2,000 years. It is a holistic approach to health care that focuses on bringing balance to the body's "qi," or vital energy. When qi is strong and flows freely throughout the body along its energetic pathways called "meridians," good health is achieved. If qi flow becomes obstructed, various problems such as pain and illness can result. To regulate the free flow of qi, the acupuncturist uses needles to stimulate specific points along these meridians, thereby correcting pathology and bringing back balance to the body, mind, and spirit. Effective for pain relief, studies show that needling acupuncture points stimulate the production and release of endorphins, natural painkillers found in the body's central nervous system. Acupuncture also is commonly used to treat gastrointestinal complaints, psycho-emotional disorders and addiction, metabolic and hormonal imbalance, and autoimmune disease.

Sources: American Massage Therapy Association; *Time* magazine; *The Wellness Book*, by Dr. Herbert Benson; American Holistic Health Association; and Washington and Shady Grove Adventist Hospitals. Acupuncture segment written by Lauren Becker. Printed with permission. For more information, please consult your physician.

The EMPTY NEST Syndrome: Is It as Sad a Time as People Say It Is?

When it comes to our children—grown or otherwise—strong emotions run through us, especially at points of passage: their birth, the first day of school, and their leaving home for college (or to find their place in the world). Whether we admit it or not, the latter is a big deal—the last big event that takes place under our protective roof, the transition from child to young adult, the end of our tenure as hands-on parents.

A lot of us feel sad when they leave. The nest is really empty and that vacant space, one psychotherapist writes, “can produce uneasiness, discomfort, anxiety, emptiness.” But does that mean there is an empty nest syndrome and that those of us who are shipping our youngest off to college or to full-time independence are likely to suffer from it?

Though the empty nest syndrome is supposed to be one of the major adjustments of life—we miss the little critters and their soccer games, swim meets, and theatrical performances—researchers now say that the empty nest syndrome is fiction. Not that our children—the birds finally out of the nest—don’t think we’re suffering from it. Karen Fingerman, a psychologist at Purdue University who teaches classes on family issues, asks incoming freshmen how they think their parents are doing now that the children are in college. Every year, the students answer, almost uniformly: Their parents must be “devastated” by their absence.

But in fact, Fingerman’s research finds that we the parents are thriving—and with good reason: all that teenage tension has left the building. While

we may experience wistfulness for the excitement they brought into the house—their music bounding off the walls, their endless talking on the phone and texting—scientists are coming around to the view that, even among women who devote all their time to raising kids, there is no empty nest syndrome. Instead, there is a feeling of satisfaction at a job well done. The kids are independent!

Fingerman points to another source of the positive vibe. As we get older, she says,

“We get better at emotional regulation.”

Moreover, a lot of the volatility that had been in our lives when we were younger has diminished; we are more settled. By the time our children are young adults, most of us know where our careers are heading, where we are going to live, and with whom. The empty nest gives us time and a chance to reach out and bring more activities and relationships into our lives. We may start reconnecting with old friends and relatives we have not seen in years. And tracing the family tree—an activity that has grown a thousandfold in recent years, has been made possible not only by the Internet, but by the energies and interests unleashed by no longer having our kids (and their tensions) in the house.

Some couples experience a second honeymoon. A University of California study followed 123 middle-aged women for 18 years and found a strong correlation between empty-nest status and an increase in how much the women enjoyed spending time with their partners.

In researching this issue for my blog about parenting adult children (www.grownchildren.net), I received this message from a couple whose youngest child was now in college. It puts the ups and downs of the empty nest cycle in perspective.

“Our daughter is home for the summer, which is balm to our souls. It’s not like our lives are empty without her. Our work is endless, we really like one another’s company, and we’ve begun to reconnect with old friends, whom we had left behind in favor of spending time with our children. So, life without kids in the house is full

“Courage is the most important of all the virtues, because without courage you can’t practice any other virtue consistently. You can practice any virtue erratically, but nothing consistently without courage.”

~ MAYA ANGELOU

Gambling Problem: How You Can Help

If you think a friend or family member has a gambling problem, it is possible to express your concern in a supportive and caring manner. Share your concerns with the person. Do not offer advice or expect any sign that your expression of concern has been accepted.

We plant the seeds of hope by offering information on how to get help.

- ◆ Be clear and nonjudgmental, just speak for yourself: “I’m worried about you.”
- ◆ Be positive: “I know you care about your family and your job.”
- ◆ Be clear about your position: “I will not lend you any more money.”
- ◆ Provide information, not advice: “The Maryland Council on

Problem Gambling has some literature and a Helpline for more information.”

- ◆ Be prepared for denial or rejection: “It may be hard to hear this, it is difficult for me too, but I am concerned about you.”

For more information, please call the Problem Gambling Helpline at 1-800-522-4700. Your call is toll free and confidential. The Problem Gambling Helpline is available 24 hours/7 days per week in English and Spanish.

This article is from the Maryland Council on Problem Gambling brochure titled *There is Hope and Help in Maryland*. Printed with permission.

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Upcoming Events:

Cancer Support Group

Date: Second Tuesday
of the month

Time: 4–5 p.m.

Place: CESC, Room 240

Any MCPS employee or family member who has cancer or cares about someone with cancer is encouraged to attend. Meeting announcements and topics can be found on the EAP website [<http://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/departments/eap/>]. Contact Debra Tipton via Outlook or at the EAP office if you have questions.

Workshop: Financial Pitfalls

Date: October 4

Time: 12–1 p.m.

Place: CESC, Room 223

RSVP: 240-314-1040

Seating is limited

This workshop will explore the impact of vital financial issues such as the lack of a plan, improper debt management, lack of estate planning, buying over the Internet, as well as not having an exit or tax plan strategy. Workshop presented by F3E, Foundation for Financial Education, a nonprofit resource.

Depression Screening Day

Date: October 6

The MCPS Employee Assistance Program will be conducting screenings for depression, anxiety disorder, bipolar disorder and posttraumatic stress disorder all day. The screenings take less than 30 minutes and are available for all MCPS employees and their immediate family members. *To schedule an appointment please call the EAP at 240-314-1040.*

The Empty Nest Syndrome

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and happy. That said, having our daughter here is like discovering that the rooms are full of sunlight and rainbows that we had been missing.”

Penelope Lemov is the founder and author of a blog on parenting grown children (www.grownchildren.net), from which this article is adapted. You also can follow her on twitter as PenPenWrites.



Laugh Yourself Healthy

Humans were designed to laugh. Laughing is nature's stressbuster. It is our own personal stress release valve that we can use whenever we need it. It lifts our spirits with a happy feeling that makes us feel good and improves our behavior toward others.

Just a few generations ago, happy, healthy humans spent 20 minutes a day or more in laughter. Now, adult daily laugh time is down to 5 minutes or less in many countries. This is thought by some to be one of the worst aspects of modern life.

We all know that laughing makes us feel good. A regular 30-minute laughing session can have a profound impact on our health and overall sense of well-being. Laughter is gentle exercise. It fills our lungs and body with oxygen, deep-clears our breathing passages, and exercises our lungs. This is really important for people who do not get regular aerobic exercise.

When we laugh, our bodies release a cocktail of hormones and chemicals that have startling positive effects on our system. Stress is reduced, blood pressure drops, depression is lifted, our immune system is boosted, and we feel great. Western science is just starting to discover the great and healing effects of laughing.

Why Laughter Yoga? Almost 20 years ago, Dr. Madan Kataria, an Indian medical doctor and student of yoga, was writing a paper for a medical journal titled “Laughter is the Best Medicine.” Convinced of the medical benefits of laughter and yogic breathing exercises, Dr. Kataria was searching for a way to bring these benefits to modern man. In a flash of inspiration, Laughter Yoga was born. Since then, countless people all over the world enjoy the benefits of a daily dose of laughter in laughing sessions with local groups or at their workplace.

Anyone can laugh without reason. You do not need jokes or a sense of humor

LaughingRx combines laughing exercises, fun, stress release, and the principles of Laughter Yoga, which incorporates deep breathing methods within the laughing exercises to bring joy to our lives. The continuous exhaling achieves deep breathing that brings in large amounts of oxygen into our lungs and leads to a greater sense of well-being. Laughter Yoga is also known as Hasya Yoga, intentional laughter, and sustained laughter.

For more information and how to find local laughter clubs and workshops, go to www.laughingrx.com/index.html.

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To help employees with troubling issues before they become overwhelming.



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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 Jeffrey_Becker@mcpsmd.org

Please note that e-mail is not necessarily confidential.

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