



The WCPA News

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BECOMING RENEWED IN A PRESSURED WORLD

By Dr. Mary Fitzgibbons
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There is no question that being an educator can be an incredibly satisfying career. It can not only be life-giving for the student, but also for the educator. Many have experienced the satisfaction that comes from teaching. Yet, in today's world, there are outside forces that can make this a less-than-ideal job. In fact, if you were to ask a group of elementary principals what their greatest issues are, especially during the second semester of the school year, among the top three responses would be that they are feeling completely overwhelmed. They are being placed on them. For example, most parent requests are reasonable, but there are not all realistically handled. Then there are the few requests that are not reasonable; one parent problem can absorb an inconceivable amount of time. Principals frequently bemoan the fact that their jobs should include more time with curriculum planning and visiting classrooms.

High school principals find that they, too, have become more of an administrator than an educator. They can find themselves mired in policy issues. All too often their relationships with faculty members become guarded and, unfortunately, sometimes too distant. Sometimes the very tasks that are implied in a principal's job description become a luxury. Spending time with students, dropping into a teacher's classroom, or watching the students' reaction to an exciting presentation seems to happen only in an ideal world. Right now this is not an ideal world.

Teachers also feel the pressure. As the school year continues, one's energy seems to ebb. The excitement a teacher experienced in the beginning of the year becomes more of a memory. Now, we have to find ways to feel involved and energized. It becomes more of an effort. In many ways, teachers are on the front line. There are more and more children who come into their classroom with diagnoses. Educating many of these children demands individual time spent with each of them. But where is this time going to come from? There are necessary and, maybe, unnecessary classroom interruptions. With technology there are demands for immediate responses when parents have concerns. Ending the school day doesn't mean that the daily work is finished. It's just continued at home where there may now be more family demands.

The one thing that most of us recognize is that we can't do it all. However, our expectations are that we "should" do it all. Most people who go into education are "helpers." They want to serve. There is a deep frustration when they are unable to do all those things that they, or others, expect of themselves. The question is how do we get ourselves out of this trap? Let's look at some suggestions.

Knowing most educators, their tendency will be to look at the following list and then say to themselves that it can't work for them. No one understands their unique situation. But this is what we do know: too many of us are losing our love for our work. Kahlil Gibran in *The Prophet* tell us, "Work is love made visible." And to work with love "is to sow seeds with tenderness and reap the harvest with joy...It is to charge all things you fashion with a breath of your own spirit." Let's look at how we can regain the passion and the love we once had for our work. (Continued)

Be absolutely realistic about what can be accomplished each day. If many of us made a list of all that we wanted to do in a given day, we might find that it would take several days to complete what we only have 8 to 10 hours to do. We also must account for the fact that there will be interruptions.

Each morning, set a list of priorities. As you finish each task, check it off and review the list that evening. If some of the tasks weren't completed, be honest with yourself as to the reasons. Were there too many tasks? Did you use your time efficiently? Was there a real crisis that kept you from finishing your work?

Say "no" to those duties that are not yours to do. Keep good boundaries. Too many of us in professions in which we serve have a tendency to do the work that others choose not to do or don't do well enough for our satisfaction. Picking up the slack is not necessarily good for ourselves, nor is it good for the system - in this case, the school community. Too often it allows others not to do their part.

Put effort into the relationships that you have with those with whom you work. If you're a teacher, create an atmosphere in your class where each student has a sense that you know something about them and that you care. The real work is that you must find a way to honestly care about all of your students. Something as little as mentioning something that they wrote in their last paper or acknowledging a new hair style can have a positive effect on a child. If you're an administrator, know your teachers. Let each of them have a sense that they are valued. Learning to love the more "unloveable" members of your school community, whether they are teachers or students, is a critical part of the job. It certainly has the most impact. The reason why this point is important is that we come to create our joy through communication with others. Meaningful relationships bring us a sense of happiness and satisfaction.

Eliminate the "shoulds" from your vocabulary. Generally, when we use the word "should" we are really defining what we think others want us to do or what we think others expect from us. The healthier way of expressing ourselves is by our "wants." In stating our wants we are defining for ourselves what is really important to us. Therefore, deciding that, "Today I'm going to clean out a closet that I've been wanting to clean for the last couple of months" becomes a positive action. When we think about "shoulds" we feel burdened; when we think about "wants" we become energized.

Lastly, be good to yourself. On a daily basis, do at least one thing that will make you happy or one thing that you are looking forward to. This can be as little as relishing your favorite candy bar at break time to having a date night with your spouse or going to an exercise class. When most people are asked what one thing they would like today that would make them happy, the response often is that they have never asked themselves that question. Your life is guaranteed to change if every day you do one thing, just for you, that brings you joy.

Remember that work is love made visible. We need to love others, but we especially need to love and to be good to ourselves.

Our Philosophy

We believe that individuals and systems:

- Are capable of permanent change
- Function best with clearly defined authority that stems from a family systems hierarchy
- Are accountable for both positive and negative aspects of behavior
- Achieve success by conscious choices that lead to strength and development of personal responsibility
- Control their environment by establishing boundaries that are consistent with their values

WCPA promotes change and growth by:

- Helping to establish order within the environment
- Meeting consistently in a collaborative relationship to achieve identified goals
- Helping to identify and process significant issues
- Aiding in resolving issues as they arise

The result for the system or individual is the development of a strong sense of identity and boundaries that allows for the achievement of goals.



Consider how these topics might
fit into your school's
Professional Development Plan!

Frequently Requested Presentation Topics for SCHOOL PROFESSIONALS

The New Faces of Addiction: Video Gaming and Internet Pornography This seminar discusses the adolescent brain and what makes teens so susceptible to addiction. Signs of addiction, along with consequences to teens of video gaming addiction are presented. The addictive nature of online pornography will also be discussed. Recommendations will be made for helpful school responses and prevention.

ADHD ~ Working with Diagnosis- and Treatment-Resistant Parents Many schools “throw up their hands” and assume that they have few rights, if any, to address such families. This workshop, however, presents many tools that creative educators can ethically use to nudge such families toward seeking help for their child. This presentation begins with comprehensive information about ADHD, then shares 25 strategies to use with resistant parents.

Netiquette How can educators teach online etiquette (“netiquette”) to today’s tech-savvy students? This presentation offers multiple tips, strategies, and lessons for increasing our students’ safety and good judgment while online. Live demonstrations of online social networking sites are shown.

OCD in the Classroom Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD) is a fascinating subject - until it enters your classroom. The workshop goals are to familiarize school personnel with the causes, signs, and symptoms of OCD; to give teachers techniques to handle children with obsessions and compulsions in the classroom; and to explain treatment techniques that therapists use and how teachers can support these at school.

Anxiety in Children and Adolescents: What Every School Should Know School professionals today must become prepared to understand and respond to students suffering from a wide array of anxiety-related problems. Discussion will focus upon understanding these disorders, how these problems can impact students’ school functioning, a basic overview of treatment, and many recommendations for helpful school responses.

Creating a School Culture of Reflection Learning organizations are made up of staff members committed to personal mastery as well as team learning. This seminar will focus on how to enhance professional practice through the creation of a culture of reflection. We will consider how leaders can include time, structural arrangements, and specific processes during a school day to support staff learning. *Action Research *Critical Friends *Reflection Notebooks

Motivating the Unmotivated Student How many students today appear lazy, disinterested, and unmotivated? Our culture has developed a cycle between these students’ parents and their schools, wherein adults promote rewards, trips, cash and candy for students willing to accomplish *anything*. With liberal use of real case stories, this presentation aims to help administrators and teachers reestablish accountability, work ethic, and a joy for learning within their students.

Compassion Fatigue: How to Take Care of Yourself in a Giving Profession This seminar discusses the symptoms of compassion fatigue and burnout. Risk factors are identified for those most likely to suffer. Suggestions will be made for workplace support, work-to-home transitions and personal resilience planning. Come prepared to discuss how this challenging issue impacts your school and your life.

Desire a different topic? Let us know and our professionals will present on the topic of your choice.
All presentations provided by dynamic speakers who are qualified mental health and/or education professionals.
Contact the West County Psychological Associates’ office: (314) 275-8599

Ask the Therapist
With Mary Saggau, MSW, LCSW

SUMMER SCREEN TIME
Information for Parents

Q: What time limits do you suggest for “screens” (cell phone, ipad, facebook, Twitter, Instagram, the internet and television) during the summer months?

A: Parents ask this question during the school year, often believing that there is no reason to maintain *any* type of limit over the summer vacation. This, however, is not the case. The American Pediatric Association recommends a limit of two hours of quality screen time per day. This limit includes all devices, so that one hour of television and one hour of facebook “hits the limit.” Note also that the limit refers to *quality* time. An important part of monitoring your child on these devices is paying attention to what they are watching, posting, tweeting and texting.



Q: Why is it so important to maintain these limits over the summer?

There are several important reasons for consistent limits during the summer months:

- 1) Our children miss valuable social interaction opportunities when much of their connection with friends is experienced via a screen. They lose out on learning to interpret facial expressions, social cues and body language. They turn someone down for a social event via text, rather than in person, while witnessing their friend’s disappointment. Kids need this real-life practice. Excessive screen time simply stunts social skill growth.
- 2) Kids need to move. An important part of time off is physical exercise. When children sit inside hour after hour and play video games or meet with friends on facebook, they are limiting valuable physical exercise, and/or time spent playing team sports.
- 3) Addiction is a real concern with internet pornography and video gaming. The average age of first viewing of pornography is 11, with 12-17 year olds being the largest consumers. With both online pornography and video gaming, addiction is primarily physiological, tied to a release of dopamine in the brain. Such addictions have severe consequences, ranging from life-long unhealthy sexual patterns to academic failure to depression and anxiety. Recovery from these addictions is extremely difficult.
- 4) Discipline and structure are important parts of children’s lives. Though it is important to have a summer vacation in which the schedule is relaxed, it is not healthy to have a total “free for all.” Kids need to learn that even during vacation times, certain rules exist. When children have consistent structure, they feel safe and anxiety decreases. In addition, children then internalize this type of structure and learn self-discipline and personal responsibility.

Q: Can children set appropriate limits themselves?

Not really. The brain’s prefrontal cortex, which is responsible for impulse control and envisioning consequences of behavior, is not fully developed until one’s mid-twenties. Our youngsters are simply not physically capable of setting these limits for themselves.

Q: Are there any other reasons to maintain limits over the summer?

Absolutely. You will have a much easier time in the fall when habits have been maintained throughout the summer – and minor tweaking is all that’s necessary!

INFORMATION FOR PARENTS

Private Psychoeducational Testing Available Year-Round

When students require purely educational testing for an academic concern, many families understandably choose to utilize the free services available through their local public school districts. However, there are many circumstances under which it is appropriate or even necessary to obtain private psychological or psychoeducational testing. These circumstances can include:

- Preferring a private office setting with confidential results
- Desiring testing for possible Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)
- Wanting testing for emotional functioning, including depression and/or anxiety
- Electing to get a second opinion
- Preferring not to delay testing, when long wait times exist in agency settings
- Having been declined for testing services through the public district
- Choosing to obtain psychological or psychoeducational testing for an adult
- Wishing to acquire psychological testing as an aid for progress in counseling/therapy
- Wanting to account for continuing difficulties, when previous testing did not determine the cause of the problems

West County Psychological Associates offers high-quality, private psychological and psychoeducational testing at our therapy offices. Wait times are usually brief and reports are available soon following the test date(s). When a minor is tested, parents can choose whether or not to give permission for our evaluator to send a copy of the report to the school or the child's doctor or counselor.

Many families in our community choose to utilize high-quality, private testing services. If you would like to learn more about this option, please contact our office, at (314) 275-8599.

Today's Parents and the "Sandwich Generation"

Are you part of the "sandwich generation?"

Forty-seven percent of adults in their 40's and 50's have a parent age 65 or older and are either raising young children or financially supporting a grown child age 18 or older (Pew Social and Demographic Trends, 2012). The pressure of providing financial and emotional support for aging parents and growing children adds even more stress to a generation that already feels pressed for time. The list of responsibilities seems endless: working full time, looking for colleges, coaching kids' sports, and caring for Mom and Dad. 40% - 70% of caregivers show clinically significant levels of depression. Higher levels are associated with people caring for individuals with dementia. Relationships among family members can become strained, especially if there is disagreement in regard to care and/or the financial situation of the patient. Where can you turn for emotional support? West County Psychological Associates can help. Our therapists recognize the demands that being a caregiver can bring and offer individual and family therapy to help you manage the stress of daily life.

Recently, WCPA partnered with Home Care Assistance in offering psychological services for their home care patients and the patients' family members. Individual, couples, and/or family therapy are available in the home for patients, and in our office for the caregivers. Our other services include grief and loss counseling, substance abuse assessment and treatment services for clients and/or caregivers, professional mediation services in regard to financial or caretaking disagreements, as well as psychological assessment available to assist in diagnosing depression, anxiety, and other emotional problems. Our licensed, experienced mental health professionals are available for consultation with medical, social work or home care professionals already involved with the family. We specialize in taking the time necessary for high-quality care, rather than providing short-term therapy. Please contact our office at [314-275-8599](tel:314-275-8599) for more information.



FOR PARENTS ONLY

Creating Healthy Family Life

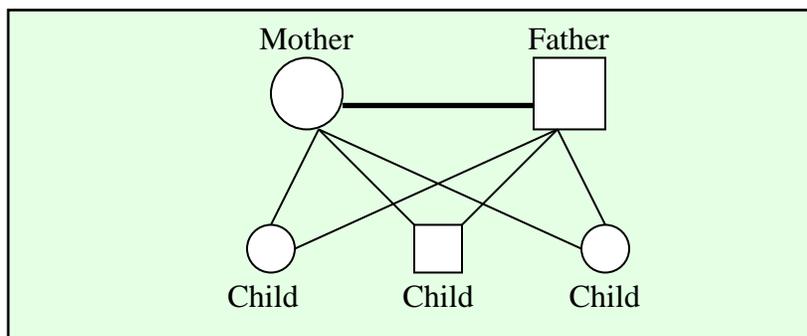
By Dr. Mary Fitzgibbons

What does it mean today to have a healthy family life? How would most of us today describe our own families? Few of us would say that our lives are orderly or quiet. Many of us would describe our families as being extremely busy, harried, or even a little chaotic. In most families, both parents are working. Our children are involved in school, sports, and other activities. There is often very little time at home together. Few of us have the luxury of regular family dinners together. Yet all the literature tells us that one of the antidotes to raising a child who becomes at risk is nightly mealtimes with the family.



Another question that we need to ask regards priorities. What are our families' priorities? Could a priority be giving our children a lifestyle that we didn't have growing up – whether this is through the type of home we live in, expensive toys, or all the latest technology? Is it a priority to give our children a good education and expose them to many different experiences, so that they can make their own good choices when they reach adulthood? Is it a priority to help our children become successful human beings, of good character and values, who are able to live successfully and independently from us? Or is a priority the fulfillment of the needs and wants of all the family members to attain a happy life – not just the children, but also the parents? Perhaps it's all of these. The concern is whether we pause long enough, during our fast-paced lives, to ask ourselves what we want for our families and how we plan to achieve it.

Maybe the way to begin to answer these questions is to first look at what a healthy family looks like. In this case, we are talking about an emotionally healthy family. Years ago, I began using a paradigm for a healthy family and have used it numerous times with parents and children. In this model, the parents are at the top of the paradigm. Connecting the parents is a strong line, denoting the fact that this is the primary relationship in this family. Underneath the parents is the children. There is a line (relationship) between each parent and each child. The critical part of this model is that the primary relationship in the family is between both parents and there is a relationship between each parent and each of the children. If this is accomplished, there will automatically be a relationship among the children.



After drawing the example for a healthy family, I ask members of the family to draw their family, based on
(Continued on back)

this model. It is seldom, if ever, that any parent or child described their family in the same way the healthy family is shown. Recently, a fourteen year old drew a picture where the line drawn between herself and her mother was very strong. The line she drew between her mother and father was relatively light and there was no line between the mother and the girl's sibling. Given what I knew of the family dynamics, the girl had drawn a relatively accurate picture of her family. I asked her what she thought needed to be done in therapy. Her response was that the relationship between her mother and her sibling needed to be improved; her relationship with her mother needed to be a less dependent one, where she would be just the child in her relationship with her mother; and her parents needed to have a stronger relationship. She got it.

What makes this the paradigm the picture of a healthy family? In the first place, the center of the family, the primary relationship, is with the two parents. (If it is a single parent household, then the key factor is the emotional well-being of the parent.) This relationship between two parents needs to be strong and well nurtured. Parents need to create the time to be with each other and to invest energy into strengthening the relationship. To reiterate, the time needs to be created. With the incredible busyness of our lifestyles, this will not happen spontaneously.

Secondly, the children are placed below the parents. Obviously, this means that the parents are in charge. The children are not the center of the family. They are not in charge. I have had many family members draw the paradigm with one of the children on top. Obviously, in that case, the child is running the family. It is easy to see that this creates a chaotic family life. When the parents are in charge, this denotes that they are the primary rule-maker in the family. Children can have input, but it is only input. The parents make the major decisions.

Finally, but most importantly, there is a line (a relationship) between each parent and each child. This again means that each parent must make the effort and devote the time to develop a relationship with each child. This needs to be done whether there is one child or eight children. Many parents are at a loss as to how to do this, especially with adolescent children. The first thing is to make time to be alone with each child – each parent with each child. Have a real conversation with the child that isn't a lecture or a list of probing questions. In fact, the more listening a parent finds him or herself doing, the more successful the venture. Parents need also to share something about themselves – about their likes and dislikes, their opinions and values. Our children need to know who we are as people.

What this paradigm demands out of family members is time. But that is the very thing that we seem to have the least of. In today's society, we are inundated with activities. Certainly, most of these activities are worthwhile. In other words, the after-school experiences for our children really are valuable. However, in the long run, is their value outweighed by the more critical need of the family for time together? I have had numerous parents tell me that they don't have the time to spend individually with each child. I have had even more parents tell me that they don't have time for their spouse. There is not time for date night. What is it that we're doing that is more important than our relationships with the people we care the most about? In fact, the best indicator of a healthy family is in the strength of the relationship between the parents. Again, in a single parent household, the critical factor is the emotional health of the parent.

If we want our children to be successful, independent adults, I don't believe that the time and money that we are spending on toys, activities and technology is the pathway to these goals. It demands something more precious – ourselves.

See an article you'd like to share?

You may always share WCPA's newsletter and its articles with other parents, professionals, or your school families. We only ask that you please be sure to credit West County Psychological Associates and include our contact information as you forward or copy.