



The WCPA News

12125 Woodcrest Executive Drive, Suite 110 St. Louis, MO 63141

Website: www.wcpastl.com

Phone (314) 275-8599

Email: wcpa@sbcglobal.net

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Antidotes to the “Me-ism” of Entitlement

Jennifer Webbe Van Luven, LCSW, Mary Fitzgibbons, Ph.D., and Amy Maus, LCSW

The term “entitlement” is becoming a common word in today’s vocabulary. It is defined as “having a right to something,” and used to be associated mainly with legal and financial rights. Today, though, it seems more often utilized to describe the all-too-familiar cultural trait of thinking only of oneself. *My* wants, *my* preferences, *my* feelings are all that truly matter. So many of us see our children, their peers, and even the adults around us becoming a society of entitled individuals. When we are brave and honest with ourselves, we even see our own entitlement rearing its ugly head at times. This sense of entitlement is now so prevalent that it seems we have developed into a narcissistic culture. In fact, it is getting more and more difficult to distinguish between run-of-the-mill entitlement and true narcissism.

Whatever roles we play in life – parent, employee, neighbor, friend – we likely see entitlement in our daily interactions:

- Parents notice their children asking for larger and more expensive gifts and gadgets, but failing to save up allowance funds to buy gifts for other family members.
- Staff members, whether in a nursing home, school, church or business, experience belittling from family members or customers upset about seemingly small problems.
- Teachers fear providing appropriate and well-earned consequences to misbehaving students, knowing that some parents will accuse them of “bullying” their child.
- Customers and clients seem quicker to demand immediate satisfaction when a problem arises about a sale or a service.
- In the crowded waiting room or the full train, fewer children are told by their parents to stand up and make room for the adult or elder who is standing without a seat.
- Volunteers at the school cafeteria have packages thrust toward them, without a simple, “Would you please help me open this?”
- Neighbors feel entitled to own the pet of their choice, even if it disturbs the sleep of the entire block each night!

So how do we challenge and combat that false sense of entitlement, and why is it so important to do so? It’s critical to challenge entitlement, because when we don’t, we inhibit one’s capability to be successful in the real world. This is especially important for those of us in the position to influence children and youth – as parents, teachers, coaches, pastors and work supervisors. In the real world, reality sets in and children find that they have to work for what they want. It’s important that we teach children the value of hard work and how to earn the things that they desire. This applies not only to monetary items, but also to grades, positions, and awards. Our youth need to see the integral connection between making an effort and achieving success. Conversely, when things are handed to young people, they receive the message, “You don’t need to do anything; everything will be given to you in life just because you are you.” It is this thinking that gives any individual an unrealistic sense of self-importance. It is this thinking that leads to entitlement and narcissism.

One of the greatest gifts we can give our children is raising them to believe that one day they will have to become completely independent. But that process starts now. It begins with toddlers who are expected to pick up their toys. It carries over to children who are held accountable by both teachers and parents for having chosen not to complete homework. It continues with adolescents who are told that they have to earn money to pay for the extras or luxuries in life – whether we, as parents, can afford them or not. It is teaching our children that they must know how to give, not only receive. So from young ages, children learn to save their money for Christmas and birthday gifts for family members. We teach our children to give to others who have less than we. At an early age, we teach them to care for others less privileged by helping an elderly neighbor who needs their grass cut or their walks shoveled, without expecting to be paid or rewarded. In fact, it is the duty of all caring adults to help children begin to recognize that while their own self is important, it is also equally important to recognize and respect the rights of others. It is a gift when we teach our children to give to others.

However, in today's world, it seems that fewer and fewer individuals – of any age – have understood and internalized this message. There is a relentless rise of narcissism in our society today. We are seeing more emphasis on material wealth, physical appearance, celebrity, and attention-seeking behaviors than ever before. In *The Narcissistic Epidemic: Living in the Age of Entitlement*, Twenge and Campbell write, “In data from 37,000 college students, narcissistic personality traits rose just as fast as obesity from the 1980's to the present. Children in the most recent generation of adults, born between 1982 and 1995, known as ‘Generation Y,’ were raised to believe that it is their right to have everything given to them more than any other previous generation. This has been instilled in them by their parents, who believe ‘my child should have more than I had.’”

We now see this cultural narcissism seeping into the attitudes and behaviors of adults as well as our younger generation. When adults display entitlement, it is not so easy to correct as that in a child. The adults in our lives, including, at times, ourselves, may be genuinely unaware of their own sense of self-absorption, and we often feel as though we have little power to make a real difference in this new cultural norm. However, the steps that we take with our young people can be applied to ourselves and other adults in our daily spheres as well. We can make the decision to live within our means, even when that means we forgo, or save and wait for, the newest fashionable item. We can conscientiously choose to be assertive, but not demanding or aggressive, when we encounter a problem at work or in a store. We can consider how our choices and actions affect our neighbors, not just ourselves. And we adults can be sure to give back to others regularly, not just for our own well-being (though giving to others in need has been shown to be one of the most direct paths to happiness), but because a healthy, kind society requires that individuals consider the needs and well-being of those around them.

Recognizing entitlement is the first step to stopping it. The analogy to the obesity epidemic is useful here, in that it operates on a similar premise – I want what I want and I don't want to deny myself no matter how much it harms me. Not only does this thinking not lead to “high self-esteem,” it promotes narcissism and entitlement and is the sure pathway to diminished health, self-esteem and relationships with others. In fact, entitlement causes almost all of the things that Americans hoped high self-esteem would prevent, including aggression, materialism, lack of caring for others, and shallow values. In trying to build a society that celebrates “loving oneself,” Americans have inadvertently created more entitled individuals and a culture that promotes narcissistic behaviors. Teaching – and living – the values of productive work and generosity to others are the antidotes to the “me-ism” of entitlement.

About the Authors:

Jennifer Webbe Van Luven, MSW, LCSW, DM provides private therapy for adult issues, depression, anxiety, marital and relationship issues, as well as adolescent development and behavioral concerns. She has extensive experience in family law and court room testifying. Jennifer is also a certified Divorce Mediator and Parenting Coordinator.

Mary Fitzgibbons, Ph.D. is the owner and director of West County Psychological Associates. She lectures frequently to schools and organizations, in addition to providing in-office therapy for individuals, couples and families. She also enjoys working with seniors and their caregivers. Mary utilizes an emotionally-focused perspective with her therapy clients, which aims for significant change over time.

Amy V. Maus, MSW, LCSW specializes in services to schools and enjoys providing presentations, workshops and consultation to groups of all sizes. Ms. Maus is trained to provide psycho-educational testing and she evaluates students for ADHD and other mental health and learning concerns. She enjoys working with students of all ages and their families.

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The Mother/Daughter Dressing Debate:

A mother/daughter session on navigating this difficult issue

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Moms, isn't this what we face? A daughter comes down the stairs in an outfit we know we are not letting her leave the house in... We say, "No way!" and all chaos breaks loose! Or, we say nothing at all and regret allowing her to dress that way, wishing we knew the right words to use. We are not alone! This is a **HOT** topic that many families struggle with today. In this session, mothers and daughters learn ways to help navigate this difficult time with break out groups led by Paula Collins from Your Closet's Best Friend and Tina Murphy, M.A., LPC, therapist at West County Psychological Associates. Join us for an evening of fashion, fun and facts.

Paula will help guide the youth in making the best fashion choices that fit their own personal style through:

- Group brainstorm on struggles, thoughts and pressure on how you're expected to look.
- Tips and techniques for dressing with focus on good choices for your body and image.
- Smart basics to have in your wardrobe, fun pieces to play with while respecting your values, body, budget and lifestyle.

Tina will discuss with the moms the science behind "why" teens want to dress the way they do:

- Common developmental issues, fashion and the brain at this age.
- Typical pushbacks and power struggles that happen while dressing.
- What to say and how to discuss the issue without taking things personally.
- Leave with real solutions!

Presenters:

Paula Collins, the stylist from Your Closet's Best Friend has over 26 years in the fashion industry. Paula has monthly featured style segments on KMOV Great Day St. Louis, a fashion blog, and does many speaking engagements. Her honest and effective approach has helped countless women and girls have wardrobes that not only reflect their best self, it respects their budget, lifestyle, and body type.

Tina Murphy, MA, LPC is a professional and school counselor with over 15 years' experience of working with children, adolescents and families in the metro area. Tina specializes in helping children, adolescents and their parents through developmental milestones, social skill issues, building self-confidence and strengthening family and peer relationships. She consults with many area schools and has given numerous parent presentations in the area on relevant issues pertaining to our youth today.



Dementia's Effects on Marriage

When we meet the person whom we want to grow old and spend the rest of our life with, we make a vow to love them in sickness and in health, until death do us part. We make a choice to marry our loved one as we know them now and with anticipation that age and maturity will only strengthen our relationship. But what happens to this marriage when one spouse is diagnosed with dementia (recently reclassified as “neurocognitive disorder” in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition) and our vibrant partner becomes a shell of their former self? How is our marriage affected by these cognitive impairments?

In a marriage, one spouse’s strengths help compensate for the weaknesses of the other. As they age, partners become increasingly interdependent. This interdependence escalates exponentially when illness and deconditioning occurs. When one spouse begins suffering from cognitive impairments, the caregiving spouse faces severe psychological and emotional effects, which have an impact on the relationship. These effects often result in increased stress.

The Family Caregiver Alliance found that spousal caregivers age 66 and older who experience caregiving-related stress have a 63% higher mortality rate than non-caregivers of the same age. In addition, factors such as poor sleep, lack of self-care, and fatigue all put caregivers at a higher risk for physical decline.

Within their marriage, the couple’s previously established roles become imbalanced as they shift from a give-and-take partnership to a caregiver/care-recipient relationship.

Family Caregiver Alliance found that 11% of caregivers report that caregiving has caused their physical health to worsen. When a caregiving spouse begins to decline physically, the ability to care for the cognitively impaired spouse at home diminishes, which may lead to the need to live in separate residences, an additional stressor.

Spousal caregivers are at greater risk for emotional stress, as studies show that 30 to 40% of dementia caregivers suffer from depression. Anxiety and fear about what the future holds for their relationship create great strain. Caregivers of spouses with cognitive impairments suffer significant social losses. Within their marriage, the couple’s previously established roles become imbalanced as they shift from a give-and-take partnership to a caregiver/care-recipient relationship. Additionally, when caregivers attend social events with their spouse, the risk of embarrassment may be high as their spouse begins to lose perceptions of social niceties and appropriate behavior. As their spouse’s social awareness decreases, it is common for the caregiver to try to cover for these deficits in public. These factors,

Written by
Amy Neu, MSW, LCSW



Amy Neu provides private therapy for adults, families and seniors. She has significant experience counseling seniors, caregivers and families within medical systems and during transitional periods from home to alternate levels of care.

combined with the reality that caregivers are often unable to leave their spouse unattended due to safety concerns, frequently lead to increased isolation at home.

Since cognitive impairments are not often fatal, many older adults wonder how long their cognitively impaired spouse will continue living in this way. Caregivers struggle through anticipatory grief, the mourning of a loved one prior to their death, and grieve the loss of who their spouse used to be. Caregivers may speak in the past tense about their cognitively impaired spouse, even though they are still alive, as they process these emotions (i.e. “He was always the life of the party,” “She loved to read”).

With all of these stressors, how can marriages continue to be successful in relationships where one spouse has dementia? To answer this, the caregiving spouse needs to acknowledge the changes in the marriage and grieve the losses that have occurred with the neurocognitive disorder. Then, spouses must look at their definition of “success” in the marriage and potentially take steps to redefine this success. If a caregiving spouse continues to believe that only a reciprocal marriage is a success, then they will view their marriage as unsuccessful. Once this perception has changed, the couple can begin to reconstruct and find additional meaning and continued love in their relationship.

There are ways for a couple to sustain their marital bond emotionally. In the early stages of dementia, long-term memory remains intact while short-term memory is affected, and individuals with dementia often retain memories from childhood, adolescence and young adulthood. Reminiscing is a wonderful means for a couple to stay connected and strengthen feelings of commitment. A couple can retell the story of how they first met, the feelings and emotions they experienced, and favorite memories during that time. They may also remember stories of the difficult times and look back on how they got through the trials together.

Another way for a couple to stay connected is through the use of touch. If the spouse with dementia is comfortable being touched, simple actions such as holding hands, stroking hair or a cheek, or putting an arm around each other are a continued demonstration of love for a couple.

It is important for the couple to reach out to their social supports during this trying time in order to attempt to alleviate stress, anxiety and depression and establish a positive outlook. Talking with family, a trusted friend, or a therapist can significantly reduce caregiver burden and can be essential for the caregiving spouse to process their losses, move forward, and strengthen the marriage.

West County Psychological Associates produces a monthly article geared toward seniors and those who provide care for the elderly. If you would like to receive these articles, simply let us know your email address. WCPA does not sell or provide email addresses to any other organization. You may call our office at (314) 275-8599 or email us at wcpa@sbcglobal.net and we will gladly include you.

Right-Sizing Parent Involvement

Collaboration is an important element to the success of any endeavor, when the key people are brought on board to “work together.” When people work together toward a common goal; bringing insight, experience, expertise and knowledge, the outcome is boundless. The power of collaboration can even be seen as synergistic when the collaborators have a shared goal, a common purpose and well thought-out strategies for attaining those goals.

Today, collaboration is touted as a successful tool in an educational system whose history has been steeped in isolation and individualism. You can see individualism in the design of school houses from the 1800’s to the present. There are modular classrooms with one door. The teacher works with a classroom of students throughout the day. In early years, little or no emphasis had been put on teacher collaboration.

In years past, parents trusted the school to carry out its mission to educate children. The school would call parents when students misbehaved. Report cards were sent home by students and returned to the teacher with a parent’s signature.

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Schools need parents to support the teachers and speak positively about them to their children. Parents need teachers to respect their input and value their ideas as ones that can be used to promote student success.

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collaboratively with colleagues to achieve personal mastery and design individualized learning experiences for students. They are expected to work in teams to create assessments and track student success.

As teachers work on collaboration strategies with colleagues, it would be important to also work on collaboration with parents. The problems that confront schools today and the solutions we develop are becoming more complex. It would seem logical that a collaborative effort between parents and schools is necessary when working together for children whose futures are important to both.

Teachers sometimes view parent involvement as working in classrooms as room parent, attending PTO meetings, helping with field trips and leading fundraisers. These are very important roles for parents, but they aren’t the only ones.

Many parents think that their only role is the protector of the rights of their children. So they come to schools with antagonistic attitudes, throwing around threats to teachers and administrators and displaying their distrust for

Written by
Carol Hall-Whitter, Ed.D.



Dr. Carol Hall-Whittier is an educator and administrator with over thirty years’ experience as a principal, instructional leader and teacher. Dr. Whittier is especially interested in providing professional development for school personnel in the areas of transformational leadership, collaborative cultures, literacy learning, and effective use of assessments and evaluations. Her goal is to perfect the practice of professionals who are preparing students to live in a democratic society.

the educational system. Teachers cringe when this happens and think, “My job will be much easier if parents stay away.” The looming questions pertaining to parent involvement are:

- Do schools really want parent involvement?
- How important is parent involvement to student success?
- What kind of parent involvement creates the most impact for student success?

With collaboration comes communication, respect for respective roles, and awareness of the great experience children can have when school and home work together. It’s not that schools cannot do their jobs without parents, it’s just that the job can be done more effectively when both parties work together.

Therefore, when considering whether schools want parent involvement, the answer is a resounding “Yes!” However, we want to support and nourish good parent/school relationships. This goal takes time and effort to build positive relationships. Schools need parents to support the teachers and speak positively about them to their children. Parents need teachers to respect their input and value their ideas as ones that can be used to promote student success. Parents and teachers can have ongoing conversations about expectations can have ongoing conversations about expectations, lesson content, and how to support the learning at home. Parents must trust the teachers to know their craft and to have a child’s best interest at heart. Teachers must welcome questions from parents about learning issues and be willing to listen to parent concerns. Parents desire to be informed when their child exhibits academic or social issues, and not told there is a problem days later. Considering parent and school collaboration, there should never be any tolerance for disrespect and disregard on the part of either party, so that both can overcome the obstacles to collaboration.

The above point leads to the second question, “How important is parent involvement to school success?” Current research reports that when parents and schools work together, students have higher grades, better attendance and fewer discipline issues. One example is the current technology issue relating to smartphones and social media. Schools have to make difficult decisions relating to smartphones and how they can be a disruption to the learning environment. Since parents provide their children with the technology, they would be a great participant in a conversation with schools to generate the standards and goals for technology use in schools and classrooms. When the standard and goals for students have been developed by both school and home, the standard is easier to uphold and there is less confusion about what’s acceptable in the school environment.

So let’s consider what kind of parent involvement is most paramount for student success. Studies have shown that parent involvement where time and effort is put into reading and communicating with one’s child, and communicating positive expectations for the child’s academic and social behavior at school yields the most student success. A parent’s positive support for learning and schools is more evidence that working together on behalf of children is a powerful endeavor.

In conclusion, it can be surmised that both parents and teachers would benefit from training on how to have a collaborative relationship. Both schools, with their highly trained educators, and parents, with insight and personal knowledge of their children, can deepen the conversation on how to effectively educate each child. Parent and school collaboration is a balanced approach to ensuring student success.

From the Director ***The “Sandwich Generation”***

Recently, I was speaking with someone whom I've known professionally for a good number of years and I mentioned some work that our office has been doing with the elderly. I wasn't prepared for his quick, intense response. "If you're going to be working with anyone, it should be with their caregivers!" He stated that most of his friends were in his situation – having to care for their parents while they were still supporting their adult (over eighteen) children. We talked for a while about what this was like. There was no hesitation in taking on this responsibility, but a sense that it can be extremely demanding.

Nearly one-half of Americans 55 and older expect to provide support for their aging relatives and their adult children. Forty-seven per cent of adults in their 40's and 50's have a parent age 65 or older and are raising young children or financially supporting a grown child. One in seven middle-aged adults are providing financial support to their aging parent and child. According to a 2012 Pew Research Survey, four in ten (38%) report that both their aged parent and adult child are relying on them for emotional support. Unfortunately, the older the parent, the more support needed. We call this group the "Sandwich Generation." They are generally the 40- to 60-year-olds who are feeling the strain of financially and/or emotionally supporting multiple families. They are experiencing the challenges of "parenting their parent" while still raising their own children. This is a relatively new but growing family dynamic, due to increasing life spans and the option to have children at a later age.

The demands of raising children today are difficult. Joining this with the pressure of attempting to meet the legal, financial and emotional needs of our aging parents can bring on an onerous burden. Emotionally, it can take its toll even in the healthiest of families. First is the worry of being able to meet the financial obligations. "Have we put enough away for our children's educations?" "Did my parents make adequate plans for their retirement or for any major illnesses they may experience?" "Have our parents been clear about who is to make medical and financial decisions as they get older?" "Are our siblings in agreement and what if they're not?" Then may come the inevitable guilt. "Am I doing enough for my children and my parents?" "I'm beginning to resent the pressures that I'm experiencing." "I'm feeling as though I am no longer in control of my life. I am having to meet everyone else's needs." Finally, do we dare ask ourselves when and how our own needs are going to be met?

Unfortunately, there are no easy answers to these questions. But there are areas that we can address to make this time of our life less difficult. The first is using good boundaries. This means that we must ask ourselves how much we are doing for others that they can and should do for themselves. Do we overfunction for our children? Are we helping them make decisions that they have to live with -- not us? Have we strongly encouraged our parents to make realistic retirement and medical choices? Do we take on more responsibility when others should be sharing in helping or making decisions? Do we allow others the consequences of their choices?

The next area is that of guilt. Can we say "no" when it is appropriate without feeling guilty? In this culture, we tend to feel guilty whether it is deserved or not. It is my thinking that guilt is appropriate when I have committed a wrongful act. Examples of this are being rude or harmful to another or overreacting in response to another. But we often feel guilt when we have to make decisions that allow others to experience the consequences of their choices – e.g. allowing our child to fail when he made the wrong choice. Or we feel guilt doing what we know is the best thing for another when it causes them pain – having to put a parent with dementia in a skilled nursing facility knowing that we are unable to properly care for her. The guilt that we experience in these examples does not contribute to our well-being but rather emotionally takes its toll on us. In other words, it doesn't help the situation.

Finally, are we consistent about taking care of our own physical and emotional needs? This is critical. We cannot be expected to take on additional responsibilities and disregard our own needs. Choosing to be there for others and not ourselves can lead to greater anxiety and depression. We mistakenly think that others must come first. We'll take care of ourselves at a later time. Sometimes there is no later time. Getting regular medical check-ups, exercising and a good diet are ways to physically strengthen ourselves to meet these challenges. I'm not sure that many of us have come to realize that the emotional drain of the "sandwich life" takes on an equal burden. This stage of life may demand that we get psychological help to aid us making these hard decisions. This kind of help may give us direction in addressing the appropriateness of our feelings. As I said earlier, there are no easy answers. However, as our children and parents need our support during these times, being aware of our own needs may be the healthy response to being a part of the "sandwich generation."

- Mary