

West County Psychological Associates

The WCPA Newsletter

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Just How Far Will Parents Go for Their Children?

Jennifer Webbe-VanLuven, MSW, LCSW, CDM

Lately, the largest college admissions scandal in recent memory has been all over the headlines. The indictments of dozens of rich and well-connected parents, even celebrities, who participated in a criminal scheme to insure their children's acceptance to selective universities is front page news. Unfortunately, this is merely one of many examples of how today's parents today seem to be willing to go to any lengths to ensure their children's success. This is often done out of love, but it comes with costs.

The biggest costs to this parenting style are that today's youth are feeling more entitled than ever and are not learning the skills of hard work and grit that it takes to make their own success. In raising children who have experienced minimal struggle, we are not creating a happier generation; we are creating a generation that has no idea what to do when they actually encounter struggle. A generation who panics and shuts down at the mere idea of failure. A generation for whom failure is far too painful, leaving them with coping mechanisms like addiction, blame, anxiety, and internalization.

Today, this type of parenting begins at a very young age. When children start school, parents begin to "help" with homework, in some cases doing most of it for their child. Ask any teacher, they will tell you about assignments that have come in a parent's handwriting or an elementary science fair project done to an adult professional's standard. This type of behavior is one that not only takes away the learning process but gives the child the message that their work is not "good enough," hence THEY are not good enough. Most children stop trying for themselves when parents continually overtake their special projects.

Then there are parents who serve excessive time in the library, lunch room and recess duty. These are the parents who are the school's top volunteers, but not out of the kindness of their hearts. They have a couple of motives. They want to have an "in" with teachers and administration – to become close to staff so that they can continually advocate for their children and have a place of power when needed. These are also the parents who are obsessive over their children's friendship groups and their children being in the "in" group at their schools. These are the parents that throw the coolest parties or organize the groups that they feel are beneficial for their child. Parents who need to work or who are unable to keep up socially and with volunteer opportunities are seemingly left behind.

Many well-to-do parents also will do anything to give their kids a leg up on the competition when it comes to testing and school success. An increasingly common tactic is getting kids extra time on school projects, testing, ACTs and SATs through a quick psychological diagnosis that may or may not be legitimate. This sort of practice teaches kids to use whatever means they have to get a leg up on the competition and to win at all costs. Again, not instilling the value that dedication and hard work are what makes the grades and a successful career.

Academics are not the only place where we see parents overstepping bounds to get their kids ahead. Athletics is also a place where some of today's parents will go to great lengths to make their kids superstars. Many parents will befriend coaches, volunteer excessive time and even become the manager of their child's sport teams for extra playing time and notoriety on

the field. The result is that their child gets the edge above all other teammates and the guarantee that they will have the playing time and position on the team they desire, whether talented or not.

Finally – and this is an area that is possibly the most surprising – there are the parents who attend their college graduated children’s job interviews. Parents are calling to arrange interviews for perfectly functional adult children, inserting themselves into schedule or salary negotiations, asking about health care and other job benefits, and berating a manager by phone or email for failing to hire or promote their adult children. Senior managers report parental invasions such as asking to sit in on job interviews, bringing gifts to potential employers, and calling hiring managers in the guise of an employment reference to heap praise on their children. Often, the more resources a parent has, the more likely they are to play concierge to their child. In an erroneous effort to help their children gain short-term achievement, hiring managers say, many parents unwittingly cripple their adult sons’ and daughters’ abilities to succeed on their own.

Studies have shown that this kind of parental behavior can have long-lasting, detrimental effects on a child. Some of these effects include:

- The child becomes poorly equipped to deal with routine growing and learning experiences. This includes everything from asking for directions and dealing with an annoying roommate to much broader skills like communicating with superiors, negotiating for something she wants and coping with disappointment.
- The young person doesn’t develop a sense of personal motivation or drive, since he only knows how to follow the path that the Lawnmower Parent has already prepared.
- The child can’t make a decision, big or small, without the guidance of others.
- The youth internalizes the message that they aren’t good enough to do for themselves. In essence, the parent has repeatedly demonstrated to their child that they cannot be trusted to accomplish things on their own.

Even though it comes with costs, parenting in this way today is so common and often tempting. How can we avoid becoming this type of parent?

- **School age kids:** start practicing now! Let your child do the talking as often as possible: ordering at restaurants, asking for directions, or calling a friend on the phone to ask for a playdate instead of arranging it yourself via text message.
- **High school kids:** while there is still room for parental involvement at this age, insist that your child attempt all communication on his or her own first. If they need to miss a quiz and do a make-up, have them make the arrangements with the teacher, and only intervene AFTER they have made the first attempt on their own. If they have a conflict between track practice and music lessons, have them discuss the possibilities with the involved groups, then have them make the decision and deal with the potential consequences.
- **Kids of all ages:** TRUST your kid to do well, and tell them repeatedly that you believe that they can make good decisions on their own. Give them room to make mistakes, even major ones sometimes, and learn from them together.

The children who are being raised today are a generation of children that believe everyone should get a medal for sports and that they are entitled to have the best grades. They often have not realized the importance of hard work and dedication. But failure is a part of success. When our children don’t experience failures and disappointments, they can’t relish in their successes. It’s great when parents can give their children the best possible opportunities, in healthy ways. But with too much, it’s hard to imagine how kids keep up with life these days. At some point, the jig is up, and those with these “advantages” may be easily outperformed by someone who has some grit and knows how to weather a basic setback.



Jennifer Webbe VanLuven, MSW, LCSW, CDM specializes in helping clients with their relationship issues, whether they want to stay in the relationship/marriage or go their separate ways. Her areas of expertise are in therapy with high conflict relationships and divorce counseling. She provides Divorce Mediation services when couples must move on, prioritizing their mental health and financial well-being. She also works with children and adolescents experiencing difficulties related to divorce or reunification. Jennifer provides training for school professionals regarding legal issues, custody, and understanding parenting plans for students of divorced parents. She has over 20 years of experience working in the mental health field.

From the Director:

Why is It So Hard for Parents to Say “No?”



I believe that the hardest job that a parent has is determining the right course of action when their children's behavior needs to be addressed. All parents want to do the right thing. It seems simple enough. Most of us believe that our children need consequences if their behavior is out of line. However, it isn't that simple. If we have to say no to something they want or if we come up with a consequence that they don't like then we start to question ourselves. And the self-questioning can become immobilizing. "Do I give a consequence? What should that consequence be?" "Is the consequence too easy, too hard? Will it work?" "Would it be better to overlook this? Am I making it a bigger issue than it needs to be?" "What is my child's response going to be? Will I be able to handle his response?" "Will she do something desperate if I punish her? Will this cause another argument between my spouse and myself?" It can go on and on and on. Often nothing is done. We'll deal with it another time because we know there will be another time.

Underlying all of these questions is fear. We are fearful that our behavior will make the situation worse and cause greater harm. We want desperately to protect our children and so we do things like track their activities and then become frightened because they're not where they're suppose to be and they're not responding to texts or calls. We are afraid that if they are grounded or cut off from social media for a short time, this will affect their social life. For many parents, it's the fear of stirring up the adolescent rage and not knowing how to manage it. Years ago, I use to say parenting is not for the weak. It's evident that it hasn't become any easier. What is obvious to me is that we have to become stronger because our children are not becoming weaker-especially when they want what they want.

How do we get beyond this fear and become the stronger parent? It's a matter of putting into play healthy principles and then being absolutely consistent in our behavior. The last four words are the most critical – **consistency in our behavior**. This is what makes a child believe that we mean what we say. Here are a few suggestions that should bring order into our home.

- **Never** put up with bad behavior. The quicker and more consistently we address bad or out of control behavior the less it will occur.
- We must remember to be calm. When we raise our voices and become out of control, the situation becomes escalated. A strong, firm voice carries a lot more authority than hysteria.
- We should never give a consequence in the heat of the argument. It needs to be thought through and it needs to be an action that we can and are going to live with. For example, we don't take away our child's phone for a month unless this is something we are able to carry out.
- The consequence must be fair and related to the behavior. For example, "You have been late for curfew twice in the last week. It will be best if you not go out with your friends this next week."

Many parents question what should be the appropriate consequence. What I have found very, very helpful over the years is the adage that the best consequence for the child is what is best **IN THE LONG RUN** for the child, the parent and the system, such as the family or school. The right answer will be the same for each person in this equation. So, in the short run you may not want to take your daughter's car away for a couple of weeks because she didn't keep curfew because it will inconvenience you. However, three weeks without a car may have a huge impact on her and will allow her to seriously reconsider coming home late again. This may create pain for the parent in the short run but in the long run it will be to everyone's advantage. Avoiding the short run pain creates long term heartache and grief. This applies to everyone – whether it be the four year old who won't pick up his toys or the 18 year old who has opted for a life with drugs.

This is not easy. It is hard. It is painful. And we may need help to make the right choice. But in the long run it will be well worth it.

- Mary Fitzgibbons



Preventing Student Suicide

Programs available for school professionals and parent groups

Training dates are currently being scheduled for the 2019-2020 school year.

Suicide among adolescents and young adults continues to increase every year and is now the **second** leading cause of death in individuals of middle school, high school, and college age, exceeded only by accidents. Suicide is responsible for more deaths of adolescents each year than all natural causes *combined*. It is vital that all school personnel and parents have up-to-date information regarding suicide warning signs and prevention strategies.

Consistent with this ethical obligation, Missouri statute now requires suicide awareness and prevention education for all school staff members. Training and professional education sessions, as well as parent presentations, are available through West County Psychological Associates.

Training for school counselors, social workers, nurses, administrators, and crisis team members:

Note: CEUs are available for licensed Missouri social workers and counselors.

- Suicide Prevention, Intervention, and Postvention in Schools (6 hours)*
- Suicide Risk Assessment in Schools (2 hours)
- Safety Planning and Counseling Strategies (2 hours)
- Postvention: What to Do After a Student's Suicide Death (2 hours)

Training for all school or district staff:

- Suicide Awareness and Prevention (2 hours)

Presentation for parents:

- Suicide Awareness and Prevention for Parents (1 hour)

***Materials Available for Your Use:** After attending the full day training *Suicide Prevention, Intervention and Postvention in Schools* training, school counselors, social workers, nurses and administrators are eligible to become qualified presenters of the two hour *Suicide Awareness and Prevention in Schools* program for their own school staff. Materials are licensed to schools/districts for use by qualified presenters to train their school staff members. Inquire through the contact information below.

➤ TRAINING IS PROVIDED AT YOUR SITE ~ CALL TO SCHEDULE

Presenter: Amy V. Maus, MSW, LCSW specializes in school consultation, providing faculty training and seminars, parent presentations, principals' consultation groups, and Care Team facilitation to dozens of schools each year. She is co-author of *The Care Team Approach: A Problem Solving Process for Effective School Change*.

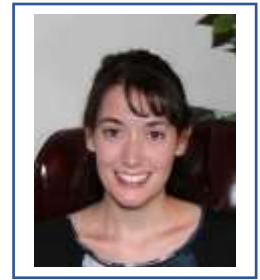
For more information or to schedule, please contact Amy at the West County Psychological Associates office, 314.275.8599, or visit www.wcpastl.com.



Presence with the Grieving

By Amy Neu, MSW, LCSW

Therapist for seniors, their families and caregivers



What do you say to someone who has lost a loved one? Many of us feel uncomfortable being with a grieving person. We fumble to find the right words, feel nervous that we will say the wrong thing, or worry that if we bring up the person's loss that they will then remember that their loved one died (as if they could have forgotten) and make them feel worse again! We put such stress and pressure on ourselves to do and say the "right thing" that we inadvertently avoid the grieving person or give unwarranted advice. These patterns ultimately leave our grieving loved ones with a deeper sense of isolation and sadness. Fortunately, when we open ourselves up to new information and listening, we can become wonderful supports to our grieving loved ones.

Grief is the natural emotional reaction someone experiences following a loss. The grieving process is complex and unique to each individual loss. There is no one right way for a person to grieve, but it is common for people to have conflicting emotions – such as anger, sadness, or relief - in response to a loss. The temptation for those near the grieving is to use logic and find words to make the grieving individual "feel better." Unfortunately, there are no magic words that will eliminate grief. How, then, can we console a grieving person? Below are powerful strategies for us to engage with and support someone in grief:

- **Presence** is one of our most valuable tools. Our culture puts great emphasis on the words we say, yet communication is approximately 90% nonverbal. Our very presence and attention to a grieving person matters more than anything we could communicate verbally. This is not to say that our words do not matter – certainly they do – but it is essential to know that what we do and how we attend to others speaks greater volumes and offers more support than we realize. Presence can start with taking a deep breath, quieting one's busy mind, and mentally preparing to be fully present with another person. Now we will be ready to attune and truly listen to the individual experiencing grief.
- **Attune and listen** to the grieving person. What does true listening look like? First, minimize distractions so that you are both able to hear each other and focus, and then open up a conversation. Give the person the space to be heard without interruption. Most importantly, do not use this time to think about what you will say next; rather, take in all of the information that they are providing you and attune to them. Focus on the words they use and observe their nonverbal cues (facial expressions, body language, and tone of voice). Maintain good eye contact as you listen. In becoming attuned to the grieving individual, we become empathic, open, and receptive to their emotions. Three questions you can ask to help begin and guide this discussion are: "How do you feel?" "What do you need?" and "How can I help?" If they ask you to do something that you are not able to do, be honest with them.
- **Validate their feelings.** Keep in mind that grief is an emotional response, and cannot be alleviated with logic. Painful feelings that are expressed, acknowledged and validated by a trusted listener will diminish. Painful feelings that are ignored or suppressed will gain strength. It is tempting for us to offer statements such as, "Don't be sad – he had a wonderful life," or "Be happy – she wouldn't want you to feel this way," in an attempt to make them feel better; however, these types of statements push grieving people away. As a result, they feel left alone with these complex emotions. They worry that no one else will understand. Instead, validate their emotions and offer support. For example, telling a grieving person, "You are feeling so much pain right now. I am here for you. How can I help?" is a comforting message. If they do not know how you can help, then let them know that you are here for them or offer something that you would like to do (for example, bring them dinner on Thursday night).
- **Be respectful with use of touch.** Be aware of your body language and use of physical contact. People in any situation value personal space, and individuals who are grieving are no different. When we respect healthy physical boundaries, it sends the nonverbal message that we respect the person. General guidelines suggest that it is best to maintain at least 2-5 feet of personal space in conversation between colleagues, friends, and family. If you sense that a grieving person may need a physical touch to be best supported, limit your touch to a short hand placement on the hand or forearm. If you are close friends or family members feel free to offer a hug and be aware of and respect when they decide to pull away.
- **Seek support and consultation** for yourself to stay healthy. As we ask our grieving loved ones to admit to and express their feelings, we all must admit to our own difficult emotions. They are natural. It is critical for all of us to learn, cultivate, and implement our own methods of relieving stress to maintain healthy lifestyles and boundaries throughout our lives.

Grief is a complex and emotionally taxing process for everyone involved. When we implement the above suggestions into our relationships with our grieving loved ones, then these individuals will feel supported and be able to experience a greater sense of relief while processing their grief. We all benefit from the space to process our emotions in a healthy, productive way.



TEENSTRONG: Starting Healthy Conversations with Your Students

An in-school program to connect with teens and tweens on difficult topics

We are all aware of the alarming increases in teen depression and anxiety, the sharp rise in teen suicide rates, the opioid epidemic that is affecting so many families, and concerns about how technology is shaping our youth's brains and emotional capacities. At WCPA, we work with countless numbers of teens and have been striving to find ways to effectively communicate with them about these very real concerns. One thing we have learned is that standing up in front of a large group of teens and lecturing them does not work. They tend to tune out, which makes it difficult for them to internalize the message.

Instead, we have put together a program designed to reach teens where they are, in a way that they will respond to – smaller group interactive conversations. Teens respond best when they have a chance to speak and be heard, especially when it is being facilitated by a non-faculty member with whom students do not fear judgment or disciplinary action.

This program is available at the classroom level to both middle school and high school students and also includes an initial parent presentation, which will explain what will be discussed, as well as give parents an opportunity to meet the presenters.

Program Objectives:

- To give students an opportunity to have conversations about the issues that are affecting them in a safe and secure environment
- To identify at-risk students and work with schools to provide needed resources
- To provide an environment in which students can learn to develop strong connections with peers to decrease feelings of isolation and increase class cohesion
- To educate and support teachers and administrators so they can be better equipped to both understand and serve their students
- To teach students to resolve conflicts with both peers and adults
- To encourage students to continue these conversations at home with parents

Available Topics

- Vaping
- Drug/Alcohol Use
- Moral and Ethical Sexual Choices Online and Offline
- Friendships/Connections and Bullying
- Social Media/Gaming
- Conflict Resolution
- Strategies for Dealing with Stress and Anxiety

Program Facilitators:

We offer a male/female team to come work with students - a male to lead male student groups and a female to lead female student groups, as teens tend to open up and share more in groups when with peers of their own gender.

Please contact **Tony Tramelli, LPC** or **Cari McKnight, LCSW** at **314-275-8599** for more information. We will tailor the topics to address any specific concerns to your school community, and will work with you to incorporate this program into your school in ways that will accommodate your logistical needs.

Groups are now scheduling for the fall of 2019.

An Education that Promotes Democracy

Carol Hall-Whittier, Ed.D.

What character traits are needed by citizens today to promote a healthy, functioning democracy? Could democratic ideals such as majority rules, individual rights, shared leadership, citizen involvement, care and support of the less fortunate be modeled in our classrooms? And could those lessons learned by our children actually work for the good of our nation when they are practiced and embedded in the lives of future adults who learned them early in life?

The social climate and development of interpersonal skills in classrooms today are necessary for academic success as well as the equipping of young people to be responsible, contributing adults in our society. When considering the social issues of today, the increasing violence, the inability to show compassion and patience for the least in our society, and the inability to consider opposing viewpoints and to respect the opposer even when you don't agree, one can only wonder if we are indeed a nation of educated, morally responsible people or if the lessons necessary to live in a democracy continue to evade the citizenry. These adverse behaviors have become commonplace in today's world.

The evidence of moral and character erosion is witnessed every day in schools across America. Of course, there have always been disagreements and fights among students who are bantering with classmates for power on the school yard. However, the teasing and mocking of others by children have hit an all-time low. These behaviors are inhibiting the ability of students to learn in a safe, supportive environment.

In the early 1970's, there were advocates of innovative teaching methods and procedures with a focus on the human and feeling side of interaction in school settings and with a concern for emotion and the self-concept in the classroom. Those topics were less emphasized during the accountability movement in education, where the goal is for children to pass the "test." However, the current complexity of today's social issues have precipitated the resurgence of such topics as *the empathetic school* and *social-emotional learning*. Many educators are reflecting on the connection between academic success and the social and emotional learner.

The classroom should be a place where ideas are shared and appreciated for their thoughtfulness and not their agreement with the majority. The classroom should represent the democracy, in the ways that students interact with each other and the decisions they make.

The time spent in the beginning of the school year to develop group processes in the classroom will pay big dividends in the development of academic and social success. There are skills and abilities necessary for a learner to grasp to bolster confidence when engaging in a group setting. During the first few days of class, students are on their best behavior and are receptive to lessons on how to speak, listen, argue, persuade and get along. Students should not work with their peers without getting to know them. Students should spend time listening and understanding who their classmates are through simple sharing activities. Our diverse society should inspire activities that involve building a sense of belonging among all students and impact the learning environment at school, at home and in the community. These simple activities can be the foundation for later group work where kids are engaged in collaborative conversations and academic debates.

The skill of handling conflict is another group dynamic poorly learned by students and the citizens of our nation. One can see examples of poor handling of conflict within the violent acts perpetrated by citizens against others, increased suicides by children and adults, and distasteful comments on social media meant to harm another; just to name a few. However, conflict is natural and it arises in our human interactions between friends, between spouses, between groups in our communities, between countries and around the world. Why not use this natural phenomena as a daily teachable moment? Instead of frowning on conflict, make learning conflict strategies a way of life in our classrooms. It is beneficial to remember that the learning experiences provided by the educator should have the attainment of academic and social skills linked to the overall student goals and expectations. The experiences should be meaningful to the student and associated with the larger world.

Other group activities to build democratic conscience can be lessons on collective decision making and problem solving procedures. Bringing students together to work on decision-making will involve listening, speaking and respect. Problem solving skills involve identifying the problem, analyzing the problem, generating multiple solutions and forecasting consequences. These high level thinking skills can be student driven and content oriented and will certainly sharpen a students' power of judgement and capacity to act intelligently.

John Dewey emphasized the social aspects of learning in the role of schooling for training students in problem solving, democracy, and sensible living. He argued that if children were to learn to live democratically; they would have to experience the living process of democracy itself in the classroom. Life in the classroom, according to Dewey, should be a democracy in microcosm. The classroom should be a place where ideas are shared and appreciated for their thoughtfulness and not their agreement with the majority. The classroom should represent the democracy, in the ways that students interact with each other and the decisions they make. Lessons of empathy, respect and cooperation should be woven into the culture of the school as they are just as important as academic success.

Schools where staff members acted in collaborative ways to find solutions: making decisions, reflecting on their practice and participating in inquiry type activities are more likely to have classrooms that function in that manner.

As we think about the components of the classroom, there is the classroom teacher, the individual students, the academic curriculum and the social environment. The teaching and learning environment in the classroom is a complicated one affected by relations among students and between the students and the teacher. Each member of the learning community wants to feel included, influential and loved, and each wants respect and a feeling of personal importance and relevance. The teacher is the conductor, assuring that each aspect of group life is a balanced melody of interaction and collaboration. Schools can teach children that the behaviors they learn in school can be practiced in their neighborhoods and throughout the community. Schools, as no other public institution, can open doors to life's possibilities and advance students' understanding of their responsibility to the public good. They must grow to be active citizens respecting the differences of their neighbors and working collaboratively – neighbor to neighbor and community to community, to contribute to the well-being of this nation.



Carol Hall-Whittier, Ed.D. *is an experienced educator who has worked in an urban school district as a principal, instructional leader and teacher for over 35 years. She received her training as an urban leader from St. Louis University, where she earned a doctorate in education. Her work has been built on the belief that the school functions as a community that is self-motivating and that views the growth of its members as fundamental. Dr. Whittier is adept in providing leadership training for principals, staff, and parents. She 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 to perfect the practice of professionals who are preparing students to live in a democratic society.*

Parent Strong

Elementary School-Aged Parent Knowledge and Engagement Platform

Parents want to guide their children with the utmost skill, wisdom and love. Unfortunately, we live in an ever-changing, fast paced global society that is not always parent friendly. How empowering it can be to learn about today's issues that impact children and the successful strategies other parents are using when confronted with them.

Parent Strong is a monthly or bi-monthly parent group available at your site for your elementary school community's parents. Parents meet together, learn about issues that impact both children and parenting skills today, and engage together with the material. The result is parents who are increasingly informed, empowered, and supportive of one another and the school. Dates and times are scheduled mutually between the school and group facilitator.

This program is available for the 2019-2020 school year. Contact **Donna Garcia** or **Carol Hall-Whittier** at West County Psychological Associates to schedule or for more information.

Healthy Masculinity in a Toxic World ~ Thoughts for Parents and Caregivers of Boys

Bryan Duckham, Ph.D., MSW, LCSW

The idea of unhealthy masculinity is not new. In their book, “A Time of Fallen Heroes” (1993), William Pollock and William Betcher outlined the unique challenges to masculine development. There does seem, however, to be a growing recognition today of the unhealthy influences on, and behavior of, males in our culture. Several recent trends can be credited with this increased social consciousness. The “Me Too” movement has raised awareness around the aggressive and predatory sexual practices of many men and boys in our culture. In addition, the fact that mass shootings are perpetrated by disaffected men has also pointed to another dangerous potential outcome of male socialization.

We now understand that to some extent “toxic masculinity” is a contributing factor to these violent and aggressive behaviors and the term seems to be gaining a foothold in the zeitgeist of our society. What is “toxic masculinity?” Generally speaking, it consists of unhealthy beliefs and behaviors that are promoted and/or incorporated by boys and men in our society about what it means to be male. It can be broken down to a number of unhealthy influences and beliefs in our culture:

- 1) Toxic masculinity stems from a belief that certain feelings are unacceptable for boys and men to feel and express. While our society supports male aggression in the form of anger and rage through sports and other competitive and “assertive” behavior, feelings of fear, hurt, sadness, guilt, and shame are deemed unacceptable. Often a word like “sissy” and other derogatory terms are used to describe boys or men who display these types of emotions. While seemingly anger is acceptable for men to express, often it is not. Men, typically, will not confront someone who has offended them and say in a tactful way, “When you did such and such it really hurt my feelings or made me angry.”
- 2) Toxic masculinity results from the belief that not being able to solve all problems (especially personal problems) and needing help is a sign of unhealthy weakness. Dependency is verboten. In addition to the aforementioned belief about feelings, this is a belief that is encountered in psychotherapy work with men.
- 3) The idea that women are to be sexualized, objectified, and dominated is another significant aspect of toxic masculinity. Boys and men are inundated with messages supporting this notion. Access to pornography and early exposure compound this belief. Some literature suggests that on average boys are being exposed to pornography for the first time by the age of 10 or 11. Early exposure to pornography is overstimulating for boys and young men and can short circuit healthy sexual maturation and exploration of their sexuality within healthy boundaries. In addition, it can create unrealistic expectations for relationships and sexual behavior. Video games often promote unrealistic images of, and attitudes towards, women or girls. The female figure is hypersexualized and their anatomy is over exaggerated in a way that is designed to stimulate and addict males.
- 4) The belief that sports and/or physical power and dominance is the only way to compete or be competent is another aspect of toxic masculinity. In addition, the role models presented in video games or movies are either aggressive, floundering, dominating, unfeeling, and represent many of the other aspects of toxic masculinity previously noted.

What is the antidote for parents to combat toxic masculinity? First, as related to a healthy expression of the full palette of human emotion parents can do two things. It is important to share with your son that feeling fear, sadness, hurt, anger, and shame are healthy and important emotions, that their expression is important for their self-esteem and relationships. Secondly, it is critical to model these feelings. Albert Bandura is credited with developing Social Learning Theory which has demonstrated the power of children’s vicarious learning by watching significant others. While it is important to not burden children with one’s struggles and feelings, a healthy expression of fear, hurt, and shame as a result of failure communicates that it is okay for them to feel and express these emotions.

Often, one must go backward before they can go forward. That is, often, to figure out what one needs they must first accept their dependency needs. One must realize that they need others to help them—others do this by listening to and holding feelings

without judging or trying to fix. If people are listened to and their deeper struggles are understood they will find their way out of problems. It is essential that parents communicate to boys that it is okay to be vulnerable and need. Again, parents too must model these behaviors.

At a certain age, parents cannot shelter their kids from the influences of the world. Arguably, they should not as kids must find a way to balance these influences with their own values. While boundaries and limits are still important for teenagers in many ways, sharing appropriate music and movies with them can provide an inroad for discussion about content and how they experience it-these times can be a great way of asking questions and in a non-intrusive way share your values.

Finally, it is important to recognize that, while some children have gifts and ambition around sports, it is only one avenue for developing talent and self-esteem. While sports provide a healthy function for some kids and our society, many kids find their passion in music, art, theater, science, nature, and many other interests. It is important to know your kid and support them to explore the many avenues available to them-to allow them the freedom to discover who they are meant to be.

In addition to combating toxic masculinity, it is important to note that not all masculinity is toxic; in addition, there are aspects of masculinity, while not necessarily unique to males, that must be acknowledged and celebrated. Research has identified healthy characteristics of masculinity (Kiselica & Englar-Carlson, 2010). They are:

- 1) **Intimacy in the context of activity** – Boys and men often bond and share within the context of a shared activity.
- 2) **Caring and protection** – Protection from physical and emotional harm for many men is a form of caring and is an aspect of healthy masculinity.
- 3) **Fathering** – Mentoring and raising children can empower men toward positive masculinity. Often men choose to work to retain the best of their own parenting while minimizing the mistakes of their parents.
- 4) **Self-Reliance** – While self-reliance, as discussed, can be detrimental to male development it can also lead to a sense of mastery and self-confidence.
- 5) **Provision** – Working and providing financially for oneself and a family is important for positive masculinity.
- 6) **Audacity** – Taking appropriate risks through courage.
- 7) **Belonging** – Being part of a group-a sense of belonging to one's "tribe."

While much work can be done on a broader social level, the influence of parents is critical. Through the messages parents send and the examples they set, boys can be helped to balance dependency with independence, express a full array of feeling, and treat women and others with respect and empathy. Parents can model how they want boys to be. Supporting the healthy and unique aspects of masculinity will only augment this ideal.

Isolation, depression, anxiety, pornography addiction, or a general sense of being shut down and not communicating can be signs that a boy or man is struggling with the toxic elements of masculinity and is in need of treatment. Therapy can help males feel safe to communicate feelings and thoughts and experience the benefits of relationships. The working relationship can be essential in the process of males relating to others well and finding their purpose. Therapists at West County Psychological Associates provide treatment for boys and men and can be reached at 314-275-8599.



Bryan Duckham, Ph.D., MSW, LCSW has thirty years' experience in the treatment of depression, anxiety and addictions. In addition to private practice, Dr. Duckham has worked in a variety of outpatient mental health and addiction treatment programs. He believes that often, people's religion and spirituality are essential parts of their recovery and sensitively integrates his clients' beliefs into treatment.

In addition to maintaining his practice at West County Psychological Associates, Dr. Duckham is an Associate Professor of Social Work at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville and teaches theory and practice courses in the undergraduate and graduate social work program. His research interests include the intersection of theory, practice, and religion/spirituality, as well as philosophy.



Care Team 2.0 *

Revitalizing Your School's Response to
Today's Generation of High-Risk Students

30 Hours of Comprehensive Training:
Monday, June 10th ~ Friday, June 14th, 2019
9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. daily

At times today, the world seems to be spinning out of control. Many of us find ourselves struggling to cope with feeling overwhelmed and worried by how to respond to all the changes. No doubt, schools are forced to cope, too. Our students are coming to school more anxious, dependent, entitled, and depressed. Suicide rates are climbing rapidly, even preschoolers come to school traumatized and anxious, and ever more students simply refuse to come to school at all.

Today, more than ever, teaching is not for the weak. It's critical that our teachers and school professionals have a means to receive collegial support, brainstorm solutions, and assure follow-through for the most high-risk students. Of course, any program that takes time and resources must be highly effective. To that end, training and support is available to make sure that your school's Care Team is creating a real difference for your students and staff alike.

Care Team 2.0 Training Topics Include:

- Attachment, the core of all relationships, and its application in the school
- Student mental health, including anxiety, ADHD, self-harm, suicide prevention and others
- Vaping and today's substance use crisis
- The effects of today's technology on our students' mental health, relationships and behavior
- Dealing with difficult parents
- Motivating the unmotivated student
- Strategies, habits, and ethics that create a healthy and effective team
- Finding solutions when the team feels stuck

Who Should Attend: Whether you are considering how to start or restart your school's team, wish to revitalize a struggling team, or just need some fresh ideas for your team that is already successful, you are welcome. All Care Team members and education professionals are encouraged to attend.

Cost: \$450 per attendee Title II funds may apply. Continuing Education certificate provided.

Date and time: June 10 – 14, 2019 9:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m. daily. Lunch 12:00 – 1:00 on your own.

Location: West County Psychological Associates 12125 Woodcrest Executive Drive St. Louis, MO Suite 120

Online registration is available at: <https://conta.cc/2ZnkDKx> Payment is expected at time of registration.

Questions or concerns? Call WCPA at (314) 275-8599. Register Today - Space is Limited.

*** This training is also available for school groups at your site. Call for information.**