



NORTHWEST PARENTS' CORNER

Spring 2008

A quarterly newsletter of parenting tips, reflections, and ideas

Funded by a grant from the Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation

A Parents' Gift: Roots and Wings

My mother and father said their parenting goal was to provide their children with two gifts: roots and wings! The "roots" they referred to are the solid foundation of family - knowing who you are, and where you come from. The "wings" are the skills and courage to soar independently - to find a way of your own. In HYSB "Family Solutions" workshops I encourage parents to create a family environment that is a safe container, with clear limits and boundaries, where its members can make mistakes, learn from them, make amends, try again, and continue to be loved unconditionally. Like the roots my parents defined, family is the solid foundation that makes it possible for kids to take chances, to try new things, and eventually to grow "wings" of independence.

In his book, "Parenting By Heart" psychologist, Ron Taffel calls the safe container that parents create, the 'empathic envelope.' "The empathic envelope is like a container around your kids and your family, a boundary between your family and outside culture. As the parent, you are in charge of this container. It is made up of *your* values, *your* expectations, and *your* ways of being with your children. It gives your children a sense they *belong* somewhere, that they are *held* by their parents in a safe and secure place: 'This is my house, I know what to expect. I belong.'"

Taffel says that "in successful families the empathic envelope derives from three basic qualities: compassion, consequences, and, communication. The combination of these three simple

qualities creates an environment in which children end up feeling *held* and *guided*. They know that you will try to be compassionate. They know where your limits are on most issues. And they can count on spending time together."

Here's the Rub -

Taffel notes that "the confusing but inevitable push of children to grow up, and the parental responsibility to caretake *bump up against each other* every day. Children and parents continuously struggle at the edge of the envelope. Far from being a problem, however, this natural friction is an essential part of successful parenting!

"The truth is that from the day we're born until the day we die we need to feel held and contained somewhere. We can let go and become independent only when we feel sufficiently connected to other people."
Ron Taffel, "Parenting By Heart"

Why? Because children need to *feel* the envelope - they need to rub up against the force of our values, our expectations, our emotions, and our fumbling attempts to understand them. If the envelope expands too quickly (too much freedom too soon) children experience a lack of connection. They will then act up until they feel the envelope snugly around them once again. This is why children often provoke us until we react. Contrary to popular belief, children (even adolescents) are not only pushing for independence, they are pushing for contact and connection.

They need an empathic envelope around them and they will do whatever they must to feel its presence. If you loosen the envelope and simply let go too quickly, your kids will drift out of the container to a place where they can once again feel *contained*. On the other hand, if the container is so tight that your kids can't breathe, they will run from you to find a place where they can be held more comfortably.

Helping Kids With ADHD Make Friends

Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) can affect a child in many different ways. Most people know that ADHD can cause children to struggle with things like sitting still, being quiet, paying attention, and staying organized. But ADHD also can make it hard for children to make friends.

Exactly how ADHD adds to social problems is not understood fully, but children with ADHD often have trouble with simple social interactions and struggle to follow social cues. Having good friends adds to children's happiness and impacts their mental health and development. In some cases, children with peer problems may be at higher risk for anxiety, behavioral and mood disorders, substance abuse, and delinquency as teenagers. Having ADHD does not mean children always have poor relationships with their peers. Parents and caring adults often can help children with ADHD to make friends.



Here are a few ways to help:

- **Keep in regular contact with the adults who are involved in the lives of children with ADHD.** These adults include teachers, school counselors, after-school activity leaders, health care providers, and faith leaders. Keep them informed about your child's treatments and, when possible, ask them to help your child improve his peer relationships. For example, ask the adult leaders to make sure that they avoid belittling him in front of his peers. If the adult in charge belittles the child, other children may think it's okay for them to belittle the child as well.
- **Involve your child in activities with her peers.** Many children with ADHD do well with structure in their daily routines, so look for a class or program that interests your child and that meets consistently. Find your child's interest and build on it! Many children with ADHD also do better in small groups of people rather than large groups.

For example, an art class of 8 students that meets every Wednesday at 3 p.m. may suit a child with ADHD better than a soccer team of 20 people that practices on both Tuesday at 6 p.m. and Friday at 3 p.m. and holds games on random weekends. Find an activity the child really likes and support her efforts.

- **Coach your child about the social settings he might face, and help him come up with ideas about what to do.** For example, if he finds himself sitting alone on the bus, help him practice asking, "May I sit here?" Even though it may feel uncomfortable, role-play these scenes so that your child starts to feel more confident in social settings. Also talk about how to handle positive and negative outcomes. It's not easy to prepare your child to respond to rejection, but learning to cope when things don't go his way is an important social skill.
- **Help build your child's self-esteem.** It's easy for kids with ADHD to feel like they're always in trouble and that no one—not even Mom or Dad—likes them. Let your child know that—in addition to loving her—you like her. That will help her feel likeable and may make it easier to share her wonderful traits with others.
- **Look for a social skills group geared toward children with ADHD.** These classes are being offered in more and more communities, and they can help your child learn how to act in social settings.

Regular, everyday activities can be challenging for children with ADHD—and this includes making friends. Parents often want children with ADHD to direct their energy toward getting good grades and staying out of trouble, but helping kids with ADHD make friends is important, too. With help from their parents and other caring adults, children with ADHD can build lasting friendships, and in doing so, they will build their own health and happiness.

Reprinted from an article at
<http://family.samhsa.gov>
For more information check out their website!

Where do kids go when the empathic envelope is too tight or too loose? To that other readily available envelope - the peer group. If you think about it, a peer group is nothing but an empathic envelope without adults around. It has the same three characteristics of a family. It has its own type of empathy ('We understand you even if no one else does.');

it has clear expectations ('Break the rules and you're out!'); and it offers kids a chance to spend time with one another.

The truth is that most children will stop at nothing to feel contained. They will make friends who are abusive to them; they will try to get into cliques that have strict, even harsh, rules and regulations. And eventually, if things are bad enough, they may even be drawn to gangs that put them at risk with the law."

A family is the safe container that keeps us connected, with a tether long enough to allow us to spin independently out into the universe, and the security of knowing we have a soft place to land. Parents are the creators and guardians of that safe container. So, love your children. Make sure they know they are an asset to your family, and an essential member of it. Spend time getting to know them. Treat them with respect and dignity, and expect them to treat you that way. Love them enough to set firm limits and carry through with consequences. Remember, while children appear to resist attempts to put limits and boundaries on their behavior, deep down they take comfort in knowing that someone more competent and experienced is running the show! Someone who loves them enough to give them roots and wings.

- Jill E. Gibbons

Friends Forever

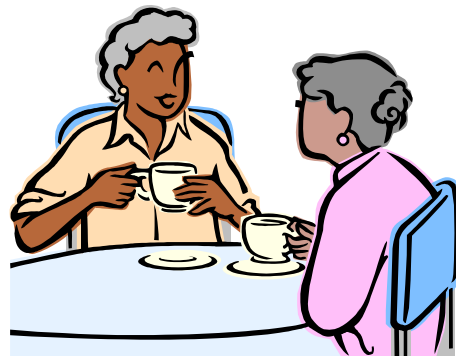
What is a Friend?

A good friend is someone who likes you, treats you with respect, makes you feel good about yourself, and is ready to help you. A person who tries to pressure you or bully you into doing things you don't want to do is not a friend.

Ask your child what qualities she looks for in a friend. Which qualities are most essential? Help her think about her best friends. Ask what she likes about them and why they get along so well.

Ask your child what traits she has that would make her a good friend? She can write them down in a journal or diary and pull out her list whenever she needs a lift!

The difference between old friends and new friends is that you can't just go out and make an old friend, so be nice to the ones you have.



Making New Friends

The best thing about old friends is that they know who you are, and you can really be yourself around them. But sometimes your child will need to make new friends, and that can be a little scary!

Talk with your child about how he can get to know the types of kids he would like to spend time with. What are some places, clubs, and activities where he could find people who would make good friends? Remind him of the traits he likes in a friend and the wonderful qualities he has that add to a friendship. Tell him that anyone would be lucky to have him as a friend!

John Hamilton, LMFT, LADC
Talks to Parents about
Teens / Drug use / Prevention

On Wednesday, April 16th HYSB “*Family Solutions*” was pleased to present an informative evening with John Hamilton, an expert in the field of addiction treatment and prevention as well as a licensed marriage and family therapist.

Mr. Hamilton shared a wealth of information and some surprising statistics regarding teen drug and alcohol use. 90% of students in the seventh grade ranked their relationship with their parents as “great” but by tenth grade this number had dropped to 20%. When asked what they would change about their relationship with their dads the top five answers were to “communicate more, spend more time together, be more understanding, be home more, trust me more.”

Amidst all the pressures of growing up students reported a perception that parents helped exacerbate the pressure by pushing kids to excel, be well rounded, and get good grades. Many students seemed to be seeking acceptance for who they were rather than who their parents wanted them to be. Mr Hamilton stressed that the family is the primary level of community and must present a united front with school, law enforcement, and social services. A couple’s marital bond must be the primary relationship in the family. He said that the greatest gift a father can give his children is to love their mother, and the greatest gift a mother can give her children is to love their father. He told men and women to enjoy their mates more than their children, because this is where children learn about intimacy, dignity and respect.

Mr. Hamilton distinguished between control, *an attempt to disempower*, and influence, *an attempt to empower*, and reminded parents that trying to control children will result in conflict and power struggles. With gentle humor he suggested parents embrace their powerlessness and meet their kids where they are at. Start with, “I know I can’t stop you from... at this party, however, if you do this, this will happen.” The consequences should be reasonable and enforceable. Kids should participate in creating the consequences... It empowers the child, reduces power struggles, and in-

creases the child’s investment in the outcome. When kids break the rules, don’t take it personally. Every time a parent engages in a conflict with a child, the child misses the opportunity to deal with the struggle within themselves. He advised parents to see a child’s behavior as information... he or she is giving you an opportunity to teach. Your child is not the problem. The problem is the problem. Treat your kids with dignity and respect. Understand that everyone makes the best decision available to them at the time with the choices available to them. Parents need to keep hope, and faith alive, looking for creative solutions, not just focusing on problems.

Like Ron Taffel, he advised that parents create a subculture around their children to protect them from pop culture. Parents need to listen, understand, take kids seriously, and affirm them. What was the last good conversation you had with your child? What were you doing? It is more important to show kids how much you *care*, before you show them how much you *know*. Parents should not be afraid to show their own humanness... It makes us more loveable! He concluded, “Always offer hope and faith, and be willing to do whatever it takes to improve your relationship with your child.”

Housatonic Youth Service Bureau

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www.hysb.org

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