

HOPE ReNEWS

In Every Journey There is Hope From End to End

The Newsletter Published by Hope Renewals, Inc.

Winter 2006

Foundation Update

This issue's topic is Stress and Coping. I bet most parents of teens in residential treatment centers have developed their own strategies for facing challenges, some better than others.

I believe I have perfected the art of stress management. Since the experts have imparted their wisdom inside this newsletter, I thought I could share my personal take.

1) **Bed.** Bed works really well and I don't see it mentioned in Matt's column. Lights dim, phone off – there are worse ways to pass your kid's teen years.

2) **Carbs.** Where would the suffering parent be without a fistful of low fat, high sugar carbs.

3) **Google.** I can't count the number of times I plunked down in front of my laptop to see if there was any new wisdom on how to manage my trying teen.

4) **Talk.** This I probably do too much of. I have gotten the distinct impression that my sisters aren't as fascinated by my situation as they could be.

5) **Sudoku.** This is a new, totally absorbing diversion. The world vanishes in the maniacal attempt to sort out all those rows, columns, grids and digits.

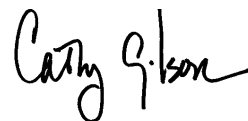
Once a particular crisis has passed, however, I do get more grown-up in my approach to handling the situation.

Volunteering for Hope Renewals is an expression of that more mature attitude. Indeed, when we were conceiving the foundation we thought about the two worst aspects of RTC life over which we might have some control – and those were easing the financial burdens faced by some families and relieving the utter isolation many feel. It is one of our goals at Hope Renewals to provide you with reliable connections at an obviously stressful time. Letters from our readers tell us that it's working.

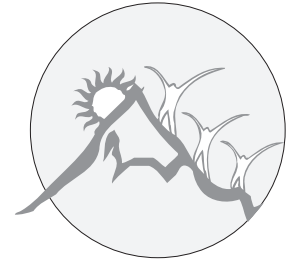
My stress these days comes from wanting to continue to help as many kids as we can. So, as always, this letter is an appeal for those of you who can help to donate to Hope Renewals. The pure relief felt by our beneficiary families in response to your generosity is wonderful.

We at Hope Renewals also need others to join us. The good we can do speaks for itself. An added bonus is having a circle of kindred spirits on whom to call when one needs an understanding shoulder. (And that need often does not end when your child graduates from Vista.) We hope you will consider emailing us with your interest.

Sincerely,



Cathy Gilson
President



Hope Renewals, Inc.

is a non-profit organization established to:

- ▲ Provide partial scholarships for families committed to the therapeutic process who face financial challenges.
- ▲ Serve as a source of support and information for families with children in residential treatment.

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Views expressed in Hope ReNews are not necessarily those of Vista.

Parent's Point of View

Terry Blumenfeld

Once your child has been escorted out of his house and into the wilderness, life is never the same. The relief that they are safe and with people who know how to deal with out of control children is tremendous. However, it is the beginning of a very long journey. The “normal families” also have their journey ahead of them, they just don't know it the same way as we do.

After coping with the stress of your child in the wilderness, the next step is placement in a controlled setting, perhaps Vista. That's when the work gets down to business. Having all this help at Vista – the therapists, drug counselors and staff – creates a really supportive environment for parents. When the parents are in therapy along with the children, it's a very important step. The parents get understanding from the sessions and the child gets to see and hear the parent with a therapist guiding the interaction. It is important that the family participate in this part of the program. I can still hear my child's therapist in my head when different issues come up.

A Special Grandmother

Edith Familian is a special grandmother and a special friend to Hope Renews. She and her husband Arnold have been and continue to be important cheerleaders for their granddaughter. And they have introduced Hope Renews to some wonderful new people who, though they may have had no contact with Vista (or probably any other residential treatment center) have given generously. We are grateful to them all.

Every new step brings great worry and fear. Can my child handle this? What should I do? How should I respond? All these new questions come up and need to be answered. On the part of the parent, there is great anxiety. Wanting to do things perfectly when there is no perfect.

Usually after being at Vista for 8 – 12 months, there is transition house or a new school placement. That is usually worked out with your educational consultant and Vista. Lots of changes and lots of high anxiety for parents and children.

The separation of leaving Vista, which is like being in the womb, for all of us, is very difficult and scary. There will never be another place that is so completely enmeshed with your child. It is like them being in nursery school with all that love and understanding. The new place is a whole other culture. Not bad, just different, with new needs and expectations for your child.

With every change along the way new growth happens for the family. What you realize is that things are always going to be in flux. Change is part of the life plan; one must accept it and try to understand that people change. They move in all different directions and, as parents, we try to encourage our children. But, in the end, they have to make their own decisions and be responsible for their choices. It's not easy for a parent to let go and allow your child to fall. We all want to save them. It's when we can let go and let them figure out their plan that they will be able to grow and mature. It is our job to get there, then step aside, so this can happen.

“Can my child handle this? What should I do? How should I respond?”

NOTE:

Terry's son is a graduate of Vista and is currently completing high school in New Hampshire.

Conversation With A Therapist

Matt Checketts, LCSW

Stress and Coping Ability

A couple of years ago I had a client come to me and flop on the ground while proceeding to tell me about how fat she was and how her head hurt all the way to the frazzled split ends of her limp hair. I first complimented her on the creative use of words and drama and then asked why she felt so upset and frustrated. Her response was that she was “stressed.” When I asked her what that meant she described feeling overwhelmed, stuck, and afraid of not succeeding. Everyone feels stress and frustration but when a person lacks the ability to cope with stress a vicious cycle can take over. When stressful feelings result in avoidance or fear-

“...when a person lacks the ability to cope with stress, a vicious cycle can take over.”

based decisions being made, a pile up of emotion begins. Without venting this emotion or confronting one’s fears it is likely that a cycle of fear, avoidance, and frustration is perpetuated. This can result in drug use, self-harm, interpersonal conflict, lack of motivation, anxiety, depression or other debilitating states.

In an effort to become more able to cope and manage stress it is suggested by Nick Stinnett and John DeFrain (1985) that families and individuals incorporate six paradigms into their daily living. In other words, coping ability equates to being able to pull together, seek help, use spiritual resources, open channels of communication, and learn to go with the flow or be less rigid. Accomplishing this is aided by

incorporating thirteen insights into dealing with stress.

1. Keep things in perspective:

Remember that fear based reactions often result in a person perceiving a situation as being larger and more overwhelming than it is.

2. Humor yourself:

Stress does not always have to be stressful if we allow it to be part of a normal daily process. We all have stress and if we can laugh at it, sometimes it may help put things in perspective and remind us to face situations with more confidence.

3. One step at a time:

Many people dealing with stress feel like they want to fix it all at once. Many addicted people are highly motivated given their perceived level of stress. AA encourages people to take things one day at a time and for those dealing with stress this is a very good idea.

4. Give up worrying:

Give up worrying about things that you have no power over. Instead, worry about and do things about issues that can be solved because worry without action is a stressful burden of despair.

5. Beware the little bugs:

Like the book says, “don’t sweat the small stuff”.

6. Refresh and restore:

Spend time doing something that allows your mind to calm down and think of only enjoyable things.

7. Get outside:

For those people struggling with addiction, this is extremely important as these individuals like to “chill” and get high in order to avoid their worries.

8. Exercise:

Exercise is a physical way to make your body get rid of tension.

9. Minimize fragmentation:

Get organized, get a palm pilot, become a gadget geek.

10. Pets:

Pets can help you feel connected and less alone but if they bug you or stress you out give them the boot. You decide.

11. Something bigger than self:

Don’t be so damn selfish and think of people other than yourself. Helping others is a good way of developing new insights into how you can manage your own stress. Find a project, join a political group, go to church, or become a volunteer and serve your community.

12. Coping with Crises:

Choose to cope with the crises instead of avoiding it! Face whatever you have to face and tell yourself that you will do whatever it takes to succeed. Determination and tenacity usually produces success.

13. Thorns and Roses:

Remind yourself to look for the good in difficult situations. It’s trite but true, “every rose has its thorn.”

I believe that stress is a killer for many teens and their families because far

STRESS continues on page 6



Matt Checketts, LCSW

CEO & Clinical Director
Vista Adolescent Treatment Center
Magna Campus

Life In The Real World

Interviews with recent Grads at various levels of Transition Program living

STUDENT PROFILE

Dave is 17, a freshman at Westminster College and in Phase One of the Transition Program.

When you first came to Vista with a background of drug and alcohol abuse, you had already been living a lifestyle that was stressful. What kind of tools did you learn at Vista to handle that stress?

Anxiety was a huge problem for me. Not particularly social anxiety, I'm typically pretty comfortable around people. I get real anxious around conflict. The two different ways that my anxiety manifests itself is in my body - my heart will race, my hands might sweat or my knee might shake when I am sitting. To counteract that, Matt (my therapist) had me run or workout to kick it. Now that I'm in the Transition House, he wants me to get a job at a gym or a racquet club or a yoga shop. Regardless, he wants me to be around those people.

The one manifestation of stress and anxiety for you is physical. What is the other?

Obsessing. For example, I remember at Vista, Wednesdays you'd get a point sheet - basically feedback from the therapists. Even though I typically would receive positive feedback, on those days, I would be thinking about it so much that I couldn't do my English or math homework. It was like I couldn't focus on anything but that. I just couldn't relax.

What would Matt tell you to do in that situation when it was all in your head and stressing you out?

Sometimes just saying the serenity prayer helped. Once my spirituality became a bigger part of my life, I could say, "Listen, I'm struggling with this." The stress and anxiety were still there, but after I put the effort into something more positive, that relieved

some of it.

You felt like you were doing something about it.

Yeah, and on managing stress on the whole, for me the best way of coping was knowing that I could handle stress. Not that I would necessarily be OK at the end of the day, but just knowing that I was fully capable - that fears sometimes aren't real and just stopping that endless cycle. I learned to do a quick interjection like bringing up the possibility that maybe the fear isn't real. That is one thing that I hope I never lose.

"Anxiety can drain me of the energy I need just to be 17 and stay sober and make friends."

What that says to me is knowing that stress is never going to go away.

Oh, yeah. This isn't just an adolescent thing, this is life.

One thing that you haven't touched upon is what role that your friends play in relieving stress in your life. If you find yourself obsessing about something, are they an outlet or not?

Yes, they are an outlet. A lot of the times I don't think that they know they are. They just provide an interruption. I stop listening to that voice inside my head and hear my friends say, "Dave, what are you saying right now?" I have the ability to make things so much bigger than they are and to blow things really out of proportion. It causes me more stress and anxiety. It can drain me of the energy I need just to be 17 and stay sober and make friends.

It sounds like when you get stressed, you have a plan to go run or go get physical or just stop the cycle. It

sounds as though you have a strategy.

It's been more extensive than that. A lot of people at Vista, in addition to Matt, played a pretty significant role in helping me learn how to relieve my own anxiety.

Being in the Transition House is very new for you. What do you find yourself worrying about?

The requirements for the stage of the program that I am in. The community service - that's a doozy, that's a lot. On the wide scale of things it's the scheduling. I went out and bought a Palm Pilot and it beeps when I have to do something. Matt has recommended this. I just need to hear the beep to remind myself of what I need to do.

That anticipation keeps you out of a stressful situation and acknowledges that you're in a new arena with new requirements? Nobody is going to be waking you up, for example?

I know that my brain can't handle organizing itself and that in itself stresses me out.

I think that you are really smart to do that, to look ahead at what makes you anxious. It sounds as though you've got your tools and your other friends at Vista. Do you find them coming up with their own schemes to handle stress?

Yes, I think that there are a lot of different things they do - yoga, running. I can't think of more than a few guys that don't have a gym membership and I think that everyone has a pretty unique relationship with their therapist.

Well, congratulations on being a college student. That's going to bring a lot of new experiences and you will have the chance to use these new skills from here on out.

I guess it is just life.

Welcome to it!

How You Can Help

The Problem: Helping a family through the ordeal of residential treatment is a costly venture – both emotionally and financially. The staff of Vista have seen families sell their homes, take on additional jobs, and appeal to friends and family on top of the stress of their teen in crisis! They need your help!

Adolescents with mental illness, behavioral problems and addictions do not evoke the sympathy that other kids with more obvious diseases do. Because of this, raising funds from the general public can be difficult and we need the help of the Vista family!

Our Goal: It is the goal of our foundation to raise money for grants to families facing financial challenges. We believe a lack of personal wealth should not be a barrier to this life changing help. We have developed procedures for making grants to current students who are making good progress, but whose families have run out of resources before their children graduate.

How You Can Help: The success of Hope Renews, Inc. relies on the support of the families we serve. Please be generous so together we can support as many families in crisis as possible!

Yes, we will help!

Enclosed is our 2006 contribution to Hope Renews, Inc.

HOPE RENEWS, INC.
11611 San Vicente Blvd., #710
Los Angeles, CA 90049
(310) 476-0258
Hoperenews@adelphia.net

\$100 \$250 \$500 \$1,000 \$2,500 \$5,000 Other \$ _____

Check enclosed **Made Payable to Hope Renews, Inc.**

Signature: _____

I would like my donation to be in the name of: _____

I prefer my donation remains anonymous.

Name: _____

Street Address: _____

City/State/Zip: _____

E-mail Address: _____ Telephone Number(s): _____

STRESS

Continued from page 3

too often stress is covered up by distracting symptoms. We often deal with the behaviors that are demanding our time and forgo considering the core problems of stress and coping. In other words, kids and their families do not deal with stress until they are stressed out and unable to cope, because things are out of control. Coping with stress requires people to make regular assessments and not avoid setting limits or making hard choices. Making excuses or rationalizing in order to avoid dealing with a moderate amount of stress will likely develop into significant problems, chaotic emotions or troubling circumstances. Confronting “the issue” is an act of love for those you are asking to take personal responsibility. Challenging people may provoke blame from them and the situation is often minimized

because it has not yet progressed to the point of disaster. However, I believe that the “magic pill” for coping with stress is to not let it build up and to encourage personal responsibility. The group U2 states in their song

I believe that the “magic pill” for coping with stress is to not let it build up and to encourage personal responsibility.

One: “Is it getting better, do you feel the same, will it make it easier on you now, you’ve got someone to blame?” The answer is “no.” Stress is managed as we take the brave step of engaging it before the overwhelming temptation to shift blame or to avoid lulls us into a quiet journey of frustration. This path is brightened as we take an action we desire without the fear of being

unable to manage the stress in our lives. Ultimately, dealing with stress improves our sense of ability, addresses our problems and puts us in charge.

Attention Artists!!

Hope Renews is considering having an art show to raise funds for scholarships. We need to know if there are Vista students, alums, parents, friends or other artists willing to donate a piece for us to show at a Salt Lake art fair, gallery or other venue. Please email us with your interest at Hoperenews@adelphia.net

Tools For Parents

CONSULT OUR WEBSITE

The website for Hope Renews provides parents with a valuable link to important information. Past newsletters, reading recommendation, grant applications and more can be found on-line.

We have now added a new FEEDBACK LINK. Visit us at www.hoperenews.org and stay in touch!

SUGGESTED READING

New in this issue:

Staying Sober

Terence T. Gorski and Merlene Miller. Herald House/Independent Press, 1968

What It Takes To Pull Me Through: Why Teenagers Get in Trouble and How Four of Them Got Out

David L. Marcus. Houghton Mifflin, 2005

Raising Cain: Protecting the Emotional Life of Boys

Dan Kindlon, Ph.D. and Michael Thompson, Ph.D. Ballantine Publishing Group, 2000

Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls

Mary Pipher, Ph.D. Random House, 1994

Angry All The Time; An Emergency Guide to Anger Control

Ron Potter-Efron, MSW. New Harbinger, 1994.

Helping Your Chemically Dependent Teenager Recover; A Guide for Parents and Other Concerned Adults

Peter R. Cohen, MD. Hazelden Foundation, 1991.

Parents, Teens and Boundaries

Jane Bluestein, Ph.D. Health Communications, Inc., 1993.

“As I’ve said before, I believe that when all is said and done, all you can do is to show up for someone in crisis, which seems so inadequate. But then when you do, it can radically change everything. Your there-ness, your stepping into a scared parent’s line of vision, can be life giving, because often everyone else is in hiding.”

Anne Lamott, “**Traveling Mercies**”

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