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Fall 2006 Newsletter

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Dear Friends & Colleagues,

*I hope this newsletter finds you happy, healthy, and enjoying the vibrancy of fall. I have always associated fall with newness: crisp, clean air, notebooks yet unwritten in, new routines, new goals. An unofficial new year, a fresh start. I find myself energized, upbeat, enthusiastic. And then, of course, there is the flip side: Schedules suddenly fill with myriad commitments, sleep quickly falls by the wayside, relaxation and family time rapidly dwindle, and stress levels begin their annual climb. In the spirit of promoting good emotional health, I am dedicating this issue to topics related to the different levels of stress management: awareness, prevention, and treatment. Needless to say, there are countless sources of stress, which affect us all in unique ways. Stress prevention and treatment come in many forms. I will discuss just a few for you here, but my hope is that you will find them relevant and valuable to you, in both your personal and professional lives. If you have not yet had the opportunity, I hope you will read my recent article published in the Chester County KIDS newspaper last month, entitled: “**Stress Management 101: How to Beat School-Related Stress.**” You can find a link to the article on my website: www.jillcrawfordcounseling.com. As always, I welcome your comments and feedback, as well as suggestions for articles you would be interested in seeing in the future. Take care and take heart—winter will be here before you know it...*

*Best wishes for a stress-free fall,
Jill Crawford*

National Depression Screening Day: **** Thursday, October 5, 2006 ****

“National Depression Screening Day began fifteen years ago as the first nationwide, community-based mental health screening program. Today it is the largest provider of mental health screening services in the country through its partnership with thousands of community-based, college and primary care screening sites. NDS has expanded in recent years to offer both in-person and online screening for four of the most common and frequently co-occurring mental disorders: depression, bipolar disorder, generalized anxiety disorder and post-traumatic stress disorder. NDS Mental Health Screening is designed to call attention to mood and anxiety disorders on a national level, to educate the public and clinicians about the symptoms and effective treatments, to offer individuals the opportunity to be screened for the disorders, and to connect those in need of treatment to the mental health care system.”¹

If you are concerned that you, or someone you care about, may be experiencing symptoms of depression and/or anxiety and would like a free, confidential, in-person screening, visit the National Depression Screening Day website: www.mentalhealthscreening.org. There you will find facts about mood and anxiety disorders, information about the screening process, and a site locator to identify a screening site convenient for you.

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¹ www.mentalhealthscreening.org

Thorough evaluation and proper diagnosis are only the first steps in the treatment process. Getting well is a journey, often with many twists and turns. It is essential to find a therapist with whom you are comfortable. Don't be afraid to "try out" a few. Find out a potential therapist's credentials, areas of specialty, and personal style. See if you feel a "click," or a good fit. A quality mental health professional will not mind answering your questions and collaborating with you to ensure an optimal treatment experience. Deciding to confront a mental illness is a big decision that requires a serious commitment. Do your research; learn as much as you can about that trusted person with whom you'll be traveling...

Putting Sleep Problems to Rest....

9 out of 10 clients that I have seen this year have complained of sleep disturbance, that is, difficulty falling asleep, staying asleep, and/or waking at an appropriate time. It is often the case that, in addition to this sleep disturbance, the individual is also suffering from depression, anxiety, and/or a behavioral disorder. In the course of my assessment, I try to determine which came first, the proverbial chicken or the egg? Is the individual's sleep disturbance a symptom of the underlying emotional problems, or is the lack of sleep contributing to a decline in the person's functioning? Sleep, or lack thereof, has a tremendous impact on mood, behavior, cognitive functioning, energy, and motor skills, and thus interpersonal relationships and work or school performance. With sleep disturbance on the rise, and the responsible stressors probably not going away anytime soon, it is essential that those suffering learn how to take control of their sleep. Developing good *sleep hygiene* is key: creating a peaceful environment and a period of unwinding before attempting to sleep. If restful sleep is not a consistent part of your lifestyle, check yourself out. These factors can influence your quality of sleep:

Behavior

- Use of alcohol
- Use of other drugs
- Caffeine intake
- Medication
- Lack of exercise
- Eating habits
- Fluctuating sleep times
- Stress

Sleeping Environment

- Noise level
- Temperature
- Lighting
- Visual Surroundings
- Distractions: TV, computer, cell phone
- Overall comfort

Identifying and then counteracting these troublesome factors can go a long way toward increasing sound sleep. Learning relaxation techniques can also be quite helpful. Finally, practice a *consistent and predictable* bedtime routine. If you tend to do work in the evenings, try to stop 30 minutes in advance of your desired bedtime rather than working until you crash. Clear your head, do something quiet and relaxing. Detach yourself from the day's stress—change clothes, clear your sleeping space of any work or stress-related items. Consider quiet music or a soothing shower. Whatever works for *you*. Improving your capacity for restful sleep will be a process of trial and error, but one with great payoff—in all areas of your life!

2006-2007 Group Offerings

❖ **ELEMENTARY-AGE SOCIAL SKILLS** (*Back by popular demand!*)

First Thursday of Each Month, 5:00 - 6:00 p.m.

This once-monthly group is a fun, structured, and interactive forum for children to have hands-on experiences working through challenging social issues. Ongoing themes include: * **Making and Keeping Friends** * **Conflict Resolution** * **Expressing Feelings** * **Impulse Control** * **Anger Management** * **Being a Good Listener**. Children will receive constructive feedback from the group leader and their peers in a warm, supportive setting.

❖ **GIRL TALK for Teens: Members Wanted!**

Group Presently in Development, Day and Time TBD

Ongoing weekly group providing a supportive and therapeutic environment in which teenage girls can open up about challenging issues they encounter in their everyday lives. Members will benefit from peer suggestions and feedback, as well as professional counseling and education. The group will maintain a flexible format, ideal for going with the flow and addressing topics the girls bring with them on a given day. Areas of focus will include: * *Cliques & Peer Pressure* *

Parenting Tips from the Trenches: “CHOICE” Words

Ever find yourself in the midst of a vicious power struggle with your child, or a child with whom you work, and think, “How did I let myself get sucked into this?” If so, welcome to the club! We are an elite group of parents, grandparents, teachers, babysitters, coaches, counselors, and pretty much anyone else who ever has cause to interact with children and teenagers. Does it sometimes seem like these little creatures are budding attorneys, who can argue an airtight case in their favor, citing your previous “promises,” your past undesirable behavior (which, of course, justifies theirs), and every other loophole in the book? If so, then they’re doing their job. Developmentally, kids grow by testing limits, learning what’s acceptable and what’s not, and figuring out their place in the world. Unfortunately, the power struggle is a major part of this growth, and it’s as old as time. Power struggles can create tremendous stress in households, not only on the parent-child relationship, but on the marital relationship, and on other children in the home as well. But don’t despair! Knowing what it is that kids **really** want and how to reason with them without compromising your values or your children’s safety will go a long way towards making those battles a thing of the past.

- ❖ **LISTEN** to your child. Really hear what they are saying, what they are asking for. Read between the lines. When your child is engaging you in a circular argument, does she really want what she’s fighting for, or does she simply want your attention? When your teenager makes an “outrageous” request to go somewhere unsupervised with friends, will it be the end of the world if you say no, or does he really just want to know that you trust him and value his burgeoning independence?
- ❖ **PROVIDE CHOICES** that you can both live with. Kids of all ages are looking for control, some sense of power in their universe. When they feel that control, it is a signal to them that they are mastering competency, a critical stage of child development, and it builds healthy self-esteem. Allowing them control does not mean you have to surrender yours. Provide your child with a set of choices that are acceptable to you, and allow him to select from that group. For example, with a young child: Instead of asking, “Do you want vegetables?” which may very well yield a “no” response (unacceptable), ask the question, “Would you like carrots or broccoli?” When the question is phrased this way, the child is being given a choice, and thus the power to choose. Some useful one-liners are: “Would you rather _____ or _____?” and “You can either _____ or _____.”
- ❖ **IGNORE** invitations to power struggle. In spite of how it may feel sometimes, you are still the adult and still have the final authority. If you suddenly find yourself in the midst of a power struggle, take the opportunity to be a good role model. State that you do not like communicating this way, stop talking, and politely excuse yourself.
- ❖ **ENCOURAGE** your child to do the thinking. Be available to set the limits and define the parameters within which your child must act. But within those boundaries, allow your child to make his own decisions.

Do the issues get more complex as your child gets older? Absolutely. But with a little effort (and creativity), these strategies will help cut down on the conflict and pave the way to more peaceful communication.

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