

LIVE

Learning to put one's needs first without worry

QUESTION:

My 13-year-old daughter used to be very outgoing and didn't seem to worry about what other people thought. Now she seems to be very worried about what everyone thinks and is very anxious in social situations. I don't think I have been a very good role model for her because I am often preoccupied with how people are thinking about me. How do I prevent her from ending up like me?

Answer:

If I had more current and historical background informa-

tion on you and your daughter (if she has been bullied at school for example) I could give you a more specific answer to your question fitting your individual situation. But since I do not I am going to answer your question in a more general way and will start by saying this: being a young woman is very hard sometimes.

There are endless books on the subject of gender socialization but I have just a few paragraphs so let me use very simple language and wide generalizations in describing what we as young women must navigate

along the road to adulthood. We grow up and from early on we are praised for being gentle, sweet, cute, quiet, and for coloring within the lines. We are not expected to be loud, opinionated or angry. We learn to listen well and we somehow get smaller in a circle of people. We accommodate the needs of others and when someone wants something from us we tend to give it to them.

I am reminded of some work I did with a client years ago. (I am changing some details to protect her privacy.) She and I worked together for a couple of years and one of her major issues was her feeling of being "walked all over" in her family of origin and within her intimate relationships. She, like your daughter, was so worried about doing what everyone else wanted her to do because when she did what she wanted, or said no, she felt incredibly worried about the other person being angry, disappointed and leaving her (physically and emotionally).

During the course of therapy we came to understand that her real fear (and cause of her anxiety) was other people disconnecting from her if she didn't give them what she thought they wanted from her.



And worse, for her was a sense that this meant she was worthless. She would do anything to avoid this moment. She had lost her internal compass.

Our work toward the end of therapy involved practising having a voice and expressing her needs directly, trusting that regardless of the other person's reaction, she was okay.

I can remember her recounting a moment where her mother, her sister and she were out for dinner to celebrate her mother's birthday and their waiter was continuously stopping by their table and talking to them. They tried every subtle due to let him know they wanted privacy. My client remembers becoming more annoyed and angry at him but didn't want to make him upset

or feel awkward. But she also didn't want this dinner to be about him. At the beginning of therapy, my client would have endured the entire evening being polite. But now she had the courage to put her needs first and simply, yet directly told the waiter, "It is my mother's birthday and we want to spend this time by ourselves and would appreciate you not coming to our table spending your time talking about all that is interesting to you."

I am not sure about the level of distress your daughter is in right now, and she may need to come in to see a counsellor to fully explore what is happening for her, but I do believe that there is a lot of power in modelling, for our daughters, how to put our own needs first and for learning how to manage the worry that can creep in afterwards. Talk with her about how she feels when she doesn't say something that she wants to

say. Make sure she is practising with you. Can you encourage her to tell you what she needs and wants even if it is hard to do so?

The issues facing our youth, both young girls and boys, are difficult for most parents. Most have a long list of questions they would like answered in order to help them parent more effectively.

We recognize this and have invited Anita Roberts of Safe Teen to address these issues on Sept. 30, at 7 p.m. at North Vancouver's Centennial Theatre. We hope you and others will come to hear her address the issues facing our youth with unflinching honesty. Visit our website at www.familyservices.bc.ca for more details.

Julia Staub-French, M.A., R.C.C., is director of clinical programs at Family Services of the North Shore. Questions? Write onthecouch@familyservices.bc.ca or call 604-988-5281.

health notes

NOTICES

Husbands' Only Caregiver Support Group: Husbands caring for wives with dementia are invited to register for this group which starts Tuesday, Sept. 8 at 1 p.m. Registration and for more information, phone 604-984-8348 or e-mail ksutherland@alzheimercb.org.

Canadian Mental Health Association Lecture: Topic: Demystifying Hypnosis, Wednesday, Sept. 9, 7 p.m. at John Braithwaite Community Centre, 145 West First St., North Vancouver. Admission by donation. For more information, phone 604-987-6959 or visit www.northwestvancouver.cmha.bc.ca.

All Star Wrestling: A fundraising event for the Squamish Nation recreation department, Saturday, Sept. 12, 8 p.m. (doors open at 7:15 p.m.) at Chief Joe Mathias Centre, 100 Capilano Rd., North Vancouver. Admission: \$15/\$12/\$10. Tickets available at Comics Scene, 338 Lonsdale Ave., North Vancouver or www.vtixonline.com. For more information, phone 604-710-0872 or visit www.allstarwrestling.info.

See more page 17

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