



HEALTH SCRIBE

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HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS *Family Matters*

The holidays are just around the corner. Bring on the traditions, memories, and, quite possibly, the family drama. Whether your family is more National Lampoon's Vacation than Norman Rockwell, every healthy relationship requires boundaries. For some, the family image symbolizes a positive, safe place. However, others may have a different family experience, which can easily trigger stress.

Unhealthy family relations are all around us from entertainment to social media, and it's often portrayed as laughable. In reality though, it may seem difficult to implement boundaries once a few specific family members are thrown into the mix. If we aren't clear on our boundaries ahead of time, it may be difficult to find that clarity in the moment.

BOUNDARY BASICS

What exactly are boundaries anyhow? A boundary is the space you create between yourself and another individual. It is an indication of who you are and in what behavior you're willing to participate. Boundaries are a critical element of self-care. If this is true, then what are acceptable boundaries? How do we affirm our boundaries in a positive, healthy way?

HEALTHY HABITS

It's helpful to know what mature, healthy family patterns are. Once we know what a healthy baseline is, we can more easily identify when family dynamics have gone awry.

- **Communication** - Healthy families embrace honest, respectful, and open dialogue. Everyone is valued.

- **Age-appropriate roles** - With time, parts of the family can greatly change. Until adulthood though, a healthy family keeps parents as parents and children as children.
- **Feelings of safety** - A secure environment extends beyond your basic needs. Healthy families provide a safe landing spot to express emotions, to problem-solve, and to discipline respectfully. A marked sign of maturity encourages learning alongside rules, rather than basing discipline on fear.

Knowing when to affirm our boundaries doesn't need to be challenging. Certain behaviors are signs it might be time to physically distance yourself from another or verbally express clear lines. Threatening, controlling, or manipulative words and actions are never acceptable. Passive-aggressive behaviors, such as "playing the victim," are also inappropriate. If you find yourself feeling constant guilt, bitterness, exhaustion, negativity, and/or stress about being near family members, consider setting some new boundaries.

Holidays are a beautiful time of the year, and our families (those by birth and by choice) can be a true gift. Make the most of your time with some healthy boundaries in place. As always, help is available through a counselor, religious leader, or even a trusted friend. They can offer an unbiased perspective on boundaries and help bolster courage. Here's to a happy holiday season for all!



STAYING FIT

Jumpstart on Wellness

If you close your eyes and imagine the ideal, healthy person, who do you see? Now, imagine that person was actually you. Is it possible to attain your ideal image? Yes! Since being “fit” holds a different meaning for everyone, you can customize your health goals to boost your confidence, competence, and life satisfaction.

RESOLUTIONS: NOT JUST A NEW YEAR'S THING

While it's nice to have a mental restart milestone, there's no reason to wait until January 1st to start fresh. If you're feeling sluggish as the temperature drops or frustrated with a lack of fitness success, consider a wellness jumpstart now!

- **Communicate** - Believe it or not, the road to your health goals actually starts with some good, old-fashioned conversation. Do a little digging, and ask family members for some health history. Perhaps diabetes, mental health, or heart disease affects family members. Do some research to better direct your wellness journey. Many health challenges are preventable or reversible. Talk to your medical professional, nutritionist, or personal trainer to develop the best plan for your health.
- **Creativity**- There's no one-size-fits-all plan for an active lifestyle. If you hate running, give yourself permission to try something new. It's not rocket science; if you like an activity, you're more likely to stick with it. Take a crack at cardio kickboxing, dancing, or water aerobics. You might be surprised by what you enjoy .
- **Community** - Why go it alone when the chances of success are much higher with a group? Personal trainers and gym staff are awesome resources for accountability and skill

mastery. Friends and even acquaintances in an organized class or club can help motivate and celebrate with you.

- **Consistency** - We are our habits; they chart our lives. Including your health goals into a daily routine is a key marker for success. Plan ahead by packing your gym bag, prepping your meals, or filling your water bottle. “Life” will always be ready to get in the way of your best self, but you're worth rising above it with healthy habits.

While it's true that each person defines being “fit” a little differently, there are some general principles to strive for, like regular activity, eating more fruits and vegetables, and resting a minimum of seven hours each night. Swap out any limiting habits – like tobacco, excessive TV/social media, or soft drinks - for healthier ones – like spending quality time with family and friends, fruitful hobbies, and drinking enough water. Don't wait for New Year's when you can step make a fitness goal that fits you, today.



THINKING WELL

Questions: Asking the Right Ones

Did you know there is an art to asking questions? You really only need to “open mouth, insert foot” once to realize you've made a horrible error. Perhaps, it wasn't a huge blunder but enough to make you feel foolish.

At some point, we've all asked the wrong thing at the wrong time in the wrong way. After one poorly-worded question, we quickly realize we'd rather not do that again. Why? Because questions are the bridge between two people and hold a tremendous power to unite. Listening to a response can help us find similarities with people or topics we might not initially see. So, rather than hunker down in isolation, let's try some creative questioning instead.

INFLUENTIAL INQUIRY

If you feel like you're struggling to find the best questions or even asking the wrong ones, go ahead and breathe a sigh of relief. The art of asking the right questions is a learned skill. Here are some helpful tips to get you started (and keep your foot out of your mouth):

- **Self-awareness** - Any good question starts with some introspection. Be honest with yourself about what you're bringing into the conversation (facts, biases, perceptions, rumors, etc.). Do you already know something about this person or topic? How do your background and experiences shape your opinions about this individual or topic?

- **Notice** - Strive to be observant as an individual is speaking. What do you notice? How does a person describe themselves or family? Many questions we ask are simply because we failed to listen to an earlier statement. Paying attention to a person's body language and tone of voice can also help identify good questions to ask- or which ones to avoid. Remember, some standard questions regarding college, marriage, or children might not apply to an individual's life and cause unintended pain or rejection.

- **Tone** - No one wants to feel interrogated, so leave the drill sergeant at home. Keep your tone of voice casual and even.

- **Type** - Ask a “yes or no” question, and the conversation may end right there. Instead, use open-ended questions to allow more room for communication. For example, instead of “Did you have a good day?” try “What was the best part of your day?” Listen for their response and ask a follow-up question using the information you just received.

Who knows where a great question could lead? New opportunities, experiences, or even a new friend might be lingering behind a well-worded question.



PEAK PERFORMANCE

Work Values

Have you ever heard, “If I am going to work most of my life, I might as well do something I enjoy?” While it may sound too good to be true, it is possible for your work to add to your life satisfaction.

MAKING VALUES WORK FOR YOU

Identifying and clarifying your work values is an important step in making the right choice for you. While there is no definitive list of work values, you can use these seven categories to help define your own list:

- **Achievement:** How important is it to you to feel that you’re accomplishing goals? If you’d rank that as a highly important element of your work, it could mean that you are results-oriented and driven to complete tasks. On the other hand, you might be someone who likes the creative process and isn’t so concerned with crossing things off the to-do list. Either way, you’ll want to consider the level of challenge, expertise, and growth you are looking to experience in your work.
- **Independence:** Jobs that foster independence allow individuals to be creative and make their own decisions, fostering responsibility and autonomy. On the other hand, you might want a job where you follow a set routine.
- **Recognition:** Is it important to you that others publicly acknowledge your successes? Do you want to “move up” in the company? If so you might prefer to work at a place where there is potential to gain more status or authority. Consider whether you’re looking for opportunities to attain power or advancement, either in the community or the organization.
- **Relationship:** What kind of relationships are you hoping

to find among co-workers? For example, does a workplace where everyone appears to be friends appeal to you? Other factors to consider in this area may include excitement, culture, loyalty, honesty, atmosphere, and competition.

- **Support:** How do you want to interact with your management? Think company policies, supervision, ethics, and human relations.
- **Working Conditions:** Knowing what compensation, benefits, and security the job offers is obviously important, but so is knowing what activities you will be doing and if there will be a variety of work. Other items to focus on include stability, safety, respect, pressure, and flexibility.
- **Lifestyle:** Do you live to work or work to live? If you work to live, then make sure you think about time off, commuting, hours, travel, and anything else that is important to you.

SUCCESS STORIES

What one person views as “successful” another might find miserable. This is true in every area of your life, and you can only find true joy by tuning your choices into your values. If you have not thought about your work values before, it is never too late – or too early!



SOUND FINANCES

Financial Literacy

When it comes to money, we’re either controlling it or being controlled. Managing money well begins with a basic financial understanding. The average US worker is living paycheck to paycheck, not saving on a monthly basis, and is saddled with debt. We would do well to increase our financial literacy to begin handling our money better. Becoming competent in the areas of budgeting, debt, and emergency funding are key components to lowering financial stress.

THE LINGO BEHIND THE LOOT

The good news is that you don’t need to be a financial planner to understand basic money concepts. Yet, as debts soar and fewer personal finance classes are offered, the fiscal fine-print can easily fall through the cracks. Start fresh or brush up on your financial IQ with these currency concepts.

- **Earn** - Understanding your paycheck and benefits is an often overlooked step. Talk to your HR representative if you have questions about any of your deductions, workplace benefits, or understanding your tax withholdings.
- **Save/Invest** - A “rainy day” fund is always a good plan. Be prepared for unplanned or emergency needs by setting aside a portion of each paycheck. Select a bank or credit union that meets your needs and choose the appropriate accounts to achieve your goals. Saving for both emergencies and

retirement is best practice, even if it’s a small contribution. Talk with a professional financial planner or a personal banker to develop a reasonable, financial plan.

- **Spend** - Using money wisely takes self-control. Delaying immediate gratification often helps curb our spending tendencies and refine our desires. Establish some short and long-term goals for those purchases. Learn to live within, and even below, your means.
- **Borrow** - At some point, most people borrow money for large purchases, like new homes or business startup costs. The best preparation for if and when that day arrives is to keep a positive credit history. Pay your bills on time, especially credit cards, to avoid penalties and a lower credit score.

TAKE CONTROL

No matter what happened in your financial past, it’s not the end of the story. Write a new chapter for you and your family. Consider taking a personal finance course online or in your community. Track your money with a mobile budgeting or spending app. There are several free or nearly free apps available, as well as mobile banking apps to help you reach your financial goals. MyMoney.gov is another tool developed by the US Secretary of the Treasury to boost financial education. There’s no time like today to release those financial worries.



COACH APPROACH

The Corner on Creativity

Would you characterize yourself as creative? Maybe you're not a concert pianist or best-selling novelist, but that doesn't mean you're creatively-challenged. We tend to view music, writing, and art as the main creative expressions. However, any activity can tap into our creative side, including our thinking skills. Problem-solving, communication, and simply staying open-minded are all examples of creative thinking. Playing with children, trying a different hobby, or even taking a new route home from work are also ways of being creative.

CREATIVITY COUNTS

Besides the obvious paybacks of creativity, which is the creation itself, there are a variety of perks from getting those creative juices flowing.

- **Emotional Health** - Ever completely lose track of time and self in the midst of a project? It's called flow, and it's deeply connected to creative thinking. Flow can produce powerful results. In fact, creative outlets are known to reduce anxiety, increase happiness, and even slow your heart rate. When you find yourself "in the flow," the end result will flood your brain with the feel-good chemical called dopamine. This is

why we return to the same creative expressions over and over; we like feeling good!

- **Mental Health** - Creativity is a powerful bridge to manage challenging emotions. People use creative activities to express negative, traumatic, or angry feelings. Perhaps, what is unable to be said with words is best told through painting, writing, drawing, knitting, or music. Working with your hands on creative projects is a natural anti-depressant.
- **Physical Health** - Who wouldn't want a stronger, healthier body? People who actively engage in creative experiences decrease stress and improve their immune systems. Even the simple pleasure of listening to music improves hormonal processes and inflammatory responses. Creative activities are also linked with reducing dementia, depression, and isolation.

Before you start whittling a wooden bowl or painting the next Mona Lisa (even if it is through a painting by number kit), remember this: when it comes to creativity, each person is different. Allow yourself to be uniquely you and give others the gift of expressing themselves also. When is the last time you created?



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