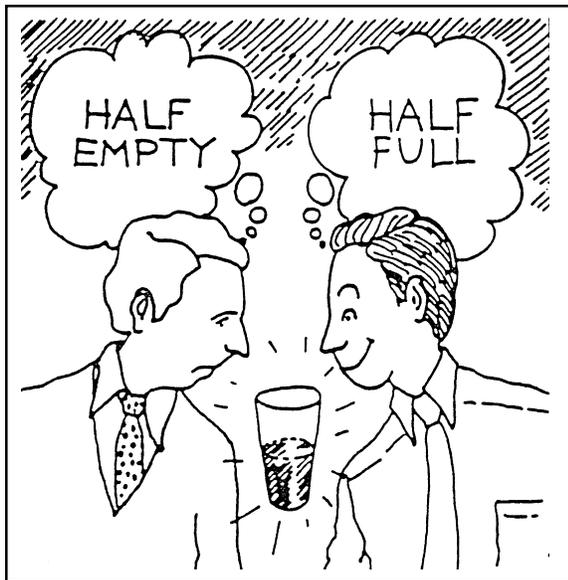


BUILDING FAMILY STRENGTHS

OPTIMISM

Do you see a glass half full or half empty?

Positive thinking, or optimism, is crucial to how we perceive life. Research has shown that the traits of optimism and pessimism are innate personality traits.



Our happiness in life is determined by our attitude. Carl Lewis, an Olympic gold medal winner in track, says, “If you go by other people’s opinions or predictions, you’ll just end up talking yourself out of something. If you’re running down the track of life thinking that it’s impossible to break life’s records, those thoughts have a funny way of sinking into your feet.”

WHAT IS OPTIMISM?

Attitude is an important aspect of optimism. Lewis Dunning states that, “What life means to us is determined not so much by what life brings to us as by the attitude we bring to life: not so much by what happens to us as by our reaction to what happens.”

Optimism can be defined as the energy that fuels your thoughts, feelings and actions based on the difference between your expectations and your perceptions of a situation. It is important to recognize the key elements of the definition:

- Expectations are desired results
- Perception is your interpretation of a current situation
- Thoughts define your state of mind
- Feelings keep your thoughts active
- Energy can be positive or negative
- Action is the response to a situation

There are many things in life that we cannot control. But one aspect of our life that we do have the power to control is our optimism. There are several factors that may contribute to maintaining an optimistic attitude, such as your past experiences and the experiences of those around you. But YOU control how you feel. Optimism in a family can bring about positive results that will result in happiness and contentment for all family members.

Three categories of attitude that determine a person’s level of optimism are:

- Spectators - those who “watch” life pass by
- Critics - those who find fault with others
- Players - those who learn and grow from experiences

Are you a spectator, a critic or a PLAYER?



PROMOTING OPTIMISM

Families that develop a positive attitude and are generally optimistic can weather most of life's challenges and maintain healthy relationships under even adverse situations.

An optimistic family may view life in the following ways:

- There is something “good” in every situation
- Change is a positive sign of growth
- A problem provides an opportunity to learn
- A mistake is an opportunity to learn
- Happiness, confidence, satisfaction and love are keys to positive family relations

Research indicates that only 8 percent of what we communicate comes from words; the remainder comes from our tone of voice and body language. Your body language and facial expression, your tone of voice, and your choice of words convey optimism or pessimism. The language of optimism includes statements such as:

- I can...
- I will...
- I expect it...
- I will take time...
- I'm sure...
- I choose to...

The universal language of a **smile** can communicate a positive attitude and a sense of optimism. Smiling spreads optimism and a positive attitude in your day-to-day contacts with your family, friends and coworkers.

There are several key elements for an individual to remember when seeking to develop an optimistic attitude:

1. Self-expectancy
2. Self-motivation
3. Self-image
4. Self-discipline
5. Self-awareness
6. Self-esteem
7. Self-projection
8. Self-control
9. Self-direction
10. Self-determination

“Since fear and dread and worry, cannot help in any way, It's much healthier and happier, to be cheerful every day.”

—Helen Steiner Rice

PRESCHOOL CHILDREN

Optimism is modeled best for young children by the significant adults in their lives. Children view the actions of the adults around them and will often react in similar ways. If children constantly hear adults



complaining and voicing negative attitudes, this tone will often generate undesirable behaviors and attitudes. Whereas an adult who constantly smiles and has a positive attitude will assist children in developing an optimistic approach to life.

Frustration and doubt can fuel negative thoughts. It is critical that young children are optimistic toward the challenges of learning new skills and mastering difficult tasks. Children are a product of their choices, not their circumstances. So we must strive to help them develop the necessary skills for wise decision-making.

ELEMENTARY CHILDREN

When children begin to socialize and observe the diversity of others through their early school experiences, it is critical that they possess a positive attitude and an optimistic approach to appreciating the differences in others. Early school experiences with classmates and teachers can set the tone for a youth's development for years to come. Fostering a positive attitude and instilling confidence can empower children to view the world in a positive light. If children witness complaining, dissatisfaction, doubt, anger and pessimism they will begin to display similar behaviors.



MIDDLE/JUNIOR HIGH ADOLESCENTS

During this critical time of self-awareness and growth, children need to exercise optimism and confidence so



that they can handle the common challenges of growing up. Parents, teachers, older siblings, relatives and other significant adults must assist children in developing an optimistic approach to life that can empower them to reach their goals and achieve the highest level of personal satisfaction. Positive peer pressure can lead to the development of an optimist attitude; however, pessimistic peers can cause children to view the world in a negative light. Therefore, it is critical that young people exercise care in selecting friends that have a positive influence on their lives. This awkward period of physical and emotional development should be approached with an optimistic and confident attitude.

SENIOR HIGH TEENS

As young adults begin to experience the world with less direct adult guidance, it is critical that they be equipped with the skills necessary to cope with the daily pressures of adolescence. A positive and confident self-awareness can enable teens to face the difficult decisions and circumstances that are common during this stage of development. Teens facing challenging times may tend to become hopeless and frustrated. Adults need to realize that maintaining a positive and optimistic attitude is an on-going process and that teens may need continued guidance in their journey through adolescence.



ADULTS

Adults are faced with daily situations in their personal and professional lives that can be enhanced by an optimistic and positive outlook. As adults, we must constantly be aware that we can determine the atmosphere around us by maintaining a positive and optimistic view of life. Remember that a smile can send a message of optimism and hope to our family, friends and co-workers.



SUMMARY

Perhaps Henry Ford best summarized the importance of maintaining a positive and optimistic outlook when he said, "*Whether you believe you can or can't — you are RIGHT.*"

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Developing Optimism in Relationships



Directions: Think of a relationship in your personal or professional life that has recently changed. Identify the reasons why you are having difficulty in this relationship. Suggest ways you can adjust your attitude to become more optimistic about this relationship.

1. *Identify a relationship with which you are displeased or uncomfortable:*

2. *What can you identify about the relationship that contributes to how you feel about the person?*

3. *What are the positive characteristics of the person?*

4. *What are your expectations from the person?*

5. *Identify the first five steps you will take in order to be more optimistic toward this relationship:*

a. _____

b. _____

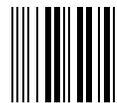
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