



Healthy Minds Newsletter #6

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Let's Work Together



Hitting The Wall

By Jen Stein, LPCMH

I hit the proverbial “wall” last week.

I knew there was a very slim chance we would return to school but I’m an optimist, so I was holding out hope. I missed my students, their earnest responses, their silly giggles. I missed my team, how we would laugh together and rejoice in the smallest successes when our students made progress. I missed the staff I worked with, teachers who consistently invested their hearts into their kids. I missed hugging people I care about. Most of all, I missed my normal life, running my son to band practice, stopping at Target and sitting down with my best friends at a restaurant. I was emotionally and physically spent.

I wonder if anyone else is feeling this way?

This is truly the strangest time in our collective experience. Usually we rely on history and learned wisdom to guide us, but this is truly uncharted territory. We are struggling to provide some normalcy for our kids, listening to the experts about how to talk to our kids, provide education and still manage our jobs (if we are lucky enough to still be employed). We still have to do laundry, get groceries, keep up with the house AND still try and be kind to those we live with. It just feels like too much sometimes, doesn’t it?

I wonder if anyone else is feeling this way?

Last week someone told me they knew, intellectually, they should be thankful because they had a house, food and were able to pay their bills. But she was still struggling. And she wasn’t the first person to share that sentiment with me. The word “should” can really cause us a lot of trouble.

I should be able to get the laundry done, geez, I’m home all day.

I should be able to manage my work and educate my kids- I’m a competent adult for crying out loud!

I should be able to do everything because I was doing it all before....right?!

When we use the word “should” it can minimize what we are experiencing, telling us our feelings and experience aren’t valid. Which leads us to feeling even worse (more pressure, possibly more sadness) about ourselves and our situation.

So I’d like to propose that, for the next month, we strike the word “should” from our vocabulary.

Instead of thinking, “*I should be able to get my kids to do their school work*”, let’s think “We will get done what we can get done and be proud of that”. Or “*I should be able to keep my kitchen clean*” to “I will get the dishes done when I can”. Or “*I should be able to manage all of this!*” to “I will manage what I can and let myself off the hook and this will be good enough”.

So let’s give ourselves a well-deserved break from what we “should” do and focus on giving ourselves compassion, grace and humor, and as we are able, let’s give our loved ones the same.





How do you feel?

By Tom Vail, LPCMH

Kind of a corny question, right? But a very important question.

Why are emotions important?

1. We are almost always having an emotion.
2. Emotions impact our decisions about how we behave.
3. Most people do not actively monitor their emotions and must consciously take notice of their emotions.
4. Once you take notice of your emotions, you are able to make more informed decisions about your behavioral choices.

What can we do?

1. Take some time each day to focus your attention on how you are feeling.
2. When you ask someone, that you care about, how they feel, wait for and expect an honest response.
3. When someone asks you how you feel, take the time to focus inward and answer honestly.
4. Give yourself permission to have your feelings and do not apologize or diminish how you feel.

How do I do this?

1. Set aside at least two times each day and make a commitment to slow down and notice how you are feeling. Pick times that are defined by your natural schedule. Times might be; when you wake up, or once you finish your coffee, or as you leave your job or school, or before you go to bed. Just get in a habit of stopping and monitoring how you feel.
 2. Take some time each day to ask those you love how they feel. When they say, “Fine” or “good”. Don’t stop there, Say, “No, I really want to know how you feel. Please take a minute and check it out and let me know. Anything you say is ok.” If they are still struggling they may not have a vocabulary or know what you mean by “feel”. Share your own feelings as an example and ask them again. What you will notice is that with practice and consistency their answers will become more complex.
 3. When you are asked, you may find that you are feeling multiple emotions simultaneously, this is very common. Sometimes your multiple emotions will, on the surface, seem contradictory. They are not. These multiple feelings reflect a deep understanding of your current circumstance and the complexity of the situation.
 4. Please do not deny or push down your feelings this will only create frustration and anxiety. Accept how you feel as a legitimate response to your surroundings and share how you feel with those around you who you trust. Most of our feelings are momentary and will pass but noticing how they are triggered will allow you to decide how you will behave.
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Tantrums

Let’s be real, tantrums are the absolute worst. When you think about your child’s tantrum behavior, or maybe even your own (we all have tantrums... it is just a matter of whether or not

we handle them appropriately) what patterns are there? What is happening right *before* the tantrum behavior occurs? If you have been reading our newsletter long enough, you would know that we refer to what happens before a behavior as an antecedent, or in other words a trigger. All tantrums have a trigger, otherwise, it's simply a meltdown. Was it denied access to a favorite item that triggered the tantrum? Was it a demand placed that the child did not want to do? Was it the need for attention? All of this matters when it comes to practicing the appropriate response. Sometimes we cannot see the trigger, and that is okay. The following steps work no matter what the trigger is!

- 1. Acknowledge feelings** “ I see you are upset right now.”
- 2. Place a simple demand:** “ I see you are upset right now, and we can talk about it once you are seated.” *Seated is the simple demand.* Other examples of simple demands are quieting down, going to a specific nearby location, cleaning up a specific item, making a specific appropriate request, etc. Be mindful of the area you are in, and any interfering factors to the simple demand being placed. *We want this demand to be simply attainable, and something your child can absolutely do once calm...Simple is key.*
- 3. Limit language** outside of simple demand, redirect back to simple demand if needed. “When you are seated we can talk.” Clear and simple is key. This is helpful because it takes out any power struggle. Your child will learn “*until I do what I was asked I will not get what I want.*”
- 4. Wait it out** - if a request is made, *redirect them back to the first simple demand.* “When you are seated we can talk.” Be mindful that many children will “pull at straws,” to receive attention outside of the simple demand placed. We call this a “extinction burst.” *Stick to the simple demand, and do not budge!* “I hear you, and I will respond when you are seated.” *Do not feel that you need to acknowledge or respond to every comment, or behavior your child engages in during this time.*
- 5. Don't expect compliance while tantrum is in full effect** - their brain simply cannot comply during this time. But, once the tantrum is finished, if any messes were created during the tantrum, have the child put the environment back together. This will hopefully decrease the chances of destruction in the future. This is what we call “restoring the environment,” and it is an overcorrection technique.
- 6. Do not budge until the simple demand is followed!** I know, it's hard! You got this! Take a deep breath and acknowledge that *you are in control here.* At first, it can take a long time to get that compliance, but each time as long as you stick to it should get better! This part can feel really hard at first, seek assistance and support if needed!
- 7. Debrief:** [here](#) is a great debrief sheet. Ask your child what happened- for them. “What happened?” “Why?” “What can we do next time so this doesn't happen?” Keep in mind debriefing may not happen until a few hours later, and that is OK. We want them to be in a place where they can process mentally, and that may take some time. *The purpose of debriefing is to point out the behavior that will not be tolerated, and an appropriate behavior to replace it.*
- 8. Practice the appropriate response:** Teach them exactly what we want them to do to **avoid** this tantrum from occurring in the future. It's important to explicitly let children know “*When you kick and throw, you will not get what you want. When you ask nicely, you do!*”
- 9. Reflect on your own:** Is there anything you could have done to avoid this tantrum from occurring? Was anything promised that wasn't delivered? What has been occurring in your child's environment lately?

10. Move on! Tantrums HAPPEN. Take what you learned from this, and move past this. Always seek support if you need it.



Life Skills

While your kids are home, it's the perfect opportunity to teach them life skills, such as basic household chores or daily living skills. We often teach life skills through task analyses, which involves breaking down the skill into several steps, and teaching each step individually. We have provided two task analyses below for using a washing machine and making a sandwich.

Using a Washing Machine	Making a Sandwich
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Gather dirty clothes (already sorted colors/whites) and laundry detergent and open the washing machine 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Get out two slices of bread, peanut butter, jelly, two knives, and a plate
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Place one sorted pile of clothes in washing machine until it's about $\frac{3}{4}$ full 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Lay two slices of bread on a plate side by side
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Fill laundry detergent cap to fill line and pour into washing machine 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Get a knife and spread peanut butter on one slice of bread
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Close lid of washing machine 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Use the second knife to spread jelly on the other slice of bread
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Turn the temperature dial to the appropriate temperature (hot, warm, or cold) depending on clothes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Rinse both knives and leave them to dry
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Turn setting to normal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Put the two slices of bread together
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Push start 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Cut your sandwich in half and enjoy!



Bring it all together: If you would like to teach your child how to make their own lunch, start small with a simple sandwich. Utilizing task analysis can decrease frustration while also providing support for life skill acquisition. Building independence in our children can take a lot off of our own plates, while also increasing their own skills!



Social Skills: Compromising

Compromising is a complex skill that involves being empathetic and cooperative. When you compromise, everyone gives up a *little* something so that everyone can get a *little* bit of what they want. Teaching this to your child can be difficult, especially when they *really* want something. That is why it is best to practice this skill throughout your every day, so when the time comes that you need them to compromise, they've already had some practice with this skill! Here are some tips for teaching compromising to your child:

- 1. Teach them to let go of the control:** Let's face it, a lot of times, children like to be in control. They like to know what's coming next and they want to make the decisions. Teaching them to let go of the control can be easily taught by providing them **easy** choices; "Do you want an apple with your breakfast or a banana?" "Should we color first or build blocks?" With this method, you're still giving them the ability to have a *little* control, but you are providing choices that are feasible and work best for everyone involved...hello **compromise!** :-)
- 2. Explain your behavior:** We've mentioned this time and time again, but your children are always watching you and your behavior, waiting to see how you handle a situation, what you're doing. They learn from you all the time! So when you are compromising with someone in your life, explain to them why you are! For example: "I wanted to have spaghetti for dinner, but your grandmother wanted to go out to eat. So decided together that we'd go out to eat at an Italian restaurant!"

- 3. Let them know what to expect:** When first teaching compromise, or if your child is very young, it can be difficult for them to understand why they aren't getting all of what they want. This is when we can explain to them (in terms they'll understand) why they need to compromise. Tell them, they may not get **all** of what they want, but they'll get some of it and so will their sibling, friend, parents, etc. When everyone compromises, everyone is happy!



Mindful Moment

Self Compassion

There are many unhealthy ways we deal with stress and anxiety, and it is never too soon to begin teaching ourselves and our young people how to respond in a healthier way. Self-compassion is not mindfulness exactly, but it is part of the path. Responding with compassion is a mindful response that helps us be more present and kind toward ourselves. Join with your teen in this exercise:

Have the teens bring to mind something that has been painful or uncomfortable for them recently. If they would like, they can put their hands over their heart (this stimulates the vagus nerve and releases oxytocin). They can silently offer themselves a few phrases of compassion:

- **This is painful and I will make it through this**

- **Suffering is a part of life and I will make it through this**
- **I recognize this pain and I will be ok**

Recognize and affirm for each other pain is a part of living, as is joy, hope and anticipation of better things.



Weekly Tips

1. **Take a Brain Break:** Even as adults, we need time to decompress. Our minds are running a mile a minute, and with the current circumstances, planning ahead is really hard to do. Find short activities that allow you to flip the switch. Whether it's writing in a journal, coloring, breathwork, a walk, meditation, calling a friend... the options are still somewhat endless even during this time. Allow yourself to reset when you feel that you've reached your capacity. - **Lauryn Elder M.Ed., BCBA**
 2. **Create a Daily Schedule:** We have discussed this before, but as we're moving into Week 7 of staying home, it is getting easier and easier to fall into the same old, same old; which in turn can make completing tasks even more difficult. Create a schedule for yourself and your children to follow each day (even loosely!) It will help your children know what to expect and when. -**Alexis Foulk, M.S., BCBA**
 3. **Do one thing for yourself each day:** It's easy to run around all day doing things for your kids, your spouse, or others, and completely lose the day before you focus on you. Make sure to do at least one thing you love and practice self-care every day! - **Alexandria Larson M.S., BCBA**
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Just for Fun

Virtual Tours: Click on the links below to go on a virtual adventure! Check back each week for different locations!

1. [Birthplace of Music Tours](#) - Are you a country music fan? Rock n roll? Classical? Whatever you enjoy -- take a minute and learn the history of each genre of music and where they originated!
2. [Louvre Museum](#) - Virtually explore numerous exhibits at the Louvre! You can take a look at Egyptian antiques, the body in movement (dance), and moving from myths to “real life!” How do artists take the legends and myths and make them come to life in movies and art?

Keeping Kids Engaged at Home: [The Secret to Keeping Your Kids Happy and Busy at Home](#)



**Brandywine School District
Behavioral Support Team
Wilmington, DE**

Email Lauryn Elder for teacher questions: Lauryn.Elder@bsd.k12.de.us

Email Alexis Foulk for additional resources: Alexis.Foulk@bsd.k12.de.us

Email Alexandria Larson for parent questions: Alexandria.Larson@bsd.k12.de.us

Email Jen Stein for mental health tips: Jennifer.Stein@bsd.k12.de.us