

The Forecaster

Newsletter of your Employee Assistance Program

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Far West
Family Services

The information provided in The Forecaster is to be used for educational purposes only. It should not be used as a substitute for seeking professional care for the diagnosis and treatment of any medical condition.

“Bless those who challenge us for they remind us of doors we have closed and doors we have yet to open.”

Native American Prayer

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Getting UnSTUCK

If you are like most people, there is some area in your life where you are feeling stuck. Maybe you are having difficulty managing your weight or maintaining an exercise plan. Perhaps you are stuck and bored in your career. Or you and your spouse may be stuck on parallel tracks and not communicating or interacting much. Perhaps you are caught in an endless cycle of credit card use and need a good plan to get out of debt.

Whatever your area of “stuckness,” you will be more successful if you provide yourself structure, support and a concrete game plan. We all know that wishes don’t often translate into successes and sheer will power can only go so far. So if you really want to get unstuck and make some changes in your life, set yourself up to succeed.

One good method is found in the book “*Change Anything*” by the authors of *Crucial Conversations* and *Critical Conversations*, by Patterson, Grenny, Maxfield, McMillan and Switzler. Their organization is VitalSmarts, Inc. and they have been studying behavior and change for over 30 years.

According to *Change Anything*, when we fail to change our own bad habits, we generally blame our lack of will power. And when we lack will power, we tend to blame it on our character. Something is wrong with ME. I am broken, I am weak, I wasn’t committed, I don’t have what it takes...etc.



“This simplistic view is not only wrong; it’s tragically wrong...because it gives us nowhere to go when we struggle to change our own bad habits or improve our lot,” according to the authors. “When people believe that their ability to make good choices stems

from nothing more than their willpower—and willpower is a quality they’re either born with or not—they eventually stop trying altogether.”

The authors present a well-researched method to use when trying to change something in your life. They offer proven strategies to deal with the many forces in our society that encourage us to “overeat, overreact, overspend, lounge too much, smoke, drink and sleep too much, or play too many video games...”

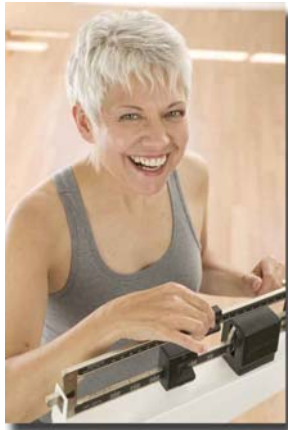
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The *Change Anything* process:

1) Gather data. What are you doing now that isn't working?

What are the steps you can take to make changes?

The process helps you identify both your "crucial moments" and your "vital behaviors," the situations where you are likely to succumb to ineffective behavior (when you're bored, surfing the web, shopping at Costco) and pinpoint new behaviors that will support your changes (making a budget, taking games off your laptop.)



2) Define what you want to change or what result you want to achieve. Be specific. "I want to lose 20 pounds by June 1."

3) Imagine your future. How will things look **if you don't** make changes you want? Then see what the future looks like **if you do** make the changes you want. Create a vivid picture in your mind and write a succinct version of it on a card to carry in your pocket.

4) Set up a tracking system to monitor your behavior. Make it fun and build in rewards. Use electronic systems if you've got access to them. (See insert.)

5) Learn the skills you need to reach your goals. (Take a budgeting course or get financial software.)

6) Surround yourself with people who support what you want to do and avoid those who do not. For

instance, stop driving by your favorite bar on the way home—you might see your drinking buddy's car there. Find a new route home!)

7) Look at things in your environment that you can adjust which will better support your changes. If you're trying to lose weight, stop stocking the freezer with your favorite ice cream. Want to increase intimacy with your partner? Take the TV out of the bedroom.

8) Engage your family and friends in supporting your changes. Ask trusted loved ones to stop you if you're whining, or if you're about to sabotage yourself.

You can set up your own change plan online, complete with a coach, at www.changeanything.com. (You can sign up for the free basic program or a more advanced program for a fee.)

The book *Change Anything* is available on line or in book stores.

If you prefer a more personal approach, you can set up an appointment with a Far West counselor to be your coach.

If you take the time to properly prepare yourself, set up a structure and develop the skills you need to change—you too can get unstuck and live the life you are longing for.



Some electronic support systems you can explore:

www.mint.com: Free financial management program

www.weightwatchers.com: dieting

www.myfooddiary.com: dieting

http://www.helpguide.org/toolkit/emotional_health.htm: free structured program for emotional health support.

www.balancepro.net: financial planning, education, budgeting

iPhone/iPad apps:

Alarmed ~ Reminders, Timers, Alarm Clock

Sports Tracker

My Daily Journal

Day One (Journal/Diary) iCloud or Dropbox sync to iPhone /iPad

Weight Watchers

Healthy Aging Tips

How to Feel Young and Live Life to the Fullest

As we grow older, we experience an increasing number of major life changes, including retirement, the loss of loved ones, and the physical changes of aging. How we handle these changes, as well as regular day-to-day stresses, is the key to aging well.

Healthy aging is about much more than staying physically healthy—it's about maintaining your sense of purpose and your zest for life. While the specific ingredients of healthy aging are different for everyone, the common factors are good mental health and the ability to manage stress. Knowing the basic formula for healthy aging will help you live with meaning and joy throughout your senior years.

Finding and following your formula for healthy aging

Coping with change is difficult, no matter how old you are. The particular challenge for older adults is the sheer number of changes and transitions—including the loss of friends, family, your career, your health, and even your independence. It's natural to feel those losses. But if that sense of loss is balanced with positive ingredients, you have a formula for aging well.

Healthy aging means continually reinventing yourself, finding new things you enjoy, learning to adapt to change, staying physically and socially active, and feeling connected to your community and loved ones. Unfortunately, for many, aging brings anxiety and fear instead. How will I

take care of myself? What if I lose my spouse? What is going to happen to my mind? However,



many of these fears stem from myths about aging that are exaggerated or simply untrue. The truth is that you are stronger and more resilient than you may think.

Tips for finding meaning and joy

A key ingredient in the recipe for healthy aging is the continuing ability to find meaning and joy in life. As you age, your life will change and you will lose things that previously occupied your time and gave your life purpose. For example, you may retire from your career or your children may move far away. But this is not a time to

stop moving forward. Later life can be a time of exciting new adventures if you let it.

Healthy aging means finding activities that you enjoy

Everyone has different ways of experiencing meaning and joy, and the activities you enjoy may change over time. If you're not sure where to get started, try some of the following suggestions:

- Pick up a long-neglected hobby
- Play with your grandchildren or a favorite pet
- Learn something new (an instrument, a foreign language, a new game)
- Get involved in your community (volunteer or attend a local event)
- Take a class or join a club
- Go on weekend trips to places you've never visited
- Spend time in nature (take a walk, go fishing, enjoy a scenic view)
- Enjoy the arts (visit a museum, go to a concert or a play)

The possibilities are endless. The important thing is to find activities that are both meaningful and enjoyable to you. Whatever your preference, taking time to nourish your spirit is never wasted. ■

For more on this topic, go to the Work/Life log-in at the Far West website and go to HelpGuide.Org and look for Aging Well on the left hand menu.

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When Parenting Gets Tough



Parenting a child with a diagnosed anxiety disorder or ADHD or a permanent disability can wear you down. All you want is to give your child the best support, therapy and education that you can. But expenses mount up, progress is slow and you feel exhausted. Nothing seems to get better. You give everything you can to your child, but your marriage is suffering, your self-esteem is low and you are plagued with anxiety about your child's future. You feel yourself spiraling down. Now when your child needs you to be strong, you feel weak and unsure about what to do and you feel guilty.

The "if onlys" begin. "If only I were a better parent." "If only I could manage him better." "If only I had disciplined her more when she was little." "If only I had taken better care of myself when I was pregnant."

You never expected parenting to be this hard and you thought you would be a better parent than this.

Every parent of a challenging child hits rock bottom at some time. Many parents find themselves falling into a deep despair or grief about their child's situation. You might find yourself experiencing the same stages of grief described by Elizabeth Kubler Ross in her book "On Death and Dying."

Denial: There's nothing wrong with my child. He's just different. I just to parent better.

Anger: Why is this happening to my child? Why me? This isn't the way it is supposed to be.

Bargaining: If I just spend more time with her things will change.

Depression: Everything is hopeless. I can't handle this. I give up.

Acceptance: I can handle this.

Self-care is the only way back

When things get this hard and this dark, it is time for self-care.

You need internal strength to continue the journey. You will not be helping your child if your marriage falls apart, you get depressed, or you have too much guilt and stress. On an airplane, you are instructed to place your oxygen mask on *yourself* first, before placing one on your child. Self-care is just as important—but it's often the last thing on the to-do list.

Things to watch for:

1. Blaming your spouse/parent for causing the child's problem. "This runs in your family!"
2. Ignoring physical needs by not exercising, over eating, not getting enough sleep.
3. Isolating yourself. Not asking for help from friends and family when you need it.
4. Wearing out your friends and family by talking/complaining about it too much. Get a therapist to work out your personal issues.
5. Giving up before you find the right therapy or training for your child. Keep looking!
6. Letting your child's issue run your household.
7. Ignoring the needs of your other children or your spouse.
8. Giving up on your child. Seeing the child as the problem rather than focusing on the ADHD as the problem.
9. Feeling judged as a poor parent by others—family, friends, school staff.

- **Find a support group or other parents dealing with similar issues.**

You are not the first person to go through this. Parents who've been through similar experiences will provide important advice and insight.

- **Seek counseling for yourself.** You have strengths to bring to parenting. In order to find those strengths, it is important to deal with your negative feelings about yourself and your child.

Issues from your past may come up, and you must deal with those, too.

- **Make a stress reduction plan.** Choose one thing for starters: yoga, meditation, warm baths, prayer, journaling. And you can call the Far West "StressLine."

- **Take care of your physical health.** You may not feel the strength to do this, but it is vital to eat well, exercise (even 15 minutes will help), get enough sleep, even get a massage to loosen up your tight muscles.

- **Feed your soul.** Do something on a regular basis that feeds you: paint or draw, knit, join a book group, volunteer to do something you love, go on a personal retreat, attend a concert, read the Bible or other religious or spiritual literature.

Couples Work

Each member of the parenting couple feels challenged by the struggles their child is facing; the hurt, the anguish, the fear, the pain. It naturally triggers our own deep hurt, anguish, fear, pain and feelings of failure. One parent may want to talk through these emotions while

the other might want to process things privately.

When parenting a challenging child, couples who are already struggling with their relationship may be pushed



further apart. Some people begin blaming their spouse or partner for the child's problems. Some disagree with how the other parent chooses to handle the problem. You might see your spouse as being too tough on the child, while he sees you as not standing up to the child when he gets out of control. A good couples counselor, pastor, rabbi or other

spiritual leader can provide you a safe place for you talk out your fears, anxieties, differences and plans.

Single Parents

If you are on your own, it is even more critical to get outside help and support. Find ways to get time to yourself and trusted friends to talk to. Enroll your child in the appropriate program for children with special needs, so he or she can have support and training from other adults. Many community centers have special programs, as do YMCAs. If you can't afford the programs, ask for scholarships.

Find the Good

When you are focused on your child's problems, it's sometimes hard to see the beautiful child you've been given. Remember to look for the good, the positive and special things about your child. Every day, remind yourself—and your child—of the things you are grateful for. ■

Keep things in perspective. Remember that your child's behavior is related to a disorder. Most of the time it is not intentional. Hold on to your sense of humor. What's embarrassing today may be a funny family story ten years from now.

Don't sweat the small stuff and be willing to make some compromises. One chore left undone isn't a big deal when your child has completed two others plus the day's homework. If you are a perfectionist, you will not only be constantly dissatisfied but also create impossible expectations for your ADD/ADHD child.

Believe in your child. Think about or make a written list of everything that is positive, valuable, and unique about your child. Trust that your child can learn, change, mature, and succeed. Make thinking about this trust a daily task while you brush your teeth or make your coffee.

(From www.HelpGuide.org, topics ADHD/Learning Disabilities)

Single Parenting and Dating: How to Begin

Your divorce is behind you now and you feel stronger and ready to date. However, your children may not be at all supportive or happy about your seeing someone new. The following are some issues single parents may wish to consider went starting back into dating. It's important you prepare your child (and your date) with this change in your life. It's important to think ahead and choose your words carefully.

Issue #1: Wanting My Parents Back Together

Depending on how long the parents have been separated, and the age of the children, there is usually a strong hope or wish on the part of the children that "my parents will get back together." Even when not openly expressed, this hope is present and must be considered when dating.

"Kids, I know you would much rather see your mother and me get back together, but that just can't be. I also know that you probably have a hard time accepting the thought of my dating someone else. It may even hurt a little or make you angry. Feeling that way is okay and we can talk about it However; just as you have friends and enjoy doing



things with them so must I and that is why I date."

Issue #2: A Date is Not a New Parent

Your date is part of your adult single world and should not be thrust upon your parenting role. There is no need for your date to "meet the kids" and/or be expected to accept them or they him or her. If your date is to encounter the children in some way, such as coming to the house to pick you up, prepare both the children and the date for that brief encounter.

"Alexis, I am going to dinner and a show with a man named Conrad tonight. You have never met him but I find him very nice and enjoy being with him. Do you have any questions?" Be sure and answer only what you are asked.

Also inform your date of any predictable behavior you think he may encounter in order to ease his introduction to your child.

"Conrad, my son is not yet accustomed to my dating and he may not greet you warmly. Don't take any initial coolness to heart. In time, I'm sure he will be as comfortable with you as I am."

Issue #3: Physical Affection initially Is A NoNo

Initially avoid physical affection towards your date in front of the child. Remember in your child's mind

mom or dad is being replaced by someone else; hence your child may have a fear of also being replaced.



The child will feel less fearful with a very direct affirmation in the presence of this supposed threat—your date. Giving your child a particularly warm and sincere "hug and good night kiss" is both appropriate and recommended. This obvious affection and caring toward your child also communicates to your date how you feel about your relationship to your child.

Getting everyone off to a good start, with clear communication, boundaries and respect will pay off in the long run and create a good foundation if the relationship should become more serious in the future. ■

"... your children may not be at all supportive or happy about your seeing someone new."

Therapeutic Value of Martial Arts

Nine-year-old Melinda has been struggling with anxiety, confidence and shyness. Much to her mother's surprise Melinda announced to her mom that she wanted to take Karate like her friend Alex. Her mother knew nothing about martial arts, so they arranged to visit Alex's class. With the instructor's permission Melinda was able to participate in the class and see what she thought. Afterwards, she was glowing and excited about coming again, so her mother officially enrolled her.

It wasn't long before Melinda's mom began to see changes in her daughter. In just a few weeks, Melinda was standing up straighter, speaking more respectfully to her parents, and taking charge of her homework. After a few months of Karate classes, Melinda herself describes feeling stronger and more confident. She is making more friends, taking more risks and speaking up more in school. Best of all, she feels less anxious.

Ronny joined a martial arts class in 3rd grade after feeling demoralized in team sports. He was very small for his age and not very coordinated due to complications from his premature birth. However, he needed an activity where he could channel his boundless energy. His parents chose Tae Kwon Do and watched Ronny blossom. There

were no team mates to tease him or put him down. He worked at his own pace and over time his coordination improved and his energy levels became more manageable. He felt successful in his training and for the

first time he felt like an athlete.

For many kids with challenges—lack of self-confidence, poor focus, emotion management or different learning styles—martial arts provides both a place to belong and the structure they need. Children who take martial arts classes often gain the discipline and self-control they need to overcome their challenges.

Under the guidance of a good instructor, children can learn concentration, self-discipline, emotion management, and respect. Since any martial art is an individual sport rather than a team sport, kids progress at their own pace. As they do so, they are developing important life skills that all children need to learn.

There are many martial arts styles and some may be more suitable to your child's temperament and needs. It's best to find a reputable organization and trainer, at a location that is convenient and in your price range. Many martial arts studios welcome children to "try out" a class as a guest. Here is a brief description of the different styles:



Karate (Japanese)

A system of self-development using kicks and punches. Its quick, sharp actions involve snapping movements of the joints, which means that kids need to warm up carefully.

Tae Kwon Do (Korean)

A form of karate developed as a military art, which has become one of the more popular martial arts in the U.S. It uses kicking and punching movements to energize the body, and breathing and meditation techniques to provide focus.

Judo (Japanese)

Taught as a competitive sport, judo teaches kids how to throw a partner using balance and leverage and helps them learn self-control and respect for their opponent.

Jujitsu (Japanese)

A competitive form of self-defense that teaches students to use their opponent's weight and strength against him. Having a partner fosters cooperation.

Aikido (Japanese)

Uses many of the same movements as jujitsu but is gentler and noncompetitive. It, too, is an excellent discipline for teaching children how to work with a partner.

Kung Fu (Chinese)

A rigorous and physical form of karate that involves more fluid movements than its Japanese cousin, making it easier on joints. It's fast-paced, so kids get an aerobic workout.

Not just for kids

Many studios even have family programs, so parents can train along with their kids! ■

Far West Family Services

The Forecaster is published quarterly by Far West Family Services, your Employee Assistance Program. Copies of this newsletter are also available via email.

We appreciate your feedback and comments about our newsletter.

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Far West Family Services, now in its fourth decade, is a professional behavioral health care service business providing Employee Assistance Programs in Washington state. If you would like more information about our customized programs, please call 206-682-8149 or 1-800-398-3440 or visit our website at www.farwestfamilyservices.com.

To learn more about your benefits through Far West or to schedule an appointment with one of our therapists, call our office during business hours, 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Monday through Friday. Sessions are available from 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. Monday through Friday and some Saturday sessions are also available.

Far West . . . help when you need it.

206-682-8149 • 425-775-4952 • 1-800-398-3440

**After-hours Emergencies:
Press option 1 to speak to a crisis counselor
or for TTY call
206-461-3219 (TTY)**

www.farwestfamilyservices.com

Need additional resources?

Go to the new Work, Life and Wellness Resources at www.farwestfamilyservices.com click on Work/Life login



HELPGUIDE.ORG

The best mental health resources on the web, in collaboration with the Harvard Medical School Health Publications. Answers to your questions about depression, anxiety, bi-polar disorder, eating disorders, insomnia, parenting, etc. Excellent self-evaluation guides and step-by-step programs for dealing with life's challenges.

Community Resources

Links to organizations in Washington state for adoption, gay and lesbian issues, financial and legal resources, county resources, drug, alcohol treatment centers, youth violence, domestic violence and more.