

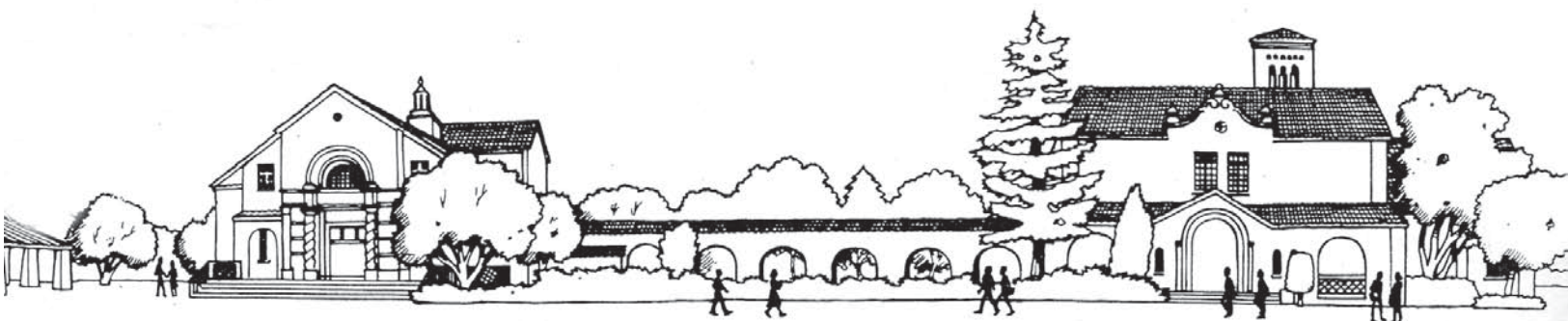
3. The Power of Showing You Care

“Caring” is a powerful word. So simple. Yet simply trying to be more considerate of each other can make all the difference to a friend, a family, a life, a world. **Showing that we care is so simple we often forget it, and treat those close to us in ways we would never dream of treating strangers.**

The power of being nicer to others is something we all possess, all the time. **When we use it, its power is felt by all of those around us** — whether or not they acknowledge it at the time. Even when family members become angry at each other, **IF** they act as if they care about and do nice things for each other, most anger will dissipate. **This has been demonstrated many times. It really works.**

Here are several ideas about using the power of caring:

- Jot down a short list today of specific things your family members could do (examples inside) that would help you know they feel good about you. **Really think about this awhile, and make an honest list.** Encourage your family members to do the same. Then share, discuss and compile a family-size list.
- Avoid trying to deal with important, underlying conflicts (“issues”) during this “caring” experiment time. (Future publications will deal with conflict resolution and problem-solving — but try some of these ideas first.)
- Make a personal decision to be more considerate to your family members, whether or not they are nice in return. *Be patient.* **The real secret is that when you change your behavior toward family members first, your feelings will change as you get nice things back, which will invariably happen — sooner or later.**
- Practice “stepping outside of yourself” and looking back at your family situation and the part you play in it. What could you do **today, perhaps right now,** to be nicer to someone else?



LifeSkills Program

How Powerful are Positive Interactions?

Positive interactions — statements or actions of praise, affection or caring — really do make a difference in people's lives.

Messages from children to parents are often as important as those from parents to children, and young persons also have a responsibility to convey such messages.

Parental messages to children can determine how that young person views the world and responds to it.

One class study* that illustrates this was done in 1968 in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

A team of graduate students under professional guidance compared the interactions of families of delinquents and of well-adjusted teens to determine the frequency and nature of positive and negative messages conveyed from the parents to the children.

The results were surprising. Both groups, they found by direct observation in the homes over extended periods of time, **received approximately the same number of negative messages** — criticisms or chastisements, scoldings.

But they found that the young people who were doing well received **twice as many positive messages as the other group.**

The groups were matched

according to income level, intelligence and other factors.

This study and others have led many counselors to advise families to sharply increase — and double or triple — the number of positive interactions, almost regardless of how many already occur within a family.

For such messages to be effective, however, they need to be sincere.

They can't be phony or manipulative.

But almost anyone can think of something that they do appreciate about

someone else in the family (even when they're angry).

Then it becomes simply a matter of expressing that appreciation, or of expressing it more often than usual.

That expression will invariably trigger thoughts, about things the other person appreciates about you, and over a period of time the entire nature of family interactions will become more positive and rewarding for everyone concerned.

This power to change how families interact is very real and very deep — AND EVERYONE IN THE FAMILY HAS IT.

But it must be tried and used for it to work.

*Article by Richard Stuart in "Advances in Behavior Theory," Academic Press, 1969, pp.193-197.



A First Exercise For 'Nicer' Families

Even families in serious trouble have found that the following exercise has helped them calm things down and lay the groundwork for dealing with substantive issues later. It can work much faster with families who are already in generally good shape.

The exercise is a simple one of, first, **writing down to yourself what others in your family could do or say to you that would make you feel better about them and yourself**, and second, **getting together with other family members (one or several) to write down a combined list.**

This is not a materialistic "gift" list (although most of us like to receive gifts), but an action list — things that could be done or said right now, today, and which are easily done. **Some examples:**

- ∑ Saying hello pleasantly when you arrive home.
- ∑ Doing small, unsolicited favors.
- ∑ Asking how the day went (and really wanting to know).
- ∑ Reading aloud an item from a newspaper, magazine or book.

Try not to make others feel guilty about not having done items in your list — **simply try to be straight and open** about things you might really appreciate in the future.

Interactions you have with people today and tomorrow are not those you had with them yesterday.

When counselors asked people to try the above exercise as a family, some said it makes them feel silly and clumsy. But trying it is strongly recommended anyway, for two reasons: (1) If you feel awkward about it, you probably are not doing enough of it, and (2) **DOING** small and seemingly simple things really adds up in how you relate overall to people close to you. **This applies to friends, too.**

How to Raise A Touchy Subject

How can I raise a touchy subject? “I crashed the car.” “I’m flunking English.” “I think I’m pregnant.” *“I don’t think you communicate well with me.”*

This last question was asked by a Palo Alto High School student during an early discussion of the LifeSkills Program. Tough issues go both ways between parents and teens.

People will often refrain from raising important issues because they don’t want to “rock the boat.” So disputes or disagreements stay unresolved and grow — until whole areas of your lives go undiscussed and can erupt.

Communicating doesn’t mean just talking. It covers the whole scope of interaction — body-language, tone of voice and words. Silence itself is a powerful message.

LifeSkills ideas can help open up such closed areas — which virtually all families have to one degree or another — by suggesting as an opening question: “What do you think about this or that?” You can ask yourself such questions, too, as you read the materials.

THE ANSWERS depend a lot on the family involved.

It’s probably not a good idea to say, “I don’t think you’re communicating well with me,” unless you want a defensive, hurt and angry, response.

Touchy subjects — where issues are loaded — require both parents and teens to be especially considerate of one another.

To improve communication, tell family members, in your own words, that you would enjoy spending more time with them and talking more.

Invite family members to spend more time with you — suggest specific times or activities you’d all enjoy.

A Simple Matter of Doing

Good interactions with others around you don’t just happen by accident. And they don’t happen by themselves. **You** need to be involved in the process of making them happen. **Involvement** is the central element, the key that unlocks happier, more personally fulfilling relationships.

Involvement isn’t simply talking, as important as that is. It means actively **doing** things that make others feel better about themselves and about you — which also makes you feel better about yourself.

For example, consider how differently someone would feel in two alternative situations:

A parent arrives home with a carload of groceries, and...

1. The young person in the house stays on the sofa watching TV and gets up only after being asked, complaining all the while (verbally or non-verbally);
2. The young person hears the car, greets the parent at the door

and without being asked pitches in to help unload and put away the groceries — chatting pleasantly with the parent while helping.

Or this scenario:

A parent hears a young person arrive home, and ...

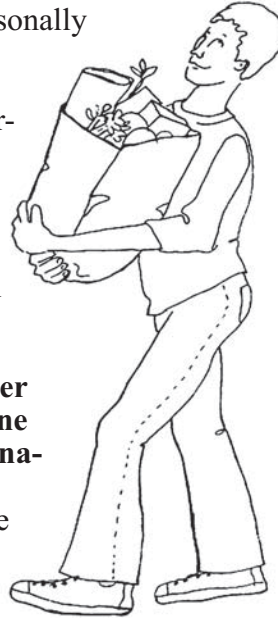
1. Gives a cursory greeting and continues reading the paper, watching TV or fixing dinner, then complains that the young person didn’t empty the garbage the night before or complete other chores.

2. Stops a moment to say hello, asks about the day and engages in a casual conversation, avoiding for the moment any mention of undone jobs or homework.

Each scenario creates an entirely different range of feelings.

People respond to each other.

Reactions later that evening or the next day may be directly related to how considerate you were to each other earlier.



But Be Realistic

Don’t expect immediate sunshine and bliss from being extra nice a few times — just be patient, persistent and consistent and see what happens over a period of days or weeks. Rarely does it take months or years.

If You Need Help

Sometimes the best and strongest people find themselves at wit’s end in relationships. There are excellent community resources available for immediate, confidential (even anonymous), help and advice: Almost all communities have teen and parental-stress advice and crisis telephone “hotlines.”

For information about such services in this area see the return address section on the next page.

Using LifeSkills

The information in this publication can make a real difference in your life — but only if you read it and share it. Here are two ideas about how you can make most effective use of the concepts.

1. **Pass it on** — Share it with friends and family members. (It probably works best if you don’t force it on anyone — just leave it around or make a comment without being “holier than thou.”)

2. **Leave it around** — Once you’ve read it, just lay it around the house. Others will check it out, maybe without your even knowing about it. **Leave it on the kitchen or dining-room table, or a coffee table, in the bathroom or pinned to a bulletin board.**

It's Not Enough to Know — You Need to 'Do'

This publication is only as helpful as *you* make it. **It is not enough to "know" how to communicate well with those close to you; you must actually do it** in order to receive the benefits from it — just as with exercise or study (but more fun).

These skills apply not just to family members, but to fellow students, co-workers, friends and others throughout life.



"NICE AND STRONG" — Many times you might be afraid to be nice for fear people will "take advantage of your good nature." If someone is being bossy, tough or rude with you, don't react to the bad treatment — rise above it and go back to the point of the conversation. Nicely.

No one ever loses stature by politely returning to the point, and you have set an example that will not be missed by the other person — even if they refuse to acknowledge it then.



If you have comments or questions about the publications you receive, we would like to hear from you. Send letters to Family LifeSkills, c/o PAMF, 795 El Camino Real, Palo Alto, CA 94301, call (650) 321-4121/Education Division, or e-mail LifeSkills@pamf.org.

Family

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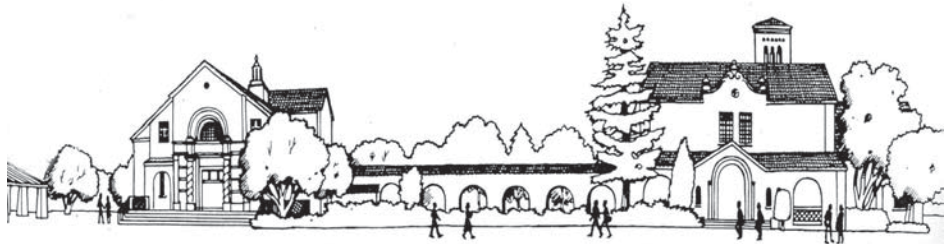
is a program to strengthen and enrich how family members interact — with the purpose of making each person and the family as a whole as psychologically strong as possible.

It was developed originally by **Palo Alto High School** and the **Palo Alto Medical Foundation** for Health Care, Research and Education, and expanded to Gunn High School.

It is now being co-sponsored by the **Palo Alto Weekly, Palo Alto Unified School District** and other community organizations, with major support from the **California Family Foundation**.

The Power of Showing You Care is the third publication in a program designed to help students and family members interact more positively and develop stronger abilities to negotiate and communicate. Other publications and newsletters will be mailed during the school year.

—LifeSkills Planning Committee



Family

LifeSkills Program

25 Churchill Ave., Palo Alto, CA 94301

For information: (650) 329-3700

For help or Advice: (650) 327-TEEN; 327-3333

3. The Power of Showing You Care: Your Strongest and Gentlest Strength