

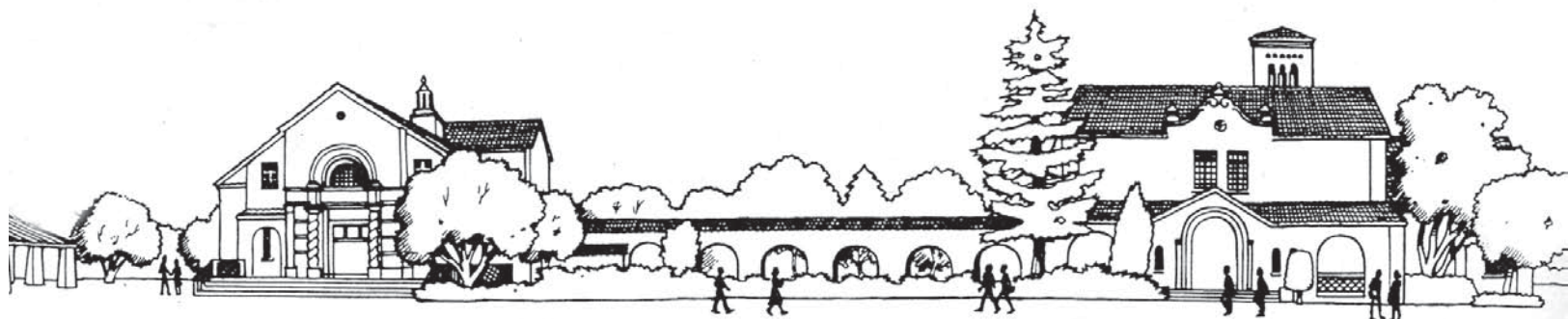
# 6. Taking Care of Yourself

People who plan their time tend to be happier than people who wander through life not knowing what they want to do and “being bored.” **Planning is the basic element of taking responsibility for yourself** — and it includes planning for work periods as well as for enjoyable times.

Your moods and feelings about yourself are *directly* related to how much time you spend doing things you really enjoy, and being with people whom you like. But “enjoyment” that puts off required work (procrastination) destroys its good effects — there is satisfaction in getting jobs done. And “enjoyment” that leaves you hung over or with dulled senses can be counterfeit and hollow.

- Monitor your “emotional bank balance” each day.** Deposits are (1) doing something you really enjoy, (2) having good exchanges with others, especially those close, and (3) getting satisfaction from doing something you need to do.
  
- Consider how alcoholic drinks, mood-related medications, drugs or other substances (even cigarettes) relate to your life and feelings about yourself. **Do you need something to “get through”?** How much do such things cause you to miss in life? How do they make you feel about yourself?

- Define what “enjoyment” means to you** — what really leaves you feeling good and what you think ought to make you feel good but perhaps doesn’t. When does “a good time” become a bad time, or a hard job make you feel good?
  
- Write down three things** you could do to help yourself feel better. Do one of them today. Discuss with a family member how you might help others feel better.



# Family LifeSkills Program

## Monitoring Your Daily 'Emotional Bank Balance'

Your emotional state is not something solid that you carry around with you like an MP3 or iPod. It goes up and down, almost always in response to what is happening in your life at the time — not overall, but daily specifics, the hour-by-hour interactions with those around you (and yourself).

This emotional "checking account" can be flush one day and overdrawn on another. It all depends on the type of transactions: **A series of withdrawals without enough deposits quickly puts you in the red.**

Debit items are easy to come by: anxiety about schoolwork and tests, keeping up on the job, worries about personal relationships, concerns about your academic future, even world events.

Deposits sometimes seem harder: doing something pleasant for yourself, completing a challenging piece of work that you've been avoiding; complimenting yourself for some little thing or for just being yourself; spending time with a good friend.

**There are ways we can learn to make more frequent deposits, keep our emotional accounts in the black and avoid emotional pitfalls — and these aren't really hard at all:**

1) Do a simple self-assessment of how you're feeling and how that might relate to what's going on in your life.

2) Develop a plan for increasing your deposits, either to get you out of a hole or keep you from getting in one.

3) Monitor yourself, keeping the "balance."  
Psychologists and family counselors use many

techniques to help clients improve their daily emotional states, **but the common denominator in most** One huge barrier to keeping a good emotional balance is the feeling: "I don't have time for one more thing!" **Most of the small-step "deposit" techniques are substitutes for debit items, and take no more time or energy.** They *do* require daily doing, not just knowing how to do them.

**The cost of becoming emotionally overdrawn is depression** — a personal bankruptcy that is a debilitating (sometimes fatal) condition. It can lead to a variety of personally and socially destructive behaviors, from drinking and substance abuse to stressful over-achievement and physical illness.

**The cost is too high to allow this to happen.** Each of us is responsible for keeping it from happening to ourselves! **Everyone has the power to take the small steps to do that.**

A highly recommended book on self-monitoring methods, self-control techniques, pleasant-activity planning, social skills, constructive thinking and other elements of personal balancing is *Control Your Depression*, edited by Peter M. Lewinsohn, Ricardo F. Munoz, Mary Ann Youngren and Antonette M. Zeiss (1978, Prentice-Hall Spectrum).

Lewinsohn, a clinical psychologist, began developing his depression-avoidance ideas and methods in the early 1960s, and they have since become standard fare for many counselors, therapists and individuals.



## The 'Face Test' Helps You Face YOUR Feelings

**Looking at others can help you see yourself**, if you know what to look for.

Often when we are feeling vulnerable or overly self-critical we tend to become more critical of others — whether they are family members or complete strangers. We might not even be aware of how we're really feeling at the time — just that everyone else seems really messed up.

Hence when we look at the faces of other people and they seem strange and "ugly" — or when what those people are doing seems completely inadequate and "all wrong" — there is some probability that we really are being extremely self-critical.

Conversely, days people appear interesting and beautiful it can be a sign that you are feeling good about yourself and how you are doing.

This "face test" idea also may apply when someone is being critical of you. **It may be that you are not the real target of that criticism.**

When you are being critical, a helpful, constructive step is to convert that criticism into a request for a specific, precise change of behavior. This process can clarify a great deal about what's really happening in all your relationships.

## The Upbeat Cycle of ‘Pleasant Activities’

Nearly everyone has heard of a “vicious circle.” That’s when a bad situation leads to a bad situation that reinforces the original bad situation.

There’s a counterpart, however, that might be called a “benevolent spiral,” and it heads upward instead of downward or ’round and ’round.

The key to the latter is simply finding pleasant activities, enjoyable things to do or think about, satisfying things to accomplish.

The sad part about a vicious circle is that when you are emotionally caught in one you really don’t feel much like engaging in the kinds of pleasant activities that would get you out of it. And, almost always, they WILL get you out if you try them.

Studies of thousands of persons who have used a 320-item “Pleasant Events Schedule” (called PES) demonstrate a **definite connection between events and mood**. BUT, people differ a great deal in what they consider pleasant events. (Thinking about what YOUR pleasant events can itself be a pleasant event.)

Some events stand out as being especially related to moods and feelings. These fall into three groups:

- Social interactions in which people feel they belong — where they feel welcome, respected, accepted.
- Activities in which they feel adequate, competent and able to do things themselves.
- Activities in themselves pleasant — being relaxed with friends, viewing a beautiful scene, thinking about something good in the future.

A quick self-assessment of your pleasant activities level entails first coming up with a list of three to 10 things you enjoy doing, then assessing how many times you have done each of those in the past 30 days.

“Often” is more than 7 times; “a few times” is 1 to 6; and 0 is not often enough. The next steps are planning and doing.

**Have some pleasant events today.**

## When Enough Just Isn’t Enough

An earlier LifeSkills publication discussed more efficient ways to “take care of business” in your life — whether that be the business of studying, paying bills or working in the “real world.”

The idea is that if you become more efficient, you not only do a better job (which is something to feel good about) but also have more time free to do things you enjoy, thereby boosting your pleasant events scorecard.

But what happens when you feel compelled to fill up the extra time with added work instead of with pleasant things? This becomes a “workaholic” syndrome that can be

both emotionally and physically draining, and can get you caught in the depression trap.

This syndrome is contagious. By the time young persons are of high school age, they usually have internalized expectations their parents conveyed to them as early as in kindergarten or first grade.

However, some young persons (and adults) THINK they know what others expect of them — when perhaps their perceived expectations are way off base.

The only truly effective way of curbing these extreme self-expectations is to plan time for your pleasant activities and do them.



## Fear of Failing

The “fear of failing” is a frequent and tragic barrier to real achievement that counselors observe in both young persons and adults.

Sadly, the more important the project or subject is to the person, the more formidable becomes the “fear of failure barrier” — until many become blocked completely and drop out or back away.

The fear can be a prison. To attack it you need first to be aware of it, then consider how sensitive you are to criticism.

Many highly creative persons “uncensor” themselves until they get a job done, and leave the judging to a trusted friend or family member.

## Discounting

When some persons receive praise or a compliment — particularly from family members or others especially close to them — they “discount” it as coming from a biased source, or they think: “Aw, it’s not that much.”

Try giving full value to these “deposits.” Just say, “Thanks!”

## Using LifeSkills

LifeSkills information 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 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.

# Taking Time to Enjoy the Product of Your Labors

This LifeSkills publication is only as helpful as you and those in your family make it.

**It is not enough to “know” how to take better care of yourself; you must actually do it** in order to be able to harvest the fruits (and vegetables) of your efforts.

Practicing positive communications with yourself is just as important as communicating well with others.



The *reason* for spending time at work, for laboring carefully over a project or task, is to be able to **enjoy the fruits of your labor**, to use a saying from a more agricultural past — when digging and planting resulted in real fruit, grains and vegetables.

Today, we study hard in order to get good grades, enjoy interesting conversations and get good jobs; adults work hard to achieve comfortable, secure standards of living.

But it is easy to lose sight of the real purpose of our study and work, and “lose it” in terms of our ability to kick back and appreciate our lives as we go, each day, in the face of the craziness of our schedules.

**Work is a means to an end. When work becomes an end in itself, your life gets out of balance and priorities get confused.**

## Family

### LifeSkills

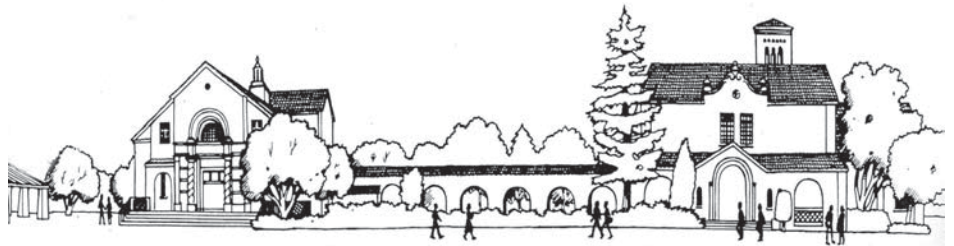
is a program to strengthen and enrich how family members interact — with the purpose of making each person and family as whole and psychologically strong as possible.

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**.

**Taking Care of Yourself** is the sixth 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

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

## 6. Taking Care of Yourself: Keeping Things in Balance