

# Connections

The Newsletter of the Connections Program

A Partnership between the Health District of Northern Larimer County and the Larimer Center for Mental Health

## Bumpy Road to Independence

Submitted by: Carolyn Bartlett, LCSW

**Y**oung adults often find the road to independence rocky. And, letting go is rarely a picnic for parents! Families support children toward the ultimate goal of independence in different ways at various life stages. Graduations and birthdays suggest milestones, but real life is less exact. Growing independence can seem gradual one minute and sudden the next.

Individual needs, personalities, family styles and history all play a part in making this emancipation journey more or less smooth, and it is best to avoid comparing your family's progress to some ideal. The American bootstrap myth that personal success is solely a matter of hard and independent work is just that, a myth. A 2005 Pew Research Center study found two out of three boomers had given financial help to their adult children. The average age for leaving home in America was 24, and of that group, almost half returned at least once.

And, that was before the economic trouble we now have. Young people just starting out face historical challenges to achieve a comfortable independence. When parents can offer help, in many instances, it can make a positive difference. It can also be a slippery slope.

Family roles need to shift as new expectations are negotiated. Parents may expose some needs they would have kept private in the past. The young adult might demonstrate maturity by working full time and taking the steps to maintain a budget and pay their debts, or improving their future prospects by going to school and passing classes. If they are living at home while they gather resources, they are hopefully giving back

to the family in some way. When accountability and personal responsibility are in place family relationships tend to be relatively relaxed and respectful.

Even so, the transition to adult independence almost always has a few rough spots. Old family issues that are not yet resolved are likely to show up and families sometimes get stuck.

How do you know if your family is stuck? Contentious, avoidant relationships are a clue. The roots of trouble include fuzzy boundaries; parents who try to make up for feelings of past guilt by over-giving; parents who need their kids to stick around for reasons unrelated to their child's needs; grandparents who enjoy playing Santa to a grandchild despite parental disapproval; and young adults who get in the habit of calling parents before using their own resources because it is easy.

Mental health issues like depression or substance abuse sometimes cause developmental delays. In this case treatment of the underlying difficulty supports a healthy transition. When family relationships are getting more conflicted, and the young adult seems stuck, families can benefit from a variety of education or counselling resources.

For parents, meeting with others who are also trying to find the right balance of helping and letting go may provide the insight, information, and good humour they need to parent effectively through this life stage.

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We encourage you to submit short articles (50-500 words) on therapeutic approaches, mental health topics, case studies, or therapeutic book/movie reviews, etc., & will publish them as space allows. We reserve the right to edit all submissions.

## Connections

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*Connections* is published 6 times/year. The purpose of *Connections* is to offer information on current therapy groups and services in the community; provide updates on services available through the Connections Program; and offer a place where information on community happenings of interest to mental health and human services providers can be shared.

Submissions are welcome. E-mail them to Carrie Husted at [chusted@healthdistrict.org](mailto:chusted@healthdistrict.org) by the following deadlines:

**NEXT EDITION:** March/April 2010  
**Article Deadline:** February 15, 2010

Submissions printed in *Connections* do not necessarily reflect the views of the Connections Program. Our editorial staff do not check the credentials of individuals wishing to submit groups or other listings. If you have concerns regarding credentials or other issues, please contact the group leader or author of the article directly. Thank you.

## Tips for Parents "A Positive Plan for Adolescent Health"



**TIP 1: MODEL POSITIVE BEHAVIOR.** Teens watch parents' behavior to determine how they should conduct themselves; therefore, it is important parents model appropriate behaviors and self-confidence.

**TIP 2: SPEND TIME WITH YOUR TEENS.** Become involved with your teens; for example, use mealtime as an opportunity to spend time together.

**TIP 3: COMMUNICATE WITH TEENS.** Talk with them about their goals, conflicts, friends, and other issues they may have. It is important to keep communications open, as well as to ask open-ended questions. This will give more opportunity for discussion, and for your teens to think about issues. Let your teens do most of the talking and show you are listening by making eye contact. Teens are very aware, and can tell when others are paying attention.

**TIP 4: HELP TEENS WORK THROUGH CONFLICTS.** Listen to them when they talk about their issues, assist with problem solving, and provide viable solutions.

**TIP 5: ENCOURAGE INDEPENDENCE.** Realize when your teen is becoming independent and provide guidance and encouragement. Encouraging independence will increase responsible behavior.

**TIP 6: PROVIDE POSITIVE FEEDBACK.** Recognize positive traits, let teens know they are capable of achievement, and provide positive responses for accomplishments and efforts.

**TIP 7: SUPPORT AND MONITOR ACTIVITIES.** When teens are involved in activities, they are less likely to get into trouble. Encourage their involvement in activities, and be familiar with what they are doing.

**TIP 8: ASK FOR OPINIONS.** Encourage teens to have and voice opinions. This will help them build autonomy and increase self-esteem.

**TIP 9: SET LIMITS.** Set rules, but be flexible. Teens do not want limits set, but they still need them.

**TIP 10: TURN MISTAKES INTO LEARNING EXPERIENCES.** Teens will make mistakes; the important thing for parents is to help turn them into learning experiences. Punishing a teen for a mistake without an explanation will increase the chances that the same incident will happen again. Remember, your teenager is learning and growing, and needs guidance.

*National Association of Social Workers – Promoting Positive Youth Environments*

## Resources for the Community

### Group Supervision

This is an ongoing group providing supervision for people who need hours for licensure. Space is limited. This group meets two time per month for an hour each time.

The cost is \$35.00 per session. The location is in Old Town, Fort Collins. There are two facilitators: Rachel Isenberg, LCSW, ACSW and Maggie Tibbitts, LCSW.

If you are interested in participating in this group, please call Rachel at (970) 490-6851 or Maggie at (970) 988-4173.



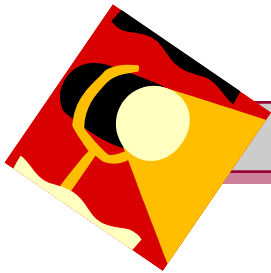
### Symposium on PTSD and Co-occurring Addiction

**Mark your calendar for February 8, 2010!**

This free symposium on PTSD and Co-occurring Addiction, will be hosted by the Community Mental Health and Substance Abuse Partnership.

National expert in PTSD and substance abuse treatment, Dr. Jerry Boriskin, will be the keynote speaker and break-out sessions will include topics such as: Veterans' Treatment Issues, Women and Trauma, EMDR, Seeking Safety, Co-occurring Basics and others. This will be a free educational event drawing a broad audience of behavioral health, human services, and criminal justice professionals. Mark your calendar now!

Please contact Emily Leetham at (970) 224-5209 or [eleetham@healthdistrict.org](mailto:eleetham@healthdistrict.org) for registration information.



### Therapist Spotlight

Ms. Kathy Armstrong of KMA Consultants, LLC, is a licensed clinical social worker with over 25 years of experience. For private, caring, and professional counselling services ask an experienced, licensed therapist to help. Ms. Armstrong also offers training and consultation services to new therapists building a private practice.

To learn more about Ms. Armstrong's practice, or to refer clients to her please call (970) 231-1656. You can also check out her private practice information by visiting [www.healthinfosource.com](http://www.healthinfosource.com).

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mental health & substance abuse resources

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