

Mind Matters

BALL STATE UNIVERSITY COUNSELING PRACTICUM CLINIC

Successfully Navigating Life Transitions

Volume 1, Issue 4

September 2009

The onset of Autumn, as with other seasonal changes, brings adjustments as we celebrate the cooler temperatures but mourn the longer days of summer. Many life transitions tend to follow this pattern, containing the potential for new opportunities but also bringing a sense of worry or loss.

It is common to cope with these changes by trying to avoid thinking about them or telling oneself that “I’ll deal with it when it comes.” While both of these approaches may reduce stress for the moment, they often do not reduce overall anxiety levels. On the other hand, proactively setting goals about how one can cope with changes helps one to feel more in control of them, decreasing stress and increasing effective problem-solving strategies.

The following are some common transitions that people experience in which goal-setting can help ease their adjustment: moving, retirement, adjusting to an “empty nest” after the children have moved out, or finding joy after the loss of a loved one. In these difficult economic times more people are faced with adjusting to unemployment, a lower salary, a lower paying job, or household changes such as moving in with another family member or changes in family roles. Children also may need to adjust to a new grade, a new school, or their first job or year at college.

Whether it is adjusting to major life transitions or pursuing

smaller goals such as saving for a car or starting a new exercise routine, the following strategies will facilitate your success:

1. Set a goal based on your own habit patterns and values. Many people are inspired by the plans suggested by others, but these plans may not account for your personality or lifestyle. For example, if you are trying to adjust to a decreased salary by using a paper-based budget and this has never worked in the past, research other options of managing money that may feel more natural to you.

2. Break up the goals into small steps and concentrate on one step at a time. For example, if you are adjusting to retirement or an “empty nest,” rather than just worrying about how you will adjust, make a list of specific aspirations you have for this new phase in life. Then set up small steps that you can take and “check off” on a daily basis.

3. Set specific time frame for each small step. This will help you avoid procrastination and allows you to celebrate each small achievement.

4. Avoid the “all or nothing” mentality. This occurs when people expect that their plan will work on the first try and then give up when it does not. Rather than blame oneself or assume that reaching the goal is impossible, work on constantly adjusting the plan and focusing on increasing the parts of it that work and substituting those that don’t with different strategies.

5. Expect setbacks. Many people do not allow space in their goal-setting to accommodate unexpected events. For example, the person who is trying to save money may have an unexpected car expense that will prevent him/her meeting the monthly goal. A parent who has decided to spend an afternoon job searching may have to care for a sick child. If you can think of unexpected barriers to reaching your goal, you will be able to build in the extra time, money or other back-up plan so that you can still progress toward your goal.

6. Set goals based on what is truly important to you rather than what you think you “should” do. Step back and assess the priorities that are most important to you. Placing them in order will also help you to identify instances where you are not reaching goals because of competing priorities or priorities that are some one else’s rather than your own.

Most importantly, **7. focus on each step rather than the final outcome.** Focusing on changing spending habits, the act of exercising, the process of trying to meet new people will be more rewarding than constantly measuring success by how close one is to the desired outcome.

Remember that learning how to reach goals takes energy and time. Expect that you will experience both progress and set-backs but that the long-term reduction in stress and increased quality of life will be worth it.

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Monthly Guidance

Dear MG,

I started a new wonderful relationship about three months ago and it has been absolutely great. For the first time in my life, I feel connected with someone truly special and I even think I'm in love. BUT since I have never felt this way about anyone before, I'm petrified of what will happen next. I find myself thinking about all the things that could go wrong and I have even considered breaking it off. I've watched my friends get their hearts broken over and over again, and I don't want it to happen to me. What should I do? I want to continue the relationship but I can't seem to get over my fears.

Sincerely,

Scared and In Love

Dear Scared and In Love,

Despite your fears, you must be feeling completely amazing to have met an individual that makes you feel connected. It is an extremely difficult task to find, cultivate, and maintain relationships that are of quality and value. For you to have found someone that not only connects with you on a deeper level but also has you fluttering in love is a beautiful, unique, and important experience! Falling in love or meeting someone special can add a deeper sense of meaning and purpose to our life. It also lightens our stress when we feel like we can count on someone else or have a companion to cheer us on during difficult times. Not to

BY ALLOWING YOURSELF TO EXPERIENCE YOUR THOUGHTS OF WORRY, YOU ARE TAKING THE FIRST STEP TO UNDERSTANDING WHY THEY FRIGH滕EN YOU

mention, the joy and laughter that surely comes with the start of a new relationship has probably lifted your spirits and has you feeling happier on a daily basis! What a great thing it is to be in love, and I congratulate you for having the courage to trust your heart with someone in that way!

With all of the great things that accompany a loving relationship, it is of no wonder why you must be feeling petrified! For something to go wrong, could mean that you will lose all the magnificent feelings you have begun to feel for the first time in a relationship. Or worse, you might get psychologically and/or emotionally hurt like the many friends you have probably had to let cry on your shoulder in the past! You take the risk, right? WRONG! You must know that it is absolutely normal to fret, worry, and be scared of taking risks and experiencing new things. The key to handling moments of change and uncertainty in your life is to do everything but avoid, deny or quit. For the best results, individuals must confront their fears. It is easier said than done, but to confront your fears means to explore them, to al-

low them to come over you without resistance so that you can begin to understand them. In other words, by allowing yourself to experience your thoughts of worry, you are taking the first step to understanding why they frighten you. If you are able to understand a small fragment of what scares you, you can be that much more equipped to addressing that fear. It would even

provide you the opportunity to more clearly express those concerns with your partner. Who knows, he or she may even subside your worries!

You can start practicing this, for example, by allowing yourself to fret or worry for an hour each day. This might be done by journaling, but be sure to also reflect on the happiness and joy that stem from this new relationship. This reflection on the great things will provide you the courage, strength, and motivation to continue to face those fears. Not to mention, you'll feel more prepared to truly and more fully experience this magnificent new relationship! If you need additional assistance, or if your worries become excessive and too bothersome, our excellently trained counselors can help guide you through this important life transition.

Monthly Guidance [MG] is here to answer questions about relationships and personal issues. If you would like to ask MG a question, you may call the Ball State Counseling Practicum Clinic and leave an anonymous message for MG. Or, you may send your question in writing to the address on the back page of this newsletter. If you choose to ask MG a question, the identity of the person submitting the question will remain completely anonymous. Please keep in mind when writing your questions that space is limited. Due to time constraints, MG cannot answer all questions, but will try to choose questions that are representative of a broad range of issues. If your question does not get answered and you would like to discuss it, please call Ball State Counseling Practicum Clinic at (765) 285-8047. Please be advised that MG is neither a crisis/emergency service nor a correspondence therapy service. If you need either immediate attention or ongoing therapy, call Ball State Counseling Practicum Clinic at (765) 285-8047.

Seeking Help in all the Right Places

By Dustin Shepler, MA

Just as BSU's student-counselors are here to help our clients whenever possible, other agencies are staffed with workers who specialize in services that are not offered at the BSU Practicum Clinic. For some, working with a team may be the best way to manage problems or transitions. While many people are aware of some of the services offered in the greater Muncie area, others may not be so familiar with local resources. Sometimes we all are caught by surprise or do not know where to turn for guidance. To help our clients access resources we cannot provide at the Practicum Clinic, we are including this brief guide of



agencies/organizations and what they can offer our community members. We encourage all of our clients to identify and obtain the services they need to improve their lives. If a service you may need is not listed below, please feel free to talk to your counselor or visit <http://www.infoki.com>. Also, while some key agencies have been listed below, a wide, comprehensive resource guide is available at the practicum clinic. Please notify your counselor if you would like information about services not listed here or would like an alternative provider than the agency listed below. Community members may also call 288-HELP (299-4357) to reach A Better Way's 24-hour crisis/information line.

Child Abuse (Department of Child Services) – 765-751-9565

Debt Management (Momentive Consumer Credit Counseling, Inc.) – 765-284-7154

Domestic Violence (A Better Way) – 765-288-4357

Emergency Services (Ball Memorial Hospital) – 765-747-3241

Family Planning Services (Planned Parenthood) 765-282-8011

Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual Support (Parents, Family & Friends of Lesbians & Gays – PFLAG) – 765-285-1013

Parenting Info., Healthcare for Children, Vaccinations (Delaware Co. Health Dept.) – 765-747-7814

Job Training (Comprehensive Employment Services – CMHS) – 765-288-1928

Smoking Cessation Program (Ball Memorial Hospital) – 765-747-8478

Suicidal Thoughts (National Suicide Hotline) – 1-800-273-8255

Word Search



Directions: The twelve words listed below are from the current issue of *Mind Matters* and can be found in the puzzle to the right.

The words appear forward and backward and diagonally, vertically, and horizontally.

- | | |
|-------------|--------------|
| TRANSITION | SEEKING HELP |
| CHANGE | ACCEPTANCE |
| ADAPTION | RELATIONSHIP |
| DEVELOPMENT | TRAINING |
| ADJUSTMENT | GOALS |
| RESOURCES | PUBERTY |

Early Adolescence and the Middle School Transition: How Can Parents Help?

By Yves Ambroise, MSEd

The early teenage years (approximately 11-14 years old) are often thought of as one of the most challenging years of child rearing for many reasons. Mainly, this time period breeds an excess of uncertainty and confusion. First, children of this age are experiencing mood swings and changes in physical appearance as they mature and develop through puberty. In addition, these children are faced with the difficulty of transitioning between elementary school and middle school, which can be a very confusing changeover. Both transitions make this developmental age equally complex for parents and their children and the ambiguity increases the risk of family tension and stress. You may not know it, but there are many ways to ease this transition period for you and your child.

**TO HELP,
MAKE
YOURSELF
AVAILABLE
AND ASK
QUESTIONS!**

First, be conscious and aware that your child is maturing through puberty. Since the onset of puberty varies from one child to the next, it may be difficult to distinguish where your child is in their development. Look for changes in body growth, body odor, and acne. Girls may begin to show signs of breast development while some boys develop facial hair. These

physical changes provoke many teenagers to question their identity and ask questions about the normalcy of their experience. Some early teens may even begin to feel isolated or that “no one understands” the changes that they are experiencing. The questioning and uncertainty coupled with these rapid changes is often associated with anxiety, which may worsen if no one is available to check in with them.

To help, make yourself available and ask questions! Although boys and girls seem to prefer talking to an adult of the same gender, don't be deterred by this if you and your child are of opposite sex. The most important thing is that you are available for your child even if the subject matter is uncomfortable. Make sure they have the appropriate resources such as school health classes that cover sensitive topics. Or identify other reliable adults (e.g., aunt, counselor) who might help you in assisting your child through the transition of puberty.

These physical changes, together with the transition from elementary school to middle school can intensify your child's feelings of distress. To ease your child's switch of school environments, keep in mind some of these facets of the transition: (1) the change for many children involves struggling to make new friends. As your child is challenged to

develop their social network, their sense of isolation and self-consciousness also increases (2) the change also involves new logistics to the operation of school (e.g., moving from class to class for each subject, having several different teachers, navigating a new system). These new logistics of middle school are structured that way to help your child develop a sense of independence and responsibility. However, it also fosters fear, anxiety, and increases uncertainty.



To help smooth out this transition, talk to your child about what to expect in middle school. Of the things to discuss are: having more than one teacher and moving from classroom to classroom; being the youngest in their school instead of the oldest, using lockers; and making new friends. In addition, if the school allows it and if you haven't done so, take your child for a visit to the new school before the new school year begins. Some middle schools provide an orientation and attending it with your child can help them become more familiar with the new environment. Also, find out if the school has any clubs that might be of interest. But most of all, be available for your child! Due to both of these transitions, many families experience stress and conflict. However, these can be avoided by simply answering your child's questions and providing them a bit of guidance.

Featured Counselor Profile

Kory L. Jordan, M.A.

By Mona Ghosheh, MEd
With Kory Jordan, MA

This column is a way for the community to learn about the diverse talents of students, both master's and doctoral, employed at the Ball State University Counseling Practicum Clinic.

Kory L. Jordan is studying to receive her PhD in Counseling Psychology from the Department of Counseling Psychology and Guidance Services. She is currently seeing clients at the Ball State University Counseling Practicum Clinic while also teaching a class on multicultural counseling, working for the University's Office of Institutional Diversity, and taking classes of her own on campus. Off campus she works with the community organization Muncie Alliance for the Prevention of Substance Abuse (MAPA) and provides supervision for counselors working with the Motivate Our Minds (MOMs) program. Kory has also worked with the Indiana Department of Corrections volunteering with the Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program (PREP) and has also used her counseling background in the political arena working with the Office of Congressman André Carson (Indiana 7th District). The following is a discussion with Kory, one of many talented individuals employed at the Ball State University Counseling Practicum Clinic.

How did you decide to pursue your PhD in Counseling Psychology?

I come from an interesting background. I grew up in a neighborhood on the east side of Indianapolis where I witnessed all kinds of injustices and unfortunate circumstances involving my friends and loved ones. Many of my friends did not finish school and eventually became involved with the criminal justice system. In addition, most of the people I knew were

poor and had very serious problems to deal with in life. Back then, I was often "the helping hand" and from there decided that even though I was one of few to attend college, the first in my own family to do so, that I would devote my life and career to righting the wrongs that I witnessed while growing up. Pursuing the PhD was to ensure that I had the educational freedom and the flexibility to serve in multiple professional roles as needed.

"I WOULD DEVOTE MY LIFE AND CAREER TO RIGHTING THE WRONGS THAT I WITNESSED WHILE GROWING UP"

What are your clinical interests?

My clinical interests include working with adolescents and adults in the contexts of individual, family, or group counseling, especially individuals from poor backgrounds as well as minorities. I would also like to work more with community agencies on an organizational level to help my population of interest.

Are you currently doing any research?

I am on a research team with Dr. Kim in the department and I am also pursuing my own research on recidivism reduction. I am interested in what preventative measures need to be taken to decrease the likelihood of individuals returning to prison after being released.

What has been your most influential (or exciting, or enjoyable) work experience?

Surprisingly, I have enjoyed teaching and supervision more than I anticipated. However, my experience as a volunteer working

with incarcerated men and their significant others through PREP has been the most enjoyable.

Are there any populations that you especially enjoy working with in counseling?

I am most interested in working with those who have been involved with the criminal justice system on some level, either currently or previously. I would also like more experience with at-risk adolescents.

What do you hope to do after you graduate?

I would like to be involved with the community in some capacity. I've thought about becoming involved with a nonprofit. I have also considered working for or closely with a government agency. Whatever the capacity, I perceive the most benefit in prevention work through research and intervention as well as facilitating change on a systemic level.



Kory Jordan, second-year doctoral student in the Department of Counseling Psychology and Guidance Services

Featured Mental Health Issue:

Managing Mental Health During Times of Change

By Jerry Novack, MA, NCC

Change can be tricky. It implies that something (or someone) is different. Yet, change is constant. Things are always changing. The time and date constantly change as each moment passes. Cells constantly regenerate, such that every 7 – 10 years we each have all new tissue. The entire planet is in a constant state of rotation as it continuously orbits the sun. With so much change in our bodies, societies and environments, it seems almost comical that we sometimes react so adversely to changes in our lives, but there are reasons for our reactions as well as things we can do to help manage changes in a healthy, adaptive way.

Some changes occur so subtly that we are generally unaffected by them. More dramatic changes, like earthquakes, often occur so suddenly that we cannot help but be effected. Still other changes occur gradually AND suddenly. For example, a loved one might be ill for several years, but her/his death occurs in a moment and often affects us profoundly. Similarly, high school or college requires four years (or more) to complete, but the transition from student into graduate happens in the course of a two-hour ceremony. We each have a certain tolerance for change; and depending on that tolerance, the amount of change, and whether it's change we enjoy or do not want, we might develop emotional struggles in response to such periods.

Depression. After intense periods of transition, people commonly experience feelings of sadness or despair. They might lose interest in their hobbies or work, experience changes in sleep (trouble sleeping or trouble waking up), changes in appetite, feelings

of intense guilt, or a loss of energy and enthusiasm. Sometimes a period of sadness can be normal and appropriate (i.e., when mourning a loved one), but other times it can inhibit healthy development. Recent college graduates, for example, might experience depressive symptoms that prevent them from enjoying a healthy transition.

Anxiety. Like depression, anxiety can occasionally be healthy and appropriate. Competitive athletes or people beginning new careers might experience some nervousness. Often they report that nervousness helps them perform well. In fact, research suggests that, to a point, anxiety improves performance in all sorts of tasks, but too much anxiety (or panic) can inhibit performance. When anticipating change (i.e., a new career), some anxiety can help people perform their best. Sometimes after a dramatic change (i.e., car accident) people might experience some nervousness driving until they regain their confidence. In either case, obsessive thoughts, excessive worry, or panic can inhibit performance and adaptation.

Depression and anxiety are common reactions to change, but human reactions can manifest in a variety of symptoms or experiences. While some changes will never be welcomed (e.g., job loss, illness), there are things we can do to ensure that

our experience is adaptive and healthy.

Acceptance. Accepting that change is about to occur, is occurring or has occurred can be the most simple, yet powerful method for maintaining mental health during transitional periods. Emotional struggles often become overwhelming when we resist change. Even when change feels bad we can accept that we feel bad and not try to repress or avoid those feelings. Embracing our experience and allowing it to “just be” empowers us to move beyond it in a healthy way.

Self-Talk. The things we tell ourselves can impact our mental/emotional wellness the way that the things we eat can impact our physical health. Telling yourself that a situation is “awful” will inevitably make that situation feel worse than necessary. Telling yourself that you can handle the change, or that even though you do not like it, you can contend with it will help the change feel more manageable.

Practice Openness. Rigid patterns and habits in our daily lives make inevitable changes more difficult than necessary. Being open to regular changes in your routine can help you learn to be adaptive when change occurs. In his book *Deep Survival*, Laurence Gonzales wrote, “Psychologists who study survivors of shipwrecks, plane crashes, natural disasters, and prison camps conclude that the most successful are open to the changing nature of their environment.”

Talk it out. If you find that a change or transition feels overwhelming, make an appointment with one of our qualified counselors.

“...CHANGES
AREN'T
PERMANENT,
BUT CHANGE
IS.” – TOM
SAWYER

Featured Wellness Issue:

What Stops Us from Seeking Help:

The Psychology Behind Not Going to the Doctor

By Jill Sullivan, MA

When thinking of reasons why you may choose not to go to the doctor when you know you need to, you may think of many practical issues like: I don't have transportation, I cannot miss a half day of work, or I do not have insurance. All of these reasons may be true, but what you may not consciously think about are the thoughts that might stop you from going to the doctor, also called psychological barriers to seeking health care.

Dr. Holly Swartz, M.D. has done research on psychological factors that may prevent people from seeking medical treatment. She states that while the list of psychological barriers for one individual could be endless, some of these barriers could include: having had a negative medical experience in the past, expecting stigma or blame for one's current condition, and/or thinking that something might be wrong and not wanting this to be confirmed by a physician.

While having a previous negative experience is unfortunate, it should not prevent you from seeking medical help in the future. Possible ways to overcome this psychological barrier might be to speak with your current doctor about your negative experience and ways in which he or she can help you have a more positive experience in the future or seek help from another doctor with whom you feel more comfortable.

Many people who are hesitant to seek help for certain conditions may feel that there is a stigma or blame that may come with them seeking help. It is important to remember that doctors and nurses are trained to help their patients with medical conditions. It is also important to remember that no matter what has lead up to your current physical health condition, doctors are there to diagnose and treat your condition and help you lead a healthier, better quality life. Another way to help you overcome this psychological barrier might be to seek a doctor that specializes in your condition. This may help you feel more comfortable talking openly and honestly to your doctor about your current

health status.

Thinking that something is physically wrong and delaying treatment is possibly one of the most prevalent psychological barriers that exist. It is not good to ignore what your body is telling you. By ignoring such things as pain, a bump, or just overall not feeling well for an extended period of time, you could possibly delay much needed medical care. While feeling like something is wrong with your body is scary, waiting to seek medical treatment could cause a condition to get even worse.

Overall, listen to your body and know that we all can have thoughts that may prevent us from seeking the medical help that we may need. Also remember that you have the right to speak with your doctor regarding your care, possible past experiences, and they way you are feeling regarding your current health condition. Take charge of your body instead of your body taking charge of you.

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Ten Story Building on the corner of
Riverside and McKinley

We're on the Web!

[http://www.bsu.edu/
counselingpsychology/clinic/](http://www.bsu.edu/counselingpsychology/clinic/)

Ball State University Counseling Practicum Clinic: Serving the Community Since 1969

Mission

- The clinic is a training and research facility for the Department of Counseling Psychology and Guidance Services.
- The clinic provides high-quality, low-cost psychological services to the Delaware County community and beyond.

Service Providers

- Over 50 graduate student counselors under the supervision of faculty.
- Faculty supervisors are licensed psychologists and counselors.

Services Offered

- Individual Counseling
- Couple Counseling
- Family Counseling
- Child/Adolescent Counseling
- Group Counseling with a focus on:
 - Parenting
 - Social skills
 - Anger control
 - Issues of concern to children and adolescents

Hours of Operation

- August-May
 - 9 AM to 9 PM M-Th
 - 9 AM to 12 PM Fri
- The clinic is closed during university vacations and holidays.

All clients have the right to receive timely, competent counseling services consistent with the ethical principles and guidelines established by professional organizations. All counseling services provided at the Counseling Practicum Clinic are guided by the Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct, the Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice of the American Counseling Association, the American School Counseling Association, the American Rehab Counseling Association, the General Guidelines for Providers of Psychological Services, and the Specialty Guidelines for the Delivery of Services by Counseling Psychologists.