



# EARLY CHILDHOOD MENTAL HEALTH CONNECTION

## MOVING LIVES FORWARD

### THANKSGIVING IS ALL ABOUT GRATITUDE

*"Feeling gratitude isn't born in us - it's something we are taught, and in turn, we teach our children."*

The Journal of Psychiatry says "Gratitude can have many different meanings, depending on the context. For some of us when we practice gratitude we feel inspired to connect with causes that are larger than ourselves e.g. for other people."

This article goes on to say that gratitude is a general state of thankfulness and or appreciation that is valuable and meaningful to oneself. These two factors are relative to families in many ways and during these difficult times. It can be as simple as the old, "What is the magic word?" Answer was 'Please' and response was "Thank you!" That little lesson in manners is really about gratitude i.e. being thankful for the simple necessities that we take for granted: snacks, cold milk and cookies. Yes, according to the expert, Mr. Cookie Monster, cookies are a basic need. "Simple necessities" can be overlooked as things we take for granted each day, but actually things we should be grateful for: clean water, warm bed or our favorite snack.

One of the techniques that helps me to stay in a grateful state of being is to ask, 'Will this matter a year from now?' The author of this question was Richard Carlson, American psychotherapist and author of Don't Sweat the Small Stuff. Hundreds of books and gratitude journals have been published on this subject and the bottom line can be summed up with: If you are feeling grateful or have a state of thanksgiving in your being, it is very hard to harbor any negative feelings. I make it a habit that when one of those negative feelings surface (as they tend to do more often lately), I replace it with simply reminding myself of my many blessings. Gratitude can be as simple as saying, 'On this not so good day, I am grateful for having all five of my senses working.'

On a more scientific basis, research has found that practicing gratitude increases dopamine, a chemical messenger that plays a crucial role in feelings of pleasure. Practicing gratitude also increases serotonin, often called the "happiness chemical" as it contributes to positive feelings and helps us feel more relaxed. Even better than all of this, feeling grateful activates the parasympathetic nervous system which can lead to positive physical-like energy, lower blood pressure, and

boost to the immune system. In this time of COVID, this healthier status sounds like an excellent state of being to be in.

According to a mediation instructor at the Chopra Center, Macas says, "There are many scientific studies showing how gratitude creates positive changes in our brain. Gratitude 'neutralizes' negative emotions and can actually increase neuron density. The more you practice gratitude, the more you strengthen the brain's neuron circuits for gratitude, making it easier to focus on positive feelings."

I know – at this point in time, we are asking, 'How do I feel gratitude when everything is so much harder?' COVID has paralyzed the world somewhat and this fear-based uncertainty makes it harder for anyone to feel functional – let alone grateful. We all are doing the best we can each day – not day by day, but hour by hour as our personal and professional lives continue to change. I have become grateful that I am adaptable – well, most days...

We can only control certain things, but we do have control over our attitudes and our immune systems by what we do for self-care. Again, many experts have convinced me that these two parts of our human being (attitude and immune system) can largely be influenced by how we think and how we take care of ourselves. Remember, sometimes it is not what happens to us, but how we react to what happened. So again, each day (or hour?) when that negative thought tries to kick in, replace it with a grateful thought. At night I replace, 'I did not get that done today' with 'Wow, I did a good job on....'

#### *Cheryl's Corner of Caring*

*Whatever we are, whatever we make of ourselves, is all we ever have – and that, in its profound simplicity, is the meaning of life."*

*Philip Appleman*

# MEET CENTENNIAL'S EARLY CHILDHOOD CONSULTATION TEAM



## AMY NATION, MA, IMH-E<sup>®</sup> INFANT FAMILY SPECIALIST

### EARLY CHILDHOOD MENTAL HEALTH SPECIALIST

821 E Railroad Ave  
Fort Morgan, CO 80701  
Phone (970) 867-4924 Ext.2231  
Cell (970) 571-2174  
amyn@centennialmhc.org

#### **Ages 0-5**

Covers the following  
counties:  
Logan, Morgan



## CHERYL BILLS, BSSW, MS EARLY CHILDHOOD MENTAL HEALTH SPECIALIST

211 W Main St  
Sterling, CO 80751  
Phone (970) 522-4549 Ext.291  
Cell (970) 762-8044  
cherylbi@centennialmhc.org

#### **Ages 0-5**

Covers the following counties:  
Logan, Phillips, Sedgwick



## ERIN POUNDS, MS, IMH-E<sup>®</sup> INFANT FAMILY SPECIALIST

### EARLY CHILDHOOD MENTAL HEALTH SPECIALIST

821 E Railroad Ave  
Fort Morgan, CO 80701  
Phone (970) 867-4924 Ext.1152  
Cell (970) 520-3320  
erinp@centennialmhc.org

#### **Ages 0-8**

Covers the following  
counties:  
Morgan, Washington  
& Yuma



## DANIELLE STOREVIK, MA EARLY CHILDHOOD MENTAL HEALTH SPECIALIST

650 E Walnut  
Elizabeth, CO 80107  
Phone (303) 646-4519  
Cell (970) 571-4224  
danielles@centennialmhc.org

#### **Ages 0-8**

Covers the following counties:  
Cheyenne, Elbert, Kit Carson,  
Lincoln & Yuma

For additional support during  
the COVID-19 Pandemic you  
can call Centennial's  
**COMMUNITY  
SUPPORT LINE**

You can do this by calling your  
nearest Centennial office:

Akron - 970.345.2254

Burlington - 719.346.8183

Cheyenne Wells - 719.346.8183

Elizabeth - 303.646.4519

Fort Morgan - 970.867.4924

Holyoke - 970.854.2114

Julesburg - 970.474.3769

Limon - 719.775.2313

Sterling - 970.522.4392

Wray - 970.332.3133

Yuma - 970.848.5412

Contact your local Centennial Mental Health Center for assistance with any Early Childhood need.

**WWW.CENTENNIALMHC.ORG**

Centennial is an equal opportunity provider and employer

Centennial Mental Health Center es un proveedor y una empresa de igualdad de oportunidades



So how do we involve practicing gratitude with our families? If journaling is not a chosen option (although it is very therapeutic for a safe place to process those negative feelings), then try putting a 'gratitude jar' in the room where the family spends the most of their time. Set aside some quality time to read entries out loud and guess who's it is. Make a game of it; reward participants with treats – whether that be popcorn and soda or an outing together that gets you outside. Being outside is the easiest way to count blessings with all that Mother Nature gives us. Again, it is often the simple things in life that we take for granted.

For those more attention seeking teenagers, let them use their phones, take pictures of what they are grateful. If that is their boyfriend or girlfriend, just roll with it. Friendships

count as something to be very grateful for, and at all ages! In this process, teach them that ONE good friend is worth all the "likes" in the world. Young people (all ages!) are really struggling now too and we have to be the best role model that we can – even on those days that we are counting the hours until bedtime. Again, speaking of bedtime, make it a family habit of telling each other just ONE thing that happened during the day that you are grateful for. This habit helps those brain neurons form patterns of positive thinking.

Zig Ziglar, author and motivational speaker, put it another way, "Gratitude is the healthiest of all human emotions. The more you express gratitude for what you have, the more likely you will have even more to express gratitude for."