



Personal Safety Nets® e-Newsletter



"UNCONDITIONAL" LOVE

January 2015, Issue 76

In This Issue

Letters & Stories

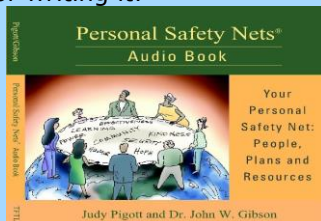
Seen & Heard

Unconditional Love & Relationships

We get . . . LETTERS & STORIES



"I am embarrassed to say that after being on my bedside table for almost a year, I finally dove in and devoured your book, *Personal Safety Nets: Getting Ready for Life's Inevitable Changes and Challenges*. Thank you for writing it!



I am still amazed that my sister Sarah pretty much put together her own care team - since she was a single mother. She managed all the coordination of help, until the last 3 weeks, at which time her friends intervened and found 24 hrs. in-home care for her. **(I think the part about having check-in meetings in the book is great.)** It helped that Sarah lived in a small community and many of her close friends were close by.

I now have lots to think about! My parents are in their 80's, live in Atlanta, and

Unconditional Love & Relationships

Most of us might define "unconditional love" as **loving another with no conditions or circumstances** - regardless of how that person treats you us, or what they do to or for us - we think the mandate is to love them no matter what.



When you find someone who loves you for "who you are," it's an amazing experience, and similarly, it's rewarding to love someone else just "as they are." But what does this mean?

Dr. Jeremy Nicholson, doctor of social and personality psychology, believes that such bonds are priceless and should be nurtured with great affection. But he stresses that "**relationships are an entirely different thing.**" Relationships are working partnerships. They involve thoughts, reasons, and decisions. **They require two (or more) individuals in communication, commitment and cooperative exchange.** Relationships have boundaries!

Therefore, **love (feelings) and relationships (decisions) can have separate rules and expectations.** Nicholson believes, "**Love, because it is a feeling, can be unconditional.**"

Sometimes, no matter what a partner does, feelings towards them do not change. **Relationships, however, are working partnerships**, and as such, they require conditions, boundaries, limits, and directions to run smoothly."



In other words: while you may continue to love a partner "no matter what," you may not choose to be in a relationship with them under all or any conditions. ("I love you, but find your behaviors/actions to be hurtful or wrong or unappreciated").

According to Nicholson, "Some individuals may say, "love is enough" - deciding as long as they have love, nothing else matters, and as a result, their relationships become "unconditional" as well. **But for most, there is a need to maintain a distinction between love and relationship.**

While these people love their partners unconditionally, they set rules that maintain a relationship that ensures a balanced, equitable exchange in their romantic partnership."



don't particularly think ahead. But, my other sister, Nancy, who lives in Atlanta will be a great advocate for them.

The book also got me thinking about burnout - which I liked. I've had to take a hard look at that in my own life since Sarah's illness. I haven't actually been able to make myself slow down until very recently. It's always been in my wiring - something that's helped me to succeed. But I am working on being more mindful and slowing down for my own good and that of my family.

I also liked the section at the end of your book about grief. There are certainly lots of stages of grief and after just over 2 years, I feel like I am in a much better place now."
- Elta R.

PS: "Using gentleness of phrase, humor to maintain a sense of balance, and opportunities for playfulness will serve everyone well."

Elta, we'd add a big thanks for your letter, and support for you in thinking ahead of time about what and who support a healthy life for you and your parents. Write down your thoughts Then, when things come up, you'll have a big head start on pulling together a helpful team. -
PSN Staff



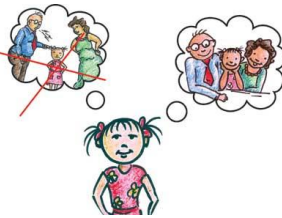
BLUEPRINT:
In the Jan-Feb issue of **AARP Bulletin**, Hall of Fame basketball player and writer for **TIME magazine**, Kareem Abdul-Jabbar is asked what his blueprint is for getting older.

"The continued pursuit of goals and dreams, and

How can I move on when I'm still in love with you?

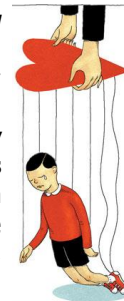
Therefore, "It is possible to continue to "feel" love unconditionally, while choosing to end unhealthy partnerships/relationships when the conditions are no longer feasible."

How does this relate to loving our children? Here there have been conflicting opinions over the decades. More than 50 years ago the psychologist **Carl Rogers postulated that simply loving our children wasn't enough - that we have to love them unconditionally - for who they are not for what they do.**



But does this match today's idea that we should turn up the affection when children are good, and withhold affection when they are not? Today's pop-psychological book-writers such as Dr. Phil and Jo Frost (the Supernanny) push us towards "**conditional parenting**" - **the idea of rewarding good behavior, and withholding love and attention (often through "time-outs" that exceed safe or reasonable limits) for bad behavior (sometimes called "love withdrawal).**

Alfie Kohn, author of 11 books on human behavior and education, including *Unconditional Parenting* and *Punished by Rewards* follows international research and data that tells us "love withdrawal isn't particularly effective at getting compliance, much less at promoting moral development." He states, "**The primary message of all types of conditional parenting is that children must earn a parent's love**, and a steady diet of that (as Rodgers warned) will see children turning to alternative resources (therapists, lovers) to provide the unconditional acceptance they did not receive from their parents." When a time out look like a withdrawal of love, then it's too much. Love for the child is secure, all behavior isn't acceptable. Ideally, parents can convey this balance.



A 2014 study by America's leading expert on the psychology of motivation, **Dr. Edward L Deci**, at the University of Rochester, working with **teenagers**, found that **both positive and negative conditional parenting were harmful** - in slightly different ways. The positive kind may get children to work harder (say at academic tasks) but at a cost of unhealthy feelings of "internal compulsion." **Negative "conditional parenting" didn't even work in the short run; it just increased the teenagers' negative feelings about their parents.** (editor's note: luckily, this is usually short-lived and disappears long before the child has children of their own)



So what about the use of parental love as a tool with children? According to Deci and others, **unconditional love by parents (as well as unconditional acceptance by teachers) should be accompanied by "autonomy support":** explaining reasons for requests, maximizing



realistically, connecting with family and friends. That is where the real joy in life is."

KIDS BUILDING TOGETHER:

Last summer Father Treacy from the **Treacy Levine Center** in Arlington, Washington (formerly Camp Brotherhood) wrote to us. He reminded us of the programs held at camp that were featured by **Sarah Stuteville**, in an article in the **Seattle Times**. The camp (and similar ones around the world) bring together middle-school aged kids from America, Canada, Israel and Palestine - for interfaith learning and REAL community building.

Behind these efforts is **Kids4Peace**, founded in 2002, and currently made up of more than 1,800 youth, families and educators working for a better future together.

Through a network of local chapters and international camps, like the one at Treacy Levine Center, they provide a six-year, year-round educational program that focuses on interfaith dialogue, community-building, leadership development, and nonviolent action. Check out the **Times** article and the **Kids4Peace.org** site to locate efforts in your area.

NORMALIZING MENTAL ILLNESSES:

"When we hear of mental illness it's often in the context of mass violence: Isla Vista, Virginia Tech, Newtown. Yet 1 in 4 Americans will experience a diagnosable mental illness in a year." But, the article goes on to say, "people with severe mental illness are much more likely to be victims of crime than the perpetrators. Mental health issues affect your family, friends, neighbors ...so why

opportunities for the child to participate in making decisions, being encouraged without manipulation, and actively imaging how things look from the child's point of view. All age-appropriate, of course.

"We must start to look at our love for our children from the perspective of the child - whether they feel just as loved when they mess up or fall short."

Thinking about unconditional love for a partner and/or a child, brings us to one greater point: giving and experiencing unconditional love for ourselves! Some of us may never have received or felt such love (even from a parent) and that may be creating a large block in our ability to provide that love to others - beginning with ourselves. But **the good news is that the ability to experience unconditional love starts with giving that love to**



I Love Myself

ourselves - and that starts with accepting ourselves - imperfections and all!

Some psychologists, including **Dr. Laura Markham**, and author of *Peaceful Parents, Happy Kids*, believe that learning unconditional love starts with a **first step**: "a commitment to radical self-compassion." This means "parenting yourself in a loving way through all the trials and tribulations of life" - **first by accepting that humans are never perfect, and each of us has flaws and makes mistakes.** Markham says, "Radical self-compassion - whether it comes from inside or outside - gradually moves humans from a state of being "self-centered" to a state of being "centered in self." **Researchers**

say this deep self-love is the opposite of selfishness. We become so secure in our ok-ness that we're more emotionally generous.

Dr. Leon Seltzer, clinical psychologist and author of *Paradoxical Strategies in Psychotherapy*, tells us, more than anything else, **undertaking such deeply personal work (learning to unconditionally love ourselves) involves developing greater self-compassion.** "You need to recognize that given your defenses, blind spots, insecurities, and the harmful things you



may have been exposed to, you really are doing the best you can - and have been - all along. Additionally, **you need to stop evaluating yourself according to standards that don't really fit who you are, or what you can realistically expect of yourself."**

Dr. Seltzer agrees: "As you succeed in accepting yourself more - in simply coming to appreciate who you are, and are not - the self-judgmental barriers that have prevented you from loving yourself other than conditionally begin gradually to fall away." Just as with another person, it is likely that there are some behaviors of our own that cross lines of acceptability: things done for which guilt is appropriate. This is a time for self-compassion. The action was regrettable and may need repair, but the love of basic self is broader.



aren't we talking about it?"

This info comes from Intercommunity Peace and Justice Center. The Center supports **Jubilee Women's Justice Circle** in Seattle - where the women decided they wanted to talk about mental health. So they set up a **Facebook** page (*Mental Health and Healing*) to share stories of those with mental health diagnoses and to normalize behavior illnesses. They reached out to area mental health organizations to include available resources and talked to their church congregations to find people to interview for the page.

By expanding the network of those who understand and speak of mental illnesses, they hope to increase compassion and bring people out of the darkness of silent suffering. For more information contact <gcarcamo@ipjc.org>.

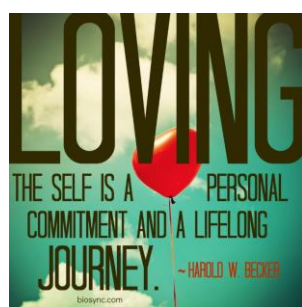
"It's precisely in this much more kindhearted and understanding self-recognition that lies the path not just to unconditional self-acceptance but also to unconditional self-love."

A second step is to make repair and connection a way of life. It's been said that we need seven positive interactions to every negative interaction to keep a relationship in good shape. Whether this exact number is true or not, **think of balancing your self-speak negatives with more positive connections - it will help you keep the relationship with yourself in the best of shape.** Don't let others tell your story for you. You are the determinator of your life and what you choose to tell and receive. Life does not have to continue the way it has been in the past. **When you change your thoughts, your feelings become more forgiving and more loving.** It's like setting up your own positive mantra.



A third step is to realize that unconditional self-love can be learned by cultivating a more benevolent attitude toward yourself.

Dr. Seltzer says this is an attitude that is "one that's more benign and forgiving, but also more charitable, considerate, and sympathetic - comprising the essential ingredients of self-love. And **with this profound attitudinal shift, such love of self can eventually be "set in stone" - virtually automatic.**" It can then extend to love of and compassion for others, while setting boundaries for behavior & safety. Give the benefit of the doubt, but stay safe.



Harold Becker, author of *Internal Power: Seven Doorways to Self Discovery*, and founder of **The Love Foundation** writes, "**The most courageous act we can ever undertake is to love ourselves and life unconditionally.** . . . doing so ensures that the energy of life flows through us uninhibited and free of judgments and misqualification." **He also reminds us that, "loving ourselves is a continuous process not a goal."**

How about taking your first step today!