

LifeLines

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safer, healthier relationships
for children and families

Learning from Change

Three years since the announcement of the COVID-19 pandemic and nearly all of us have experienced significant shifts in our daily lives. Strict isolation guidelines that have since been relaxed resulted in major changes in routine. This included the loss of many activities we had previously taken for granted, such as hugging loved ones, attending celebrations, commuting to work, and taking part in group activities. Students experiencing virtual learning and employees working remotely spent significantly more hours online, and social norms of getting showered and dressed before heading into shared spaces were temporarily disregarded.

Initially, this presented a level of pleasurable novelty. The idea of going to class in pajamas used to be limited to special celebrations at school. And many families found that the forced reduction in outside activities allowed for more togetherness.

Not everyone felt positive about these changes, even in the beginning. But now that we are out of the acute phase of this unique experience, what are we learning about the lasting effects?

A review of recent research performed by various academic institutions reveals how our lives have shifted over this period. Humans are wired for connection and comforted by a familiar routine. Often, we feel a sense of dissatisfaction about change but have difficulty recognizing exactly what it is that we are missing.

Presently, there are still significant changes that are impacting our physical and mental health in concerning ways. Overall, levels of physical activity have remained lower than before COVID-19. Children and adults are spending more time on screens for recreational purposes, and people are engaging in fewer in-person group activities. Sleep quantity for some has increased, but sleep quality has gone down. There are more people suffering from anxiety and depression. Overall, people have remained more isolated than before the pandemic and are struggling to re-engage themselves with others. It is well-documented that regular physical activity results in better sleep as well as overall physical and mental health.



Alterations in simple routines that are seemingly mindless have affected us in ways that we didn't see coming. An example from recent research concerns the loss of commuting to work. Researchers explain that the time spent in travel allows for "liminal space" where we exist outside of a specific role. This allows time to shift from one headspace into the next. Loss of commute time has resulted in what has been termed "role blurring." Without the existence of liminal space, stress, and burnout can occur. One woman reported sitting in her car for several minutes every day simply to re-enact this part of her lost routine. She didn't know why she needed this until it was explained to her!

The good news is that many activities that were restricted are now available, and in instances where this isn't the case, there are ways to adapt to meet our needs. Taking time to examine our lives insightfully and consider what we have lost is important. With insight, we can take steps to reclaim our lives and find what we didn't know we lost. Read on for practical tips and suggestions about ways to begin doing just that!

Life Without Margins

As discussed in the previous article, the pandemic left us with blurred roles. Our roles as parents bled into roles as workers, spouses, and sometimes teachers too. Now that the pandemic has cooled, some are struggling to reestablish their footing in their home, work, and social lives. In some ways, the pandemic left us without margins.

Imagine, if you will, an office memo that was filled with words from edge to edge and top to bottom. What if it lacked punctuation too? How hard would it be to read or enjoy?

In the same way, our lives need margins too. This is why we have weekends and snow days, and vacations! We take the time to mark beginnings and endings like weddings and funerals, and birthdays. Without margins and “punctuation,” there is no time to step back and think higher thoughts about who we are and what we do. We lose the “why.” It is the savoring and reflecting we do in those “off” times that give us life’s flavor.

Here are some fresh ideas to help you find or create some wild unfilled places in your life that will set you free.

Fire yourself and make yourself CEO. That’s right, have an out-of-body experience. Freeze yourself and gently float out of your body and bob up to the ceiling.

Now look down at that person below you. How are they doing? Are they happy? Are they tired? Are they buried under a never-ending to-do list? As an employee, what do they need to do their job better? What resources would benefit their work? To increase their joy in productivity? Be the best boss ever and decide if they need a vacation, more time alone, or maybe more schooling. Think about how you can gently encourage and enable them to thrive. What difficulties can you take off their plate?

Goodness of Fit. The right outfit can make you look and feel great. If your life was an outfit, what would it look like? Does it look good on you? Is it comfortable to wear? Where

is it tight? Where is it too sloppy? Perhaps there are pieces of the outfit that just aren’t “you” anymore. Like, “Why am I still wearing these leopard print pants?” “Or why am I still wearing worn and torn jeans that look like they were pulled out of a dumpster?” Here is a challenge; ask three close friends how your life is fitting on you. If you find an ill-fitting spot, try changing something. Anything. Nothing changes until something changes.

Running on Empty. Every person needs power, love, belonging, freedom, and fun. Take a moment and draw five gas gauges and put an E for empty and F for full in each gauge. Label the gauges with power, love, belonging, freedom, and fun. Now mark with a line how full each tank is. Where are you running low? Which answers surprised you? What can you do today to fill the tanks that are running low?

Running on empty never feels good. Life is a balance. We are always in flux. Filling our tanks and the tanks of people we love every morning is the key to happiness. Take a moment to cuddle your loved one before you get up. Be silly and playful with your kids. Give yourself permission to get the double mocha latte today! Phone a friend and be there for each other. Arrange time apart from everyone to be free and “off the leash” for a while.

Quit one good thing a month. Bob Goff, an author who describes himself as a recovering lawyer, has an inspirational bucket list of amazing things he has done. One of his many secrets is to quit one good thing a month. Every month he looks at all the good things he is doing. Then he finds the one that is no longer a good fit, and he bumps it from his life. Doing “good things” can take over. After a while, we are doing so many “good things” that our sense of freedom and our sense of being who we need to be can get lost in the process.

No matter which of the previous metaphors worked for you, begin today with the intention of creating open spaces in your life. Make room for possibilities, inspiration, and fun. This is never a finished work. It is THE work.



A Local Lifeline for Teens

The adolescent years can be a time of great struggle for teens and the adults who parent them. Recent reports have shown a dramatic increase in the number of suicides among this population, with almost a 60% increase in the past decade. There are likely multiple factors for this uptick, including the seclusion of the pandemic and the transition back to in-person learning. The high use of social media among this age group puts pressure on the young, who feel the need to measure up to the standards set by peers. Add systemic racism and bullying to the mix, and is it any wonder that our teens are struggling with mental health issues? And yet, this group is the most underserved in addressing mental health challenges.

Fortunately, there is a place called The SPOT (Supporting Positive Opportunities with Teens) that is sponsored by the Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis. Their mission is “to increase access to health care for youth who have been disproportionately impacted by HIV, poverty, trauma, and discrimination. In order to protect and promote the physical and mental health of those we serve, we partner with youth to create a safe, welcoming space for them to address their goals and achieve positive outcomes.” The Spot also partners with other agencies in town to assist adolescents in getting their needs met.

The Spot offers a variety of services, including medical, sexual, and mental health care, as well as access to showering, laundering, computers, and food. The Spot is also the place for youth entering foster care for the first time between the ages

of 13 and 17 to receive their required 30-day comprehensive examination. Once enrolled in the COACH program, youth have continuous access to medical, psychiatric, and dental care, as well as case management until the age of 25. For more information, email coach@wustl.edu.

The Spot is located at 4169 Laclede Avenue, St. Louis, MO 63108. They encourage anyone interested in receiving services or with questions to call them at 314-535-7275. To see their full array of services, visit thespot.wustl.edu/ for more information.



Recognizing FamilyForward’s Mission, Values, and Programs

April	May	June
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Child Abuse and Prevention Month• Occupational Therapy Month	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mental Health Awareness Month• National Foster Care Month	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• International Day for Protection of Children



Scan the QR code to join us on social media and see how we’re taking note of these important months.

#familyforwardfriends



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for children and families

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Our Vision

FamilyForward leads the community in providing innovative solutions for advancing safer, healthier relationships for children and families.

Our Mission

FamilyForward moves vulnerable children in the direction of hope by delivering comprehensive therapeutic and educational services to support biological, foster, and adoptive families.

Visit familyforwardmo.org/publications to read LifeLines online.

Educational Opportunities for Adoptive, Foster and Kinship Parents

All in-person classes will be held at the new campus located at 11358 Van Cleve Avenue in St. Louis County.

The Amazing Brain

Thursday, April 20, 2023 | 6:00-9:00pm

This training will give parents a deeper understanding of brain development from conception to maturation. The impact of early childhood trauma on the brain's organization will be explored through a small group activity utilizing The Brain Architecture Game. Will your team be able to build a brain that stands up to toxic stress?

Crisis Management

Monday, April 24, 2023 | 6:00-9:00pm

Parents will learn what qualifies as a crisis, the signs of escalation in their children, and methods to de-escalate the dysregulated child. The development and use of safety plans for the home will be discussed. Police CIT (Crisis Intervention Teams) and protocol for engaging their assistance will be introduced.

Self-Compassion (Virtual Lunch and Learn)

Friday, April 28, 2023 | 12:00-1:00pm

Self-compassion is not self-indulgent or narcissistic; in fact, the opposite is true. By being kind to ourselves, we are better able to be kind to others. Based on the work of Dr. Kristen Neff, an Associate Professor of Educational Psychology at the University of Texas at Austin and a pioneer in the field of self-compassion research, this class will offer tools for extending compassion to ourselves first, increasing our ability to offer the same to those we care for and interact with in our daily lives.

Prenatal Drug and Alcohol Exposure

Thursday, May 11, 2023 | 6:00-9:00pm

Children who were exposed to alcohol or drugs in-utero can experience a wide range of medical, developmental, and mental health challenges. This training discusses the effects of a range of substances as well as parenting techniques that are helpful in daily challenges. Parents are empowered with the knowledge that having at least one caring adult in the child's life can make a positive impact on the long-term outcome.

When You Worry Too Much (Virtual Lunch and Learn)

Friday, May 19, 2023 | 12:00-1:00pm

A certain level of anxiety can be helpful and energizing, but a lot is problematic. With insights from Dr. Dawn Huebner, a Clinical Psychologist, Parent Coach, and popular speaker specializing in anxiety, we will discuss how to know if a child is experiencing too much anxiety, what you can do to help them, and when to get professional support. Dr. Huebner asserts that too much accommodating and reassurance can fuel anxiety rather than resolve it. She talks about what we can do instead to assist children experiencing excessive worry.

Healthy Relationships

Monday, May 22, 2023 | 6:00-9:00pm

Children with trauma histories often have not had healthy relationships modeled for them within their families of origin. Some have witnessed domestic violence, seen inappropriate familial and peer relationships, and have experienced a violation of their bodies, distorting what is or is not appropriate in relationships. Exploring topics that may be difficult for adults to discuss with children and teens is the starting point of becoming comfortable with the subject matter. Developing healthy self-respect is the foundation for future healthy relationships, and as their caregivers, we must engage our children in an on-going conversation.

CORE TEEN: Understanding the Impact of Trauma on Teens in Care

Wednesday, May 31, 2023 | 6:00-8:30pm

Parenting adolescents can be very challenging, parenting adolescents with a trauma history even more so! Dr. Bruce Perry introduces brain development, an essential component to understanding how trauma interrupts an individual's overall development. Using this information provides a basis for responding to the need behind the challenging behavior that teens will exhibit.

Trauma 101

Monday, June 5, 2023 | 6:00-9:00pm

When a child is abused or neglected, it can affect every aspect of the child's development: physical, emotional, social, and psychological. A video will kickstart the discussion that focuses on the reasons for delays and challenges based on the neurobiology of brain development. National Child Traumatic Stress Network Core Concepts of Traumatic Stress is also covered. This course incorporates the required reading material that is mandatory for resource parents and provides a good general introduction to the topic of trauma.

CORE Teen: Parenting Youth Who Have Experienced Trauma

Wednesday, June 14, 2023 | 6:00-8:30pm

Parental self-awareness is necessary for adults to understand why they react the way that they do to a teen's challenging behavior. Parents will explore their level of confidence in parenting as well as the arousal continuum, as explained by Dr. Bruce Perry. Traditional parenting approaches often fail and leave parents and youth at odds. Alternative methods will be discussed and practiced.

CORE Teen: Developing and Sustaining a Healthy and Supportive Relationship

Wednesday, June 28, 2023 | 6:00-8:30pm

This session will explore disenfranchised grief that is a hallmark of youth in foster care. Counteracting this grief requires a fully attuned parent, something that is difficult to practice with the hectic lifestyles of many families. The session will conclude by looking into what is necessary to build psychological safety inside a structured yet nurturing environment.

Preservice Training for Foster Parent Licensing will begin on April 18, 2023.

Spaulding Pre-Adoptive Training will begin on June 20, 2023

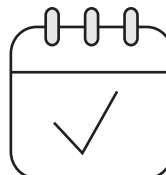
Please contact Tonya Williams at Children's Division for further information and registration.

Tonya.Williams@dss.mo.gov.



Online resources

Sign up for our LifeLines email newsletter and view training information online by scanning the QR code or by visiting familyforwardmo.org/calendar



Register for training

Call: 314.534.9350 ext. 7234

Email: intake.dept@familyforwardmo.org