

CILT's Peer Links

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Surviving the Winter?

I don't remember the last time that we had a winter with so much snow. It makes very difficult for many of us to get out and about. A recent example was CILT's *Breast Health Awareness Workshop*, scheduled for the evening of January 27, 2004 which had to be cancelled due to a nasty snowstorm. That workshop has been re-scheduled for Tuesday March 30, 2004 6-8p.m. A flyer will be sent out to everyone closer to that date. Let's hope that by then the weather will have drastically improved.

In an effort to beat the winter blues, the Parenting With a Disability Network (PDN) is planning a "Mid-Winter Get Together" on Saturday, February 21, 2004, from 1-4 PM at CILT. The PDN has extended an invitation to the Prime Timers to join them. The Prime Timers is a fairly new social group for adults with disabilities age 35 and up. In the past, the PDN and the Prime Timers have teamed up and shared social events. If you belong to either one of these groups and you would like to attend our Mid-Winter Get Together, please call (416) 599-2458, and ask to speak to Nancy (x27) or Kimberly (x35). We hope that you will be able to join us.

I hope you enjoy reading this issue of Peer Links. If you are interested in writing an article for our peer support newsletter, we would definitely like to hear from you. Please call (416) 599-2458, x27 and speak to the Peer Support Coordinator. Until we meet again, take care and stay warm!

Your Winter Skin Survival Guide Winter skin care essentials

Dehydration: Because it's not hot outside, you may not feel as thirsty while exercising. However, if you're active, you can get dehydrated, even in the cold. It's especially important to stay hydrated at high altitudes (for instance, while skiing in the mountains), since dehydration can make altitude sickness worse. Be sure to drink plenty of water before, during and after exercise. Avoid alcohol while exercising outdoors. It can cause dehydration.

Frostbite: Cold weather can cause areas of the skin to freeze, leading to frostbite. This is usually seen on the skin of the face, fingers and toes. Frostbite causes ice crystals to form in the tissues. This leads to tissue damage and reduces the blood supply in the affected areas. If not found and treated quickly, it

may lead to infection and tissue loss. With frostbite, the affected areas are cold, white, hard to touch and numb. When warmed, the areas become swollen, red and painful. Blisters may appear, and areas of the skin may be black or gray. Frostbite is treated by warming the affected areas in warm (but not scalding) water. Once thawed, the areas should not be refrozen, as this will do more damage. Antibiotics and surgery to remove damaged tissue may be needed in cases of infection.

Tips for preventing frostbite:

- Dress in layers, with a moisture-wicking inner layer, a warm middle layer and a wind-proof outer layer. Mittens provide more warmth than gloves. If your hands or feet become wet, go inside.
- For very cold temperatures, try a neoprene facemask or a balaclava to protect the delicate facial skin from frostbite.
- Blood circulation helps keep the extremities (hands, feet, ears and nose) warm in cold temperatures. If you have conditions that affect your blood circulation (such as diabetes or Raynaud's disease), you may have a higher risk of frostbite. Sunburn: You can still get a sunburn in the winter, especially on snow or ice, which reflect 80% of the sun's rays. Apply sunscreen to all exposed skin to protect it from sunburn. For more information on sunscreens, see "Sunscreen is for winter too!" in this health feature.

During the winter, most people find that their skin gets drier. This is partly due to the winter weather - cold air and winds dry out the skin. It is also partly due to the things people do to cope with winter, such as turning up the heat and taking hot baths or showers.

As soon as the temperature starts to drop in the fall, it's time to switch to a winter skin care routine. Good winter skin care means changes to the way you clean, moisturize and protect your skin, as well as to your diet, lifestyle and environment.

Bathing: It might seem that a nice hot bath would help keep your skin moist. But hot water actually dries out the skin. Use lukewarm water instead. Spending a long time in the bath or shower can also make your skin drier. Try to limit yourself to about 10 minutes. And use a cleanser that is free of soap and alcohol - soap, alcohol-based cleansers and bubble bath can make your skin drier by removing the protective lipids or oils that help your skin hold onto moisture. You may want to try using a bath or shower gel to help with dry skin.

Moisturizing: Moisturizing is a critical step in winter skin care. After your bath or shower, pat your skin dry with a towel and apply moisturizer immediately. This

way, the moisturizer helps hold moisture in the skin. Moisturizer will also help protect your skin from moisture loss during the day. The choice of moisturizer will depend on your skin type. For more oily skin, an oil-free, non-comedogenic (not causing blemishes) lotion can be used. For drier skin, a cream, which contains more lipids or oils and moisturizing agents, is a good choice. Some areas of the skin, such as hands, feet, elbows, nose and lips, are more prone to dryness and may need extra attention. Carry around a small tube of moisturizer and lip balm to give a quick moisture boost throughout the day.

At home: Although cold air dries the skin, the hot dry air that comes from indoor heating can also be a culprit. If you don't have a climate meter (a device that tells you what the temperature and humidity is in your home), consider getting one. If your home is dry, you may want to invest in a humidifier. If this is not an option, you can also try boiling some water or putting a pot of water on the radiator to increase the moisture in the air.

Lifestyle: The healthier you are, the healthier your skin will be. In the winter, you may not feel as thirsty, but you still need plenty of water each day to stay hydrated. Keep a "drinking water cup" nearby at home and work to help you get enough fluid. You will need to drink water throughout the day, not just at meals. Eat a balanced diet that includes plenty of fruits and vegetables as well as non-saturated fats (such as fish oils). Other lifestyle changes that will help your skin include quitting smoking, limiting your use of alcohol, and getting aerobic exercise for at least 30 minutes per day or most days of the week.

Assertiveness

Do you find yourself saying "yes" to others' requests of you when you really feel like saying "no"? Are you unable to express your discontent with a friend or partner, even if you think it's justified? Do you find it difficult to accept a compliment?

If you answered "yes" to any of these questions you may have a problem of being assertive.

Assertiveness is standing up for yourself in a way that does not violate the rights of another person. It's a direct, honest and appropriate expression of your feelings and opinions. You may have been uncomfortable being assertive in the past because you confused it with aggressiveness. Aggressiveness is a way of standing up for yourself that violates the rights of the other person. It results in humiliating and putting down the other person.

Specific Techniques for Assertiveness

Assertive Talk: Do not allow others to take advantage of you. Insist upon being

treated with fairness and justice. Be as clear and specific as you can about what you want, think and feel. Examples: "I was here first." " Please turn down the radio." "Since you ask, I'd much rather see you in another type of outfit."

Disagreeing Passively and Actively: When you disagree with someone don't feign agreement in the interest of "keeping the peace" by smiling, nodding, or paying close attention. Instead, change the topic. Look away. Disagree more actively and emotionally when you are more confident on the subject.

Asking Why: When you are asked to do something by a person in authority that does not sound reasonable or enjoyable to you, ask "why" you should do it. You are an adult and should not accept authority without question. Insist on an explanation that is convincing.

Talking About Yourself: When you have done something you consider worth sharing, let others know about it. Also, let people know how you feel about things. Do not monopolize conversations, but do not hesitate to bring them around to yourself when it is appropriate.

Assertiveness is about being able to say no, having your boundaries and limits respected, getting your needs met and keeping yourself safe. It will help you achieve your goals.

Why do I say yes, when I really mean no?

Sometimes other people can seem intimidating, especially if you have had experience of them being abusive. We are afraid and to avoid conflict we can comply with their wishes. We can also be afraid of peoples' rejection, especially if we are close to them and rely on them for emotional support. The message is "they won't like me unless I do what they want." There may be a belief about yourself behind this, like - "I'm not worth knowing for who I am but for what I do for people!" In both cases there is a power imbalance in the relationship, assertiveness helps ensure a fair and respectful relationship.

Some common behaviours you will come across include:

- ***Aggressive behaviour:***

Is being pushy and bossy. It doesn't take the other person's point of view into account and denies them respect or consideration. The aggressive person will try to get their own way in spite of the cost to others.

- ***Passive behaviour:***

You behave passively when you allow others to fulfill their wants and needs whilst ignoring your own passive-aggressive behaviour:

Guilt is the key to "getting your own way" with passive-aggressive behaviour. It is a form of manipulation and involves playing the martyr so that the other person feels so guilty that they give in to you.

- ***Assertive Behaviour:***

There is respect for both people and each person has equal value. Assertive people are honest about what they think and feel, they choose what they want to do and what they don't want to do and don't feel guilty about saying "no!"

- ***No is not a dirty word:***

Saying no to someone's requests that conflict with your own needs and desires is honest. You have the right to say no, without feeling guilty.

Usually saying "no thank you" or "no I'm not interested" in a firm, polite manner should suffice. If someone persists, then simply repeat yourself without apology! If you want to give an explanation, then:

- Acknowledge the request by repeating it.
- Say no and explain your reason for declining it.
- Optional - suggest an alternative proposal where both people's needs are met.

Practice saying no over little things with safe people, and as your confidence increases so will your ability to say no to anyone!

How can I be assertive when I'm having all these strong feelings?

Strong feelings can arise when someone criticizes you or acts aggressively. These feelings such as anger or hurt have lots of energy that can be used and expressed. The key is to use it not lose it. Anger arises when we think we are trapped or threatened, it's a sort of fight or flight response. Some circumstances can trigger past anger that has nothing to do with them personally. So we need to take care with our anger as it can do damage if expressed abusively. For this reason some people are afraid of their anger, try to suppress it and then may experience a temper outburst over a minor matter. It's important to monitor your feelings, and withdraw from situations to keep yourself safe when you need to. You might say, "I am feeling too angry now to talk to you." Sometimes a few deep breaths will be enough for you to compose yourself so you can express yourself effectively.

How should I respond to criticisms?

Criticism creates many barriers between people. It can be useful but is often seen negatively as "moaning." It is seldom given directly, is usually misinterpreted, and can be the tip of an iceberg of pent-up frustration. Also people often hear criticism where none is intended and react accordingly.

Listen carefully to what is said, decide how valid it is for you, choose your response. Options include:

- Agreeing with them - this communicates the desire to stop the discussion
- Selectively ignore - respond to the bits you decide you want to respond to and ignore the rest
- Question them - ask them to be specific, how it affects them, if there is anything else
- Do some sorting - point out that there are several issues and offer to discuss one
- Say no - you don't agree with them and your position is explained, or how you feel about it.

How do I give constructive criticism?

Constructive criticism or feedback, is not motivated by a desire to hurt but to communicate and get your needs met

- Choose the time and place, - away from the situation, don't wait until next time it happens
- Describe the behaviour clearly and your feelings, - "when you play your music loud I feel..." Don't blame or label them.
- Ask for a specific change - "please turn your music down after 9 PM"
- Be realistic in describing consequences, avoid empty threats
- Ask them how they feel.

General Assertiveness tips:

- Start sentences with "I." This helps you to own your feelings and thoughts. For example "I feel"...
- Try and present your ideas in short, simple sentences.
- If you want something - ask for it - but be prepared to be turned down.
- Be direct in your requests and insist others too.

Examples:

Situation: Your wife or girlfriend comes home from work and talks during dinner about office politics and rivalry.

Response: "Every night this week we have spent the dinner hour talking about the personality conflicts at your office. I'm glad we can talk, but I get fed up with the pettiness, as I see it, of the people you work with. I miss talking about the news, my work, our new house plans, and how we are getting along."

Poor responses: An unassertive person would suppress his anger and say nothing or pretend to be really interested. An aggressive person would blow his top, calling his wife's co-workers names and telling her how boring and petty she is.

Situation: Your husband or boyfriend looks (excessively) at attractive women.

Response: "You used to be subtle about it, but lately you ogle every well built woman you see. I feel irritated that you aren't more concerned about my feelings. I really feel hurt. If you would change, I'd feel a lot better and I think it will increase our trust and closeness with each other." This response was suggested by a perceptive reader who also suggested another good response:

"I feel inadequate when I notice you looking excessively at other women. Therefore, in the future, I would appreciate it if you would ogle me instead."

Poor response: Pretending not to notice his looking and continue hurting in silence or turning off sexually or starting to flirt (in anticipation of his having an affair). Of course, the aggressive reaction would be to call him a self-centered sex maniac.

Arts Events Program for Consumers with Disabilities

Arts Carousel has a program called "Arts Events." where it arranges visits to fully-accessible sites for people with disabilities. Places include museums and live theatre. This program is open to all consumers in the Toronto area. Family and friends are encouraged to attend.

Arts Carousel provides attendants for consumers if required. Costs are partly subsidized. Flyers are mailed out about a month in advance.

To be put on the mailing list, or if you're interested in attending an event, please contact Arts Carousel at 416-391-2086. Trip ideas or requests are always welcomed.

New support group for Asians with disabilities

Are you a consumer with a disability of Asian descent who is looking to meet with other consumers who share the same ethnic background(s)?

A local consumer named Gail Shimoda invites all consumers of Asian descent to join her new support group for Physically Disabled Asians.

Topics discussed in this group may include:

- Getting around in the city
- What your personal interests and needs are
- Housing
- Services
- Planning social events and activities

Place: Japanese Canadian Cultural Centre (to be confirmed), 6 Garamond Court (Don Mills/Eglinton); it is fully wheelchair accessible, with barrier-free washrooms

Time: afternoon once per month

If you're interested in joining this group, or would like more information, please contact Gail at 416-739-9534 or gshimoda5213@rogers.com.

Come join the group for an informative & enjoyable afternoon session with other disabled Asians in your community.

No attendant services provided.

Transition Ontario Project

Please help us create an important online resource. We want to make the transition to adult life for youth with disabilities (16-29 years) easier.

A website is being developed for the province of Ontario with the latest news about transition to adulthood. This will include a listserv where people can talk and share information. People with disabilities, parents and service providers are working together to make the website and the listserv. We hope everyone will be able to use this resource as well.

This project was started by a group of service providers, parents and youth with disabilities in 1999. They learned that we need an information resource in Ontario that has all of the information you would like about transition, as well as giving you a chance to share your experiences and asking other people questions about transition.

How can I help?

If you are a youth, parent or family member, professional/service provider, we

need your help in a number of ways such as:

Telling us what you think by attending groups and answering surveys.

Attending Steering Committee meetings. This group includes both people with disabilities and service providers. Currently we need people who represent the issues and interests of people with developmental delay, autism, mental health, acquired brain injury and the education sector.

Attending task group meetings to help with a specific area of the project. We have four groups:

- Newsletter
- Website design
- Listserv
- Database

Entering data into the computer

By attending one of these groups, you will learn about how Transition Ontario is being developed. It will also give you a chance to share your ideas about how the resource will work.

What topics are included in the website and listserv?

- How do I find out about various types of education?
- Where can I find a job?
- I love basketball. Where can I play the sports that I like?
- Now that I'm an adult, what health services are accessible for me?
- I want to live downtown. Where are the wheelchair accessible buildings?
- Who can help me with this transition to adult life?
- Who can I turn to if I'm being treated unfairly?
- I need help to attend a course that I'm interested in. Where do I find this type of personal support?
- What does my community offer in terms of transportation?
- I wonder if they've invented a more advanced product than I'm using now?
- What types of funding are available to me now that I'm an adult?

What has been done so far?

- Asked youth, parents and professionals about what they would like included in a database about transition.
- Decided on topics for the database.
- Set up a structure for the database.
- Began data entry July 2003.
- Designed the way the website will look.

- Set up an initial trial listserv among the project members.

What do we plan to do in the future?

- Enter more information into the computer.
- Tell people across Ontario about Transition Ontario.
- Check if Transition Ontario is useful for people in the process of transition.
- Keep the information in the database up to date.

How is the project being paid for?

So far the project has received money from Bloorview MacMillan Foundation, West Park Foundation, CanChild, and Ministry of Health and Long-term Care. Also, all the organizations involved have helped by giving their time, resources and supplies.

Who else is helping?

People with disabilities and their parents, Ability Online, Bloorview MacMillan Children's Centre, CanChild Centre for Disability Research, Centre for Independent Living Toronto, Easter Seal Society, Erinoak, Family Net, Gage Transition to Independent Living Toronto District School Board, Ontario March of Dimes, Ontario Association of Children's' Rehabilitation Centres & West Park Healthcare Centre.

If you want to help with Transition Ontario, or want more information about the project, please call toll-free (800) 363-2440, or (416) 425-6220, x3207, or email transitionontario@ablelink.org.

Peer Links is a quarterly publication of the Peer Support Program.

To become a member of the Peer Support Program, or to receive **Peer Links** on a regular basis, please contact Nancy at:

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Peer Links is also available on audiotape.

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