

SUMMER 2012

# FOCUS



Vista Psychological & Counseling Centre, LLC

## Tips for Positive Single Parenting

Parenting without a partner can be difficult. As fulfilling as the good days are, the bad days can be grueling, panic-inducing and lonely. Even if you co-parent or share custody of your child(ren), the time spent alone with him/her can make it seem like you have a hundred more opportunities to “mess up.” To get through it, here are a few tips to keep your good humor, your sanity and most importantly, your kids—no matter what age—intact.

### **Tip # 1: Remember: You Do Not Live Alone.**

As tempted as you may be to let the dishes and laundry pile up, to not comb your hair for two days on the weekends, or to not leave the house, always remember that there is someone else living under your roof. Your kids deserve to live in a clean and orderly environment, and to look at their parent and see someone who is well-groomed (and who at least appears to have things under control). If your child is old enough, give him an appropriate share of the responsibility for keeping some modicum of order the household. Even a four-year old

can sort laundry according to color (and they may even think it’s fun) and a six-year old can clean their room

### **Tip #2: Remember: You are the Adult.**

One of the best things about having a partner is being able to vent about work, friends and family and having your partner recognize it as such. But kids (no matter what age) don’t always recognize venting. If you share concerns about your boss, your colleagues and your bills, you could make your kids feel anxious and insecure. Home should be a safe place psychologically as well as physically. Don’t inadvertently threaten that by taking the office home with you.

### **Tip #3: Don’t Just Give In.**

Children and teens can sense a weakness. They can feel that chink in your armor that makes you say yes when you should say no, or give up in defeat just because you’re too tired to argue. In the long run, they rarely thank you for it, and they may even lose respect for you as an authority in the home. But what’s more, if you don’t set boundaries for them now,

they may never learn to set their own later.

### **Tip #4: Pencil it In.**

Time is at a premium when you’re a single parent. Between work, running a household, and keeping up with your kids, it may seem impossible to get everything done within the span of a 24-hour day. Sometimes the only way to ensure quality time with your kids is to pencil it in. While it is true that some of your finest bonding moments may happen spontaneously while folding laundry with your kids, it’s also good for them to know that at a specific place and time, they will be your only priority. If you are a single parent to more than one child, try to arrange time to spend with each of them exclusively. An activity as simple as reading with your child for 20 minutes each day can reap benefits that last a lifetime.

### **Tip #5: Pay Attention:**

When you’re tired and overwhelmed, the first thing to do is focus. You can drift through the entire week on auto-pilot, dropping kids off

And picking them up, fetching the dry cleaning and making lunches. If you’re not careful, your kids can go through important life changes right before your eyes without you noticing. At best, you will overlook some of the more difficult aspects of puberty but at worst you could miss changes in friends, dress, and warning signs in your child’s behavior that signal that something might be wrong. Or, you could miss the opportunity to get to know your kids, and to give them the well-deserved accolades and positive reinforcement they sorely need.

Everyday Parenting Ideas from Search Institute  
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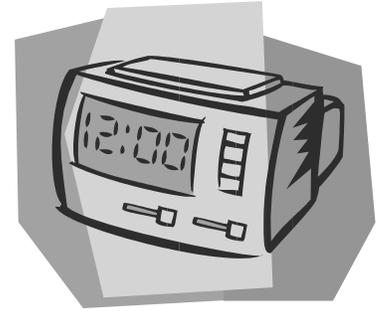
# High School Students Test Best With Seven Hours of Rest

Whether or not you know any high school students that actually get nine hours of sleep each night, that's what federal guidelines currently prescribe. A new Brigham Young University study found that 16-18 year olds perform better academically when they shave about two hours off that recommendation. "We're not talking about sleep deprivation," says study author Eric Eide. "The data simply says that seven hours is optimal at that age." the new study of Eide and fellow BYU economics professor Mark Showalter is the first in a series of studies where they examine sleep and its impact on our health and education. Surprisingly, the current federal guidelines are based on studies where teens were simply told to keep sleeping until they felt satisfied. "if you used that same approach for a guideline on how much people should eat, you would put them in a well stocked pantry and just watch how much they ate until they felt satisfied," Showalter said. "Somehow that doesn't seem right." In the new study, the BYU re-

searchers tried to connect sleep to a measure of performance or productivity. Analyzing data from a representative sample of 1,724 primary and secondary school students across the country, they found a strong relationship between the amount of sleep youths got and how they fared on standardized tests. But more sleep isn't always better. As they report in the *Eastern Economics Journal*, the right amount of sleep decreases with age:

- The optimal for 10-year-olds is 9 –9.5 hours
- The optimal for 12-year-olds is 8– 8.5 hours
- The optimal for 16-year-olds is 7 hours

"we don't look at it just from a 'you kid might be sleeping too much' perspective," Eide said. "From the other end, if a kid is only getting 5.5 hours of sleep a night because he's overscheduled, he would perform better if he got 90 minutes more each night." The size of the



*...the necessary amount of sleep decreases with age*

effect on test scores depends on a number of factors, but an 80-minute shift toward the optimum is comparable to the child's parents completing about one more year of schooling. "Most of our students at BYU, especially those that took early-morning seminary classes in high school, are going to realize the 9 hours of sleep isn't what the top students do," Showalter said.

Brigham Young University News,  
[news.byu.edu](http://news.byu.edu)

## How Well Do You Know Your Partner?

Do you know your partner's inner world? Take the quiz below and find out!

1. I can name my partner's best friends. ( ) yes ( ) no
2. I know what stresses my partner is currently facing. ( ) yes ( ) no
3. I know the names of some of the people who have been irritating my partner lately. ( ) yes ( ) no
4. I can tell you some of my partner's life dreams. ( ) yes ( ) no
5. I can tell you about my partner's basic philosophy of life. ( ) yes ( ) no
6. I can list the relatives my partner likes the least. ( ) yes ( ) no
7. I feel that my partner knows me pretty well. ( ) yes ( ) no
8. When we are apart, I often think fondly of my partner. ( ) yes ( ) no
9. I often touch or kiss my partner affectionately. ( ) yes ( ) no
10. My partner really respects me. ( ) yes ( ) no
11. There is fire and passion in this relationship. ( ) yes ( ) no
12. Romance is definitely still part of our relationship. ( ) yes ( ) no
13. My partner appreciates the things I do in this relationship. ( ) yes ( ) no
14. My partner generally likes my personality. ( ) yes ( ) no
15. Our sex life is mostly satisfying. ( ) yes ( ) no
16. At the end of the day my partner is glad to see me. ( ) yes ( ) no
17. My partner is one of my best friends. ( ) yes ( ) no
18. We just love talking to each other. ( ) yes ( ) no
19. There is lots of give and take in our discussions. ( ) yes ( ) no
20. My partner listens respectfully, even when we disagree. ( ) yes ( ) no
21. My partner is usually a great help as a problem solver. ( ) yes ( ) no
22. We generally mesh well on basic values and goals in life. ( ) yes ( ) no

**15 or more yes:** You have a lot of strength in your relationship. Congrats!

**8 to 14:** This is a pivotal time in your relationship. There are several strengths you can build upon but there are also some weaknesses that need your attention.

**7 or fewer:** Your relationship may be in trouble.

John Gottman, Ph.D. Emeritus Professor of Psychology, University of Washington, and cofounder, The Gottman Institute, Seattle. [www.gottman.com](http://www.gottman.com)

# Forgetfulness and Normal Memory Problems

It's normal to forget things from time to time, and it's normal to become somewhat more forgetful as you age. But how much forgetfulness is too much? How can you tell whether your memory lapses are within the scope of normal aging or are a symptom of something more serious? Healthy people can experience memory loss of memory distortion at any age. Some of these memory flaws become more pronounced with age, but—unless they are extreme and persistent—they are not considered indicators of Alzheimer's or other memory impairing illnesses.

## Seven Normal Memory Problems

**Transience** - This is the tendency to forget facts or events over time. You are most likely to forget information soon after you learn it. However, memory has a use-it-or-lose-it quality: memories that are called up and used frequently are least likely to be forgotten. Although transience might seem like a sign of memory weakness, brain scientists regard it as beneficial because it clears the brain of unused memories, making way for newer, more useful ones.

**Absentmindedness** - This type of forgetting occurs when you don't pay close enough attention. You forget where you just put your pen because you didn't focus on where you put it in the first place. You were thinking of something else (or, perhaps, nothing in particular), so your brain didn't encode the information securely. Absentmindedness also involves forgetting to do something at a prescribed time, like taking your medicine or keeping an appointment.

**Blocking** - Someone asks you a question and the answer is right on the tip of your tongue—you know that you know it, but you just can't think of it. This is perhaps the most familiar example of blocking, the temporary inability to retrieve a memory. In many cases, the barrier is a memory similar to the one you're looking for, and you retrieve the wrong one. This competing memory

is so intrusive that you can't think of the memory you want. Scientists think that memory blocks become more common with age and that they account for the trouble older people have remembering other people's names. Research shows that people are able to retrieve about half of the blocked memories within just a minute.

**Misattribution** - Misattribution occurs when you remember something accurately in part, but misattribute some detail, like the time, place, or person involved. Another kind of misattribution occurs when you believe a thought you had was totally original when, in fact, it came from something you had previously read or heard but had forgotten about. This sort of misattribution explains cases of unintentional plagiarism, in which a writer passes off some information as original when he or she actually read it somewhere before. As with several other kinds of memory lapses, misattribution becomes more common with age. As you age, you absorb fewer details when acquiring information because you have somewhat more trouble concentrating and processing information rapidly. And as you grow older, your memories grow older as well. And old memories are especially prone to misattribution.

**Suggestibility** - Suggestibility is the vulnerability of your memory to the power of suggestion—information that you learn about an occurrence after the fact becomes incorporated into your memory of the incident, even though you did not experience these details. Although little is known about exactly how suggestibility works in the brain, the suggestion fools your mind into thinking it's real memory.

**Bias** - Even the sharpest memory isn't a flawless snapshot of reality. In your memory, your perceptions are filtered by your personal biases—experiences, beliefs, prior knowledge, and even your mood at the moment. Your biases affect your perceptions and experiences when they're being encoded in your brain.

And when you retrieve a memory, your mood and other biases at that moment can influence what information you actually recall. Although everyone's attitudes and preconceived notions bias their memories, there's been virtually no research on the brain mechanisms behind memory bias or whether it becomes more common with age.

**Persistence** - Most people worry about forgetting things. But in some cases people are tormented by memories they wish they could forget, but can't. The persistence of memories of traumatic events, negative feelings, and ongoing fears is another form of memory problem. Some of these memories accurately reflect horrifying events, while other may be negative distortions of reality. People suffering from depression are particularly prone to having persistent, disturbing memories. So are people with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). PTSD can result from many different forms of traumatic exposure—for example, sexual abuse or wartime experiences. Flashbacks, which are persistent, intrusive memories of the traumatic event, are a core feature of PTSD.

Harvard Medical School  
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*Memory has a use-it-or-lose-it quality: memories that are called up and used frequently are least likely to be forgotten.*



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## Welcome to Vista!

Our FOCUS is on you  
by offering the very best in  
psychological and counseling services.  
Established in 2008, our clinicians hold  
over 60 years of combined experience.  
We are committed to helping you have  
greater emotional wellness  
and adjustment by offering individual,  
child and adolescent, couples,  
family, and group therapy.

We are available to you  
Monday thru Saturday with day and  
evening hours for your convenience.

## Things to Do When Stressed

The goal is to calm and contain your feelings. Try many things until you have found the things that work for you. It may not be listed on this page so keep trying no matter how silly or crazy you may feel trying them. Try to include things that appeal to many of your senses (touch, sight, hearing, smell and taste!).

- Breathe
- Listen to music
- Rock in a rocking chair
- Play with your pet
- Weed a garden
- Scream into a pillow
- Take a bath
- Watch a movie
- Paint
- Pray/meditate
- Go for a walk
- Journal
- Call somebody
- Color
- Walk around the mall
- Play golf
- Clean the house
- Throw ice at a tree
- Beat a drum
- Scream out loud
- Tear up a phonebook
- Read a book/magazine
- Ride a bike
- Search the internet
- Do your nails
- Rearrange the furniture
- Take pictures of nature
- Light scented candles
- Beat a pillow
- Shoot hoops
- Mow the lawn
- Build something
- Yoga
- Blow bubbles
- Take a nap

Source: Alabama Mental Health Counselors Association ([www.almhca.com](http://www.almhca.com))