

Juvenile Assessment Center
of Lee County
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The JAC Perspective

Happy Holidays From the JAC Staff



The Juvenile Assessment Center of Lee County ... assisting youth and their families to seek the treatment and programs they need to lead productive, crime free lives.

Law enforcement should call ahead to

**258-3461
or 258-3471**

when bringing an arrested youth to the JAC or to confirm that a youth is eligible for a civil citation.



The JAC of Lee County is operated by the Lee County Sheriff's Office in partnership with the Lee County Board of County Commissioners and the Department of Juvenile Justice.

Being Happy

During the holiday season there is often a focus on being "happy," but that sentiment is not always automatic. All individuals have challenges and setbacks, but research indicates that this has little to do with how content one is. Almost everyone, including very smart people, have at least a few cognitive distortions or biases in thinking. One type of bias in thinking that seems to be hard wired in us is that our brains are naturally biased to notice the negative. This is a human trait that has survival value in that the least wary of our ancestors were likely to be eaten! This tendency to focus on the negatives of a situation while ignoring the positives means that we sometimes



need to work a little harder on noticing the positives in a situation. Why is this important? Most of us have an endless stream of unspoken thoughts that run through our minds much of the time. It includes conscious thoughts as well as unconscious assumptions and beliefs. It is so automatic that sometimes one might not even be aware it is going on. How we think about things often contributes to our emotions and state of mind. Our thoughts about a situation send the same chemical message to the brain as it receives during actual experiences. The body responds with the same physical symptoms and emotional responses as if a stressful event or a pleasant event is actually happening. Focusing on the
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Don't Phub, Do Unplug

Now days it is pretty much accepted that focusing on one's cell phone is a distraction, such as, when driving. When someone is focused on their cell phone they are not paying close attention to other things...or to other people. Use of smart phones has become so widespread that some people have become desensitized and unaware that they are not fully present with the people they are with. There is now a term for it. When someone snubs someone else by texting or glancing at their phone instead of paying attention to the other person, it's called "phubbing." A person who does it is called a "phubber." Research from Baylor University found that for adult couples, when



one perceives that their partner is repeatedly distracted by his or her phone, they begin to feel less and less satisfied with the relationship. People tend not to feel that they are being listened to when others are texting or glancing at their phone at the same time they are talking to them. It is also hard for teens to feel a sense of connection during family activities when a parent seems more engaged with their phone than with them. Consider setting aside some time to unplug and be fully present when spending time with your family and others you care about. In this season of gift giving, remember that being fully "present" when spending time with those you care about is the gift that most people want (and need) the most.

Being Happy (cont.)

negatives while ignoring the positives can affect us emotionally, physiologically, and spiritually in very destructive ways. Sometimes these habits of biased negative thinking can contribute to the emotional, behavioral, and relational difficulties one experiences. One cannot always control the situation one is in or change other people, but by identifying our cognitive distortions and biases in thinking one can consciously choose to think about the situation or person in a more realistic, rational, and productive way. This doesn't mean to be in denial, but don't magnify the negatives either. This cognitive flexibility in thinking is an important part of developing resiliency and happiness. Teens who are resilient are able to bounce back from difficult times and cope with challenges. Research indicates that resilient and happy teens are better able to avoid risky behaviors such as violence, crime, substance abuse, and teen pregnancy. Happy peo-

ple practice certain habits that help inoculate them from life's setbacks and changes. These habits can be learned and with regular practice can become a way of life. Youth can also learn these habits when adults in their lives model the behaviors and encourage youth to do the same.

Take time to practice gratitude.

On a regular basis find time to identify the good in life and in other people. Then give thanks to others, to oneself, or to a higher power. Research finds that practicing gratitude is good for one's overall wellbeing. People who practice gratitude are healthier, more successful at reaching their goals, and more optimistic. What if one doesn't feel there is anything to be thankful for? It turns out that even faking the act of being grateful can be a good place to start. When one chooses to act grateful for what one has it signals the brain to stay in sync with the behavior and feelings of gratitude follow.

Regularly focus on moments of joy from the past. Research shows that the brain actually re-experiences its original sensation of pleasure when one reminisces about joyful experiences from the past.

Let bygones be bygones. Holding on to anger and resentments from the past is toxic to oneself. While we cannot change the past, we do have a choice in what role the events that inspired our resentment play in our present. Letting go of resentment is not a gift to the person we resent, but rather a gift to ourselves.

Cultivate personal relationships. Despite all the things we think will bring us happiness – buying new things, more money, promotions, awards, winning the lottery – research indicates that the main key to being happy is having close personal relationships.

“Your thoughts are like a magnifying glass. Whatever you focus on will expand.”

Proposed Change in Florida's Direct File Law

Florida leads the nation in the number of juvenile offenders that are transferred to adult court. Approximately 10,000 youth in Florida were transferred to adult court in the past five years. The decision to place a juvenile in the adult system is called “direct file.” It is a power currently yielded largely by state prosecutors in Florida. When a case is direct filed a youth loses all benefits of the juvenile court and is treated in all respects as an adult – including receiving adult jail and prison sentences and adult probation. A bipartisan group of Florida lawmakers has proposed new restrictions on how juvenile offenders can be transferred to adult court in Florida. The legisla-

ture will be considering this issue in the 2016 legislative session under House Bill 129 and Senate Bill 314. The proposed reforms would require prosecutors to seek a judge's approval to direct file a youth. Opponents of the current direct file process argue that youth placed in adult court have less opportunity for rehabilitation and have higher recidivism rates than youth who are dealt with through the juvenile justice system. They argue that direct filing youth adds to the social and economic costs to the state. They also point to disparities in the use of the direct file option among different jurisdictions in Florida and argue that justice practices should not be based

upon what zip code the offense occurred in. Also, youth sent to the adult criminal justice system are more vulnerable to being victims of rape and suicide than adults. Proponents of leaving the statute as it is point to the narrower timeframes youth spend confined within the juvenile justice system compared to youth dealt with in the adult criminal justice system. The bill, if passed, would not prevent a youth from being prosecuted as an adult. Serious offenses, including murder, manslaughter, and sexual battery would be exceptions under the proposed reform and not require a judge's approval. The 2016 Florida Legislature convenes on January 12th.