

From the Heart...

... Life Skills for Today

By Sharon L. Benedict MS, ACC



Relationships that Linger

Here we are, starting around the New Year mountain again with this month's focus on *Relationships-Core Values*. Looking back over 2008 and where I was on that New Years' day, I don't believe any of us could have predicted the events and circumstances of that year. No matter your politics or your pocketbook, 2009 will definitely be a unique year for us all. But at this moment my thoughts are still lingering around how much I loved having my daughters and grandson with us for a whole two weeks during the holidays.

You can be sure I had my camera out with every moment taking pictures and movies for the memories I hold dear . . . watching my grandson, Jasper Grey, play with Grandpa and his "chu-chu" train together; playing with play dough with his Mama; racing their remote cars down the side street; Jasper constantly asking for a piece of dried mango he loves so much. And having to say no, not yet; and hearing him sigh "Oh...OK" as he finishes his meal; then gives us big smiles and yells out "mango, please!" One of the more sweet moments is when he calls out to us, Nana and PawPaw, to show us he can count to ten now and say the whole alphabet. Not bad for 3 ½ years old!

The emotions run high for this grandmother right now as my older daughter, Kimberly, went back to Corpus Christi; and my youngest, Kelly and Jasper, returned to

California today. Oh, how I wish they all would stay nearby. Any other grandparents out there going through the same emotions as you say your goodbyes? I bet there are. I know our children must live their own lives and follow their own dreams. Yet, the goodbyes are so hard sometimes. And tears seem to flow so readily with each thought. So, I had better not linger here too long or your newspaper will be drenched with wistful tears!

I'm sure I will get back in the swing of things shortly. With my type of personality I will undoubtedly be fast putting the Christmas decorations away as my husband soothes my lonely heart with hugs and mealtime cuisines he whips up so lovingly. He too needs some special hugs. But, as for mealtime cuisines, I'll leave that to his very capable hands. I'm sure I'll find other creative ways to soothe his lonely heart too!

So, as you journey through this New Year, may you find special ways to cherish those relationships near and dear to your heart—all through the year. And no matter how far away your loves ones may be, keep in touch so they know your love, care, and prayers are always there for them. You never know, they may miss you so much sometime in the future, that one day they will call you up and say they are coming home to stay! Grandparents can always dream!

--

Sharon L. Benedict, MS, ACC, is a certified life wellness coach-consultant, specializing in life skills, wellness, and creative arts development for individuals, businesses and organizations (www.harvestenterprises-sra.com). She welcomes your questions and comments and can be contacted at seekreachachieve@gvvc.com.

From the Heart...

... Life Skills for Today

By Sharon L. Benedict MS, ACC



Nice or Nosey Neighbor—which one are you?

Do you know your neighbors? Is your relationship with them casual where you just say hello as you leave for work or return home in the evening? Or have you actually spent some time together, watched their house, and fed their dog for them when they were out of town? Have they even become close friends of the family?

For many of us, we sometimes keep our distance...knowing just enough so we feel somewhat safe in our neighborhood. There are those who choose to live in a gated community; yet, that gate doesn't necessarily make them totally safe more than any other neighborhood. Those for either personal preference or economic reasons live in a more risky part of town often times get to know their neighbors much more quickly—not only for their own safety sake but also wanting to help each other.

My husband and I have lived in many different neighbor environments—one of high density on a hillside neighboring an East Los Angeles state university. We have also lived in upscale acreage communities. Both have had their ups and downs. Although the risks seemed higher in east LA, we got to know some of the nicest singles and families with young children trying to better their lives while strapped financially. And in our upscale neighborhood, we also met many very special families. Yet, we also had a well-known drug dealer with three unfriendly pit bulls right across the street. Fortunately, the dealer was found out by the police and hauled him away leaving a

4,000 sq. ft. house with attached office and pool in bad shape; and torn up by the dogs being confined inside a lot (unless they escaped occasionally). The animal control people eventually gathered them up.

Sometimes getting to know our neighbors and even becoming friends can be a delicate process, no matter your environs. There are neighbors who just as soon be anonymous to everyone (as a recluse would be or our drug dealer neighbor was) or are just too busy with their lives to connect past an occasional hello. Yet, learning the intricacies of neighborliness become valuable helps for building relationships and connecting to our own neighborhood and community.

Where do you start without becoming a nuisance and eventually being labeled a “nosey neighbor?” There is a definitely a balance between making sure you and your family are secure with your inquiries and becoming a congenial neighbor. Here are some starter tips I have learned over the years:

1. Give your love, heart, and time to your own family FIRST so you won't be known as the screaming family down the street! Your neighbors will definitely appreciate it.
2. When you first move into the neighborhood, introduce yourself and your family to your neighbors on each side and across the street.
3. Always offer your own basics when asking about theirs—married, single, children, job, hobbies, community interests, people you both know).
4. After you get to know each other a little and you feel comfortable with the connection, offer to watch their house or feed their animals when out of town. Give them your phone number and email, if appropriate for you; and that you

will try to be available for family emergencies if they need some help. Being available for emergencies involves a degree of commitment on your part you need to be comfortable with. So, consider this carefully before offering. Your neighbor just might take you up on the offer. And, remember, we all have our own definition of “emergency.” Yet, most neighbors are respectful of what those criteria are based on, related to the relationship ya’ll have developed so far.

5. Very important! Respect your neighbor’s privacy. Give your neighbor time to reach out to you. Don’t be pushy and on their doorstep every day or even every week. Be sensitive to opportunities they present to you to serve and befriend your neighbor.

These are just a sample of helps that are just plain common sense, and some I’ve learned by the mistakes I have made with my neighbors. Next issue, I will cover some intricacies of relating to a nosey and even nasty neighbor—not just being nice but a good neighbor even if they are annoying. Keep in mind, your response to that neighbor often times is central to breaking the icy glares or fiery fights that seem to routinely show up.

Until next time, watch for opportunities to be one of those “special” neighbors everyone wants next door.

--

Sharon L. Benedict, MS, ACC, is a certified life wellness coach-consultant, specializing in life skills, wellness, and creative arts development for individuals, businesses and organizations (www.harvestenterprises-sra.com). She welcomes your questions and comments and can be contacted at seekreachachieve@gvtc.com.

From the Heart...

... Life Skills for Today

By Sharon L. Benedict MS, ACC



Warming up to Nosey & even Nasty Neighbors

Whenever you have a run in with a neighbor nearby or down the street, what is your first typical response? Most of the time, we just shrug it off, labeling that neighbor nosey, a nuisance, or even nasty. We do our best to avoid that neighbor by leaving for work earlier or later than they do, or just avoiding eye contact as we drive away. We may even call another neighbor to vent about the nasty one and wish they would move out of the neighborhood and relieve us all of their unfriendly presence.

Yet, there may be a better way to respond to someone we really don't know very well. Every family has their rough times and moments. And there just may be some inconvenient but not unsafe issues best left alone to accept and chill out about. Can you think of any that fit this category? I know one—lawn not mowed for months, or even occasionally a barking dog.

I'm sure there are many more we could think of very quickly that would tempt us to label our neighbor nosey, a nuisance, or nasty. Yet, there are some intricacies of relating to a nosey and even nasty one. It is possible to avoid becoming one because of "those neighbors." You can actually not only be a nice neighbor but considered by all to be a good one, no matter how annoying the people over the fence might be.

Believe it or not, your response to that neighbor often times is central to breaking the icy glares or fiery fights that seem to routinely show up. Attitude is everything! I

know, you are probably thinking, “Sharon, you don’t know MY neighbor!” In spite of the fact that there may be a line your neighbor crosses that impact more than your side of the fence, let’s offer some more positive thoughts about those somewhat less annoying lifestyle habits of your neighbor. Here are some tips offered in www.ehow.com I found very practical:

Step 1: Be good to your neighbor even if they are annoying.

Step 2: Do not focus on the negative side of your neighbor's life. Treat them as your family by simply recognizing their presence.

Step 3: Be patient all the times. Being a good neighbor takes a lot of patience to accept their actions. It can be very intimidating to hear loud noise or voices from them but be considerate to them.

Step 4: Remember that we are all human and make mistakes. Be considerate to others and be patient.

Step 5: Do not just focus your attention on your annoying neighbor. Ask yourself what you can do to make your mind at peace with the situation.

Real estate expert, Barbara Corcoran, offers us some practical advice from her 2007 MSNBC news article on ***How to handle bad neighbors***, she believes are failsafe strategies:

1. Call ahead and pick a time to talk.
2. Meet on the sidewalk or on the property line.
3. Don’t accuse; let them know how the problem bothers you and suggest ways to solve it together.

4. If that doesn't work, check out local noise and disturbance ordinances and write a personal letter. Offer a solution.
5. Consult your condo or block association. Ask them to send a standard letter citing the ordinance or by-law. A condominium association's right of first refusal is a little-known clause that can be used to buy your neighbor out.
6. Should that fail, call your local precinct. Keep a record of your complaint.
7. Call in an expert mediator. (To find a mediator, check with your local courthouse, police precinct, or bar association).
8. As a last resort, file a complaint in court.
9. For the property line fanatic, walk the property line together to determine what belongs to whom; consider having the property surveyed to nip the problem in the bud.

I would add one thing to these tips. Somewhere around #4-5, if the problem is impacting other neighbors, ask if one other neighbor could go with you to talk with the other neighbor. It's important to not gang up on the neighbor you are about to approach. Both of you should behave respectfully at all times trying to reach a shared solution.

Next time, the focus will be on making sure your family, especially your kids, know your neighbors and, hopefully, feel safe with them.

--

Sharon L. Benedict, MS, ACC, is a certified life wellness coach-consultant, specializing in life skills, wellness, and creative arts development for individuals, businesses and organizations (www.harvestenterprises-sra.com). She welcomes your questions and comments and can be contacted at seekreachachieve@gvtc.com.

From the Heart. . .

. . . Life Skills for Today

By Sharon L. Benedict MS, ACC



Your Kids & Your Neighbors

We all know we can't keep our kids safe 100% of the time. Yet, we can make our homes safer from mishaps and dangers by getting to know our neighbors. There is an ancient Hebrew verse that says, "Do not devise evil against your neighbor, for he dwells by you for safety's sake." Another version of this verse is, "Do not contrive or dig up or cultivate evil against your neighbor, who dwells trustingly and confidently beside you."

So, the first step is to be a good neighbor yourself. And keep in mind this gem from another Hebrew proverb, "Judge a man not by the words of his mother, but from the comments of his neighbors." Now that you have officially been deemed a good neighbor, that means you are already on your way to getting to know your neighbors next door. Once you feel it's time & appropriate, bring your kids along to visit with the neighbor in your presence. Then afterwards ask your kids their impressions.

Throughout your children's growing up years, one of the most important things you can offer them is age-appropriate words of wisdom and ground rules for their own safety with neighbors and strangers. Here are just

a few. Be sure to visit Kids U.S. government portal, <http://www.kids.gov/>, and KidsHealth for more, www.kidshealth.org.

- Never accept candy or gifts from a stranger.
- Never go anywhere with a stranger, even if it sounds like fun.
- Run away and scream if someone follows them or tries to force them into a car.
- Say **no** to anyone who tries to make them do something you've said is wrong or touch them in a way that makes them feel uncomfortable.
- Always tell you or another trusted adult if a stranger asks personal questions, exposes himself or herself, or otherwise makes them feel uneasy. Reassure kids that it's OK to tell you even if the person made them promise not to or threatened them in some way.
- Always ask permission from a parent to leave the house, yard, or play area or to go into someone's home.
- Make sure younger kids know their names, address, phone number including area code, and who to call in case of an emergency—plus review how to use 911 or a local emergency number.
- Point out the homes of friends around the neighborhood where your kids can go in case of trouble.

Having your kids gain this knowledge and neighborly connection is even more important for latchkey kids who come home on their own or even on the bus to an empty house.

Next issue, your kids' cyber relationship safety will be the focus. I leave you now with more words of wisdom to contemplate, with a laugh or two from around the world and ancient cultures

(<http://www.inspirationfalls.com/neighbors-quotes/>) –

A bad neighbor is a misfortune, as much as a good one is a great blessing—

Hesiod

A good neighbor is a fellow who smiles at you over the back fence, but doesn't climb over it—Arthur Baer

As man draws nearer to the stars, why should he not also draw nearer to his neighbor?—Lyndon B. Johnson

Borrow trouble for yourself, if that's your nature, but don't lend it to your neighbors—Rudyard Kipling

Don't complain about the snow on your neighbor's roof when your own doorstep is unclean—Confucius

Don't laugh when your neighbors oven is on fire—Lithuanian Proverb

Don't throw stones at your neighbors, if your own windows are glass—Benjamin Franklin

Fortune and misfortune are neighbors—German Proverb

Good fences make good neighbors—American Proverb

If you burn your neighbor's house down, it doesn't make your house look any better—Lou Holtz

If you want to annoy your neighbors, tell the truth about them—Pietro Aretino

It's better to pick a fight with your in-laws than with your neighbors—Indian

Proverb

It's not necessary to blow out your neighbor's light to let your own shine—M.R.

Dehaan

It never rains on your neighbors without you getting your feet wet—Chinese

Proverb

Love is blind — but not the neighbors—Mexican Proverb

Love thy neighbor as thyself, but choose your neighborhood.—Louise Beal

Love your neighbors, but don't pull down the fence—Chinese Proverb

Mix with your neighbors, and you learn what's doing in your own house—Yiddish

Proverb

No man can worship God or love his neighbor on an empty stomach—Woodrow

Wilson

No one is rich enough to do without a neighbor—Danish Proverb

Nothing makes you more tolerant of a neighbor's noisy party than being there—

Franklin P Jones

Your own safety is at stake when your neighbor's house is in flames—Horace

Recession is when a neighbor loses his job. Depression is when you lose yours—Ronald Reagan

Regard your neighbor's gain as your own gain, and your neighbor's loss as your own loss—Tai Shang Kan Ying P'len

Serve your neighbors as you would be served yourself—Japanese Proverb

Sweep first before your own door, before you sweep the doorsteps of your neighbors—Swedish Proverb

The nicest woman is your own; the nicest harvest is your neighbors—Korean Proverb

We make our friends; we make our enemies; but God makes our next door neighbor—Gilbert Chesterton

--

Sharon L. Benedict, MS, ACC, is a certified life wellness coach-consultant, specializing in life skills, wellness, and creative arts development for individuals, businesses and organizations (www.harvestenterprises-sra.com). She welcomes your questions and comments and can be contacted at seekreachachieve@gvtc.com.

From the Heart. . .

. . . Life Skills for Today

By Sharon L. Benedict MS, ACC



Your Kids & Cyber Relationships

In our world today, the internet is THE way to communicate and connect. Except for a few pure traditionalists, we can't do without it. That's how we stay in touch with friends, find help with homework, and do every kind of research on the latest news or the next great place to visit.

Yet, the internet also tempts us with many ways to waste the precious time we have each day. It's also so easy to get into trouble with strangers and friends alike. Finding a balance for ourselves in cyberspace is one thing. Yet, as parents, our kids' cyber relationship safety has priority. How do we help our kids stay safe? Here is a sample of tips offered by KidsHealth, www.kidshealth.org, as well as the government website, www.kids.gov.

I encourage you to visit these websites to gain much needed advice on internet safety for your children. One of the most important things you can do is sit down with your kids at the computer and cruise through together those websites they frequent and talk about what you find there. Maintaining your composure and your secure relationship with your kids is paramount as you start to give them a list of do's and don't.

- First Rule of Smart Surfing—Remain as anonymous as possible. Keep all private information private (i.e. full name, home address, phone number , Social Security number, passwords, names of family members, credit card numbers). Most credible people and companies will never ask for this type of information online.
- Think carefully before you create an email address or screen name. Web experts recommend that you use a combination of letters and numbers in both — and that you don't identify whether you're male or female.
- In chat rooms, use a nickname that's different from your screen name.
- Keep online friendships in the virtual world. Meeting online friends face to face carries more risks than other types of friendships (too easy to pretend they are someone else).
- Cyberbullying—refers to cruel or bullying messages sent to you online from former friends and strangers. They can be irritating and, in some cases, even frightening. Best to ignore them. If they persist, get help from parents or a trusted adult.
- Online Annoyances—hackers that add you to their spam lists. Use blockers to keep them out of your mailbox.

Learn much more about safe surfing, chatting, IM'ing, blogging, as well as protecting yourself from cybercrime by visiting the government website. Just put in "internet safety" in search. You will be glad you did.

--

Sharon L. Benedict, MS, ACC, is a certified life wellness coach-consultant, specializing in life skills, wellness, and creative arts development for individuals, businesses and organizations (www.harvestenterprises-sra.com). She welcomes your questions and comments and can be contacted at seekreachachieve@gvtc.com.