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July is Purposeful Parenting Month

By Angela Comsa, Director of Child and Adolescent Services for Regional Mental Health

July is Purposeful Parenting Month, a time for parents to emphasize open communication and support children's growing independence. There are eight elements to Purposeful Parenting: structure and order, responsibility and accountability, firmness and fairness, limits and boundaries, consistency, problem-solving skills, understanding and unconditional love.

This summer, look for opportunities to give your child age-appropriate independence. It's important to give your child as much responsibility as they can manage.

Clearly communicate expectations. Make the consequences of breaking rules clear. Be firm and fair. Mistakes will be made. It's important to remain consistent and issue appropriate consequences.

Five Tips on How to Be a Purposeful Parent:

1. Connect and interact. For many families, relaxed summer days offer opportunities for parents to initiate meaningful conversations. Find opportunities to engage in common interests. Join your child in activities they are interested in. If your child is a sports fan, watch sports together. If video games are his passion, ask him to teach you to play. Parents who strive to have close, positive relationships are more likely to have children that make healthy and safe decisions.

2. Be aware of where children are and what they watch. When children are not at home or school, you should know where they are. Use parental controls on phones, computers and tablets. Trust them to a certain level. If they break the rules, implement consequences.

3. Take concrete steps to help adolescents avoid harmful situations. Be home at key times of the day (in the morning, after school, at dinner time and at bedtime). Watch social media usage. Today's parents face unique challenges in protecting kids in the digital world. Be familiar with social media: KICK, Twitter, Instagram, facebook and more.

4. Make family time a priority. Eat together as a family every day. Eliminate cell phones and interruptions. Try to squeeze in time on the weekends, when there are fewer commitments. If schedules make it impossible, implement movie night or game night.

5. Pay attention to your own well-being. If you don't take care of yourself, you won't be in the position to take care of your child. Include physical activity, a healthy diet, and plenty of sleep into your daily routine. Parenting is difficult. None of us are perfect. Forgive yourself for mistakes. There are lessons demonstrated by apologizing to your kids for parental mistakes.

Struggling parents often turn to Regional Mental Health for help. Individual and family therapy is offered. Many only need a few sessions to see improvement. Regional Mental Health utilizes the Systematic Training and Effective Parenting program (STEP). STEP promotes a more participatory family structure by fostering responsibility, independence, and competence in children; improving communication between parents and children; and helping children learn from the natural and logical consequences of their own choices.

For information about Regional Mental Health Services, visit <http://www.regionalmentalhealth.org/> or call 219.769.4005.