

Farm Youth Stress & Challenges

“What Do You Tell the Kids?”

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Farm Youth have varying degrees of “mastery” to deal with the opportunities and stressors of life. Learning opportunities abound on the farm, but growing up on a farm can also bring challenges—this fact sheet’s focus.

Challenges are normal and can be healthy as they can push youth to do things that promote healthy growth. It is in the process of dealing with and overcoming challenges that can help provide deeper meaning in life and can help youth develop a life skill of “Mastery” along the way.

Mastery is the ability to both conceptualize and actualize solving a problem, create a project, communicate an idea, achieve a life skill, or using a skill to deal with or better manage a situation or opportunity. The aim here is to better develop Mastery over life’s more “down” times.

When Youth are Down with a:

Dent, Doubt, Damage, Demand, Denial, Departure, Disappointment, Discouragement, Delay, Debt, Danger, Deficit, Difficulty, Dispute, Disturbance, Division, Defeat, Depression, Destruction, Disaster, Disability, Disease, Divorce, or even Death....

What Do You Tell the Kids?

The Power of Positive Reality is a mindset to help youth use the Power of Positive Focus that hopefully leads to the Power of Positive Definition of who they are that then leads to the Power of Positive Reality in their lives. Relating the Power of Positive Reality to Farm Child Psychology is depicted in the table below. The goal of Reality is to foster youth to positive Actions, Behaviors, Habits, Performance, Decisions and thus Positive Reality on the right. But, in order to get youth there, we need to step back and help youth create or envision positive Thoughts, Images, Ideas, Perceptions, Mission to help youth create a positive FOCUS—a mindset to overcome negative stimuli.

Farm Youth Psychology 101:

The POWER of POSITIVE REALITY

Thoughts → Feelings → Actions

Images → Attitudes → Behaviors

Ideas → Values → Habits

Perceptions → Principles → Performance

Mission → Identity → Decisions

FOCUS → DEFINITION → REALITY

Positive Thoughts are a precursor to positive **Feelings** and thus, positive **Actions**. A common parenting skill is to threaten youth to quit this action, behavior or habit or to perform a certain way or make this decision, maybe even harping on this daily to get this end-result or action. As children grow, they tend to get rooted pictures or images, ideas, perceptions from parents and peers, teachers and television, siblings and society that may or may not be healthy.

Trying to sway youth towards a healthy **action** that conflicts with their **perception** or **mind picture** of what is the norm may mean a parent needs to go back and adjust the camera or brain lens to help youth understand why their **image** might need to be changed first for healthier **decision-making**. But, the reality of getting from picture to good decision has another step. Attached to the thoughts, pictures and perceptions are often feelings, attitudes, values and principles that often need changing to get at



the desired action, behavior or habit. Bottom line is that positive thoughts or images are precursors to positive feelings or attitudes which are precursors to positive actions, habits or behaviors—Thus, the power of positive reality in youth development.

Well-Adjusted Youth tend to come from well-adjusted parents. Modeling healthy behavior is key. Witnessing unhealthy conflict due to farm or family can be harmful, a source of unhealthy pictures or perceptions that may get rooted in a child’s mind forever. Farm and family stress may cause youth to be anxious, scared or sleepless and may respond by acting out or turning inward, and having trouble interacting, concentrating and performing in school or elsewhere (NERMEN). All families have some conflict and challenges or they are not normal. ☺

It is more important to deal with a child’s thoughts more than feelings (Rosemond) as often parents give overt attention to a child’s feelings at the expense of well-adjusted thought processes to help them better deal with their feelings. **It is more important to empathize with a child than to sympathize** with them. The former tends to help with understanding their situation. The latter tends to help them feel sorry for themselves. But, in times of great grief, sympathy may be the needed form of compassion.

**Acknowledge Thoughts...I understand...you’re thinking...
Empathize with Feelings...I sense...you must feel....**

Communicating with Youth under Stress is not an easy task! Its success is a product of good relations. Success of relations is a product of good communication! Thus, it's a "Catch 22" situation needing a "TALK" plan!

Talk Meaning—help youth see and appreciate the "meaning" of small, good things in their lives, starting early on. They find greater happiness and satisfaction, even amidst difficulty, and help understand the bigger "meaning" of other things.

Talk Definition—help youth "define" who they are in their strengths and abilities, not just athletic or musical talents, for example. Call attention to their goodness, kindness and sensitivity and "encourage each other (them) daily while it is still today" (Hebrews 3:13) with positives points mentioned much more than negative ones.

Talk Positive Reality—help youth "realize" that if they want to feel good about themselves they need to "think" good about themselves. Do they see themselves as weak and down in a hole or strong, sitting on top of the world? Both **Humility** and **Confidence** need to be learned in their internal reality. Focus on the positive and learn from the rest as youth are as happy as they decide to be.

Talk Relative—help youth relativize, not magnetize problems. Often farm youth don't have all the things others do. Talking the previous topics of meaning, definition and reality, can help youth realize how blessed they may be without things or in comparison with other youth around the world.

Talk Respect—help youth develop humility and thus develop a sense of respect for others and the world around them. Understanding that respect for parents, teachers, coaches and other role models, barring and wrongdoing, creates a value of humility within oneself towards others. Humility is often a more important interpersonal value than pride, for communication skills later in life.

Talk Joy—help youth experience joy in relationships by:

- Being **genuinely** interested/concerned using eye contact and focus, which means not letting cell phones get in the way!
- Being appreciative with attitude of gratitude.
- Being accepting, yet disciplined in righteousness.
- Being joyful, looking at blessings even in sorrow and joking around as appropriate.
- Being affectionate and empathetic which means using a tender touch. (adapted from NERMEN)

Talk Their Level—Adults can be intimidating to youth often simply because height is associated with power. Sitting or kneeling to get closer to their level can often improve communication response with a simple gesture for more level "eye to eye" contact.

Talk in Their Time—Youth often are not as talkative when their minds are occupied elsewhere. Meal times, car ride time, family game time and/or lying in bed/prayer time are often more responsive times when youth "might" talk. ☺

Talk Their Talk— Use words and examples they can relate to and create "word pictures" connected to their interests to give better meaning. Youth tend not to be proactive in talking so, like



boating, if just left to natural currents, busyness and competing interests will drift people away. It takes time and energy to keep youth on course with purpose.

Talk Their Walk—youth are growing up in an environment today much different than parents. Farm and family stress might pale compared to bullying and social challenges brought on by technology and social media, which have made it ever so difficult to walk a mile in their shoes. When their "walk" is less than good, youth need support, security and safety measure, knowing they are not alone and that family is their safe haven where boundaries and the "**fundamentals**" of life are found. Youth need safety and boundaries, but help them see the **fun** or meaning in the **mental** challenge of "thinking" through life.



So, What Do You Tell the Kids? Farm youth, when times are tough, can often rise to the occasion, and even help deal with the fire or problem, if supported with clear and caring communication. Protecting loved ones from bad news is not always best, as often, kids may be aware of something, feeling emotional charges. Mistrust can develop if not being told the truth. If age appropriate, give youth the opportunity to appreciate the real concerns of the family—it can teach youth to deal with difficulty—and can help build resiliency in your children. Bring youth along in the discussions rather than just announce the bottom line plan. Let them know they are loved and did not cause this as they often blame themselves. Listen to them without criticizing their worries. Check their level of understanding and know a one minute chat, a gentle hug or a reassuring word may be the best way to communicate with youth under stress.

When Youth Turn to You, do you? a) **Turn away**—ignoring bid for connection and continuing what you were doing...
b) **Turn against**—can't you see I'm busy...why do you want to waste your money...where'd you get that crazy idea...
c) **Turn toward**—well that sounds like fun...I'm happy you shared with me...that is interesting...but... (adapted from NERMEN)