

Are the Children Well?



QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER OF THE COALITION

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Thank you Sharon Stewart!



We bid a fond farewell to our valued tri town partner, colleague and friend, Sharon Stewart, recently retired Assistant Superintendent of Student Support Services for the Tri-Town School Union. As a founding member of The Coalition, TTC's substance abuse prevention program, Sharon served as a vital conduit between The Coalition and our tri-town elementary schools. A passionate advocate for the Developmental Assets (experiences and qualities that positively influence youth, helping them become caring, responsible, and productive adults), Sharon sought creative and innovative ways for TTC to work with TTSU leadership and staff to help us grow (and grow it has!) and expand this initiative. Sharon's partnership furthered our relationship with Masconomet through her participation on the Coalition's Data Assessment team which is responsible for the biennial implementation of the Youth Risk Behavior Survey among other activities. With deep knowledge, experience and understanding of the social and emotional needs of children and expertise in data analysis and interpretation, Sharon has been a guiding force on our team; instrumental in the impact and influence of The Coalition and Tri-Town Council leading to better outcomes for our youth and our community.

We will miss Sharon's thoughtful, insightful observations, sense of humor, roll up your sleeves and get it done attitude and always patient and compassionate counsel and support. Sharon, your contributions of time, talent and passionate advocacy for the well-being of youth have been invaluable to our agency and community. We wish you all the best as you embrace this new chapter in your life!

Massachusetts Voters Approve Recreational Use of Marijuana....What's Next?

Massachusetts voters joined California, Maine, and Nevada in approving the recreational use of marijuana on November 8th. (**If tri-town voters decided for the state marijuana would still be illegal – the NO votes were higher by as much as 14% in the tri-town.**) Lawmakers have some time to figure out the taxation and regulation of marijuana use but there are some immediate changes that come with passage of the law.

Short Term (as of December 15th):

- Those 21 and older may possess up to 1 ounce of marijuana in public and up to 10 ounces in private.
- Residents can grow up to 12 marijuana plants in their homes, provided they are out of plain sight and appropriately secured.
- Smoking marijuana in public places is banned and is forbidden anywhere smoking is already prohibited.
- Driving under the influence of marijuana will be penalized the same as driving under the influence of alcohol.
- Public consumption or an open container of marijuana in a car is punishable by a fine of up to \$500.

Question 4 Results:

	<u>NO</u>	<u>YES</u>
Boxford	52%	48%
Middleton	53.6%	46.4%
Topsfield	57.2%	42.8%

Thank you tri-town!

Long –term (2017 and beyond):

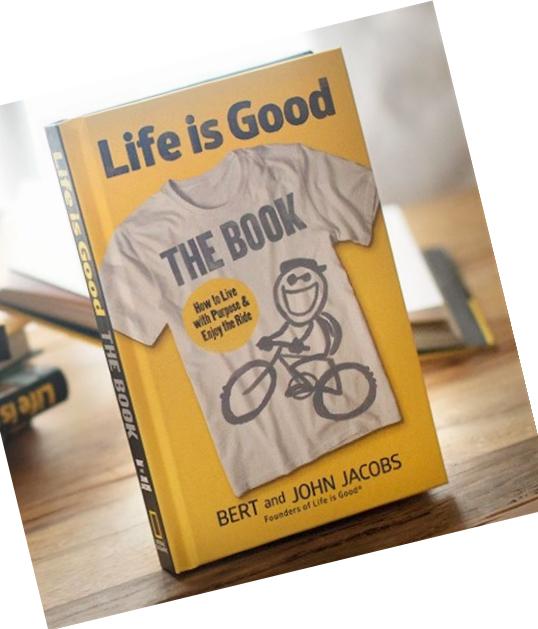
- Treasurer and Governor appoint 3 member Cannabis Control Commission (CCC) and 15 member Advisory Board to regulate adult use of marijuana
- Advisory Board and CCC determine regulation of growing, marketing and retail sales of the drug. Determine how licenses to sell pot will be issued and how fines/penalties for non-compliance will be managed.
- Cities and town can limit but not ban retail stores, cultivation facilities and marijuana manufacturers.
- Retail sales will not be legal until January 2018 when the first licenses will be issued. (Expect to start accepting applications for licenses in October 2017)

Marijuana: Resources for Parents and Teens

- ⇒ [DrugFree.org: Talking with your teen about marijuana](#)
- ⇒ [DrugAbuse.gov: Facts parents need to know about marijuana](#)
- ⇒ [NIDA: Marijuana Facts for Teens](#)
- ⇒ [Advice from the Experts](#)
- ⇒ [Talking to your teen about marijuana: The Do's and Don'ts](#)
- ⇒ [Resources from the Coalition—a program of Tri-Town Council](#)

Life is GOOD! Tri-Town Community Read Spreads the Power of Optimism

by Tri-Town Library Directors



"In the book, Bert and John Jacobs share the personal and professional highlights of their unique ride—from their scrappy upbringing outside Boston to the unlikely runaway success of their business. The brothers illuminate ten key "superpowers" accessible to us all: openness, courage, simplicity, humor, gratitude, fun, compassion, creativity, authenticity, and love. Their story, illustrated with the company's iconic artwork, shows how to overcome obstacles and embrace opportunities—whether it's growing stronger from rejection, letting your imagination loose, or simplifying your life to focus on what matters most."

Life is Good :The Book continues to be an energizing phenomenon that is having a tangible, positive effect in people's lives! Flint Library Director Melissa Gaspar says "Life is Good" was chosen for the Tri-Town Community Read program because of its universal appeal. The writing is clear and accessible and the concepts are appropriate for all ages, she says.

Recently, a Flint Library patron shared with Melissa that she was inspired to do something to help bring people together and get people to stop arguing. "The book just makes you want to do something to help make a more peaceful world."

Another Flint patron commented that she totally enjoyed the book, appreciating that it's a fun, light read and it's easy to just pick up and start reading any chapter. Others appreciate the feel-good vibes inspired by the book's artwork, and still others feel a kinship with the authors'

local origins. The most frequently mentioned idea from the book is the expression "I get to....." instead of "I have to..." Many people have related stories of how this simple change in perspective has made a large impact on their lives.

Tri-Town librarians agree that the *Life is Good* community read is a very different experience and are thrilled with the community's response. Becca Crockett and Laura Zalewski reflected that in the past, Topsfield's Community Reads were designed to bring the community together, but in reality they found they were only reaching those who already considered themselves "readers." Not the case with *Life is Good!* One woman remarked how amazed she was when her husband read the book. "I was so surprised because he never reads anything. But he read the book and he really liked it." On any given day, most of each tri-town library's 50+ copies of the book are circulating among patrons looking to get in on the positive mood growing within the community. Even those who don't normally read nonfiction have been charmed and inspired by the book.



Cole School 2nd graders created a Gallery of Gratitude to show how 'Life is Good' for all of them!

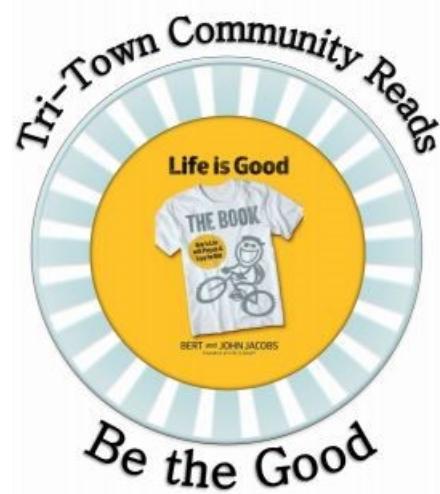
Library staff remark how incredibly rewarding it is to see several generations all participating in the same message of positivity and optimism. In each building the message is expressed in different ways. In Topsfield, during story times, the youngest patrons read picture books encouraging openness, gratitude, and

compassion and engage in creative arts and craft projects. School-aged children and teens are sharing what makes them grateful by hanging gratitude circles on the tree. Adults gather to unwind in evening creative sessions, held in the library's newly opened Maker Space.

Boxford library patrons recently reflected on the superpower of gratitude, sharing that good health, family, and friends are some of the things they feel grateful for. In Middleton, visitors are commenting on the Life is Good themed decorations and children are often overheard saying, "We have that at school too!" as they point to the banner or a "Life is Good" picture.

The power of optimism and positivity is spreading beyond the tri-town. Recently a library vendor was very interested to hear more about the book. She bought a few copies and shared them with her co-workers. The ripples were created and now other people in the business are reading the book, talking about the ideas, and putting them into use with their customers! Other libraries have heard about the positive response and are inquiring to learn more as they consider using the book for their own town-wide read.

And the fun will continue in 2017—library staff and patrons alike are looking forward to the upcoming joint ventures the Tri-Town libraries are planning to celebrate all the ways "life is good!" Additional information about Tri-Town Community Read events are on the library websites.





Teens Need Sleep!

by Carolyn Miller

Tri-town Start Times Advisory Committee (STAC)

The Tri-Town STAC is investigating the desirability and feasibility of a later start time for Masconomet. The committee recognizes that school start time is just one of the factors that impact the quantity and quality of sleep our teens get. Regardless of whether school start time is changed, families can help teens learn good sleep habits and make good choices such as balancing number of extracurricular activities, establishing good sleep routines, and limiting electronics use.

Sleep is the third pillar of health, along with good nutrition and exercise, and yet it's often overlooked. Sleep is essential for brain health. During sleep, important body functions and brain activity occur that help teenagers remember things they have learned during the day, prepare their brains for learning the next day, and help their bodies grow and heal.

Sleep deprivation can be harmful — when we don't get enough sleep it's harder to learn new things and our ability to plan and stay organized is impaired. Lack of sleep affects our mood, too. It can make it hard to get along with family or friends, and make it harder for teens to cope with stress in their lives. When teens are not getting enough sleep they are also more likely to have an accident, get injured, and even more likely to fall ill. A teen's body needs sleep.

How much sleep do we need? Children (age 6-13) need 9-11 hours of sleep and teenagers (age 14-18) typically need 8-10 hours of sleep.

The National Sleep Foundation found that

"If parents and teens know what good sleep entails and the benefits of making and sticking to a plan that supports good sleep, then they might re-examine their choices about what truly are their 'essential' activities. The earlier parents can start helping their children with good sleep habits, the easier it will be to sustain them through the teen years."

-Mary Carskadon, Ph.D., Director of Sleep Research, Brown Medical School

Healthy Sleep Habits—Tips for Teens

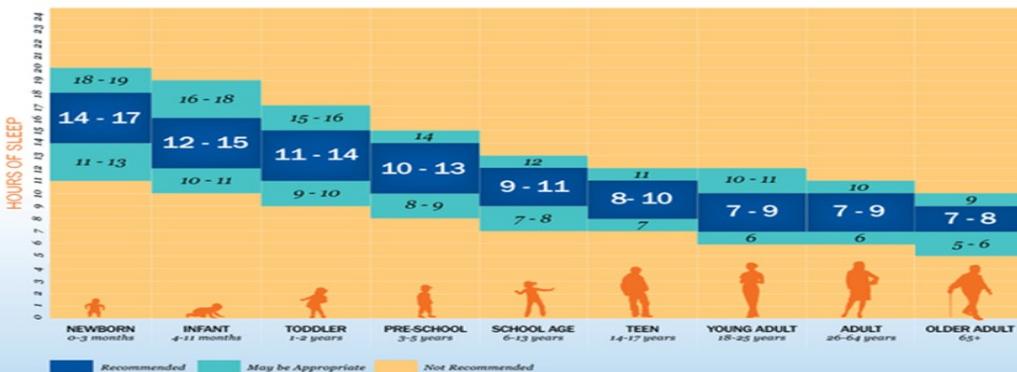
Source: National Sleep Foundation



- Make sleep a priority.** Decide what you need to change to get enough sleep to stay healthy, happy, and smart!
- Make your room a sleep haven.** Keep it cool, quiet and dark. If you need to, get eyeshades or blackout curtains. Let in bright light in the morning to signal your body to wake up.
- Avoid caffeine after 12:00pm.** The half-life of caffeine in your body is 6-9 hours. That means that the energy drink you had at 3pm with 80mg of caffeine in it, still has 40mg of caffeine in your body at 9:00pm. That will keep you awake!
- Establish a bed and wake-time and stick to it.** A consistent sleep schedule will help you feel less tired since it allows your body to get in sync with its natural patterns. You will find that it's easier to fall asleep at bedtime with this type of routine.
- Don't eat, drink, or exercise within a few hours of your bedtime.** Stick to quiet, calm activities, and you'll fall asleep much more easily!
- Don't leave your homework for the last minute.** Try to get it done at least an hour before bedtime, so your mind can calm down.
- Avoid all screens in the hour before you get in bed.** This includes the TV, computer and telephone. The blue color of screens is particularly bad about keeping us awake – it's the same light that our bodies see at high noon, and makes us feel more awake.
- Leave your devices outside your bedroom.** It's too tempting to check your phone in the night, or send a few more texts to your friends. They can wait until morning – sleep is more important.
- Do the same things every night before you go to sleep** and you'll teach your body the signals that it's time for bed. Try taking a bath or shower (this will leave you extra time in the morning), or reading a book.
- Try keeping a diary or to-do lists by your bed.** If you jot notes down before you go to sleep, you'll be less likely to stay awake worrying or stressing.

NATIONAL SLEEP FOUNDATION

SLEEP DURATION RECOMMENDATIONS



SLEEPFOUNDATION.ORG | SLEEP.ORG

Hirschowitz M. The National Sleep Foundation's sleep time duration recommendations: methodology and results summary. *Sleep Health* (2015). <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.slebeh.2014.12.010>

Self-Regulating Strong Emotions and Impulsive Behaviors

How to Strengthen Executive Function Skills in Children – Part II

by Stephanie Meegan (www.StephanieMeegan.com)

"Our daughter turns every little thing into a major catastrophe!"

"Our son acts rashly without stopping to consider consequences."

Managing strong feelings and controlling impulses are important aspects of **Executive Function**. Self-awareness and self-regulation take experience, modelling, coaching and time to fully develop. Here are some tips to strengthen these skills.

Over-Reacting: When children make a big deal out of small things, try redirecting the behavior by quietly saying, "Use your calm voice, please." A visual cue like pulling your ear can signal an older child to "turn down the temperature" of their words, tone of voice or behavior. A silent signal is face-saving for a young person, especially in front of others.

Some kids have more trouble processing disappointments, frustrations, hurt, or sensory overload. These experiences can be perceived as **emergency-level problems**. For children who have these heightened reactions more support and direct coaching are necessary to help them develop coping strategies for modulating intense responses.

Make Proportional Reactions Visual: An initial step in diminishing over-reactions is to help children discern if their problem is a big or small one. Parents and teachers can use a color-coded chart like the one above to promote a better understanding of **levels of urgency** and the **proportional responses** associated with each level.

The **How Big is the Problem** chart can be introduced when discussing characters in stories and how they react. Once the levels of urgency are defined through examples, children can consider problems they have and sort them by how big they are. The more frequently the chart is applied to real life situations the more effective it becomes as a tool for self-regulation.

As they get older, children can help identify their typical problems and common emotional triggers. Since we all over-react and use catastrophic language from time to time, consider making a **constructive family habit** of revisiting the chart to put things into

How Big is the Problem?

1	Emergency	Serious harm or immediate danger: fire, car accident, choking, ambulance needed, doctor needed, police needed	Call 911 (from safe distance) Contact trusted adults
2	Gigantic	Threat of, or ongoing, physical harm or danger: getting lost, fighting, bullying	Get help, and ongoing support and protection from trusted adults
3	Big	Problem happens often & help is needed to figure out options & practice strategies: handling everyday conflicts, confusing social situations, planning & finishing projects	Ask for ongoing help: to anticipate challenging situations & consider options, practice ways to work through conflicts, rehearse social skills, plan action steps-resources-scheduling
4	Medium	Routine problem that triggers: frustration, disappointment, hurt, sensory or stress overload	Ask for ongoing help: to use calming strategies, express emotions using assertive words, brainstorm options for lessening stress or sensory overload
5	Small	Minor setback, change or glitch: losing a game, being left out, having to change plans, making a mess, quiz grade	Accept or fix: try positive self-talk, figure out how to make things better, let small stuff go

perspective.

Feelings First: Learning a wide range of feeling words is an important step in managing drama, mediating conflicts and sorting out problems. Many conflicts and problems are deescalated by **first identifying and validating the underlying emotions**. With practice, by second grade, most children can take a few deep breaths or count to ten, and then turn inward and reflect on what they are thinking and feeling.

Press Pause: Learning to think before speaking and acting is an important life skill. **Impulsivity** can negatively impact learning, relationships, and even, personal safety. Young people who effectively self-regulate are in the **habit of reflecting on choices and consequences BEFORE acting**.

Use the chart below to **visualize the steps for controlling impulsive behaviors**. Have children

How to Press Pause

1		Stop
2		Think through what you were going to say or do
3		Decide if it will make things better or worse
4		Choose the words and actions that will make the situation better

say the steps aloud, apply them to characters in stories, and practice using them when they need to think before acting.

Practice What We Preach: Parents and teachers can help children modulate intense feelings and control impulses by **making their own thinking process transparent**. When adults express aloud their self-regulating thoughts, they are being constructive models. For example, when frustrated while driving, a parent could say, "The traffic is so heavy, but getting upset isn't going to help. I'm going to take a few calming deep breaths and then let's listen to some music." When weather spoils a planned activity, a teacher could say, "That is really disappointing. Let's use our imaginations to come up with a fun indoor activity we can do instead."

Closing Thought: Self-regulation is not easy — for children or adults. When children are having a meltdown or struggling to control impulses, that's when we grown-ups need to muster our self-discipline. Or in the sage words of Dr. T. Berry Brazelton, "Don't have a tantrum back."

Coalition member Stephanie Meegan collaborates with parents, educators, law enforcement and mental health professionals through programs and consultations supporting resiliency in children. As the founder of Impact On Youth Educational Services she has provided services across the country and Canada for over thirty years.