

Turning a New Leaf



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- Promoting healthy relationships and personal growth from a Christian perspective -

Spring 2017

Living with Chronic Illness

By Donna Southard, MA, LCPC, Licensed Mental Health Counselor



May 1st, 1999. It was a beautiful day, and I decided to go sit in my back yard to get some sun. That morning I couldn't have predicted that my life would be forever changed. As the weeks moved forward, I began my journey of being in and out of doctors' offices and becoming more frustrated and confused with the medical community. By July my legs could no longer hold my body weight, I had facial paralysis, and a laundry list of physical symptoms that didn't make sense. I was given numerous diagnoses, but in the end no one could explain what was happening to me. I was 28 years old with what felt like the body of a 90 year old and was told by my "specialist" he didn't know what to do with me - I was overweight, out of shape, and should seek therapy because my symptoms were probably psychological.

This day was life changing for me because I realized that the only way I was going to get

better was to do my own research, learn to advocate for myself, and fight for my belief that I knew my body and health better than anyone. I went on to learn that I had Lyme Disease. I had "heard" of Lyme Disease, but I had no idea what it was going to mean for my life and my future. During the next year my entire body was attacked by this disease, and I couldn't stop it. But to make matters worse, my life became something I couldn't recognize. I was told by friends that I was probably over reacting, it must be something else, or even, "Wow, that's bad!" But that is where it ended. My friends of years began to quit calling and ask if I would like to go out, no one came to visit, and I went from being very independent to feeling helpless and dependent. My life and relationships were turned upside down, and I felt that I would never be whole again.

I have been fighting to reach some normalcy now for almost 18 years and have made it my life's work to help others who are also struggling with chronic illness to face and accept their challenges, have an understanding and listening ear, and learn to navigate this lonely world we are pushed in to. Chronic illness sufferers report feelings of loneliness, sadness, anger, and grief. They feel others view them as lazy or faking sick and live feeling abandoned. Most wish more than anything they had the energy to be part of the

world like they want to be rather than feeling they are a bystander in their own life, and living with the memories of the many things they used to be able to do, the life they once had, and the future dreams now lost. In addition, many report not feeling safe to open up about their illness or how sick they really are. Sufferers report the need to pretend they are ok for others because they make others uncomfortable. One fighter stated, "I can feel like I want to crawl in a hole and die there, but you'll never know it. I can plaster a smile and choke back the tears, fight through the day, and you'll never see a bit of it. I've been practicing this role of 'healthy' for years." Lastly, they struggle with guilt—guilt of not meeting expectations, not being a good enough spouse, parent, friend, employee....

Therefore, if you have a family member or friend who is struggling with a chronic illness, please keep in mind that you will never be able to see the true struggle of his or her illness and that most just want to feel loved and supported as an individual, not just as a sick person. Help embrace them when they have good days, and try to respond on a more positive note when they have to cancel plans or are not up to doing things. Come to them if possible and work around their limitations. Be

knowledgeable, have realistic expectations, and accept that there is often nothing you can do to make them feel better. However, learn to see past their illness, and enjoy the friends or family members you love just as they are. I know I will never allow my disease to win, and I will continue to make the best of the life I've been given.

Ways to Help A Person Struggling with Chronic Illness:

- Learn about the illness and how it affects the person.
- Tailor activities and group outings so friends or family members can still participate in the fun.
- Be a good listener.
- Understand that chronic illness makes life unpredictable and sometimes plans will be cancelled.
- Think simple acts of kindness—a movie night, phone call, or offer of help with household chores could dramatically boost someone's day!

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Our Mission

**New Leaf Resources
promotes healthy
relationships and
personal growth through
counseling, education,
and consultation from
a Christian perspective.**

Fostering Safe Independence in Your Teen

By Ashley Elcock, BA and Shelby Manning, BS, Therapist Interns



The transition of children into adolescents is a trying time for many parents. Parents may start asking, "How do I keep my child safe when they want so much independence?", "How do I trust my teen to do the right thing when they are still so young and inexperienced?", "Why is my teen acting so rebellious?" Almost every one of us has gone through this transition ourselves, so we get it, our baby is growing up. However, it might be relieving to know that much of this "rebellion" and boundary pushing that our adolescent is engaging in is not only normal, it is

beneficial. When children have been raised in a healthy and secure context, adolescence becomes a time of additional exploration as the child starts the transition into adulthood, both socially and biologically.

Allowing some of this exploration will help your child learn and grow into a mature adult, both through their successes and their mistakes. During this time, parents can help their child by practicing "authoritative" parenting by balancing the need for rules and consistent consequences with nurturing, love and open communication with their child. Parents may need to adjust their rules to better fit their maturing child but also know the limits in regards to the safety and well-being of their child.

Many transitions are happening for your teen as well, such as entering romantic relationships, experiencing puberty, making decisions about extracurricular activities,

making new friends, and grieving the end to other relationships not to mention the pressure of getting good grades to get into college! They need your support. Creating an environment in which the adolescent will feel safe talking to parents about their life and not feel judged or receive overwhelming (sometimes unwanted) advice is the key to a successful transition. Listen to your adolescents and give them an appropriate amount of space to make their choices. They will be thankful that you were there to listen when no one else would, and this may open up further communication, openness, and advice seeking from your teen.

Both parenting and the transition to adolescence are difficult tasks! But with supportive parents who can set rules but still connect, this task becomes easier. Be compassionate, be kind, and give yourself credit during this time!

Tips to Guide Your Teen

* Be very clear with your teens about what's appropriate, but let them know that you trust them to respect these boundaries and give them space to make these decisions.

* Be very consistent in the consequences when rules are broken.

* Stay in touch with your teen regarding the rules. This way you have an idea of

when they might need to be changed as your child matures and certain rules are no longer needed.

* Keep some "family time" and "one-on-one time" set apart. Family activities and time spent together are so important in increasing closeness, understanding, and open communication.

* Try not to make assumptions or pass judgment when

your teen is talking to you about concerns or questions related to this transition. Be honest and open. This will help your teen feel safe to open up to you.

* Take some time for self-care. Research has shown that it is much easier to stay connected with your child and sensitive to their needs when you are not feeling overwhelmed or stressed.

Client Finds Strength at New Leaf



A client recently shared how her experience at New Leaf Resources has given her hope, help, and healing.

"Due to my counseling, I was able to cope much better with my painful memories and give my own family the love and support they deserved.

Counseling is a real life saver! Counseling doesn't erase the pain, but it helps you to understand and live with it. Seeking counseling doesn't make you a weak person—it just shows you that you are strong enough to face your pain 'head on.'

"Counseling at New Leaf helped me get through the painful memories."

**- "Kathy," age 79
in therapy for
depression and childhood
trauma**

Speakers Available

Need a speaker for your next group or church function? New Leaf therapists are available to address groups of any size and age on a variety of topics such as addictions, depression, grief, stress, and many others.

Call Lisa at New Leaf at (708) 895-7310 for more information.

What's "New" at New Leaf Resources

There are some new faces at New Leaf and we can't wait for you to meet them.

New Leaf Resources welcomed **Ashley Elcock** and **Shelby Manning** as our new therapist interns in January. They are both accepting new clients.

Ashley Elcock received her Bachelor of Arts degree in Psychology from Indiana University Northwest. She is currently pursuing her Master of Science in Child Development and Family Studies, specializing in Marriage and Family therapy at Purdue University Northwest.

Ashley specializes in working with couples with various relationship concerns, such as infidelity or communication concerns. She also works with individuals, families, or

couples looking to manage anxiety or depression, process trauma and abuse, increase communication, improve self esteem, deal with difficult life transitions, or develop parenting skills.

Shelby Manning earned her Bachelor of Science degree in Human Development and Family Studies with a minor in Psychology at the University of Missouri. She is working toward her Master of Science degree in Child Development and Family Studies with a specialization in Marriage and Family Therapy at Purdue University Northwest.

Shelby specializes in relationship dynamics and individual's needs. This includes communication and conflict management, parenting difficulties, child behavior concerns, depression, anxiety,



Ashley Elcock (left) and Shelby Manning (right) joined New Leaf Resources as Therapist Interns in January.

substance abuse, identity exploration, acculturation, life transitions, work-related stress, grief, and relational abuse.

New Leaf also welcomed new members to its Board of Directors. **Mary Boonstra, Lisa Doot-Abinoja, Claire Griffith, and Tanya Harper** will be offering their

expertise and wisdom over the coming years as they help guide New Leaf's services and mission in their role as Board members.

New Leaf is so thankful for the years of service provided by retiring Board members **Deb Koster, Dave Larsen, Carol Moxey, and Donna DeGraff.**

Special Gifts

Contributions to New Leaf Resources can be made in memory or in honor of a loved one or friend. Thank you to the following donors:

In Memory of
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Mark Your Calendars to Celebrate with Us!



This year, the New Leaf traditional annual celebration banquet is being expanded! **Mark your calendars with the following dates!**

- **Thursday, May 4** - a night of great music by Sam Cerniglia from NBC's "The Voice," delicious desserts, viewing of our new video, and a short presentation in the Grand Lobby of Trinity Christian College in Palos Heights, Illinois.
- **Tuesday, June 13** - an informal, down-home night of BBQ, electric violin music, viewing of our new video, and a short presentation at Pentwater Barn in Crown Point, Indiana.

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New Leaf Resources is...

A **professional mental health agency** which provides counseling and consultation services to individuals, families, couples, children, churches, schools and businesses.

A **ministry** which brings the best possible care to those we serve, striving to reflect God's grace and love to all who seek help.

A **community resource** offering educational services, prevention programs, training, support and coaching.