



CASA FEEDBACK

Fall 2011

Fall is here and the end of the year is upon us. This means shorter days and less daylight to enjoy with our *CASA* youth after school or in the evening hours. It also means the holiday time is here and we are all experiencing the hustle bustle of this fun but stressful time of the year. This newsletter is written to help you be more aware and more prepared for the winter months while working with the youth you are so dedicatedly serving.

Even the healthiest of us experience the stress and pressure that frequently accompanies the winter and holiday season. I personally like the longer days and the warm bright sunlight of the summer months. I find myself hibernating and becoming a little less active during the winter. I miss the sun shine and the energy of summer activities. For the *CASA* youth we serve, the tendencies to hibernate or become less active are often exacerbated by family sadness, absentee parents, separated sibling groups, emotional trauma and yes the inevitable commercialization of the holidays. It is barely even November and we already see holiday decorations and increased advertising of all the ideas for gift giving and receiving.

As *CASA* volunteers we want you to know we understand that you have work, family and other personal responsibilities that also affect you during the holiday season. We encourage

you to make plans early with your foster families and group home staff to assure that you have the time and the activities scheduled that you and your *CASA* youth want to participate in.

This time of the year means having to juggle an already busy schedule. We want to remind you that we are here to support you and one way we want to help is to give you as much warning about dates, activities and holiday plans as we can.

This newsletter will give you a few ideas and suggestions for the next few months and will also help you understand how the holiday season might affect our *CASA* youth. We hope the content of the following pages will help you in making the holidays a fun time and assist you in refocusing the youth you serve on a brighter less stressful winter season.

With my deepest respect,

Millie

Holiday Stress

Try to take the hype out of the holidays. Talk to your CASA youth about the true meaning of the holiday season this will vary depending on your faith and heritage so please be sensitive. Get them to help you find ways to simplify the season. Studying other cultural celebrations and traditions can be fun. However, please note that holidays do not always have a special meaning to our youth. In fact it can be associated with sad memories one being that they are not with their parents.

Help them do their holiday gift planning. The wish to go holiday shopping can be overwhelming for our kids. Can they get something for their parents or brother or sister? Will they be let down and feel sad because they are not going to be with their parents? So help them in advance by talking to them about the holidays and what it means to them. Do they want to do something for their parents or siblings? Who to buy for, what to buy, how to get the money and how much to spend.

Help them make appropriate gift giving decisions for family and friends and remind them giving is from the heart. A home made card, a poem, a letter or something simple like a bakery purchased cookie can make a sibling feel special.

De-emphasize television. Much holiday programming seems to be designed in a way that gets our CASA youth all worked up about the holidays.

Emphasize family traditions but keep in mind that for our youth we may need to create new traditions. For CASAs that have been on a case for over a year make sure you talk about last year, what you did. Perhaps they would like to make it a tradition to have a special lunch, see a film, read a holiday book, or poem each year.

Routines and rituals are comforting to most CASA youth and help to create lasting, happy holiday memories.

Stick to your normal routine as much as possible. It's often hard to take time out of busy holiday preparations, but a walk, a hike, a trip to a playground or play area, or whatever else you usually do with your kids each day can be a great stress reducer.

Keep travel to a minimum. It may not cause major stress for your CASA youth to travel with foster parents or go to see extended foster family, but trips to visit parents or well intended extended family may be very stressful. Plan ahead and help your CASA youth know what to expect. Show them a map of where they are going, how long it will take and assist in making sure they have what they need to feel comfortable. A familiar pillow or game to play can be very comforting. A good book can also keep anxious youth occupied and comfortable.

Include your CASA youth in holiday planning sessions; let them know the final details well in advance. This will give them a chance to prepare themselves emotionally for the visits, dinners and other running around of the season.

Warning:

If you notice that your CASA youth begins to get stressed, try to spend some quiet time with them before the situation gets out of control. Stop for a snack, a game or a few minutes of reading, and then get back to holiday.

Fun During the Holidays

Many people get so caught up in shopping and obligations that they have no time left to have a good time.

Remember, the holidays are supposed to be fun. Being a CASA and spending time with your youth during the holidays can be really fun.

CASA youth have a way of putting the joy back into the holidays. There is nothing like seeing youth have fun and experiencing the fun of the holiday season together.

HOLIDAY IDEAS:

- 👤 Watch old Holiday movies together.
- 👤 Read aloud "A Holiday Carol" by Charles Dickens.
- 👤 Make ornaments together, arts and crafts.
- 👤 Take the youth to see the holiday lights and decorations.
- 👤 Gather foster or group home friends together to bake cookies, make sweet breads, and/or find out about other holiday traditions they have to share.
- 👤 Trim the tree together at the foster home or even one in the park
- 👤 Use an Advent calendar. It's a fun way to count down to Holiday school breaks or the next fun holiday plan you have.
- 👤 Decorate a small Christmas tree for the youth to keep.

Tip: Leave ample time for you and your CASA youth to have fun together. You're a busy person too, by planning ahead you can enjoy this time of year with each other.

Don't forget we have Holiday Cards for Sale at the CASA Office. What a great way to support CASA!



We have a lot more to look at so come on by

SAVE THE DATE



CASAs annual Open House
November 17th

Holidays, Gifts, and Giving

Remember gift giving and providing material things to our CASA children is discouraged. However, holidays and birthdays are recognized as exceptions. Tact is encouraged. CASA has a fund that you can donate to that can in return disperse funds to your youth. This may not only empower the youth but will help you maintain a relationship that is based on caring and time spent on relationship building not on gift giving.

Taking children to lunch, shows, and on special outings can be a costly venture and once CASAs start adding clothing, allowances, and other material needs for the child the CASA and child relationship becomes confusing. Providing material needs through donations to the child is best if handled through the office. Please talk to your volunteer supervisor when considering giving gifts or supplying fees for services. We also want you to get a full tax benefit for your support services.

CASA has a Rewards Program and an Activities Reward Program. You can participate in designating your pledge to our child while the boundaries between you and child are kept defined by the rules of the program. Questions can be directed to Millie.



FROSTY'S VILLAGE

CASA will be having our Frosty's Holiday Village once again this year. This is an opportunity for you to come by the office, pick up a few gifts for your CASA youth and perhaps their siblings. We want you to feel free to take items that will not only be fitting for your youth but also for siblings and/or other foster youth living in the same home. Gifts will be available starting December 19th. Please call ahead and make sure the sleigh did indeed arrive.

We are making every effort to have gifts for older youth but we would like to remind you that sometimes a fun game can be just as rewarding for an older youth, especially when he/she and his/her CASA play it together. While you are perusing the Holiday Village, remember this is a nice time to pick up a birthday gift to put away until needed.

KMART AM **Holiday gifts for youth**

If you want to shop with us at
6:00 AM @ Kmart on
December 3rd.

Please RSVP by calling the CASA
office at 707-565-6375
1st come first served

CASA TRAINING

Refer a friend to the CASA Program, there are about 40 children in our waitlist.

"Each one reaches one"

Call the office to get times and specifics

Winter- January 19th - 26th

Spring - April 19th - 26th

Summer - July 19th - 26th

Fall - October 18th - 13th

WINTER BLUES....

Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) is a specific type of recurring depressive illness that manifests in an annual pattern, usually from early-to-late fall and subsiding with the longer, sunnier days of spring. Some people have the milder form, called Subsyndromal-SAD (S-SAD), also called Winter Blues, which causes minor problems in their lives but not the total disruption that full-blown SAD causes.

Researchers have confirmed that specific biological changes within the brain occur in response to different levels of bright light exposure, and that these biochemical changes affect hormones and neurotransmitters responsible for regulating our mood, energy, sleep and appetite. In the majority of the population, these changes are not troublesome; they simply cause minor variations in their annual rhythms. For those with SAD, though, these changes are profound enough to cause significant disruption to their lives.

WHO GETS IT?

SAD affects both genders and people of all ages. A small but significant percentage of CASA youth are affected with the female-male ratio being about equal among this age group. In the 15-43 age group, however, women outnumber men by nearly 3.5 to 1. After age 44, the number of women starts to decline and the gender ratio again equalizes. Anyone deprived of regular sunlight exposure or adequate indoor lighting can suffer from SAD symptoms. A series of rainy, overcast days can trigger SAD even in the summertime.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS?

SAD manifests itself in different ways in different people. The typical symptoms include decreased mood and energy level, social withdrawal, anxiety, irritability, and difficulty concentrating or being productive at work. The "classic" SAD symptoms, which are considered atypical symptoms of non-seasonal depression, are changes in sleeping patterns (oversleeping and having poor sleep) and appetite changes (increased appetite, carbohydrate cravings, and subsequent weight gain).

In CASA youth and teenagers, the symptoms are slightly different from those for adults. These symptoms include irritability, very sad spells, anxiety, fatigue, difficulty in getting out of bed for school, and a lowering of grades and self-esteem. Because these symptoms mirror the symptoms of laziness, Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD), learning disabilities, or the stereotypical behavior of teenagers, it is important for CASAs to note whether these symptoms recur year after year during the fall and winter months, and whether they go away in the spring.

WHAT CAUSES IT?

Researchers aren't sure what causes SAD. Three main theories have been put forth, and there is contrasting evidence both for and against each of these theories: the Melatonin Hypothesis, the Phase Shift Hypothesis, and the Serotonin Hypothesis.

The Melatonin Hypothesis argues that SAD is due to too much melatonin being secreted in response to the long, dark days of winter. Some studies have supported this theory, while others have disputed it.

Advocates of the Phase Shift Hypothesis, proposed in 1986, contend that in patients with SAD circadian rhythms have been desynchronized to the light-dark cycle and that appropriately timed bright light reverses SAD symptoms by realigning these rhythms. Again, there is evidence on either side of the debate.

In the Serotonin Hypothesis, the idea is that serotonin levels in the brain are much lower during the winter months in patients with SAD than they are either in people without SAD or in SAD patients during the spring and summer months. This hypothesis came about from researchers observing that SAD patients tend to feel energized after carbohydrate consumption, whereas people without SAD generally feel more lethargic after eating carbohydrates. Whether serotonin is 'the cause' of SAD or not, there is currently a wide body of evidence to suggest that it does play a major role in the disorder.

HOW IS IT TREATED?

Get active with your youth during the winter. When it is light and sunny out, grab that winter coat and go for a walk. Have picnic outside; be in the outdoor air and sunlight as much as you can. When going to a restaurant sit at the window table, go for a drive in the car on a sunny day.

We know that bright light is highly effective in treating SAD. According to the Journal of the American Medical Association, "Treatment for SAD with bright environmental light is generally a first-line therapeutic approach. Four out of five people with seasonal difficulties (either SAD or S-SAD) should expect to benefit from bright lights and sunny days." It is the most cost effective treatment we can give our youth.

Other treatments that may be helpful include changes in diet and exercise, stress management, sleep restriction, psychotherapy, and antidepressant medications.

From Millie's Desk:

Save The Date :(please see attached flyers for more information):

Continuing Education: S.R.J.C. **BOUND**
PRESENTED BY: Maurice Travis, Karen Bushnell & Lorrie Quam
Wednesday, November 30th at 12:00 & 6:00

Hearts for Children

Saturday, March 24th 0125:00-10:00 p.m.
VINTNERS INN and John Ash Event Center



👁️ Check this out! Museum of Fun: <http://www.playland-not-at-the-beach.org/>



👁️ **December 3 -- Petaluma Downtown Holiday Open House**
Holiday, Celebration: Don't miss the Christmas festivities and open houses throughout Downtown Petaluma, CA
Fee: Free **Time:** 11 a.m. - 5 p.m. **Phone Number:** (707) 762.9348

👁️ **December 3 - 4 -- Luther Burbank Home Annual Holiday Open House**
Holiday: Enjoy a holiday experience at the home of Luther Burbank, early 20th century horticulturist. Tour his home decorated in Victorian Christmas spirit. Kids will enjoy a holiday craft activity in the big tent. Find items in the gift shop that are perfect for holiday giving. Free Parking at 1st & "D" Sts., free rides on "Rosie the Trolley." Corner of Santa Rosa & Sonoma Avenues, Santa Rosa CA
Fee: \$2 Ages 12 & Over **Time:** 10am-4pm **Phone Number:** 707-524-5445

👁️ **December 3 - 4 -- Dickens Holiday Craft Fair**
Holiday, Fair: Over 60 booths with handcrafted items created and sold by the artists. Fantastic prize give-away! Free entertainment. Refreshments available for purchase. One stop holiday shopping! Finley Community Center, 2060 West College Avenue, Santa Rosa
Fee: \$2 Adults/18 & Under Free **Time:** Sat 9 a.m.-5 p.m./Sun 10 a.m.-4 p.m. **Phone Number:**(707) 543.3737