

# Six Degrees of Separation



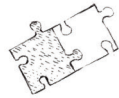
## CONNECTION



## SEPARATION



## PROBLEM RESOLUTION



## RELATIONSHIPS AND COLLABORATION



## RESPONSIBILITY



## SUPPORT THROUGH TREATMENT



Presented by:



## A Guide to Parents

Emerging adulthood is a period of transition toward increasing autonomy while struggling to define new ways of remaining connected. The family is undergoing a parallel transition of its own. As such, it may be necessary for parents to be open to changes that will occur, including changes within your emerging adult as well as within family relationships. Parents can help by being supportive, trusting, open to reciprocal communication, and encouraging of independence. For every step the emerging adult takes, there is a corresponding need for change within the family.

Entering the Yellowbrick Residence may be the first time your emerging adult has lived away from home or lived in an independent setting. Alternately your emerging adult may have, in the past, attempted college or living on their own and experienced difficulties in managing and regulating their life. Your son/daughter's involvement at Yellowbrick represents a step toward autonomy and self-management. You, as parents and partners in the treatment, can be an invaluable aspect of that process.

Here are six ways to help your emerging adult help themselves:

**1** Connection: The primary goals, as the emerging adult enters Yellowbrick, are to adjust to living on their own, to connect with the Yellowbrick community, and to engage in the treatment and other productive activities such as school or work. Much time and energy may be expended in the process of this developmental step. The "phone call" may come during a period of being overwhelmed or feeling unable to manage. Initial anxious or tough moments in treatment are often expressed as complaints or accusations about the program that provoke fear and anger in parents. As much as you would like to alleviate the stress, you cannot and should not try to "fix" this for them. Be calm and reassuring about their ability to work through challenges and to seek help from the support system at Yellowbrick. Speak with the Yellowbrick Family Liaison directly about any concerns being evoked in these communications.

**2** Separation: Accept that as much as you may have needed to in the past, you won't know the details of your emerging adult's life. Your son/daughter may not have lived away from you before and the opportunity to move toward adulthood and establish autonomy is an important step in their growth. Your emerging adult may need to experience the outcome of their choices and manage this outcome on their own with the support of others in the Yellowbrick community. This may require of you that you find support to manage your own anxiety about the

separation. Your Family Liaison is available to provide support to you as needed. The Parent Weekends, held on a monthly basis, are an opportunity to meet with others who are parenting emerging adults and may share similar concerns.

**3 Problems:** Managing complex problems within society, i.e. dealing with the daily business of life, is a vital part of becoming a competent adult. Empower your young adult to solve problems by offering guidance, expressing confidence in them, encouraging a balance of independence with thoughtful reliance on others for needed support, and trusting their decisions. Handling difficult situations for them only impedes their development and conveys a lack of believing in them as capable of developing their own strategies. They are learning important skills and becoming empowered to undertake other challenges with confidence.

**4 Personalities:** Learning to live with other people teaches essential skills such as communication and boundary setting. Your son/daughter is living in a setting where the staff is available at all times and understands the multiple challenges of this developmental period. The culture at Yellowbrick urges the emerging adult to deal openly with relationships within the community with support from the staff and peers. Several meetings a week are devoted to the experience of community and the relationships with staff, peers, and others in the Evanston community. Encourage your emerging adult to actively work through issues instead of avoiding, looking for easy solutions, or fleeing. Help your emerging adult to seek solutions that will enhance their growth and learning.

**5 Responsibilities:** Rules and structure are a part of any setting that your emerging adult may experience. Learning accountability for their actions and conduct is an important aspect of life at Yellowbrick and an important tool for managing responsibility in the future. The Yellowbrick Agreements and policies are designed to provide for your emerging adult's safety, health, and security as well as assist in self-regulation, engagement in treatment, and neurobiological growth.

**6 The Treatment:** Your son/daughter is involved in an intensive treatment program. Days are often long and can be exhausting. Outside of IOP programming, there are many activities designed to promote community, provide cultural and fine art experience, enhance living skills and have some down time and fun. The weekends are less rigorously scheduled, but developing the skills to be alone with one's self and to be an active agent in life are all important aspects of the program at Yellowbrick. It is also a time in which grocery shopping, caring for the apartment, and other tasks may be completed. It is important to take the cues from your emerging adult in regard to time spent at home and family obligations. Often, the emerging adult will need a period of separation in order to work on building autonomy, a stronger sense of self, and the skills of self-expression and self-declaration. The ultimate goal of the separation process is relational autonomy - to become able to achieve and affirm independence and self-governance while maintaining close and mutually validating relationships.

Six Degrees of Separation are guidelines for providing support to your emerging adult as they work toward increasing autonomy. Yellowbrick is here to provide support to you, as well.

# How Parents Can Help the Process

- Attend and participate in Parents as Partners weekends and activities.
- Parents are encouraged to reach out and seek support from Yellowbrick's Family Liaison. Yellowbrick will not routinely initiate communication outside of scheduled Family Rounds or Family Therapy but rather encourages you to determine your needs for communication. The Family Liaison is free to speak with you about all information which is in the arena of "Public Behavior". The Family Liaison is the exclusive parent contact for routine clinical communication.
- Become familiar with the concept of connected autonomy. This may require tolerating discomfort associated with limited communication or periods of symptomatic behavior as a means of self-expression as issues get approached in treatment. It is often the case that a period of separateness is necessary in order to reestablish connectedness to self from which emerging adults can then re-approach family relationships differently from prior maladaptive patterns.
- Looking at family history/relationships is not about looking for someone to blame. It is about helping the emerging adult, and the family as a whole, gain a better understanding of how your son/daughter has taken inside the experiences of their history, how he/she has integrated his/her early experiences into their self-concept and view of the world, and the narrative which the emerging adult has created that has shaped their relationship to themselves, others and reality. The unique configuration of this is known as the individual's core enactment. Yellowbrick's approach to psychotherapy focuses on identifying and working within the real-time reliving of the core enactment so as to free the emerging adult's relationship to their needs and feelings and their ability to bring that forward effectively within their relationships and community.
- Family Rounds is a strategic planning session within which the emerging adult speaks with family regarding the experience of treatment. Areas of progress and struggle are noted. Issues which relate to patterns within the family are identified and addressed as needed. If indicated, a plan for family therapy is identified. Treatment planning, including decisions about transitions and length of stay are explored. Parents are encouraged to bring questions that may not have been raised previously with the Family Liaison, including questions about finances or other issues previously screened from their son/daughter. Family Rounds is attended by the Family Liaison, Advocate and Medical Director.
- Family Therapy sessions have the goal of helping the family to observe interactions and mutual influences in the present, improve communications each members' experiences, feelings and needs and negotiate areas that require problem solving. While appreciating and honoring the understanding of the how the shadow of the past falls on current shared experiences, the emphasis is on improving communication and negotiated problem-solving.
- Everyone in the family may feel challenged and even threatened by change. It is helpful to anticipate family system changes as well as changes in the emerging adult and the other individuals in the family. Your son or daughter may be creating problems for the family, but it is not helpful to view them as the problem from a family perspective. Symptomatic behavior in an emerging adult often has meaning about issues within the family or about that individual's relationship to the family as part of the process of separating towards connected autonomy. When any one member of a family changes, this inevitably leads to changes in the family dynamic, often ones that are disruptive at first.
- Parents often focus early in the treatment on the priority of behavioral changes in executive function and plans for continued education or career plans. Most of the emerging adults who come to Yellowbrick have had their capacity to maintain routine role performance crushed under the influence of disabling emotional struggles and psychiatric illness. It is often necessary for an extended period of time for work on symptomatic relief and the untangling of emotional issues within the core enactment before the emerging adult is able to sustain meaningful efforts in these areas of life critical for adult responsibility and functioning.
- Treatment can be frustrating, discouraging and at times even infuriating for parents. It may raise issues of trust with your son or daughter and with Yellowbrick Professional Staff. You are encouraged to express these painful moments in treatment and know that they often occur at moments of potential transformation and profound opportunity for change.