

## The Ranches Alumni

*"Made a lot of friends that became family...will never forget the good times :-)"*

*"Same here...unfortunately for me now in my thirties a lot of my fellow heart ranchers didnt make it....I have hit bumps but im good thanks to them."*

*"My daughter was there in the late 90's. The best. Taught her a lot Thank You soooo much for what you do. GOD Bless You."*

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Rekindling Hope in Today's Youth - Since 1944

# FALL 2017

Vol. #50, Issue #3

## DON'T BE SCARED

By Heath Kull

I often work with and write about hurting and angry young people since they make up the majority of the kids at The Ranches. On any given day, in any coffee shop in New Mexico, you can hear people talking about the problem with young people and how they are all hurting and angry. While I tend to agree, it leaves out a very important part of the equation. Most kids are struggling because they are actually scared. School, friends, new teachers, rumors and social cliques are all very scary to young people. As adults and as parents, we sometimes inadvertently send the message that kids should be fearless instead of teaching them to be courageous; and the men of my generation are the absolute worst at expecting everyone to be tough, respectful and fearless.

"Don't be scared!"

"Suck it up, Buttercup."

"Man up!"..."Cowboy UP!"

"FEAR is just False Evidence Appearing Real."

"Don't be weak!"



The problem starts to take shape when kids start to realize that being fearless has consequences. While all of these sayings are meant to help kids face the little things that scare them, they fail to address the fact that fear is natural and present in all of us, and that there are actually things that we should be afraid of. These sayings also tend to leave kids with the distinct impression that they are broken or flawed when they start to be scared or experience the fear that we all have had to face. Once the feeling of being flawed and broken starts to take hold, the limits for what kids will and won't do to manage their fear starts to disappear. Drugs, sexual encounters, negative relationships and withdrawal from society all start to make a lot more sense and become much more attractive.

"Smoke this. It'll help and it's not addictive."

"Just trust me. It feels good and I won't tell anyone."

"Just send me a picture."

"Just sneak out. All the best people with be there."

"If you take enough of these, you won't feel anything anymore."

These messages start to replace the messages from childhood that were uttered with the best of intentions and these alternate messages are much more compatible with the idea that the scared child is just broken and flawed.

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# LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT



**Heath Kull**  
President

## #RaiseThemUp

Parenting Today's Youth

By the time kids come to The Ranches, it is not uncommon for them to have a fairly negative view of themselves. Parents, siblings, teachers and friends have all given their two cents about who the child is and who they should be. In many cases, past behaviors have become defining moments that are often repeated and used to diminish the spirit of the child. While this is done, in many cases, with the intention of preventing future bad behavior, often it becomes a drumbeat of negativity in the child's thoughts. When this is coupled with the guilt and the grief that comes from the loss of loved ones and relationships, it can be overwhelming. In these cases, we have to work to help the child learn to give up on having a better past. All too often, the belief that there is a way to erase those negative behaviors and get back the time that was lost to negativity drives their current actions and leads to unhealthy relationships and more guilt.

Oddly enough, many parents fall into the same trap. I often speak to parents who have managed to get themselves into a negative feedback loop due to the way that they have interacted with a child. Losing one's temper, overreacting, getting frustrated in traffic or having a bad day can all become sources of parental guilt.

In many cases, my advice to parents is the same as my advice to kids: You have to give up on having a better past...even if the past was this morning.

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## PLANKS & SAWDUST

*"Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?" Matthew 7:3*

I think that we are all fairly adept at looking at kids today and determining the things that need to be altered, dealt with or fixed. Dishonesty, disrespectful attitude and language, laziness, influenced by peers, selfishness, inability to comprehend accountability, tantrums, cheating in school, stealing, etc. are all behaviors and characteristics that we deal with regularly and they tend to wear down our spirit and, eventually, our souls. I am often confused as to why the Bible references all of these things as sawdust or "specks" in their eyes. It has made me wonder; what would qualify as a plank?

Whether we like it or not, we are called to look for the plank in our own eye, sometimes before we look at the sawdust in the kid's eyes. While some, including the kids, may interpret this to mean that we cannot address the flaws in the kids until we ourselves have become perfect, I don't think that this is the meaning of the passage. I believe that it is about what we focus on and not necessarily how we address the kid's issues.

For me, anger, resentment, impatience, "colorful" language to express my anger, resentment, impatience and letting others down by not following through on things I've committed to, are my planks. I look for them as often as I can, but it is not nearly enough. Sometimes, in my worst moments, I will focus on a child's anger or laziness or dishonesty to make myself feel better about my planks, but those things, according God, are to be seen by me as just some specks of sawdust. It is my job to keep focusing on my planks while taking the time and energy to mercifully and gracefully identify and offer support for dealing with their sawdust.

This has been, by far, the hardest article for me to write. I can't help but struggle with my own planks while writing about them, but I also want to stay focused on the goal of these messages: to help people understand how we go about helping our staff care for more (and more difficult) children. To that end, it is important for me to make sure that we are focused on our own planks so that we can better handle and deal with their sawdust. If we work hard and end up getting it right, one day they will be the adults looking for their own planks while knowing that their children's worst behaviors are just sawdust. Hopefully, their children will not need us to help deal with those specks.

Hopefully this will help someone who is reading this to be a little more patient, a little more understanding and a little more willing to work hard to clean up a little sawdust for someone that they love.

Sincerely,

 Heath Kull - President  
heathk@theranches.org



#RAISETHEMUP @THERANCHES

# FRIDAY NIGHT LIGHTS

By Heath Kull

Like most small communities around the country, Friday Nights in the Fall are all about football. While we've attended sporadically over the years, this year is a bit different. We have someone to watch. One of the kids at The Ranches made the Belen Eagles team. We couldn't be more proud of him or more excited to head out to sit under the Friday Night Lights.

Every now and then, after a reception or a tackle, we'll notice him look up to the stands to see who all came to watch. It's truly a pleasure to see the look on his face when he knows that we came out to support him.



#RAISETHEMUP @THERANCHES

# 21st Annual Pete Leyva Memorial Golf Tournament

By Feliciano Warren

On Monday, September 18th, more than 130 golfers played at Sandia Golf Club in Albuquerque for the 21st Annual Pete Leyva Memorial Golf Tournament, presented by Richardson and Richardson Construction benefitting The Ranches. It was a fun day with residents from The Ranches participating by playing golf and volunteering. We are extremely grateful to all the sponsors and players who participated. A special thank you also goes out to Richardson and Richardson Construction who work tirelessly every year to make this event a success.





## CONFLICT AVOIDANCE

By Heath Kull

We have, for the most part, become a conflict avoidant culture. We work very hard to make sure that we aren't seen as aggressive or angry and we expect others to do the same. Keeping our feelings, particularly our negative feelings about others, to ourselves is much easier than confronting the negative behaviors and attitudes of those around us. This is especially true of our loved ones. We work very hard to make sure that conflict does not separate us emotionally from those we care most about. When you think about this, it makes sense. Ignoring and "letting go" of our negative emotions and feelings towards others is far easier than risking the damage to the relationship that can come when issues are dealt with honestly and bluntly. Additionally, avoiding conflict can help shield us from the inevitable criticism that comes in return from the person that we are struggling with. This, to the conflict avoidant personality, seems like a win-win situation. "Why bring up something uncomfortable and have to drudge through the difficult criticism that will be expressed back? I'll just let it go."

While this can be a successful strategy for minor negative issues, it typically doesn't work as well for bigger issues. Generally, these bigger issues, when left undealt with, turn to frustration, unhappiness and, eventually, contempt for those who represent conflict, anger and aggression.

At The Ranches, we deal with many families who are, for the most part, conflict avoidant. They have a tight family system that worked well when the children were younger, but is now in chaos. This chaos is often blamed on the child who is not willing to avoid conflict and keep the peace within the family. While it is simplistic to think that the conflict oriented child is to blame for the problems in the family, it is often expressed that way. "If Johnny wasn't so angry and would just be respectful of authority, everything would be just fine!" While often expressed, this rarely turns out to be true as the issues are far deeper than Johnny's anger and all members of the family contribute to dysfunctional habits within the family. Johnny has just learned that, if he embraces conflict, he can control the other members of the family. They will disengage and Johnny can then feel powerful and do what he likes. This makes for a toxic and untenable situation for the parents and other conflict avoidant members of the family. This is usually when we get a call at The Ranches.

This dynamic is not unique to us and is usually present at different times in any given family. This is particularly true during a child's teenage years. Simplistically, conflict avoidant parents think that they will, inadvertently, raise conflict avoidant children. But it isn't that simple.

At their core, conflict avoidant people are sensitive to **criticism** (especially criticism expressed in anger) and, more importantly, to rejection. Their desire to avoid conflict stems from their desire to avoid criticism and, in doing so, limit the opportunities for rejection.

In contrast, conflict oriented people are sensitive to **change** (especially the minor changes in interaction that come when a conflict avoidant person is frustrated but in the process of "letting it go") and, more importantly, to the loss of perceived control in the relationship. Additionally, conflict oriented people are usually accustomed to and calloused toward, criticism. They typically have a plethora of experience dealing with rejection. While this may sound like an indictment of the parents and other family members, I assure you it is not. Every child reacts to and processes their world a bit differently. Friends, teachers, transitions between grades, the opposite gender, weight, height, being described as unattractive or "ugly", family stress and siblings all have a unique impact on every child. Furthermore, there is no way to predict a child's reaction and there is no way for parents and family members to be present during every event that may cause an issue.

And so... the dynamic is set. The conflict avoidant members of the family conceal their negative emotions in an effort to minimize the risk of criticism and rejection. At the same time, the conflict oriented member of the family is overtly expressive of their negative emotions in an effort to force the other members to be honest. From their perspective, if everyone would express their negative emotions, then we could deal with and argue through those negative emotions. In their opinion, this would allow them, the conflict oriented person, to feel that they have the ability to react to, control and influence the criticism and rejection. They view this safer and preferable to avoiding it all together. "I can't control what I don't know about!" is a common expression for conflict oriented young people.



# THEIR JOURNEY





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Sadly, we sometimes fail to recognize that our fear makes sense when we are afraid of something that can actually hurt us, damage our reputation, ostracize us or point out our flaws on social media. While we want our children to be fearless, it is much better for children if we teach them to be courageous and to understand their fear, but not let it control them.

Instead of expecting kids to be fearless, we have to teach them that it is OK to admit that they are scared and to then formulate a plan to handle scary situations with courage and caution.

As anyone with a loved one in the armed services can tell you, fearlessness is not what gets your loved one home at night. Fearlessness is ignorant of reality, while courage fully acknowledges the reality of the situation, but gives you the strength to cautiously move towards and face the things that rightfully scare you.

As we deal with hurting, angry and scared young people at The Ranches, we have to teach them to be courageous in all that they do – even when they are scared. *Especially* when they are scared.

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While kids are with us, we work to help them learn to deal with conflict in a healthier and more productive way. While this can be difficult, it is necessary in order for the family to heal. While the conflict avoidant family members tend to appreciate this, we do not stop there. We also work with the family to be less avoidant of conflict and to develop some healthy ways to express difficult emotions and to address the behaviors of everyone in the family. While difficult, we have found that we have to address both sides.

#### **Tips for the Conflict Avoidant**

- Remember, avoiding conflict just causes it to grow and intensify
- You can handle the negativity
- The feelings of others aren't necessarily criticism of you
- The person you are in conflict with wants emotional closeness from you
- You cannot ignore another person into feeling loved
- You aren't, and have never been, incapable, bad or unlovable...quite the opposite
- You may be talking to someone who has been criticized repeatedly
- You may be paying for the "sins" of others
- This is your way of controlling the world around you
- The conflict oriented person is desperately wanting to get back to normal

#### **Advice for the Conflict Avoidant**

- Schedule a time and a time limit for others to address negative feelings
- Remind yourself often that the other person loves you
- Take a break when you get overwhelmed
- Learn to say, "I can see your point."
- Avoid being passive aggressive
- Decide, ahead of time, how long you will allow yourself to hold onto your anger
- Let go when the time is up
- Remind yourself to let go when it's over (you were planning to let go anyway - avoid)

#### **Tips for the Conflict Oriented**

- Remember, your emotions overwhelm the person you love
- Slow down
- Avoid "always" and "never"
- If you can hear the other person, you can get back to being close
- You aren't and have never been entitled to be hateful or abusive
- Don't assume that their sensitivity to criticism is weakness
- You cannot control the avoidant people in your life and be emotionally close to them
- If they didn't love you, they would leave and not look back
- Apologize when you see that you hurt them
- This is your way of controlling the world around you

#### **Advice for the Conflict Oriented**

- Respect the limits of the person who is conflict avoidant
- Don't argue with their perspective – it may not be criticism
- Remind the other person that you love them
- Learn to say, "I hadn't thought of it that way."
- Avoid "beating a dead horse"
- Allow the other person time to reset...then double it
- Stop talking when the time is up
- Force yourself to let go when it's over. You got what you needed
- It will take time for things to get back to normal and that's OK

Both parties need to remind themselves that you love the other person and that the reason for the conflict is that you have the ability to hurt each other. It also helps to remember that the conflict avoidant person avoids conflict because it is a part of who they are. Additionally, it helps to remember that the conflict oriented person needs to resolve conflict in order to move forward with you. It is a part of who they are.



# THE RANCHES

## THOU SHALT NOT BEAR FALSE WITNESS

by Heath Kull

The Bible makes it clear that we are not to bear false witness. Some interpret this to mean that we should not lie about others and some take it to mean that we should not lie at all, but the message is clear that lying is not acceptable. At The Ranches, we are constantly working with young people on this issue. As you can imagine, the kids come from a world where lying is considered a necessary form of communication. You can't tell your friends how you really think and you definitely don't want to ever talk about how you really feel. So you fudge the facts a little here and you leave part of the story out over there. This allows you to navigate the complicated relationships in your life with as little conflict as possible. After all, the whole point of lying in the first place, in many cases, is to avoid conflict.

This can make a child's transition at The Ranches very difficult as we expect kids to learn to tell the truth while they are with us. In most cases, we have to start at the very beginning.

*What is a lie? ... And what isn't?*

Is it dishonest to say "fine" if someone asks you how you're doing (And you're not doing fine)?

Is it a lie to say that someone looks OK when you don't think that they do?

Is it dishonest to say that your chore is done when it's only done to a level you find acceptable?

Is it dishonest to say that you worked for two hours when you spent as much time as possible asking to go to the bathroom?

Is it dishonest to change the subject when someone asks if you're doing alright?

These are just some examples, but they are situations that we deal with on a daily basis. We must acknowledge that it is difficult to live a life where we choose not to lie. It is even more difficult to live a life where we choose to be honest all of the time. But how can you trust people who are working to help you find hope again by changing your behavior if you can't trust them to be honest with you about how they feel, or even how they think.

At The Ranches, we must challenge ourselves to understand and accept that we, "shall not bear false witness." Especially to hurting kids who have been lied to so many times that they believe that they do not deserve the truth.

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## THANK YOU

Thank you to all the businesses, organizations and churches that made monetary or in-kind gifts during the period July 1, 2017 - August 31, 2017. We deeply appreciate your commitment to children and families!

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Our counseling staff offers classes for parents and others working with young parent training programs.

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## Help Us Share Our Story

Representatives of New Mexico Boys and Girls Ranches are available to meet with clubs, civic organizations and fellowship groups to share our story of bringing hope to hurting youngsters.

If you are interested in arranging a speaking engagement for your organization, simply give us a call at (505) 881-3363 or (800) 660-0289.

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