

Your Wellness

Strategies for Mental Health, Career, and Family Success

Issue 134 March 2026

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Recco Santee Richardson, Ph.D., LPC

Dr. Recco's Corner

I'm embattled regarding an "on the grounds" practical look at children/teens and their emotional existence in today's culture. It is becoming clear that the world in which we live today is trying to take our children on a ride.

From where I sit, a better understanding of childhood, culture and emotions is needed for those of us committed to teaching, serving, helping, and guiding children and their families.

At the core of what is needed, is a focus on the cultural educational experiences of children that are offered in the home, local schools, community, religious settings, and the broader society. My thoughts can be called many things.

The fact remains, after three decades of servicing children and families and armed with my top-tier graduate school educational training, I see what I see and know what I see. I'm ready to share knowledge.

Today's generation is not lost. They are not even close to it. What is perhaps lost is our touch and ability to meet their expressed needs. Needs that require tender care, resources, support, planning and the rest of the kitchen sink.

So today, I'm calling on individuals like you and others to take a closer look. A look that not only examines the current state of our children/teens but also explores what we can do to better things. It is my belief we can write a more proper narrative regarding our children and their outcomes.

I'm ready to pen a more perfect narrative. Are you? I sense a calling and pending mandate. Do you? I want to make a difference and see results. Do you? Will you help me and help us, help our children and families? Our children and families need you, need me and need us.

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A Look at Internal Family Systems (IFS)

Featuring: Jiandan Leslie Hu, Master's Level Counseling Intern

Internal Family Systems (IFS) is a therapeutic model. It was created by Richard Schwartz and views a person's inner world as a system of "parts," each with its own feelings, needs, and protective strategies. Instead of assuming people have one unified personality, IFS says we all have multiple subpersonalities that try to help us navigate life in their own ways. At the core of the model is the belief that everyone has a "Self," which is the core of who a person is beneath all their emotions, reactions, and inner conflicts.

In simple terms, Self is the calm and grounded part of you that can respond rather than react. It is the inner leader that is steady, compassionate, and clear minded. Schwartz describes this Self as naturally curious, confident, and caring. The approach focus is on helping clients reconnect with their Self so they can relate to their Self parts with more ease and less fear. In IFS, parts tend to fall into three general categories.



1). Exiles: Exiles are the young, vulnerable parts that carry emotional pain from earlier life experiences.

2). Managers: Managers work hard to prevent that pain from getting triggered, often by controlling situations, striving for perfection, or staying hypervigilant.

3). Firefighters: When exiles do get activated, firefighters jump in to put out the emotional "fire," sometimes through intense behaviors like substance use, overeating, or shutting down.

While these behaviors can look unhealthy from the outside, IFS treats every part as trying to help in the best way it knows how. The goal is not to eliminate any part. Instead, therapy helps them relax out of extreme roles so the client can move through life with more balance.

Therapists who utilize IFS job is to help clients notice and build relationships with their parts. They start by supporting clients in identifying which part is showing up, what that part is trying to accomplish, and how they feel toward it. Curiosity is the key. The therapist then guides the inward and help them create enough space from their reactions so they can speak from Self rather than from a blended or overwhelmed part.

From there, the work unfolds gently. The therapists help client's protective parts feel acknowledged and appreciated for how hard they have been working. Many protectors (managers and firefighters) will not let the client approach more vulnerable exiles until they trust that Self can handle the intensity. Once trusting the therapist takes place, clients allow their therapist to connect with exiled parts, hear their stories, and help them release the burdens they have been carrying. This process, often called unburdening, allows the system to reorganize in healthier ways. Managers and firefighters step back from extremes and exiles no longer overwhelm the client with old emotional wounds. To use IFS effectively, therapists need patience, steadiness, and a commitment to staying in their own Self energy during sessions. When done well, IFS offers clients a way to understand themselves with more compassion and to transform inner conflict into a more peaceful, cooperative internal system.

References

Schwartz, R. C., & Sweezy, M. (2019). *Internal family systems therapy* (2nd ed.). Guilford Press.



Leslie Hu

Master's Level Counseling Intern

"Leslie is developing
at a good pace."
Dr. Recco

Welcome

To Our Team of Mental Health Therapists!



Jianda Leslie Hu, BA
Master's Level Counseling
Intern



Chaunjon'a Verdun-Jennings, BA
Master's Level Counseling
Intern



Hannah Rau, BA
Master's Level Counseling
Intern



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"We're excited about
our new therapists."
Dr. Recco

Therapist's Spotlight

Featuring: Pamela Nealy, MSW, LMSW

Pamela "Pam" Nealy is the Therapist Spotlight for the month of March. Pam is a Licensed Social Worker. She spent many years working at a local hospital, until retirement. She works for Deborah Dewey Walker Family Services (DDWFS) as contractual clinical therapist and enjoys having the duties as her retirement job. Pam has a lot of work experience in the health and human services field. Prior to being a social worker, she worked in foster care, CPS, and even had a career path at Genesee Intermediate School District. Pam is someone that will advocate for others, go into the community, provide information, offer resources, brighten a person's day, provide the right answer, and be there at critical times.



Pamela Nealy
MSW, LMSW

1). In your opinion, what most determines a person's personality and why?

According to Pam, a person's personality is their characteristic, way of thinking, feelings, and behaviors. She went on to say that personality embraces moods, attitudes, and opinions and is most clearly expressed in interactions with other people. It includes behavioral characteristics, both inherent and acquired, that distinguish one person from another and that can be observed in people's relations to the environment and to the social group. She finds that often she explains to her clients the development of their personality development which is influenced by genetic, social, and environmental factors. The light comes on for her clients when they understand and learn how their responses, environmental pressures, and social influences powerfully shape their attitudes, values, and beliefs.

2). What seems to be a person's go-to thought when they fail and what should they do to fix it?

The first thing that Pam mentioned was cognitive distortions. She said that when a person fails at something, many times they engage in negative cognitive distortions such as, labeling, overgeneralizing, all or nothing thinking, mental filter (dwelling on one aspect of a criticism), mind reading, or discounting the positive. To manage the distortions, Pam encourages her clients to first identify patterns, keep a journal, take a break and calm down. Second, she suggests that they challenge various thoughts and focus on facts. Third, she poses to her clients to use the double standard method, which features asking if you would hold a friend to the same harsh standard. Lastly, Pam encourages her client to consider appropriate alternatives.

3). How do you assist clients in enhancing their personal character?

Pam stated that she encourages her clients to practice daily self-reflection, analyze their actions and thoughts to understand the behavior patterns, and live by the values –act in alignment with them. She shares with her clients the importance of immediately taking responsibility for their mistakes, cultivate empathy and kindness by actively listen to others, try putting yourself in their shoes, stepping out of their comfort zone, and embrace new challenges. In addition, she suggest to her client to surround themselves with like values and positive trait and use tools for growth such as journaling, meditation, reading all can cultivate mindfulness and self-awareness.

"Not many words describe Pam's and her abilities."
Dr. Recco

4). Why do bad things tend to happen to good people?

Pam quipped that bad things not only happen to good people, but misfortunes also have no respect for class, race, or status of a person. A person can have both good and bad things present in their lives which have nothing to do with a person's character.

For instance, say a good person was diagnosed with a mental health diagnosis which interrupted the life they knew. The diagnosis could cause them struggle to make connections, increase emotional distress, promote cognitive difficulties, and impact their enjoyment of activities.

This "bad thing" could result from a complex mixture of genetics, brain chemistry, environmental factors, life experiences (which could include childhood), and chronic stress. So, when we look at bad things happening to good people, some of the horrible things are a result of people not being able to manage the fore-mentioned and the stressors of life.

5). Talk about a time you felt empowered as a person and how you achieved it.

After a brief pause, Pam shared that for many years she thought she couldn't return to school and complete her master's degree in social work. The thoughts were due to age, the required level of commitment, and lack of confidence in navigating the requirements of the program. She graduated with her bachelors in 1979; it wasn't until 2009 that she returned to obtain her master's degree.

Pam stated that what changed her thinking was the decision to stop telling herself that she couldn't succeed. She replaced the negative distortions with healthier empowering thoughts. She went further to say that her change (and other people's change) happened when work was attached to it. From here, Pam took it upon herself to research different programs and recognizing and knowing what type of learner she was. Once she found a learning a program, institution, she completed the enrollment packet and received the acceptance letter.

She realized that it was her own negative thoughts and fears that paralyzed her from moving forward for years. She said that she started moving forward with more confidence, a better sense of self, and the realization that she had control over the outcome.

6). What is the best way for your clients to cope with a failed relationship (friend, dating, marriage) and how do you help them?

With lots of confidence, Pam argued that when clients seek tools to manage the emotions from relationships that are no longer working or have ended, it is important for them to allow time for grieving, accept the breakup, and turn their focus on self-care and rebuilding their life. Tools that she shares with clients include the following.

1. Processing their emotions: She encourages clients to allow themselves to cry and grieve rather than suppressing their feelings.
2. Cease communication: At the conclusion of a relationship, Pam urges her clients to cut off or limit communication so as to have good closure and avoid re-opening wounds.

**"There is an answer
to the bad things
that happen to us."
Dr. Recco**

3. Refrain: It is critical to refrain from checking and reviewing the former love interest's social media and places they regularly visit. Doing the stated can hinder the healing process.

4. Analyze the relationship: It is important to examine what went wrong, identify lessons, and commit to avoiding repeating patterns. In this stage, effort should take place to avoid using things to cope with the pain of the loss, refrain from using mood changing substances, don't rush into another relationship, rebuild yourself by engaging in hobbies, practice personal growth, and most importantly regularly forgive yourself, your x-partner and others.

7). What are some ways a person can celebrate themselves?

For some reason, people do not often celebrate themselves, said Pam. She believes that when a person celebrates themselves, they validate themselves and engage in a form of self-care. There are several ways a person can celebrate themselves.

First, they can acknowledge accomplishments, practice self-care and pampering, connect with friends and family, create a relaxing atmosphere at home, do something that they have on their bucket list to complete, shift their mindset and language, practice positive affirmations, journal regularly, and embrace their strengths.

8). Why is self-worth important to have and how to you help your clients secure it?

With a straight face, Pam shared that self-worth is the internal and, stable belief that a person has that makes them feel valuable and worthy. Self-worth is critical for wholesome mental health, being resilient, reducing anxiety, avoiding depression, and securing healthier relationships.

Pam helps her clients improve their self-worth by encouraging them to practice self-compassion, challenge negative self-talk, and celebrate small personal victories in their lives. Some tools that uses during counseling sessions are active listening, highlighting strengths, helping to recognize skill sets and rehearsing past accomplishments.

9). What are some ways to overcome feeling or being embarrassed?

Pam offered that there are many ways a person can minimize being embarrassed. She often tells her clients to practice self-compassion, laugh it off, normalize the mistake, shift the focus, take a deep breath, use humor, acknowledge the mistake, and own what happened. Pam went on to say that we all do embarrassing things. The key is how we handle the situation.

**"It is okay to
celebrate ourselves."
Dr. Recco**

12 Financial Wellness Tips



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Over the years, I have learned that money struggles and concerns can impact a person's mental health and overall well-being. To address the stated, it is helpful to do the following on a regular basis.

1). Know Your Numbers: Take time to understand your income, expenses, debts, and savings by writing out your monthly cashflow. Something as simple as an excel chart or handwritten pages can help see where the dollars are going monthly. Awareness is the first step towards feeling more in control of your finances.

2). Build An Emergency Fund: Only 46 percent of adults who live in the United States have enough emergency savings to cover three months of expenses, according to Bankrate's Emergency Savings Report. Having a cushion of cash can reduce stress when unexpected expenses arise. Savings is built by consistency so designate an amount every pay period or month and stick to it-pay yourself first.

3). Avoid Financial Avoidance: Ignoring bills or financial decisions often increase anxiety. Facing financial tasks in small steps can reduce stress. Delaying can also make a problem even larger. Thus facing your finances sooner is typically better than doing it later. Delaying can lead to missing deadlines, penalties, fees and additional interest charges that are costly.



4). Create a Simple Spending Plan: A budget doesn't have to be restrictive. Think of it as a plan that gives your money purpose and direction. If you don't like the word "budget" because it feels restrictive, use "cashflow" and remember you are in control of where you spend your dollars.

5). Watch How You Talk About Money: Words have power to frame things in a positive way. Don't say you are "bad" with money, say you "need to understand money better" and get professional guidance. Don't think of deprivation and what you *cannot* afford, focus on what you *can* pay for and enjoy those options.

6). Limit High-Interest Debt: Credit cards and other high-interest debt can quietly grow over time. Paying down high-interest balances can provide both financial and emotional relief. Consider why the credit card debt exists and focus on the future, not the past decisions. With a new mindset and better spending awareness paying off credit balances will reduce your stress.

There is a relationship between mental health and financial stability."
Dr. Recco

7). Automate Good Habits: Automatic savings and bill payments make it easier to stay consistent without constant decision-making. There are so many options such as automatic bill payments for utilities and automatic transfers of funds from saving to checking to help manage cash flows monthly. When using automatic payments, set it but don't forget it. Also, it is good to confirm transactions monthly so that errors are caught quickly.

8). Save for Future Goals: Setting aside money for goals—retirement, education, or travel—can provide motivation and a sense of progress. It can seem overwhelming but think of saving as a marathon, not a sprint. Consistent repeatable steps will get you closer to your destination. You might not get there as quickly as you want but you will make progress toward your goal. To stay motivated, focus on the progress on a year-to-year basis.

9). Review Your Financial Protection: Insurance, emergency savings, and estate documents help protect you and your loved ones from unexpected events. Insurance and estate planning should be done with a professional. Most attorneys and financial planners have an initial no fee consultation. The key is to review your financial protection before a crisis, illness or family emergency occurs. Reviewing, protection, and planning can give you peace of mind.

10). Have Honest Money Conversations: Talking about finances with partners or family members can prevent misunderstandings and improve financial decision-making. It is good to have open conversations with your partner so you can be aligned with your money goals. When it comes to end of life planning, gather loved ones and discuss your legacy plan by hosting a family meeting.



11). Avoid Comparing Your Finances to Others: Everyone's financial journey is different. Focus on steady progress rather than comparison. In a world of instant gratification, accessible luxury goods, and social media influencers, it is easy to suffer from FOMO – fear of missing out. Set your own goals and celebrate the small wins that build confidence and reinforce your healthy financial habits.

12). Seek Professional Guidance When Needed: Financial professionals can help create a plan, reduce uncertainty, and provide clarity for complex financial decisions. They can go by many names such as financial advisor, financial planner, and wealth manager to name a few. When selecting a professional focus on what licenses, certifications and experience they have and make sure they are aligned with your area of planning.

**"Habits and goals
can improve our
personal finances."
Dr. Recco**

Sunshine Committee Outing

Dave and Busters

Saturday, April 11, 2026

Where?

Dave and Busters- Utica

45511 Park Ave
Utica, MI 48315

Date and Time?

Saturday, April 11th, 2026
5:00pm until 9:00pm

Who?

This is a sunshine committee event that all staff members can attend. This includes the interns. Everyone is allowed to bring a plus one to this event and all their school-aged children that live with them. Dr. Recco will be paying for the event, so it will be **no cost** for those attending.



"It is good when staff spend quality time together."
Dr. Recco

Name: _____ Date: _____

Phone Number: _____

Will you have a plus one? (Circle one) **YES or NO**

Will you have children? How many? _____

PLEASE HAVE THIS COMPLETED FORM TO SAMANTHA BY April 4, 2026

Children, Culturalism, & Emotional Development

By: Recco Santee Richardson, Ph.D., LPC

At the core of the quality and wholistic development of children/teens is the need to be emotionally intact and healthy. To reach the stated, the fostering of childhood experiences, culture, emotions, goals, behaviors, and intentions must take place in the school setting via social emotional learning programming (McCormick, Cappella, et., al. 2019), in the home via effective parenting, and in the larger community via programming and support.

Our children's past, current, and future outcomes are dependent on their ability to succeed in school, the workplace, relationships, and citizenship. This cannot be waived on or made a side note. In truth, now is the time to put forth a full court press that encourages our children to exhibit self-control, emotional regulation, pro-social skills, strong character, conflict resolution abilities, and much more.



It is in the arms and huddle of social contacts that children best gain and excel in competencies that promote wellness, achievement, success, and overall good spiritedness. The home, school, community climate, and culture have a critical role in children developing competencies and moving forward with intent and purpose. For children/teens, their purposes, competencies, emotions, culture, family, education, and social skills are all interdependent.

"Culture can anchor our children."

Dr. Recco

Speaking as an in-demand clinical therapist and seasoned trainer, too many of our children are not excelling due to struggling with basic emotions, under-developed character traits, distorted family views, and poor competencies. Why? Because somewhere along the line in the home, school or community, effective efforts to instill in them the following skills did not take place adequately (see chart 1).

Chart 1 Important Childhood Skills

Personal Self-Control	Attentional Skills	Compliance/Cooperation
Accepting Others	Cognitive Flexibility	Being Organized
Positive Relationships	Critical Thinking Skills	Multi-Tasking
Problem Solving	Following Directions	Focus/Concentration
Remaining Calm	Healthy Emotions	Having Empathy/Apathy
Understanding Social Cues	Stress Management	Working Memory

A Solution Called Culture

Overall, I try not to be too pessimistic and guilty of not providing solutions. For every problem stated, a solution should be offered. There are myriads of solutions for the current struggles that our children/teens and families experience. For example, better public policies, enhanced funding for schools, on-going community programs, and quality early childhood care are possible solutions. For the purposes of this writing, the suggested solution is enhanced cultural education.

If nothing else, my graduate school studies at Central Michigan, Wayne State University and Walden University taught me the importance of culture and social change. Various sources report that:

1). Culture: An umbrella term which encompasses the social behavior and norms found in human societies (Wikipedia, 2021). Culture is the knowledge, beliefs, arts, laws, customs, capabilities, and habits of individuals in group settings. Historically, it is reported that culture is acquired through the learning processes and introduction of enculturation and socialization.

2). Social Change: A set of philosophical ideas and goals that move society forward. It is based on culture, religion, economics, and science that drives development and interactions. When implemented properly, social change can create and apply ideas, strategies, and actions that promote the worth, dignity, and development of individuals, communities, organizations, institutions, cultures, and societies (Walden University, 2021). In essence and fullness, positive social change results in the improvement of human and social conditions.

The Necessity of Cultural Teachings

Regardless of the race, ethnicity or religion of a child/teen, there is a need for them to be taught about their culture and the culture of other people. The instructions must be unbiased, fair, accurate, sensitive, and reflective of the past and current times. I really believe that consistent cultural education can fix the current child/teen related problems associated with substance abuse, school truancy, failure to reach grade level equivalency, hues of early life racism (institutional, structural), bullying, teen pregnancy, juvenile crime, disrespect, low regard for life, and detachments.

As a nation, we are not discussing the various cultural issues that children/teens need resolved. Because of this our children/teens are challenged by levels of crime, premature death, under-funding, and politics that directly impacts them. It behooves us to begin talking with our children/teens about cultural issues, sensitive world topics/strategies and what equitable opportunities and outcomes are available. The goal should be that from an informed view, our children/teens perceive the world and others properly and with respect. This we must do if we want to fix the problems that destroy healthy childhood experiences.

Part of our doing rests in our decision to promote and offer cultural events. The events are a perfect alternative that helps children/teens avoid boredom and engaging in risk taking behaviors.

Types Of Cultural Events

Throughout the world, there are myriads of cultural events that place daily. Most cultural events fall in one of the following categories.

Ceremonies	Dance Company	Service Event	Food/Drink Festival
Museum	Community Arts	Sporting Event	Music Festival
Art Gallery	Theatrical Play	Various Shows	Invitationals

**"Today, culture and social charge are badly needed."
Dr. Recco**

Benefits Of Culture

Because there are benefits for our children/teens associated with teaching and offering culture, it is our duty to fix the presenting problems. The benefits include:

- 1). Culture can instill and transform views, beliefs and attitudes that are productive and good for personal wellness.
- 2). Culture can provide strength to withstand inequality and social ills.
- 3). Culture helps to integrate into the larger society, respond better to prejudices, and empowers.
- 4). Culture can promote positive attitudes and an understanding of societal roles.
- 5). Culture can encourage high expectations, adequate competence, and critical consciousness.
- 6). Cultural issues shape the social, political, economic, and cultural fabric of the United States.
- 7). Culture fundamentally influences lives.
- 8). Cultural awareness can increase achievement, engagement, and close gaps.
- 9). Culture promotes ethnic-racial identity development.
- 10). Culture encourages democratic citizenship in a pluralistic society.
- 11). Cultural awareness has the potential to be transformative.
- 12). Culture can strengthen identity, promote equity/inclusivity and support critical thinking.
- 13). A steady diet of culture can provide much needed challenges and scaffold learning.
- 14). Culture encourages taking personal responsibility and inclusiveness.
- 15). Culture can raise critical consciousness and promote problem solving skills.
- 16). Culture encourages diverse experiences that provide knowledge.

**"The power of culture
must be discussed."
Dr. Recco**

**"Together, we
all can win."
Dr. Recco**

How to Contact Us

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