

Encouraging Your Wellness

Volume 4, Issue 1

March 19, 2012

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Positive Parenting— American Parenting Under Fire—Again.

It's no wonder that there are literally hundreds of thousands of parenting books on the market. Every time we turn around, another author or study is examining where we are going wrong and how to make it "right." I typically take these studies with a grain of salt, but one I recently read hit home for what I see often in my practice. American parents are known as hovering, helicopter parents who rush in at the first sign of trouble to rescue our little ones. We are stressed if our child isn't zooming through their developmental stages or school the way other children are. We worry that our children won't be competitive in our fast paced American culture if we don't take them to piano lessons and Mandarin classes. One need not go any further than typical suburban America to see first hand the competitiveness exhibited between parents/children and their counterparts. "Oh, *your* child's not walking yet... My Annabelle has been walking for over a month already!" And so it begins... A new book titled, Bringing Up Bebe, which lauds the "wisdom" of French parents, who love their children but don't live for them the way American parents do, has recently hit the bestseller list. It challenges the intensity of American parenting, and basically tells American parents to stop living for our kids.

While I don't believe that the French (or any other culture) has parenting any better figured out than we do, I am concerned about the intensity of parenting in America. Sharon Hays, a sociologist at the University of Southern California states, "American parenting is child-centered, expert-guided, emotionally absorbing, labor-intensive, financially expensive and is



A Closer Look at the Strengths of Introverts

In October, 2010, Psychology Today magazine published an article by Dr. Laurie Helgoe titled, "Revenge of the Introverts." I found this article to be very helpful and have since given it to several of my clients. It was the first article I have found that outlined the strengths of being introverted instead of making introverts feel inferior. By the way, introvert does not mean that someone is lacking in social skills. It is much more about how a person thrives. Dr. Helgoe explains that introverts have a preference for the inner world of their own mind rather than the outer world of sociability. Depleted by too much external stimulation, introverts thrive on reflection and solitude. Introverts psychic opposites, extraverts, prefer schmoozing and social life because such activities boost their mood. They get bored by too much solitude. (continued pg. 2)

Dear Readers,



I just heard the weather report for the week and it called for temperatures in the 70's. I'm trusting it is not premature to wish everyone a Happy Spring. I hope this issue of **Encouraging Your Wellness** finds you happy and staying healthy. And, as always, I hope you find this newsletter informative as well as inspirational in helping you be the person, parent, and partner you want to be. Happy Reading!

This is the 4th year anniversary of this Encouraging Your Wellness Newsletter. In that time, I have gone from a few subscribers to hundreds. I continue to feel very blessed to be working in a field I love with clients who are truly inspirational to me. I was recently talking with a client about the concept of "attitude of gratitude." Her goal this year is to wake each morning and start her day with thoughts of what she is truly grateful for in her life. She doesn't just stay with the typical friends, family, etc. She has really stretched to look for the smaller things in life that she may take for granted. For me, well, I am grateful to have witnessed the transformation it has made in her life, and the inspiration it has given to me. Spring is a great time for clearing out the old negative thoughts and replacing them with all that is good in our lives. Look closely, I bet you'll find a lot!

"The mothering today in America is culturally and historically unprecedented."

American Parenting Under Fire—cont'd from pg. 1

expected to be done by mothers alone. The mothering you see today in America is culturally and historically unprecedented. We expect selfless devotion to what we interpret as the child's needs, wants and interests at every moment of the day." This statistic in a recent newspaper article really caught my attention:

American mothers who work outside the home (and that's 75% of all American moms) spend more time with their children today than stay-at-home mothers did in the 1960's

I had to read this several times and let it sink in. My initial thought was, "What were stay at home moms in the 60's doing with all their time?!" I was missing the point. I believe it is very likely that our American culture drives us to be better, smarter, faster, more prepared, more competitive, stronger, and the list goes on...It is quite possible that we are getting way too much of our self-worth through the performance of our kids. We think more and more is

Strengths of Introverts cont'd from pg. 1

While there are some extreme extroverts and extreme introverts, most of us share some characteristics and traits of both. But ask any introvert and it will seem like everyone else is extroverted. This is because of perceptual bias—extraverts are noisier and dominate the spotlight, so they seem more prominent. Introversion is often confused with shyness, but introversion is not social discomfort. Rather than being adverse to social engagement, introverts become overwhelmed by too much of it, which explains why the introvert is ready to leave the party after an hour and the extravert gains steam as the night goes on. Dr. Helgoe explains that introverts seek time alone because they *want* time alone—not because they are unable to secure social contacts. She uses the example, "An introvert and a shy person might be standing against the wall at a party, but the introvert prefers to be there, while the shy individual feels she has no choice." The problem, then, is *not* that there is something wrong with the introverts, rather that there is a misguided view of introverts that make

Couple's Corner—Investing in Your Relationship

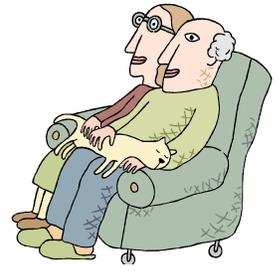
Spring is nearly upon us and soon many of us will be planting gardens and waiting enthusiastically to see our investments pay off. We will turn and nurture the soil, give just the right amount of water, pluck weeds and scare away unwanted garden visitors. We know that to have a plentiful harvest of flowers or fruits and vegetables, we must spend time and effort caring for that which is important to us. Our relationships are no different. No matter how happy we are or healthy our relationship is, we must spend time to nurture it to keep it strong and thriving. A client recently shared with me some wisdom in this area that she had heard. To nurture and keep vital your relationship requires undistracted and totally dedicated time to one another. This was this rule of thumb:

- 15 minutes per day
- 1 hour per week
- 1 night per month
- 1 weekend per quarter

I really liked this because it felt reasonable to me. How about getting your partner's attention and sharing this idea with him/her. Hopefully, by harvest time, your relationship will be as satisfying and plentiful as your garden.

American Parenting Under Fire —cont'd from page 2

better. But this kind of pressure has significant disadvantages. Kids and teens are being diagnosed with anxiety and depression at alarming rates. Some estimates say that a quarter of them are on some form of anti-depressant or anti-anxiety medication by the time they leave for college. Christine Carter, a sociologist at the University of California Berkeley believes American parents have it backward. In the pursuit of happiness, "The underlying American assumption is, if our kids get into a great college, they'll get a great job, then they'll be happy. What we need to be parenting for is not achievement first, then happiness, but happiness first." She advises parents to lose the complete and total self-sacrifice and take care of ourselves. (Now there's something I preach regularly!) She also advises to expect effort and enjoyment; not perfection, and do simple things together like have family dinners. We know from science when their brains are filled with positive emotions, like engagement, confidence and gratitude, they are more likely to be successful and fulfill their potential.



"...lose the complete and total self-sacrifice and take care of ourselves."

Strengths of Introverts Con't from pg. 2

them feel like misfits in their own culture. In fact, both anxiety and depression are more common among introverts than extraverts. It is important for introverts to know that they are not inferior in any way. In a series of studies, researchers mapped brain electrical activity in introverts and extraverts. The introverts all had higher levels of electrical activity, indicating greater cortical arousal, whether in resting state or engaged in challenging cognitive tasks. The researchers proposed that given their higher level of brain activity and reactivity, introverts limit input from the environment in order to maintain optimal level of arousal. Extraverts seek out external stimulation to get their brain juices flowing. So, for introverts, recognizing your own strengths and seeing the effects of cultural extraversion on your life can allow you to become more truly and comfortably *you!* And, for extraverts, take note. Treating introverts as if something is wrong with them is unwarranted. Labeling them as "shy", asking them why they don't like parties or people or demanding immediate feedback from introverts are all among the don'ts. Above all, telling an introvert how they can be more extraverted, as if that's the desired state, is very offensive. For more information, Dr. Helgoe's book, [Introvert Power: Why Your Inner Life Is Your Hidden Strength](#) is now available.



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If you are in need of individual, couple or family help, call me. Together with you, I will design a treatment plan that helps you achieve your goals and gets you on the road to feeling life more fulfilled. I specialize in working with teens, adults and children who are struggling with depression, anxiety, low self-worth, past experiences of abuse, and who are believing there must be more to life than what they are currently experiencing. I look forward to speaking with you.

Dear Pam,

What is the point in doing therapeutic trauma work? Doesn't it just bring up all the negative emotions, and if so, how is that helpful?

Your question is a complicated one. While trauma work is not for everyone, most clients find that it is tremendously helpful in the long term. First, some education about what causes trauma. When we are exposed to a situation, or a chronic environment in which our safety or integrity, or the safety or integrity of someone we love is at risk, it can cause trauma. Trauma itself is an actual event that happens in the brain. It actually psychologically freezes us in that moment until we are psychologically able to work through it. For example, after a serious car accident, we “see” cars about to hit us from every direction and possibly overreact causing our driving to be dangerous. Or, after an assault, we wake up in a panicky sweat, sure that someone is in our bedroom. Because trauma psychologically “freezes” us in that moment, these reactions can happen for years. We continue to see danger, and be on hyper-alert status, even when there is no danger present. This is no way to live in peace! This is the point in doing the therapeutic trauma work. We have successful therapeutic interventions that can help the brain re-process the trauma, and help to get it off of frozen, hyper-alert status. The work itself can be physically and emotionally draining, so it is important to pace the trauma work so as to not become more psychologically overwhelmed. But clients, both in my practice and in the larger trauma treatment community, report successful outcomes including better sleep, anxiety reduction, better self-esteem and empowerment, improved relationships, improved performance at work and a returning sense of safety and security that have been missing from their lives. They also report significant reductions in trauma symptoms including nightmares, flashbacks, and startle responses and increases in their general ability to relax. Trauma work is hard in the shorter term, but the benefits longer term make many clients see it's value.

