

Encouraging Your Wellness

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In this issue:

- **Positive Parenting...Helping Your Child with Anxiety.**

- **Keep On Laughing! It really is Good for You!**

- **Dear Pam,**

A question asked from a client, website visitor or class member is answered for all to see.

- **Couple's Corner**

Tips on keeping your relationship strong.

Positive Parenting— *Helping Your Child with Anxiety*

It is normal for most children to experience phases of anxiety, for example being scared of the dark or having trouble being away from a parent. However, when the anxiety lasts longer than a month or so, an Anxiety Disorder could be the reason. It is estimated that as many as one in eight children suffer from an Anxiety Disorder, and if left untreated the disorder can result in serious consequences. For example, children with untreated Anxiety Disorders are at a higher risk of performing poorly in school, having impaired social relations, and engaging in substance abuse. We also know that when children are left in a “state” of anxiety too long, it can become a “trait”, or more of a common mode of functioning. This can lead to a lifelong struggle with anxiety and/or depression. For these reasons, the American Psychological Association, among other medical associations, recommend treatment for children whose anxiety outlasts a “phase.”

How do you recognize if your child could be struggling with an Anxiety Disorder? One signal is your child having nervousness or fear that leads them to avoid places or activities. Frequent stomach or head aches that do not have a medical cause can also signal an Anxiety Disorder. Others include having sleep problems, difficulty concentrating, a behavior change including moodiness or clinginess, or the development of a nervous habit such as nail biting or hair pulling. If your child has a strong reaction to a change in routine, this is also a sign of anxiety. (cont'd on pg 2)



Keep On Laughing—It Really is Good for you!

My husband would be the first to tell you that after a long or stressful day, I can be found in front of an old episode of Seinfeld. I *crave* a good laugh, and for me, Seinfeld always comes through. For me (and for other lovers of this former sitcom) it is a great reminder to *not* take life too seriously. Truly, laughter is good for all of us. The benefits of laughter have been studied for decades, and here is what that research has taught us. Laughter has been scientifically shown to reduce stress hormones such as cortisol, epinephrine, and dopamine, while increasing health enhancing hormones like endorphins. Endorphins can be responsible for reducing pain, and one study even found that these endorphins are a stronger pain reliever than morphine in similar doses. Most significantly to me, though, is laughter's impact on feelings such as irritation, (Cont'd pg 2)

Dear Readers



Welcome Fall! I hope this issue of Encouraging Your Wellness finds you happy and staying healthy as well as enjoying the cooler mornings and Fall's bounty of colors. 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.

My summer was amazing! My family and I had a truly magical vacation and were so blessed to be able to spend nearly four weeks touring some of the National Parks. We made memories that I hope will last a lifetime. But there is something about the newness of fall, the return of school and routine, that I always crave. When we were kids, fall meant new clothes, new school supplies, new classmates and teacher, and a new opportunity at a great year. Even as an adult, I find fall a time of renovation and renewal. I imagine how I want the "year" to be, and set goals for myself and my family. I reflect on things that didn't work so well in the year past, and try to revamp. With each of these steps, I hope that I am living more intentionally in a way that truly matters to me. How about you? Could fall be an opportunity, as it was in childhood, to make a change? What change have you been putting off, that you know would improve something in your life? Fill in the blank: If I were living more intentionally, I would _____. Happy Reading!

"When we tell our children that their feelings/fears are silly, they do not feel heard or understood, and the anxiety can actually get worse!"

Helping your child with Anxiety...Cont'd from page 1

If your child does have troublesome anxiety, here are some tips for you: Pay attention to their feelings, don't dismiss them. When we tell our children that their feelings/fears are silly, they do not feel heard or understood, and the anxiety can actually get worse. Be your best, CALM self when your child is anxious. Your sense of calm can help your child restore their sense of calm. Try your best not to match your child's anxious emotions, as this can keep their anxious feelings aroused. Keep as much of a normal routine as possible. When anxious kids have predictability in their routines/environments, it can help them plan ahead for managing difficulties. Limit your child's exposure to upsetting news, stories, or movies. Some parents believe that exposure to these things gives the child lots of practice at managing anxiety. Not so! The child is already showing you their coping skills are tapped out, so upsetting news or movies simply elevate the anxiety further, and introduces more things for your

Keep on Laughing! continued from page 1

grief, anger, depression and anxiety. Laughter has been shown to reduce and sometimes dissolve these distressing emotions, most likely by the reduction in stress chemicals and the increase in endorphins. Additionally, laughter can shift our perspective to a more light-hearted view of our situation. Laughter helps us to relax, and studies have shown that our muscles remain relaxed for up to 45 minutes following a great belly laugh. Did you know that kindergarteners laugh approximately 300 times a day, and adults average only 17 times a day? We can learn something from kids, as they tend to be much more effective at taking themselves a little less seriously and life a little bit lighter.

When was the last time you had a great laugh? No, seriously, WHEN? I'm talking the abdominals hurt, tears rolling down your face, can't breathe kind of laugh. Try to create more opportunities for laughter in your life. Television and movies are great ways to seek reduce stress. In order to better understand mindfulness, it helps to compare it to

Couple's Corner—Time for a Relationship Check-Up?

Sometimes the best relationships are that way because of the time and attention that go into them. We wouldn't expect to plant our garden, offer no time or attention, and receive a bountiful harvest. Yet, some of us in relationships get stuck in that rut. We don't give our relationships the time and nurturance they need to get a great return on our investment. We all need check ups from time to time, and our relationship is no different. Try this idea. Write down the following statements, and rate yourself on a scale of 1-10 on how you are performing in each category (10 is the best). Then, both you and your partner rate one another in each of the categories. Warning! This can be an eye opening experience, so do this exercise when you and your partner are feeling generally satisfied with the relationship, and are looking to make it even better.

- I am a good listener
- I am romantic
- I regularly consider my partner's needs and interests
- I am supportive and regularly show my appreciation for my partner
- I talk about problems directly
- I am physically affectionate
- I notice my partner (haircut, new outfit, sad face, etc)
- I am playful/flirtatious with my partner
- I initiate sexual contact as much as my partner

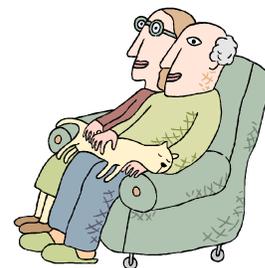
When you have both rated yourselves and each other, compare together over a nice dinner or glass of wine. Find out one area that your partner wishes you would spend more time and attention, and give it a try. It might also be fun to find out what your and your partner's Love Languages are by going to 5lovelanguages.com and taking the short quiz to learn how you most feel and experience love from another. Understanding your partners love language can help you communicate your love in a way that they can most enjoy it. Most importantly, use the information as a way to grow your relationship even stronger. Have fun!

Helping Your Child With Anxiety –continued from page 2

child to worry about. Children, or teens with anxiety, should not be watching horror or tragic type television. It is too much for them, and can lead their state of anxiety to become a trait. Next, and this is the hardest for parents, *Don't over-reassure your child!* When we offer too much reassurance, we disable our children from offering themselves internal reassurance. For example, if your child is very scared that there is a monster in the closet, and you actually *go to look for it* to disprove their fear, this can make things worse. Your child is now left thinking that it could have been true, since you, their wise parent, went to check it out. Worse, they rely on YOU to solve it, and they feel powerless to handle it themselves. When I am treating a child/teen with anxiety in my office, we work hard to build on their internal tools for managing anxiety. The client and I teach these tools to their parents, so that when the child is anxious, the parent can support the child by referring them back to their tools. This allows the child to develop internal resources versus expecting the parent to make it better each time they are anxious.

Keep on Laughing—Cont'd from page 2

laughter, but did you know that if you watch with someone else, you're more likely to laugh harder? Other opportunities include going to a comedy club with friends or family, having a game night with friends that you tend to laugh with, and surrounding yourself with reminders to loosen up, such as toys! Also, try to make it a practice to laugh at yourself and even find the humor in a bad situation. I have a client that has really had a fair number of challenges over the past two years, but she has the most amazing way of finding the humor in her situation. When she comes in, yes, she cries and is serious, but she also laughs like no one else I have ever heard. If you're likely to *eventually* look back on it and laugh, try to laugh in the moment instead. Force yourself to laugh, and see if the laughter then comes more naturally. Find a great funny book, or other ways to kick start your own humor therapy. And then share it with me, and we'll get a good laugh together!



“When we offer too much reassurance, we disable our children from offering themselves internal reassurance.”



Pamela Boaz, LCSW

I HAVE MOVED!
2095 W. 6th Ave. Suite 212
Broomfield, CO 80020

Phone: 303-906-8992
Fax: 303-460-7850
Email: pamelaboazlcsw@cs.com
Web: pamelaboaz.com

I'm on the Web! Visit me
at pamelaboaz.com

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,

My teenage daughter has a friend who cuts up and down her arms. Is she suicidal, and what should I say or do about it?

In the professional world, we call this practice *self-mutilation*. The practice of self-mutilation has been on the rise in the past two decades, and unfortunately, it is now common to know someone who engages in this type of behavior. Those who self-mutilate tend to have lower self-esteem, problems in dealing with their feelings, and have possibly experienced abuse or neglect. Some are imitating peers whom they have seen use self-mutilation as a coping skill. In fact, estimates suggest that 13-23% of teens have engaged in non-suicidal self-injury. Those who do often report that it helps them manage difficult emotions, and thus they repeat the behavior time and again. It is a physical way for them to show their emotional pain, and unfortunately, the endorphins that are released with injury can produce a sense of euphoria. Thus, there is temporary relief of the pain that they were overwhelmed with, suggesting to them that it works! To determine if someone who is engaging in self-injury is suicidal, a formal suicide assessment with a mental health professional is best. As the mom of her friend, here are some tips. Are her parents aware of the behavior, and do they take it seriously? If not, notifying the school counselor can bring this behavior out in the open. Do not react to her injuries with disgust, instead show concern without overdoing it. Too much concern can actually reinforce the practice. If this child is around your family frequently, *role model* how you handle difficult emotions. We know teens can have extreme emotions, and they may have no way to know how to regulate their emotions (talk themselves down from the edge). Role modeling that with your daughter and her friend can help her learn other ways. Encouraging this friend and her parents to seek mental health treatment where she could gain the skills and tools to better manage her own emotions is best. And don't forget about the impact on your daughter. Keep open communication lines about the self-mutilation (and other things) so that she knows she has your support in this difficult situation.

