

# Encouraging Your Wellness

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## Positive Parenting— *An Unpopular Topic*

I am going to go out on a limb here and tackle an unpopular subject. Several times in the last few weeks, I have come across situations where parents were promoting the use of spanking as a parenting tool. First, a friend on Facebook made the statement, "I would rather go to jail for spanking my kids than to have them go to jail because I didn't." Second, last evening I was in line at a festival and the parents in front of me were discussing spanking their children and at one point said, "I don't even get parents who don't spank their kids! Their kids just turn out to be rotten!" I have to admit that I get a little more than fired up when I hear statements like these, not because I am mad at the people making the statements, but because I am frustrated that more education is not offered on the harmful effects of spanking. I am hopeful that these parents mean well, but just don't have all the information. Years ago, when I was about to become a parent for the first time, and had no intention of using any form of corporal punishment with my child, my dad shared his disappointment with me and fear that my kids would be unruly—downright BAD, if I didn't plan to spank them. I am happy to report that my kids are well-adjusted and I get regular comments on how well behaved and mannered they are. While I respect that parents get to make their own decision on this, I also want to ensure that I am doing my part to spread the word on the harmful effects of spanking and promote parenting tools that actually work. Let's start by taking a look at the dangers of spanking. First and foremost, it doesn't work in the long term to correct misbehavior—research has demonstrated that it may (cont'd pg. 2)



## Depressed, but against an anti-depressant?

There has been much written recently on whether or not anti-depressants are as effective as once thought. Some studies have concluded statistically significant improvements, while others have found no better results from anti-depressants than placebos. I strongly believe that it all has to do with body chemistry, and have certainly seen psychotropic medications save people's lives. I have also witnessed clients moving from one medication to another to try to achieve some benefit without much luck. Regardless of whether you are strongly against the use of medication to treat depression, or haven't had much luck with the current medications, there are some ways to lift your mood naturally. Let's take a look at some, while keeping in mind that any change to your regimen of treatment should include a conversation with your doctor. (Cont'd on page 2)

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## Dear Readers,



Happy Holidays! 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!

The Holiday's are upon us—shopping, baking, socializing, decorating, giving—and this list goes on... In the past, this newsletter has discussed how to manage holiday stress, how to manage unresolved grief during the holidays, and how to help your children be grateful for what they have instead of getting a bad case of the “gimmes!” This time, however, I am going to fast forward to the New Year. Late December is also a time that most of us give thought to the improvements we wish to make in ourselves in the upcoming year—known as New Year's Resolutions. Research shows that most of us will make a resolution—usually related to our physical health—losing weight, exercising more, stopping bad habits, etc. I'm going to suggest a MENTAL HEALTH resolution. Try: Practicing self-care time, journaling, starting each day by listing 5 things for which you are grateful that day, regular deep breathing, intentionally looking for the good in a bad situation, practicing a daily affirmation—all of these will promote better mental health, which research has shown leads to better physical health. Happy New YOU!

*“We have to find other ways to solve conflicts and our kids need this example.”*

### **An Unpopular Topic—cont'd from pg. 1**

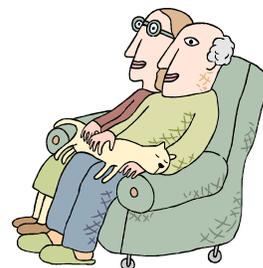
stop misbehavior in the short term, but makes behavior *far* worse in the long term. It has been shown to increase aggression in kids, likely because they have been sent the message that hitting solves problems. Therefore, it is actually counterproductive and works against the parent. For the person on Facebook with the jail comment—sorry—the opposite is actually true. Your child has a much greater risk of going to jail if you DO use spanking, and a considerable amount of research supports this finding. Where else in our lives do we hit people who behave badly or upset us? It isn't okay to hit our spouses, our bosses, the unhelpful store clerk, etc. We have to find other ways to solve conflicts and our kids need this example. When we spank our kids, what we are really saying to them is that they have completely outsmarted us, so our only option left is to out-muscle them. As adults, we can do better! Next, lets take a look at another message that hitting sends our children: *People who love me hit/hurt me*. Is this really a message we want our kids to receive? Domestic violence/violent relationships continue to be on the rise. I have seen multiple teens in my practice who are involved in violent relationships. When we send the message that I love you, therefore I hit/hurt you—it confuses our kids into believing that they deserve to be hit when they mess up—and therefore our kids are more likely to tolerate (cont'd)

### **Are you Anti Anti-Depressants? cont'd from pg. 1**

Let's start with eating habits. Our digestive track is known by some as our second brain because of how it's nerve cells interact with the brain. Think about how stress makes you feel in your stomach, and it's not hard to see the brain-gut connection. Some information suggests that 95% of our body's serotonin—a mood elevating chemical—is found in the stomach—not the brain! Research studies have shown that those who consume primarily whole foods like fruits, vegetables, fish and other non-processed foods, as compared with those who eat primarily processed meats, fried foods and desserts are 60% less likely to suffer from depression. Fresh whole foods have higher levels of vitamins, minerals, antioxidants, protein and healthy fats, which can dramatically improve our moods. Consider adding supplements. Omega-3 fish oils have been shown to be effective in mood management, and Dr. Oz once said it is the number one supplement he recommends. B-complex vitamins have been coined “anti-stress” vitamins, and inadequate levels can

## Couple's Corner—A Useful Communication Technique

When clients enter couples treatment, it is often because their communication has completely broken down. When we are not communicating effectively with our partners, we feel misunderstood, frustrated and often angry. A primary technique that couple's therapists teach their clients is called the Speaker/Listener technique from the book Fighting for Your Marriage by Markman, Stanley and Blumberg. This technique can feel very unnatural and takes some practice prior to getting the hang of it. Here's the basic idea: Only one person can have the "floor" at a time; they are known as the Speaker. Their job is to communicate their feelings or perspective using "I" statements vs. "You" statements. The other person is known as the Listener; their job is ONLY to listen and reflect what they hear their partner saying to them. They are NOT to agree, disagree, argue or state their perspective at this time. When they reflect to their partner what they hear from them, their partner indicates whether or not they have heard them correctly. If not, they repeat the process. If they have heard correctly, the partners change roles and the Listener becomes the Speaker to offer their feelings and perspective, while the partner's job becomes only to listen and reflect what they hear the Speaker communicating. This technique can feel burdensome, but it accomplishes a number of wonderful things. First, it slows down the runaway train of anger and frustration that can often depict this type of situation. Second, it almost always leads each partner to feel *heard*, which most couples report has been lacking in their communications. Third, when we are forced to truly listen to our partners in order to reflect their position accurately, we avoid getting caught in our own perspectives, or in only thinking of what our comeback will be, and we open ourselves to a deeper understanding of our partners emotions, perspectives and needs.



### An Unpopular Topic –cont'd from page 2

this in a romantic relationship. Furthermore, it makes our kids' self-esteem plummet. Although we are out to correct the misbehavior, if we ruin our kids self-esteem in the process, we open our kids for far more negative choices when they feel bad about themselves. Good discipline techniques actually build the child's self-esteem and make the *choice* into the problem instead of the child or parent being the bad guy. So, if we know that spanking doesn't work in the long term to correct misbehavior, it makes our kids more likely to be aggressive, it erodes our kids' self-esteem, it teaches them that hitting solves problems and that they deserve to be hit when they mess up—why do we continue to use it? Most often the answer is, "I don't know what else to do., so I do what my parents did." Well, I am going to argue that some of our parents used a rotary phone, too, but we now know better, have better options available, and have far better knowledge about what works. So, just as you learned to use a cell phone—instead of that rotary phone, it's time to grow current-day skills that will TRULY help your kids be the best that they can be. Let me know if I can help!

*...our parents used a rotary phone, too, but we now know better, have better options available, and have far better knowledge about what works!*

### Depressed, but Against An Anti-Depressant? Con't from pg. 2

cause depression. Vitamins B3 and B6 seem to have the most pronounced anti-depressant effect, but vitamin B12 and folic acid often help as well. A complex B vitamin will ensure you get all you need. St. John's Wort has some strong scientific research behind it and studies show it keeping pace or outperforming leading anti-depressant medications. The herb is said to work exceptionally well with mild to moderate depression when taken in the appropriate dosage. Vitamin D deficiency is said to be correlated with depression and other mood disorders. Most foods do not contain much Vitamin D, and we limit our exposure to the sun, which often leaves us Vitamin D deficient. Taking a supplement of Vitamin D can help to restore appropriate mood levels.

Physical Activity Nothing can be more clear. Exercise and mood regulation are close companions. If you want to give depression a swift kick out of your life, exercising daily can deliver the knock out punch. The feel-good chemicals that are released during exercise (adrenaline, endorphins, etc.) can help to counter the effects of depressive chemicals. Depression can rob you of the energy to exercise, so you might need to practice a mind over mood mentality—for example, "I don't have the energy/motivation to exercise, but I am going to do it anyway." Don't let your mood run your life! are



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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,**

*Help! My three year old is touching her genitals and I am scared that something has happened to her. Is this normal?*

Nothing seems to get us as scared than to imagine someone hurting or sexually abusing our child. When we hear things in the news such as the Penn State scandal, our fears increase—we ask ourselves how something like this could happen from a trusted/well-respected person. Knowing about normal sexual development can help ease our fears, as well as help us to identify if there actually is a problem.

Here's what is normal:

Age 2-6 : Curiosity is expressed in looking and touching.

You show me yours games/ Poop and pee talk

Awareness of differences in genders—mom's have breasts/ dad's have a penis.

Having erections/ rubbing genitals occasionally but not obsessively

Age 7-12: Creating games to compare bodies—playing house or doctor

Sexual interest increases—lots of questions

Interest in having or birthing a baby

Increasing modesty/ touching self in private

Dirty words or jokes—

May begin to imitate sexual behaviors—always consensual and without coercion.

Age 13-18: Masturbation in private/Trying to get sexual information from the internet

Voyeurism—wanting to watch and look at sexual development/activities of others

Kissing/interest in dating

Increased sexual behaviors both in and out of relationships

Sexual pre-occupation

The more information your child can get from you, the less need they will have to get it from others or through experience, so I always encourage parents to make sexuality a regular and open topic of discussion. The Body Book for Girls and The Body Book for Boys are great resources.

