

Encouraging Your Wellness

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Positive Parenting— *Taking a Closer Look at Rewards*

On goes the parenting controversy...to reward kids for their behavior and accomplishments or not to reward. Common sense might tell us that when we reward our kids for doing the right things, they will want to do it more often. However, I just finished reading a summary of a study that suggested that kids actually feel *controlled* by the behavior for reward system, and sabotage behavior systems such as these. In my experience, kids are not “one size fits all” and I believe that some kids can benefit from behavior charts (I have seen it many times.) But I also believe that if our kids are only working for external rewards, we are undermining their future success and happiness. Take for example, the employee that will only do a good job if there is a bonus in it for them. The adult who is only nice to people who can offer them something significant in return. The dad who will only be a good dad if the kids reward him for it. Not a pretty picture, huh? We have all seen this type of parenting around us. When my daughter first played soccer, there was a mom on our team that would shout during the game to her daughter, “20 bucks if you score a goal!” over and over again. (I cringed over and over again!) We see kids at the grocery store asking what they “get” if they are good in the store today. We see kids who only work for good grades because they get paid per A and B, etc. The question I ask is, “If the reward were not there, would the child still want to do their best?” (cont'd pg. 2)



Mindfulness—What is it?

I am so lucky to have the most amazing clients. Recently a fourteen year old boy shared with me that he spent a good deal of time, “checked-out.” He was asking for help to be more aware and present in the moment. The practice of mindfulness was just what he needed.

The core concepts of mindfulness come from Eastern philosophy, but are making their way to mainstream America. Yoga studios are packed full. The practice of meditation is sweeping previous non-believers. Kaiser Permanente recently wrote on the power of mindfulness to significantly reduce stress. We of course know that stress leads to various medical complications, thus Kaiser’s investment in helping members *prevent* or (cont'd on page 2)

Dear Readers



Welcome to Summer! I hope this issue of **Encouraging Your Wellness** finds you happy and staying healthy as well as enjoying some of the freedom that summer can bring. 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 family and I are preparing for an adventure in July. We are heading out on a road trip to see five National Parks, both in the US and Canada. We will be camping together for a month! There was a time in my life where being away (especially *camping*) for a month would have seemed impossible to me. My obligations and responsibilities would have felt too much for me to break away. Plus, truth be told, I *love* being home. But, as I started to consider it, I thought about the memories that would be made for myself as well as my children. I thought about a saying I have in my living room, “Live the Life You’ve Imagined.” And I considered how much I encourage my clients every day to live their lives with things that bring them joy and emotional renewal. So here I am—going for it... My hope is that I can role model for those of you who, like me, have been finding reasons *not* to live out something potentially amazing and memorable. Find something to go for...Happy Summer and Happy Reading!

“If the reward were not there, would the child still want to do their best?”

A Closer Look at Rewards...Cont'd from page 1

Or, absent the tangible reward, do they give up caring about doing their best or doing the “right” thing? What I know for certain is that we don’t want to raise a generation of kids who only try their best or act ethically if they get an *external* reward out of it. Here is what I like best. Unexpected Rewards. When we *occasionally* reward kids for doing their best or doing the right thing. The reward comes out of nowhere, and is *not* expected by the child. Here are some examples:

My husband is a teacher, and occasionally he will bring in donuts in the morning and say, “Kids who have all of their homework turned in can help themselves...” Kids are not simply turning in their homework *because* there will be donuts—it is an unexpected reward. (Cont’d pg 3 for another example)

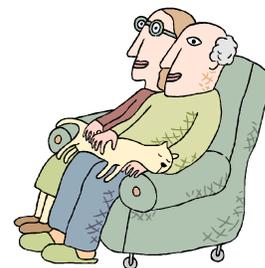
Mindfulness—continued from page 1

reduce stress. In order to better understand mindfulness, it helps to compare it to “mindlessness.” Mindlessness is what we experience when we are on autopilot, not really aware of what is going on around us. An example is driving home from work or to complete an errand, and not even remembering the drive. To the contrary, mindfulness is about paying attention to your moment to moment experiences. It’s focused on being solely in the moment.

Many mental health treatment programs incorporate mindfulness into their programs, based on the verified benefits. A colleague of mine added mindfulness to her parenting classes with great feedback from parents. Imagine being more present in the moment with your kids—we all might enjoy parenting a bit more if we could accomplish that. (cont’d) better physical health. Their beliefs that they were truly needed and valued increased their sense of

Couple's Corner– Relationship Consequences of Internet Pornography Use

In the last three years of my practice, I have been saddened by how many individuals and couples have been impacted by the use of internet pornography. It prompted me to look into this further. Some studies estimate that some 50-75% of men could meet criteria for a sexual addiction. (Statistics are less available for women, but certainly they can struggle as well) We know that internet pornography is cheap (often free!), and readily available, 24/7. Sex is a powerful driving force. Some people become completely preoccupied and obsessed with sex. Like any source of pleasure, sex can become addictive, in which case it becomes distorted and is used as a means of escape from the problems of every day life. Rather than deal with the problems, engaging in pornography use can lead to a feeling of comfort. This is then followed by shame and remorse. The addict believes that the solution to coping with feelings is found in yet another sexual experience. The cycle continues, creating more and more damage. The addicts partners have emotional and sexual consequences of their own. They often feel betrayed, undesirable and sexually inept, not being able to keep the interest of their partner. Trust is broken and the stability and passion of the relationship suffer. One of the most dangerous parts of any addiction is that it requires increased use to achieve the same benefit. With pornography addiction, increased visual and/or physical stimulation is required to achieve the same arousal level. By comparison, a drug addict who now regularly uses cocaine can no longer get the same “high” from marijuana. The sexual stimulation provided by extreme pornography use often results in no longer being able to achieve arousal in normal ways. The addiction has essentially eroded normal sexual satisfaction—thus destroying the couple’s sexual relationship. While pornography addiction can be very shameful, there is help available. To learn more about sex addiction, please visit, www.sexaa.org, www.sarr.org, www.sexhelp.com, or www.sexualrecovery.com After the addiction is treated, couple’s therapy can help get the relationship back on track. (Thanks to Mark Gungor for some of the above information)



A Closer Look at Rewards –continued from page 2

My daughters and I were coming home from the grocery store and I asked them, “Who will help carry in the groceries?” My older daughter said, “me” and my younger daughter said, “not me.” When we were finished, I said, “Kids who helped carry in groceries can help themselves to a treat.” My younger daughter was upset, saying, “I didn’t know we would get a treat!” I shared with her that we don’t always know what is going to happen, but we try to do the right thing anyway. The following week, both girls offered to carry in groceries, and my younger daughter finished and asked if she could get a treat. I said, “No, today we carried in the groceries just to be helpful.” I didn’t want her to believe that she always gets something tangible out of helping. She now regularly carries in groceries, and it is clear that she feels good about helping. And yes, *occasionally* there is a reward. Help your kids *feel* good about doing their best or the right thing by saying to them, “You must feel really good about yourself for...” They will start to feel the internal reward of being their best, and the external rewards will just be bonuses! Good luck.

“Help your kids feel good about doing their best or the right thing by saying, “You must feel really good about yourself for...””

Mindfulness–Cont’d from page 2

If you’re ready to give it a try—here’s how to practice mindfulness. A therapist can help you with formal mindfulness practices such as meditative body scans, but informal practices can be mastered at home. Start with deep breathing, focusing on your breath as it goes in and out, and on the breath moving your lower belly. Next engage your senses. Intentionally pay attention to the sights, sounds, and smells around you. For example, go for a walk. Intentionally notice what you see around you. Notice what birds or other sounds you hear. Notice what your feet feel like in your shoes. Notice what the air feels like on your skin. When you focus on the scene in front of you, it helps to keep the brain calm. When we stay present in the moment, we appreciate more of what is around us, and ward off anxiety provoking thoughts. In the end, mindfulness may ward off the stress that’s wreaking havoc on our physical and mental health, and that’s worth paying attention to.



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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,

My husband and I divorced a short time ago. What is the best way to introduce my new boyfriend to my kids?

There are several important things to keep in mind when introducing a new person in your life. First, how stable and committed is your new relationship? Kids should not be exposed to every person you date. Only move forward if you have been dating the person for six months or more, and feel that it is serious. Next, keep in mind that while *you* may be excited, your child is not likely to be. Kids often fantasize (even secretly) about their parents getting back together. They will see your new partner as an obstacle to that, and can resent them from the very beginning. Try to have empathy for their situation. They didn't ask for or want the divorce, nor did they have any control of the changes that occurred in their lives as a result of the divorce. *You* may be excited about your new partner meeting your kids, but pushing too hard will only make them resent the new person and the situation even more. Focus on *your* relationship with your child—not on the new person's relationship with your child. When you do introduce them, most of your time with your child should still be spent with them alone—not including your new partner. Your kids still need to know that they are your priority and if you always include your new partner, they will not feel that they are. Recognize that they have loyalty to their other parent, and have trouble imagining how they can accept the new person while still loving their other parent. Have patience. Try not to talk too much about your new boyfriend, or go out of your way to point out his strengths. Again, your kids will feel pushed and they will likely respond by further rejecting the new person. If the new person is as wonderful as you think they are, your kids will see that for themselves—slowly—over time. Don't allow the new person to *parent* your children. You are in charge of parenting decisions and discipline. While kids don't get to make the decision about who you are with, take their feelings into account and talk with them about it—non-defensively. Kids need to feel heard in this transition.

