

PEDIATRIC PSYCHOLOGY

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Youth in Crisis

“Be self-controlled and alert. Your Enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.” I Peter 5:8.

“Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child. Children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death.” Mark 13.12.

Part One: The Causes

Atterburn and Burns (1995) write: “There is a “death of innocence” plaguing our youth and we must understand what is going on in our society in order to understand and appreciate why our kids have become a generation in trouble.” Our children are under attack and to fail to understand and appreciate this is to lose the battle. We will first look toward what has caused this “death of innocence” then we will address some solutions.

Consider the words of Carla Koehl:

“There are, unfortunately, no SATs to measure maturity: no tests to determine how a student handles frustration, resolves conflicting choices, or develops intellectual interests in people and events and ideas that are older than yesterday. These are the qualities of character that are best developed at home, and the absence of these values in the young, many experts believe, reflects a lack of parental concern. The irony is that we have the best group of educated parents in history doing the least for their own kids...

Ultimately it’s a question of cultural values. What young people see enshrined in the media and malls of America are, after all, the values adults put there: consumerism, narcissism, and the instant gratification of desire. When those change, so will American Youth” Carla Koehl (1990).

When June Cleaver said, “Ward, I’m worried about the Beaver,” she wasn’t worried about crack cocaine, pornography, or suicide. Rather, her main worry was perhaps that the Beaver might turn out to be as obnoxious as Eddie Haskell. As Atterburn points out, times have certainly changed since those days of innocence that were reflected on the screens of black-and-white TV screens. The days when children ran barefoot and picked dandelions ended with the death of innocence, when children were made to grow up before their childhood was completed. This crisis with kids hit when innocence was abandoned early for a harder world. Childhood today presents with challenges that we never faced as children.

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The struggles of our children are alarming. Within the next 30 minutes:

- 29 kids will attempt suicide.
- 57 adolescents will run away from home
- 14 teenagers will give birth out of wedlock
- 22 girls will get abortions
- 686 kids will use one of many drugs
- 188 will use alcohol

Teenage Violence

- As reported in the Archives of Pediatric and Adolescent Medicine (1995): Adolescents are now experiencing the highest rates of lethal and non-lethal violence. The increase in violence among youths 10 to 14 years of age is especially important and alarming.
- Suicide is the second leading cause of death among adolescents.
- The suicide rate of adolescents has quadrupled over the past 30 years.
- 5,000 young Americans between the ages of 15 and 24 suicide annually.
- 6% of teenagers have attempted suicide.
- 25% of males and 42% of females report that they have given serious thought to suicide.
- Between 1982 and 1991, the arrest rate for juveniles increased 93 percent for murder and 72 percent for aggravated assault.
- About three million thefts and violent crimes occur on or near some school campus each year, representing nearly 16,000 incidents per day.
- By best estimate, 20 percent of high school students carry some sort of weapon (gun, knife, razor) with them to school on a regular basis.
- On March 24, 1998, thirteen-year-old Mitchell Johnson and eleven-year-old Andrew Golden of Jonesboro, Arkansas drove a stolen van filled with stolen weapons to a local middle school, where they set off the fire alarm and then run for the cover of a nearby wooded ridge where they'd stashed their arsenal. As teachers and students filed out of the building, Johnson and Golden opened fire, killing four little girls and a teacher and wounding ten others.
- On April 20, 1999, seventeen-year-old Dylan Klebold and eighteen-year-old Eric Harris went on a well-planned killing spree at Columbine High School, where they methodically murdered twelve students and a teacher before committing suicide in the cafeteria as police closed in.

Of course, these statistics often don't mean much until they happen to your child. Then, suddenly, they have great meaning. If you think about them, though, they do clarify the fact that the world our children live in is much different from the world we knew. When

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we were teenagers, we had the feeling of innocence. But for many kids today, that feeling left long ago.

The Role of the Media

A humorous rendition of the 23rd Psalm cited in the Christian publication, Life Messengers, brings home the potential destructiveness of too much television:

The Twenty-Third Channel

The TV set is my shepherd. My Spiritual Growth shall want.

It maketh me to sit down and do nothing for His name's sake because it requireth. All my time. It keepeth me from doing my Christian duty because it presenteth so many good shows that I must see.

It restoreth my knowledge of the things of the world and keepeth me from the study of God's Word. It leadeth me in the paths of failing to attend the evening worship services and doing nothing in the kingdom of God.

Yes, though I live to be one hundred, I shall keep on viewing my TV as long as it will work, for it is my closest companion. Its sound and its pictures comfort me.

It presenteth entertainment before me and keepeth me from doing important things with my family. It filleth my head with ideas that differ from those set forth in the Word of God.

Surely no good thing will come of my life, because my TV offereth me no good time to do the will of God; thus I will dwell in spiritual poverty all the days of my life.

Although the reasons for the rise in teenage violence are multifaceted, the media and poor parental limits certainly are part of the problem. Consider the following:

- By age five, the average child is watching close to three hours of television per day, more than one thousand hours per year.
- By age twelve, that same child is watching nearly five hours of television per day and has seen an astonishing 8,000 killings.
- In the average American home, television is on more than seven hours per day.
- Fifty-four percent of American children have televisions in their rooms.
- American children watch two hours of television for every hour spent in school.

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- In one survey of children ages four to six, more than half stated that they preferred watching TV to spending time with their parents.
- Prime-time television averages some five violent acts per hour, whereas children's Saturday morning programs average from twenty to twenty-five violent acts per hour.
- Children with video games play an average of ninety minutes per day, or more than ten hours per week. That's more time spent playing at violence than being engaged in any other single extracurricular activity. At least three of the 1990s school killers were highly involved with video games. According to reports, Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris, the Columbine High School murderers, were obsessed with such violent games as the highly popular "Doom."

The research is clear that televised violence predisposes violent behavior:

- A study done in the early 1970's found that children who had watched violent programming demonstrated a heightened willingness to hurt other children.
- Children judged to be already somewhat aggressive became even more so after watching Batman and Superman cartoons.
- Children who seem to enjoy watching violence on television are more likely to be aggressive than children who become distressed when viewing television violence.
- Young girls who in the 1970s often watched shows featuring aggressive heroines (Charlie's Angels, The Bionic Woman) have grown up to be more aggressive adults - involved in more shoving matches, choking incidents, and knife fights - than women who had watched few or none of these sorts of shows as children.
- The NIMH in 1982 issued a policy statement on this issue: Violence on television does lead to aggressive behavior in children and teenagers who watch the programs. This conclusion is based on laboratory experiments and on field studies. Not all children become aggressive, of course, but the correlations between violence and aggression are positive. In magnitude, television violence is as strongly correlated with aggressive behavior as any other behavioral measure that has been studied.

The Media and Sex: In addition to violence, television helps to erode the morality of our children. For example, research done a few years ago revealed the following:

- The average person sees 9,320 actual or implied sex acts on TV per year.
- 81% of that sexual activity is extramarital.
- This means that average child, watching TV for ten years between the ages of eight and eighteen would see almost 75,000 acts of illicit sex.

Bauer (1990) wrote, "A number of rap groups routinely use racial slurs, depict women being raped, and promote anti-Semitism. Groups such as Ice-T, Guns and Roses, as well as others, make millions of dollars appealing to our most debased instincts. Rap groups like N.W.A. and 2 Live Crew call for a war on police. White rap and heavy-metal groups,

including the Beastie Boys and Motley Crue, have used satanic images and mimic masturbation on stage" (p. 213) .

3. More than half of all MTV videos feature violence or implied violence, and 35 percent revealed violence against women (Dobson, 1990) .

4. Dobson cites one of the most shocking examples of the garbage that has been aired to our children, namely 2 Live Crew's "As Nasty AS they Wanna Be" where he tabulated the words that appeared in this song: Keep in mind that this music is over ten years old. It has only gotten worse since then.

- 226 uses of the "F" word
- 117 explicit terms for male or female genitalia - 87 descriptions of oral sex
- 81 uses of the vulgarity "s--t".
- 42 uses of the word "ass".
- 9 descriptions of male ejaculation
- 6 references to erections
- 4 descriptions of group sex
- 3 descriptions of rimming (oral/anal sex)
- 2 inclusions of urination or feces
- 1 reference to incest
- over a dozen illustrations of violent sex

Failure of Attachment

Since 1972, married women with children under three years of age have been the fastest-growing segment of the job market. As children, most of us in our generation spent the first five years of our lives with a stay-home parent. That trend has been reversed in the last two to three decades and at present, the majority of children experience a significant amount of their early lives in daycare, many from as young as a few weeks for as long as seven to ten hours per day. This trend has greatly damaged many children's ability to form appropriate attachments to their parents.

Attachment helps the child to:

- Attain his full intellectual potential
- Sort out what he perceives
- Think logically
- Develop a conscience
- Become self-reliant
- Cope with stress and frustration
- Handle fear and worry

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- Develop future relationships
- Reduce jealousy (Fahlberg, 1979)

If the first relationship as a baby has does not set the stage for trust, then later relationships cannot be based on trust. The baby learns from the first relationship what he can and cannot expect from others. If there is no healthy give and take, the baby will not know how to give and take with others. Unattached children do not grow up socially. They have great difficulty learning how to build any kind of relationship (Magid, 1989).

Spitz, Bowlby, and Sally Province, three of the top researchers in this area, all agree on one point - the earlier the break in the attachment process, the more damaging it is. The data suggest that the period of greatest vulnerability with respect to later development is under two years of age. The younger the infant, the more disastrous the break will be. The first months of an infant's life are the most important for the attachment process, although the process does not seem to be fully complete for about two years. The length of time the cycle is broken is also very important. If a primary caregiver is gone from the child a relatively few hours, little damage is done. But repeated day-long breaks, or breaks of several days or more, can result in an unattached child. Finally, the basic genetic predisposition of individual children play a role too, although just what this is has not been determined at this time (Magid, 1989).

When children are unattached they lack an internalized object. Because of this, they do not mature but instead they continue to be self-centered, impulsive, and "babyish." Their concern is always "What's in it for me?"

Unfortunately, this sense of detachment is continued by many parents. Consider the words of Drs. Michael Resnick and Robert Blum's words about the state of affairs in Rockdale County, Minnesota.

"It's hard to view a story' that is so starkly told. It certainly wasn't clear who was the more lost the children, or the parents of Rockdale county. It should be said from the outset that this story does not tell us about all of our children. It does not tell us about all parents. Yet, this depiction of adolescents, their parents, their community resonates beyond the limited portrait of a single setting. There are messages in here for all of us who work with and on behalf of young people, and who love and care about kids

We heard a lot about emptiness. Houses that were empty and devoid of **supervision**, adult presence, oversight. There was for far too many of the adolescents a fundamental emptiness of purpose; a sense that they were not needed, not connected to adults, to tasks, to anything meaningful other than the raw and relentless pursuit of pleasure. And what empty pleasure-seeking it was. On reflection, so many of the girls indicated that they were feeling that emptiness, and

one suspects that had one dug just a bit deeper, many of the boys would have reflected similar sentiment. Back in 1970 in his now classic book The Pursuit of Loneliness, sociologist Phillip Slater spoke of American culture at the breaking point, and one that willingly, senselessly embraced alienation and disconnection. That drama was played out with such pathos in the lives of these adolescents who were driven to extremes of self-destructive behavior by a very "normal and healthy need," the need to belong. Bereft of meaningful expectations, responsibilities, healthy options for recreation and entertainment" and with a notable absence of adults who were capable of being adults and active, involved parents, these young people turned to the basest of impulses within and among themselves, with startling and pathetic results. What our research is showing, indeed what the research of many colleagues who focus on risky behaviors and protective factors in the lives of young people has shown--is that parents, families and adults outside of the family are fundamentally important to the healthy development of youth.

It would seem that some parents in America embrace the myth that once their sons and daughters make it past childhood into adolescence, what they, the parents, say or do or hope or believe is no longer relevant. Granted, many adolescents are very skillful at telling us, as adults, that we have become irrelevant in their lives. And we make the mistake of believing that. What is clear from the national studies of adolescent health and resilience is that caring and competent adults who recognize, value and reward pro-social behavior in young people can have a profound effect on what adolescents value and believe, about themselves and the world around them."

Cline (1979) has identified 14 characteristic of poorly attached or character-disturbed children:

1. Lack of ability to give and receive affection.
2. Self-destructive behavior.
3. Cruelty to others or pets.
4. Stealing, hoarding, and gorging.
5. Speech pathology.
6. Extreme control problems.
7. Lack of long-term childhood friends.
8. Phoniness.
9. Abnormalities in eye contact.
10. The parents seem unreasonably angry.
11. Superficial attractiveness and friendliness with strangers.
12. Learning disorders.
13. Preoccupation with blood, fire, and gore.
14. Crazy lying.

This distinguishing characteristic of the diseases of non-attachment is the incapacity of the person to form human bonds. In personal encounters with such an individual there is an almost perceptible feeling of intervening space, or remoteness, of "no connection."

Stanton Samenow (1989), the national expert in adolescent antisocial behavior identified seven characteristics of the child/adolescent psychopathic personality:

Characteristics of the Emerging Child/Adolescent Psychopath:

1. Life is a one-way street - my way.
2. Complete disregard of injury to others.
3. Unrealistic expectation and pretensions.
4. Always takes the easy way out.
5. Lying is a way of life.
6. "It's not my fault mentality." Refuses to take any responsibility and makes himself a victim.
7. An island unto himself.

If these traits are left unchecked, the adult psychopathic personality develops. Cleckley (1964) was the first to establish a list of characteristics for adult psychopaths, in 1964. Since then the list for psychopaths has been modified and enlarged and has been used to test prisoners for psychopathy. In subsequent research the checklist was confirmed for its high reliability (Schroeder, Schroeder, and Hare, 1983). Notice the correlations between this list of characteristics and that of the symptoms for character-disturbed children.

Characteristics of the Adult Psychopath:

1. Giftedness/superficial charm.
2. Grandiose sense of self-worth.
3. Need for stimulation/proneness to boredom.
4. Pathological lying.
5. Conning/manipulative.
6. Lack of remorse or guilt.
7. Shallow affect.
8. Callous/lack of empathy.
9. Parasitic lifestyle.
10. Poor behavioral controls.
11. Promiscuous sexual behavior.
12. Early behavior problems.
13. Lack of realistic, long-term plans.
14. Impulsivity.
15. Irresponsibility.
16. Failure to accept responsibility for own actions.
17. Many short-term marital relationships.

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18. Juvenile delinquency.
- 19 Revocation of conditional release.
- 20 Criminal versatility. (Hare, 1986)

The effect of failure of attachment is that the person cannot establish any stable, long-lasting intimate relationships, such as marriage.

The Self-Esteem Movement

Aristotle - *"Happiness is not an emotion that can be separated from what we do."*

According to Rosemond (2000), beginning in the 1960s, professional parenting "experts" began telling parents to direct their energies toward nurturing something they called "self-esteem." Self-esteem becomes a means to an end, a goal. We have replaced doing well with feeling good. Somewhere on the way to the twenty-first century someone got the idea that constantly praising children for every little thing they do will ultimately produce high self-esteem.

A sign in a the boys' rest room in an Alabama elementary school reads: "You are looking at one of the most special people in the whole wide world." This is, of course, a bald-face lie. The truth is, no one is special. By virtue of being human, one is faulted: or in theological (politically incorrect) terminology, sinful.

Good parenting - a balance of unconditional love and firm discipline - equips a child with a sense social obligation (respect for others) strong enough to successfully suppress his or her narcissistic impulses. The child slowly develops self-respect as a consequence of parents who guide him into respecting other people, not by telling him he's special.

Right on the mark, Rosemond continues by adding that Grandma and Grandpa were wise in their belief that they did not want one of their children to *think* he or she was special, a cut above the rest of humanity. Rather, they valued the Judeo-Christian quality of humility. They knew that pride is authentic only when the person in question is fundamentally humble. Authentic pride, furthermore, is directed not at the self but at specific accomplishments. Grandma and Grandpa knew that false pride, the delusion that one's *self* is special, invariably leads to antisocial behavior because the prideful (vain) person feels above reproach and is able to rationalize antisocial outbursts. True self-esteem is a feeling of self-worth based on accomplishments.

Is it just a coincidence that during the era when Americans made feeling good and boosting self-esteem in children a primary aim, the incidence of depression has skyrocketed and feelings of self-esteem have plummeted (Seligman, 1995)?

The world would be a much better place if adults concentrated on simply teaching children to be responsible: to have compassion and respect for others (social responsibility), to do

their best (task responsibility), and to do the right thing even when no one else is watching (personal responsibility).

We need to teach our kids about life. It isn't enough to pump them up with empty praise for a job poorly done. We need to guide, teach, gently correct and help our kids move toward competence. Self-esteem, after all, comes from competence, not from incompetence (Friel and Friel, 1999).

Value System gone Awry

- Family, nation, and God take a back seat to the Self.
- Consumerism becomes a way of life, shopping an antidote to depression.
- Leaving an unsatisfactory, but not unbearable, marriage for the possibility of a better life after divorce becomes acceptable.
- Daycare, single mothers, and absent fathers become common.
- Duty, formerly the bedrock of adult life, goes out of fashion.
- Depression, a disorder of feeling bad, is separated from manic depression and labeled as an illness.
- The study of self-esteem becomes a field in psychology.
- Psychotherapy becomes usual for "normal" troubled people.
- Entertainers and sports figures command higher salaries and more prestige than captains of industry and politicians.
- Women's magazines feature dieting, looking good, and sexual satisfaction more than cooking, gardening, mothering, and wifery.
- Litigation by ordinary individuals becomes rampant.
- American manufactured goods become flashy and shoddy (in contrast to Japanese goods which become muted and sturdy).
- Physical punishment of children becomes unusual and illegal.
- Failing students get an "Incomplete" or even a "Satisfactory" instead of an F.
- Instilling feelings of high self-esteem becomes an explicit goal of education and parenting.

The Devastation of Divorce

- Approximately 50% or more of all children experience a single-parent family.
- Compounding the obvious problems of divorce are the ways in which it is handled; custody battles and visitations arranged by uninformed judges and lawyers can set children up for unattachment and subsequent disaster.
- Young children, in particular, cannot be safely out of the care of their primary caregivers for too long a time. Still, many children are daily placed in visitation arrangements taking them away for too long from their primary caretakers - even to other states.

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- **There is no such thing as a disposable parent, which is often the father. Research has shown that lack of father involvement is a primary predictor to promiscuity, social deviance, poor marital outcome, poor academic achievement, and various mental health problems. Optimal development requires both parents. Boys are more affected by father absence than girls.**

Part Two: Some Solutions

The Role of Temperament

The wisdom of Proverbs 22:6 is still relevant today and is consistent with some child-rearing experts. "Train your child in the way he should go and when he is old, he will not depart from it." We use the word "train" when we prepare for athletic events. In this connotation, the emphasis is on the hard work, time, and dedication required to get ready for competition. Similarly, training our children entails tremendous commitment and dedication. It is an active and involved process that requires time. A father or mother cannot "train" their child if they are caught in the syndrome of workaholism or are primarily devoted to the pursuit of their own interests. Additionally, Sears (1991) adds that "train" means to bring into submission. In this connotation, God is reminding us of the awe-inspiring responsibility to discipline our children.

The phrase, "in the way he should go" implies that God has a specific plan for each child according to his inherent temperament and characteristics. Many Biblical scholars agree that each child has an individual bent or way and an individual plan. As such, we are admonished to get to know our children, to be tuned into his individual bent. As we know our children well, we can tailor a parenting and discipline approach which fits her. Sears adds that children all have a bent toward good and a bent toward evil. It is then up to the parent to unbend their children's tendency toward evil. One crucial aspect of this is the ability to discern what challenging behavior is resultant of rebellious behavior and what is resultant of temperament.

In his excellent book, The Difficult Child, Dr. Turecki (1989). Encourages parents get to know the temperamental profile of their child. Borrowing from the temperament research of Drs. Chess and Thomas, he developed a means for parents to assess and determine the temperamental profiles of their children and offers very effective suggestions to manage difficult temperamental traits. His basic premise, and I agree, is that temperamental traits are resultant of the physiology of the central nervous system. As such, behavior resultant of temperament is neither good or evil and should not be conceptualized on spiritual grounds. Moreover, temperamental traits should not be punished. Rather, they should be managed by intelligent bypass strategies.

Briefly, the nine temperamental traits as delineated by Turecki (1989, pp. 16 and 17) are:

- (a) Activity Level: How active or restless is the child generally, from an early age?
- (b) Distractibility: How easily is the child distracted? Can he pay attention?
- (c) Intensity: How loud is the child generally, whether happy or unhappy?

(d) Regularity: How predictable is the child in his patterns of sleep, appetite, or bowel habits?

(e) Persistence: Once involved with something, does the child stay with it for a long time (positive persistence)? How relentless or stubborn is she when she wants something (negative persistence)?

(f) Sensory Threshold: How does the child react to sensory stimuli: noise, bright lights, colors, smells, pain, warm weather, tastes, the texture and feel of clothes?

(g) Approach/withdrawal: What is the child's initial response to newness - new places, people, foods, clothes?

(h) Adaptability: How does the child deal with transition and change?

(I) Mood: What is the child's basic disposition?
Is it more sunny or more serious?

An example of challenging behavior resultant of temperament in the Hansen household used to occur almost every time then 3 year-old Ashley got dressed. Ashley would complain of "plumps" in her socks after we had expended considerable effort lacing up her tennis shoes. She would escalate to the point of tears requiring us to take her shoes off, straighten out the "plumps". After 3 or 4 repetitions of redoing her socks, we would become angry thinking Ashley was just being oppositional and intentionally difficult and then Ashley would really disintegrate into tears. Once we realized that Ashley's difficulty here was really a function of a temperamental problem with low sensory threshold, we changed our approach. Instead of becoming angry with her, we would tell her that we would redo her socks and shoes only 2 times. After that, although we sympathized with her discomfort, she would have to wear them regardless. We also began to buy Velcro shoes so she could remedy the problems herself. Because we learned to manage her temperamental behavior instead of punishing it, everybody won.

I highly recommend that you read Dr. Turecki's book if you find that your child has significant difficulty in any of these areas for invaluable insights as to how to better manage the problem traits.

Beware of the Seven Faulty Parenting Habits of Modern Parents

John and Linda Friel (1999) in their excellent book, The Seven Worst Things Parents Do, identify the most common faulty assumptions that parents make in child rearing today. It is vital that parents be aware of their philosophy of parenting and the type of involvement they should have.

Don't Baby your Child

In Daniel Goleman's Book, Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ, it was stated that mothers that protected their timid children from upsetting experiences produced kids who continued to be plagued by fear as they grow older. Mothers who gradually and consistently encouraged their kids to deal with more and more of the world produced children who were much less fearful later on. The previously mentioned self-esteem movement which, in an effort to build self-esteem, tends to reward every little accomplishment which, unfortunately, helps to make the child so dependent on outside reward that they become virtually helpless on their own, ultimately lowering their self-esteem. This paralyzes children, robbing them of the joys of struggle and accomplishment.

Eric Erickson, one of the fathers of modern personality theory identified eight stages of development. Successfully resolving each stage or crisis requires a balance between the urges and impulses of the developing child and structure provided by parents. This balance creates a healthy struggle.

Moreover, as Seligman (1995), a leading researcher on depression has written that optimal doses of struggle help to inoculate the child from depression because it equips the person with knowledge and awareness that life has adversity and that it can be surmounted.

Friel and Friel (1999) give the following excellent suggestions:

- Let'em tie their own shoes!
- They won't break if they have to wait a few minutes.
- Let her tears do the healing.
- Don't bail him out.

Don't Put your Marriage Last

Many couples tend to over-focus on their children and under-focus on their relationship. This serves to give the message to the child that he is all-important and only increases narcissism and self-centeredness. Suggestions to remedy is include:

- Take a small bit of time each day, even if only a few minutes, to talk.
- Set aside two evenings per month for a date.
- Take at least one weekend away each year with your spouse

Don't Push your Child into too Many Activities:

Somewhere on the way to the twenty-first century, it seems as if the majority of middle-class parents decided that it would be a good thing to work themselves to death - and then just for good measure, they decided to work their children to death.

In their compelling article entitled, "The Parent Trap," Kantrowitz and Wingert write: "These days, raising kids is like competing in a triathlon with no finish line in sight. Millions of parents around the country say their lives have become a daily frantic rush in the minivan from school to soccer to piano lessons and then hours of homework. But they're trapped, afraid to slow down because any blank space in the family calendar could mean their offspring won't have the resumes to earn thick letters from Harvard - and big bucks forever after. And a busy schedule at the office only adds to the pressure. Parents believe they have to do it all - or they're toast (and so are their kids). As a result, says psychiatrist Alvin Rosenfeld, co-author of "Hyper-Parenting: Are You Hurting Your Child by Trying Too Hard?" middle-class parents are under "continuous pressure to plan, enrich and do this important job the one, precisely right way."

What families risk losing in this insane frenzy, many parenting experts say, is the soul of childhood and the joy of family life. These are supposed to be the years that kids wander around and pal around, without being faced with the pressures of the real world.

Rosenfeld makes four pertinent recommendations:

1. Think before signing up - Limit the number of activities and the amount of time spent in any one activity.
2. Forget Tiger Woods - Childhood is a preparation, not a performance. Resist the pressure from coaches and the media to push your child to excel too early.
3. Be skeptical about expert advice.
4. Make family time a priority.

Don't Ignore your Child's Emotional and Spiritual Life

Garbarino (1999) wrote that one of the shared characteristics of violent juvenile offenders is a "crisis of meaninglessness." Because of this spiritual vacuum, kids live with the simple creed, "I am born; I live; I die." At best, the only value that many young boys receive from the culture at large is materialism or the pursuit of physical pleasure. The understood purpose for existence is the accumulation of things. But this is not enough to anchor young people. This lack of meaning leads to despair and plays an important role in the lives of violent juveniles.

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Cassie Bernall was shot in the head by one of the Columbine killers who noticed her praying and reading her Bible. As the report goes, he questioned her about her belief before he pulled the trigger.

Religious faith can give young people a sense of hope and a higher purpose in life beyond materialism. Religion's focus on an individual choosing a new or different moral value system validates that "inward" change results in "outward" change, in spite of a negative social environment. Garbarino says that even in the worst social environments, many of the violent juveniles that he has interviewed have undergone dramatic inward, moral transformations; changes that have trumped both family instability and a social toxic environment.

Without some sort of spiritual anchor, Garbarino says young people are adrift in a toxic society that provides few answers to the questions of the meaning of life. Rather than emphasizing the importance of religious faith, our society has increasingly become hostile to religion and religious beliefs. Academia has denounced it; Hollywood has mocked it; legislative activism has virtually banned it from the public square; and public schools have become "no religion" zones.

We need to provide our children with opportunities to experience and internalize a faith that can offer them the anchor they need and the meaning they crave in order to navigate through the ever increasingly tumultuous adolescent years, if not through the rest of their lives.

Don't Try to Be your Child's Best Friend

There has been a dissolving boundary between parent and child in the United States. Family systems theorists like Salvador Minuchin point out that in a healthy family, a semipermeable boundary exists between parents and children so that while they are connected to each other in intimate ways, they are also separate from each other in appropriate ways. In other words, in a healthy family, somebody is always in charge. When the boundary begins to dissolve, the result is emotional chaos. In weak systems children get seduced by the lack of structure and they can't let go of the inordinate amount of power they have acquired. We must accept that many times our children will become angry at us when we place limitations or expectations on them and that this is simply part of our job description. We must realize that part of the necessary medicine of childhood is that the child must experience some pain and that this helps to inoculate them against adversity in the future.

Don't Fail to Give your Child Structure

Jean Piaget and Erick Erickson knew that children learn "internal structure" by first experiencing "external structure." From the seminal linguistic research of Luria and Vigostsky we learn that language develops in a pattern of being first external and then internal.

Kohlberg identified four stages in this process:

- Noises
- Descriptive
- Talk out loud for regulation of behavior
- Talk internally to control (self-talk)

The model of behavioral structure must first come from parents (external) which paves the way for internal control. This process takes many years.

In 1971, psychologist Diana Baumrind published the results of her longitudinal study on parenting styles. After twenty-six years and counting, Baumrind's research is considered a classic. She compared three parenting styles:

- Authoritarian: high expectations, low nurture
- Authoritative: high expectations, high nurture
- Permissive: low expectations, high nurture

Her study found that the Authoritative parenting style reared the most well-adjusted children. Moreover, she determined that authoritative parents who tend to employ spanking (in moderation) as well as other punitive consequences reared the most well-adjusted, well-behaved children. Most interesting was that many of the permissive parents later disclosed in one-to-one interviews that they had had explosive attacks of physical rage toward their children. Baumrind decided that they apparently became violent because they could neither control the child's behavior nor tolerate its effect upon themselves. Moreover, a 1995 study conducted by the Swedish government found a fourfold increase in serious parental abuse of children since parental spanking was outlawed in 1979.

"Discipline is the process of creating a "disciple" out of your child, someone who will follow your lead. It is leadership, not punisher-ship. For a parent, this means *acting as if you know what you want your child to do and not do and communicating your expectation straight forwardly, in no uncertain terms*" (Rosemond, 2000.)

Before any discipline can be implemented we must ensure that the process (how it is delivered) of delivering that discipline is in check. Process is more important than content.

Dr. Tom Phelan, in his book, 1 - 2 - 3 Magic, identifies the two cardinal “process” sins that parents make in dealing with children: TOO MUCH TALKING and TOO MUCH EMOTION.

The TOO MUCH TALKING error is a function of the “little adult assumption.” That is, the idea that kids are just smaller than we are, but they have hearts of gold and are basically reasonable and unselfish. If your child is not doing homework, you simply sit him down and explain to him the three golden, irrefutable reasons why he should. First, he will learn more. Second, it will make you and his teacher happy. And third, he will grow up to be a responsible person. Your child, naturally, after receiving this wealth of wisdom, responds, “Gee I never looked at it like that before,” and immediately goes to his room to complete his work. Of course, this is not the case. The lectures will not work and, in fact, usually only help to create an escalating cycle of frustration and anger between the parent and child.

As Phelan puts it, “Childhood is a period of transitory psychosis. That means that kids, when they are little are sort of nuts! They are born unreasonable and selfish, and it is our job to help them become the opposite.”

TOO MUCH EMOTION also serves to escalate the emotional climate between the parent and child. Or as Phelan somewhat humorously puts it: “Why is too much emotion destructive? It has to do with the fact that when they are little (and even older in many cases), little kids feel inferior. They feel inferiors because they are inferior. Sure, they can be cute and nice and lovable, but they are also smaller, less privileged, less intelligent, less skillful, less responsible, and less of just about everything than their parents. And this bugs them a lot! They don’t like it. They do like to feel that they are powerful and capable of making some mark on the world. Have you ever seen a small child go down to a lake and throw rocks in the water? They can do this for hours, partly because the big splashes are a sign of their impact. They are making things happen.” Similarly, if this small child can get big old you all upset, your “upset” is the big splash for him.

Some common discipline techniques include:

Time out: A version of time out which I like is detailed in Dr. Phelan’s book, 1 - 2 - 3 Magic. When the child misbehaves, she the behavior is identified and told, “that’s a one.” If this behavior is again repeated within a short period of time or if another misbehavior occurs, she is told, “that’s a two.” If the child repeats a third time, or if another misbehavior occurs, she is told, “that’s a three” and must go to time out. In other words, the child is given two chances to turn things around before time out is implemented. The time out can be taken in the child’s room, the minimum sentence must be served before she is released (at least 10 minutes), and the child must be quiet before she is released.

Restitution: Child must perform chores as payback for misbehavior.

Clock's Ticking Technique: Best for things like prolonged whining. When the child won't stop whining simply tell him that he is on the clock and note the time. The parent then notes how long this behavior continues. Then, at a time of the parent's choosing, the child must later either serve time out or make restitution for an amount equal in time to the duration of the timed misbehavior.

While time out is fine for minor misbehavior, stronger discipline is needed for more serious problems to include:

- Strongly manipulative and self-centered behavior: Three strikes rule: First offense in a day, the child goes to room for one hour. Second offense - another hour. Third offense - the remainder of the day. The child can come out for meals, bathroom, and previously scheduled family commitments. He loses all rights to any of his scheduled events.
- Openly rebellious behavior: Three strikes rule or possibly the whole day in room, depending on severity.
- Aggressive behavior - All day in room.
- Destructive, deceitful behavior - All day in room.

Don't Expect your Child to Fulfill your Dreams

We must remember that it is not right to project our aspirations onto our children and expect them to make us feel good about ourselves. Many parents live vicariously through their children and, as such, place enormous pressure on them. Life is hard enough for the child to grow up and to figure out how to feel good about himself without having to feel responsible for his parent's self-esteem. Part of being an effective parent is learning to let go. First to some of our own fantasies of what we wished we could have accomplished and didn't and letting go of the fantasy of how we wanted our children to be, and aren't.

Youth in Crisis
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