



Vol 22 / Issue 1
April/May 2015

PRACTICAL family LIVING NEWS

Skills and Hope

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April 2015

- Anxiety, Phobia & Panic
- Family Roles: The Good, the Bad and the Ugly Working with Your Child's Temperament
- Relating with Wisdom
- Detours in Relationships
- Building Confidence in Children

May 2015

- Proactive Parenting that Minimizes Sibling Rivalry Live Within Your Means
- Putting Fear in Its Place
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- Great Love Equals Great Responsibility

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Children: Shamed and Text Attacked

By Lynda Savage,
M.S., LMFT, LPC

A thirteen year old has not been alive a day without the Internet in existence. That is a reality hard to comprehend for most adults. That means the difficulty one might have experienced socially in junior or senior high school twenty years ago could have a welcome break once home from school. Now any social difficulty at school follows kids into their homes and into their bedroom via phone or notepad. The explosion of shame based bullying attacks on kids is something hard to comprehend in the adult world. It is something a child, just learning about boundaries and defenses, has to deal with often alone. How many have to deal with these personal attacks? Here are some statistics. I believe them to be conservative:

*About 42 percent of kids have been bullied while texting/online with one in four being verbally attacked more than once.

*About 35 percent of kids have been threatened online.

*About 58 percent of kids and teens have reported that something mean has been said about them or to them in a text or online. (Source: www.isafe.org)

The following is a "what to do" for parents and adults. It is comprehensive and worthwhile to directly quote here:

"Parents may be tempted to take away a teen's cell phone to prevent him or her from being a text bullying victim, or if he or she is already a victim, but this deprives teens of social connections that are very important to them and feels like a punishment for something that isn't their fault. Fear of losing their cell phones is a major reason why teens don't report text bullying. There are, however, other ways that parents can help combat text/online bullying:

Talk to your kids about text bullying and why it is wrong. Tell them if they ever are the victim that it's not their fault and they won't be punished. They should not respond to the bullying, but instead should save it to report to a parent. If the message is sexual or threatening in nature they can report it to the police, who can trace it and take legal action against the bully.

Consider having a cell phone use contract with your teen that forbids text bullying, including forwarding

mean messages, even if someone else starts it. Take away the cell phone for a set period of time if the teen text bullies anyone. You can also limit the times when teens can use their cell phones, such as requiring them to turn it off at night, and reserve the right to ask questions about whom the teen is texting and what they are texting about.

Encourage your child's school to ban cell phones during school hours.

Teach teens not to accept calls from someone they don't know.

Encourage teens to think before sending messages, and not to send a message they wouldn't want everyone else to see since they don't know if the person they send a message to may forward it to others, or if they are even texting the person they think they are.

Help teens block numbers that are sending mean text messages.

Tell teens not to let anyone else use their phone to send messages.

If the text bullying is serious, contact the cell phone company to get the teen a new phone number and have the teen be very careful about who they give it to.

If the teen knows who the bully is, let the bully's parents know what they are doing. If the text bullying doesn't stop, make the parents aware that they may face legal action if it doesn't stop, and be prepared to consult an attorney if necessary.

It is important for teens who are the victims of text bullying to know that they should not blame themselves for it, and that you care about them and think they are worthwhile regardless of what the bully says."

Sources: *Committee for Children, Cyber Bullying and Media Safety; "Dealing with Text Message Bullying" [online]; Kathy Brock, ABC News, "Text Bullying" [online]; Stop Bullying Now, "Cyberbullying" [online]*



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Games People Play to Avoid Taking Responsibility

By Brenda Spina, M.S., LMFT, LPC



People, because they fear they will lose love or arouse anger if they honestly and directly ask for what they want, often learn to get their needs met by indirect means. Games are dishonest maneuvers designed to get someone to do something by making them feel guilty, fearful, or sorry. Games only work if someone consciously or unconsciously agrees to be the victim and someone the rescuer.

Game players have adopted helplessness and refuse responsibility for their feelings and behaviors. They believe they are victims and blame others for their bad/sad feelings. They punish others who might put them down or take advantage of them. If others do something of which they do not approve, they may try sulking, crying, provoking guilt or sympathy. At the same time, they encourage others to take advantage of them by indirectness. They use phrases like "I can't", "I have to", "I need", and "I'm afraid to."

The Poor Me Game: This game is commonly played by those who have been taught they should always be compassionate, do endlessly for others or never say no. They believe their rewards will come only through selfless devotion. When they find others are only too happy to accept their services, they come to the realization that the rewards they get are seldom worth all the dirty work.

They then feel resentful and hurt. They hope someone will notice their suffering and feel obligated to rescue them. A common phrase felt and used in this case is, "after all I've done for you...", because their beliefs do not allow them to be direct. Sometimes there are unconscious physical symptoms which make it possible for the "poor me" to say no or get the attention they want but won't ask for directly. An example is the woman who would like help with the housework, but doesn't

believe she has the right to ask her husband. She just sighs heavily, gets tired, and develops physical problems. She believes all these things make it clear that she needs help. Because she feels angry at her husband for not being aware of her needs, may think when he reaches for her in bed, "All men ever want is sex."

The Uninvolved or Don't Blame Me Game: Here are people who believe it would be rude to state their opinion directly. They wish to avoid taking responsibility for having an opinion in case it turns out to be wrong. When asked where they want to go, he or she says, "anywhere," "I don't care." Of course, they do care and in the long run end up losing a sense of who they really are.

The Saboteur: These people pretend to be agreeable and go along with you but find secret ways to block you. Angry with a co-worker she cannot say so directly but may spread gossip. Angry at his doctor he simply does not cooperate in the treatment then says, "I told you so," when the treatment doesn't work.

The Seductress: This particular game gives a "poor little me" message of false helplessness and humility. "You are so smart...and I'm just dumb, little ole me," "I couldn't possibly take care of myself. See how I need to be rescued by big, strong YOU!" Because this game is demeaning and a put down to the self, the seductress usually turns in resentment on her rescuer and attacks him or her for making her feel so inadequate.

The Wet Blanket Game: The player wants to avoid fighting but also wants to get his or her own way. He or she does not openly state their position. They just withdraw their support and refuses to discuss it. The game avoids open conflict but results in frustration for both parties. An example is the wife who doesn't like fishing but won't say so. She won't enjoy herself and makes sure he doesn't either.

Salt and Light

By Christine Vander Wielen, MSSW

Vividly, I remember my grandmother sharing stories about Uncle Henry. She would laugh, as she would tell me how Uncle Henry invited himself for a three-week visit, and he ended up staying for three years. That was just the start of it; Uncle Henry was "one of those people." He was an expert at everything, and he was not shy to let you know you were doing things wrong. He was the first to complain when things did not go his way, and the last to help in situations. Looking back, I admire how my dear grandmother was able to not take Uncle Henry or the situation too seriously but rather was able to be kind and loving toward him.

Unfortunately, we have all met "Uncle Henrys", whether it is in our family, church, or work place. Uncle Henrys are difficult to be around, as they usually cannot read social cues and are unaware of how they come across to others. They tend to trample across boundaries, stomp on feelings, and take advantage of others.

Let's be honest, our natural tendency is to point the finger and find someone to sympathize with us, and someone to agree with us on how difficult Uncle Henry is. So how do we deal with difficult people? How

does The Lord want us to respond?

When dealing with Uncle Henrys, we need to remember that we were all made in God's image, and we are all God's children. Although, we all have our weaknesses, we are all equal in His sight.

We can stand shoulder to shoulder with The Lord Almighty; look at ourselves in the mirror with Him at our side to see what He sees. Asking Him, is there anything I do or have done to contribute to this, am I missing something? What are my weaknesses? Is my behavior toward Uncle Henry above reproach, and am I an Uncle Henry to anyone? What is He trying to teach me through this?

We are called to pray, and seek The Lord's wisdom on how to treat the Uncle Henrys in our lives. Regardless of an Uncle Henry's attitude or behavior, we will be held accountable for how we acted. We are called to respond in love to difficult people, and the only way we can respond in love is through the power of the Holy Spirit.



Additionally, it is beneficial to ask, is there something I can do to help? Sometimes the Uncle Henrys need to be listened to and encouraged because they may not be encouraged by anyone else. Once we get to know the person better, some of the tension may dissolve.

Not to confuse the issue, but sometimes the most loving act we can do is to set limits with an “Uncle Henry” and to lovingly call them on their behavior.

All in all, look to the scriptures for answers because the scriptures are full of wisdom on how to interact with people. God calls us to be “salt of the earth” (Matthew 5:13) and “light of the world” (Matthew 5:14) even to the Uncle Henrys.

Moving Past Fear, Powerlessness, and Trauma: A Neuroscience Perspective

By Carrissa Pannuzzo, M.A., LMFT-T, LPC-T



Everyone has had moments of fear and moments of powerlessness. But, when these two feelings are felt together they combine to create a powerful experience called trauma. And, unless trauma is addressed quickly it can lead to clinical issues, including Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Then, the daily crisis of survival mode becomes a reality with which those suffering have to live. Healing begins when the person suffering from trauma begins to recognize that something is not right and that help is necessary.

A powerful option for healing involves developing an understanding of brain anatomy and functioning. When a person experiences trauma, the brain responds exactly as it was designed to – survive at all

costs! Survival is done through three primary responses – fight, flight, or freeze. These originate in the limbic system, or the “downstairs brain” (Dr. Daniel Siegel). The downstairs brain is a small part of the brain that can rule over the rest.

In a stressful situation the downstairs brain is activated. It receives signals from the rest of the body almost instantaneously and takes over to ensure survival. It can be activated by anything that causes us stress – anything from a baby crying to war. This puts us into “triggered-brain”.

Ideally, the downstairs brain kicks in, keeping us safe from the danger, then the danger ends, we process and make sense of the experience, and then our brains return to a “calm-brain” state.

When a person experiences extreme trauma through one or repeated events and never has the opportunity to process it, this person will remain in triggered-brain. Symptoms can include tense muscles, rapid heartbeat, shortness of breath, and many more. They may become a way of life while some may come and go. The always-triggered symptoms include all of the above plus hypervigilance, jumpiness, nightmares/“daymares”, and all the other symptoms listed in the PTSD diagnostic criteria (which can be found with a simple online search). It could be too that some symptoms are unique. Maybe every time a child throws a temper tantrum the sufferer wants to drink or when a spouse gets too close to the pain through a gentle touch or a critical word the sufferer wants to run.

Now, if that’s the difficult reality here’s the hopeful reality – a brain that is constantly triggered, or “switch on”, can be “switched off.”

There are several effective therapies, including two that specifically utilize neuroscience concepts to switch off the triggered-brain. These are called Brainspotting and EMDR. These therapies involve very little talking, in contrast to traditional “talk therapy” methods.

Help is nearer and simpler than you think.

Those Pesky Buttons

By Laura Demetrician, M.S., LMFT



Have you ever been around a person or in a certain situation and you say to yourself, “Wow! She/He really pushes my buttons”? Whatever the circumstances, you realize that your reaction of annoyance, irritation, or anger is much stronger than what the situation called for.

When we recognize that our annoyance is higher than what is warranted, we have the opportunity to ask ourselves, “Why did I react like that?” “Why did I react so strongly and it doesn’t seem to affect others as much?”

By definition, this experience isn’t pleasant, but the amazing thing is that we can learn something about ourselves from these situations. As a result, we have an opportunity to grow. If we change the way we view the situation from an irritation and an annoyance to a learning and growing opportunity, we can allow God to come in the moment and do something in our heart and in our relationships.

Here are a few things to think about as you process the “Pushed Buttons”:

- Invite God into the situation! Always the best place to start.
- Where in your body did you feel a reaction? It is important to pay attention to our physical reactions so that we can be attuned in the future.
- Ask yourself or process with a therapist if this could be something from your past. Was there any trauma, grief, loss, hurt, or loved one of whom you are reminded?
- Ask yourself if being around this person triggers feelings of inadequacy, weakness, insecurity, fear, etc.
- Take some time away from the person, if possible. This will give you time to reflect, seek insight, and pray.
- Get closer to the person. Start by praying for this person. And then move into...
- Ask yourself how you can be a blessing to the person.

Those pesky buttons feel horrible when pushed, yet it is a wonderful opportunity for insight and healing!



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