



ELKANAH COUNSELLING

www.elkanahcounselling.com.au

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Monday – Friday

8.00 am – 12.00 pm
Saturday

Consultations by
appointment only.

After hours: Elkanah
does not operate a
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This edition of our newsletter concentrates on children, adolescents and parenting.

As I have said in one of the articles, parenting is one of the most difficult jobs we do in life, as all children are different.

Our own backgrounds and personalities and expectations are also varied, and to date we don't get much education on parenting. If parents don't agree with each other in regards to parenting, it can cause trouble in their relationship too.

Also these days, our children are subjected to a lot of traumatic events via television in particular. Of course, in some cases, if they live in areas where floods or bushfires occur, they are personally affected by these terrifying and unpredictable situations. Other bad events that can affect children adversely are the death of a family member, divorce of their parents, cyber bullying etc.

Right now, adolescents in V.C.E. are going through the worry of exams as are their parents, so read my article on "Adolescents and Study" as it may help, especially towards the end of the school year.

Remember that although parenting is difficult, there are many joys that go with having children and even more so, if like me, you have grandchildren.

Lyn Shand
– Psychologist & Family Therapist

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Adolescents And Study – Who Owns The Problem?

Some Tips For Perplexed Parents

Lyn Shand

Parents and teachers often ask school counsellors or psychologists to help students with “study skills”.

This really can mean one or more of the following:

- The work is genuinely too difficult for the student
- The student lacks organisational skills and/or procrastinates
- The student is less mature than others in his/her year level or is a late maturer and so has social problems
- There are other worries unrelated to school that make school work irrelevant or less important
- Parents are having difficulty in assisting their young person to become independent

First, as parents, you will have had interviews with teachers over the years and by now will have an idea about you son/daughter’s ability. Perhaps they do well or at least cope with Humanities subjects but struggle with Maths/Science (or vice versa). Encourage your young person to seek help from the teachers. Discuss with your son/daughter whether or not they would like private tutoring. The value of this comes from the young person seeing it as useful – otherwise you may be wasting your money! In later years, students will need to make informed decisions about which subjects to continue and which ones to drop. Encourage them to visit the Careers Counsellor or psychologist if they are in doubt, or come with them to explore options. The Internet can also help to show the required subjects for various University or TAFE courses. If the young person is aiming towards a career that requires subjects that they are really having difficulty with, it may be better to look at other possibilities.

If the problem has more to do with the student being disorganized or lacking in motivation, the best thing you can do is to tell them often that you believe they are capable. Encourage them to do things for themselves (maybe show them how at first) and then praise them for their efforts. Frequently these young people lack confidence. If you would like a reference book to help, I can recommend Andrew Martin’s book, “How to Motivate Your Child – for school and beyond”. Once again though, it is most useful if your son/daughter can see the relevance of using this as a guide. School counsellors or psychologists can provide extra support in the form of further encouragement.

The student may be a late developer and so feel isolated from his/her peers. This can split friendships due to interests that change for one person but not for their friend. This often happens in Year 8 or 9 when the peer group is very important in the child's development. The young person needs to have some things in common with their peers. Be sympathetic and encourage areas where your child can meet or mix with others at a similar level of development. Pushing kids up at Primary level has fortunately stopped as this often caused such problems when the child reached secondary school. Do not get hooked into squabbles. Remember that if they feel they have no friends, schoolwork is little compensation. Often this type of student will become the "class clown" or other trouble maker just to get noticed by his/her peers. If there is a vast discrepancy between your child and others at their level, discuss with the counsellor or coordinator, whether or not it would be better for the child to repeat a year or even change schools to do so.

When there are worries outside of school, schoolwork will often suffer. Of course, individual differences will mean that some young people will be more resilient than others in coping with stressful situations. However, situations such as the death of a friend, pet or relative; separation or divorce of parents; conflict within the family (either hidden or open); illness; moving house or school or suburb; in fact any change of any sort, can have a detrimental effect on young people. Their concentration levels will drop as their energy is directed towards their anxieties. Depression may be very real for these young people too. Watch for indicators such as acting out, change of eating or sleeping habits, mood swings, or change in personality, obvious academic decline, alcohol or drug abuse, isolation from friends. If obvious, get some professional help for both the student or yourselves. Family therapy can be of great help to all concerned.

When there are none of the above problems but your son/daughter is still not working, perhaps you are being too conscientious as a parent! Adolescence is a time for you to let go a little at a time. You cannot control your son or daughter, nor is it in their best interest for you to do so. They must be encouraged and allowed to take responsibility for their own lives. Over-protection – feeling that that you must remind him/her to take lunch money, sports uniform, see or not see certain friends, spend time doing "their" homework, or continually arguing with them will not help. They may try to prove to you that they are self sufficient and go overboard. Their self images will be low, because you are telling them that they "should" be listening to you. This can make them feel helpless or inadequate. They may either resist you or feel incapable of making any decisions for themselves.

Help them make informed decisions and meantime look for other areas in which to define yourself, other than "the good parent". A rebellious adolescent may be doing you a good turn!!

Discussing Traumatic Events With Children

Sylvia B. Werba

In the light of recent world events and consequent media coverage, it is likely that many of us - including children have been subjected to some significantly traumatic images, experiences and situations – whether directly or indirectly.

One of the most difficult tasks for a parent is to harness their own coping mechanisms in order to discuss a tragic or sad event with their children. This can range from the death of a family member or the death of a pet, to a natural disaster or some other local or international crisis. Although parents generally wish to shield children from such things, this is not always possible. However daunting it may seem, adults have the responsibility to engender hope and optimism in whatever way is possible.

Although there is no way to make this task easy, there are some basic guidelines which may assist to steer the discussion in a way that may be helpful.

- **Remember to consider the developmental level of your child/children.** Remember that different children will be at different stages.
- **Listen to your children carefully.** Try to gauge what it is that they understand or believe, and then what may be behind their question(s).
- **Invite questions.** **If you yourself have difficulty answering the question, it is OK to say that you need some time to think about it – and perhaps ask for some help yourself.*
- **Acknowledge your own feelings.** It is important to acknowledge that even adults must deal with their own emotions, and then demonstrate ways to deal appropriately and constructively with these feelings.
- **Remember it is OK for children to know that sometimes adults worry – but it is just as important for adults to model ways to deal with this**
- **Brainstorm constructive ways to help, or to show concern or care –** such as sending letters, cards, toys, or collecting some money for those affected.
- **Give children reassurance.** Assure them that all is being done to assist those directly affected by the crisis, and once again reassure them that you are there to love and protect them.
- **Minimise television viewing after a world or community trauma – particularly the news.**
- **Children express grief or fear differently to adults.** It helps to sit down privately with your child and ask them what they are thinking – You can begin by telling them how you are feeling.

- **Avoid “difficult” discussions just before bedtime.** Always talk about something constructive or positive, just before bedtime.
- **Structure helps.** One of the things that helps children through difficult times, is a continuity of family structure, routines and traditions. Keep the family together. *While children need to have the tragedy acknowledged, they also need to know that the world will go on.*
- **It is crucial to allow children to enjoy outings and activities guilt free.** It is important for those who are not directly affected by the tragedy, to continue with life and to look after themselves, so that they are then able to help others. **Laughter and fun will help the world to heal – and will help the children believe that this is possible.**

The role of parents is not to shield their children from tragedy, but to help their children become resilient enough to survive it. In the midst of this difficult world climate, we have the responsibility to engender hope and optimism – as much as we possibly can. Often this is not easily managed alone. If you need help, ask for it from friends, family, or a helping professional.

- **We must do what we can to help our children feel safe.**
- **We must help our children feel empowered.**
- **We must keep hope alive and help our children think towards a future.**
- **We must look after ourselves and each other.**
- **Above all, we must ensure that we do not model blaming and discrimination, in our reactions and behaviour**

During times of war or national crises, children may be exposed to hatred or prejudice aimed at different nationalities or religions. They may themselves be the target of such prejudice. It is extremely important for parents and teachers to teach children that the behaviour of a few does not always represent the behaviour of an entire nation. It is also important to be consistent, to model appropriate behaviour, to invite open discussion, and to report any sign of prejudice to the appropriate authority.

Adults in the child’s world have the responsibility to be role models for the kind of adults they would like their children to become. Hopefully our younger generation will not lose hope, will maintain optimism and excitement for the future, and will learn to be tolerant and respectful adults.

Tragedy does happen – but hope and optimism are hereditary. Our children learn this from us, and we must do whatever we can to keep this alive!

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(After the events in Christchurch and Japan, we have had several requests for this article to be reprinted.)

I DIDN'T LIKE MY CHILD!!

Lyn Shand was recently interviewed about this topic for the April edition of *Nurture*, a Leader Community Newspapers publication.

I was asked to comment on this topic because after two years of constant crying and screaming from their second child, it almost tore one of the families interviewed for this article apart. The reporter was Tamara Heath.

I said that support is needed for the mums of these children, to help them maintain a realistic mindset when facing seemingly insurmountable challenges. Often advertisements show warm and happy mums, always enjoying their babies, so many parents feel as if they are failures if they can't live up to such expectations.

In fact parenting is a difficult job and parents need to accept that they are going to make mistakes. Also every child is different.

I often say to parents that they shouldn't say should, as there are no actual "shoulds" in parenting. Babies are born with very distinct personalities and some are always going to be more difficult than others. Of course the personalities of the parents and child don't always mix well, which is why having two parents or the support of grandparents becomes so important.

Ideally parents need support structures in place to help care for the child – and to give the frazzled parent a break.

Now as a grandma myself, I remember having a difficult time with our eldest child when he was a baby and toddler. In those days there was only Dr. Spock's book (the popular childrearing handbook of the time) and what he said just didn't work with our son!! There was no professional help available either. Now we do have psychologists and family therapists who can provide professional support if this becomes necessary.

If parents are struggling with their feelings towards a child, it is very important that they do not withdraw affection. Try to remain consistent but accept that you will flare up every now and then, so don't worry too much if you do.

You have a different relationship with each of your children. It is better to recognise children's differences than try to treat them all the same. Temperament, intelligence levels, co-ordination ability, interests etc. all play a part in the differences.

One consolation for someone like the one described in this Nurture article is that children with early behavioural issues often have minds of their own and turn out to be very intelligent. So encourage them when they do the right thing as often as possible.

Fortunately, most difficult babies do grow into great kids!!

Lyn Shand

ELKANAH NEWSLETTER

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