

July is Purposeful Parenting Month

July is Purposeful Parenting Month and a time to focus on parenting, both the joys and the struggles with raising children. Parenting is one of the hardest jobs we will ever do in life and unfortunately it doesn't come with an operations manual. Whether you are the new parent starting out trying to decipher the cries of your newborn or the stressed out mom trying to tame temper tantrums while reining in your own temper balancing career and home life or the parents who are preparing for their adolescent to leave the nest for college, there are tasks that challenge us at every stage. Parenting is hard, being responsible for raising a child from infancy to adulthood. And the financial pressure mounts with the current average cost of raising a child from birth to age eighteen hovering at \$226,920 it's no wonder that we often feel stressed. Far too often, parents struggle and do not get help because they don't know where to turn or are afraid to seek help, blaming themselves for not being the "perfect parent". Please know that you are not alone. Reach out to mental health professionals like myself for help in parenting support and family counseling or to the numerous parenting support groups out there to find other parents who are struggling with the same things every day.



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Are You Being Present As A Parent?

Avoiding the Distracted Parenting Trap

By Michelle DeLaRosa, LCPC
Child, Adolescent & Family Counselor

A recent study published in the May 2014 issue of Psychology Today reported on the growing incidence of distracted parenting in society today. The researchers studied families in fast food restaurants and showed that 70 percent of parents were distracted by their devices during their meal. In the meantime, their children complained and misbehaved, throwing tantrums and even food at their parents. Society today has become dependent on these devices. We are constantly checking emails, sending texts, posting on facebook and tweeting to the detriment of those we are spending time with, often our children. The problem lies in that our quick “checking in” means that we are checking out from those in front of us. We often miss parts of conversations and interactions with our children. Young children may feel ignored and have to escalate negative attention seeking behaviors to get our attention. And with teens, we may miss the one moment that they have decided to open up and share with us while we are on our devices.

From birth, babies need their parents’ attention to grow and develop normally. Researchers in the 1970’s showed the impact of maternal facial expressions on the social and emotional

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Contact Michelle at (847)302-1196 for a free phone consultation.

*Her services include:
Individual Therapy*

-Family Therapy

-Play Therapy

-Parenting Support

-Consultation with psychiatrists, school staff, and pediatricians

-Referrals to other providers



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development of babies. If you are staring at your cell phone screen,

your baby is not getting facial expression input and interaction from you to develop socially. Children imitate their parents' facial expressions and then wait for responses which allows their brains to develop. When appropriate responses are made by mom, a baby feels secure and attached. When appropriate responses are not made, a baby's attachment can be fractured. Attachment styles develop early in childhood and determine how we interact in relationships with others as adults and how we seek to have our needs met. Insecure attachments in childhood can create a multitude of problems in adolescent and adult relationships.

When parents are on their devices, they are missing opportunities to interact with their children. Often their children's emotions are being ignored. This distracted parenting can also have a negative impact on children's self esteem. In this study's interviews, children expressed feelings of being boring, because they are unable to compete with smart phones for their parents' attention. Their feelings toward the phones waivered between hostility (calling them "dumb" phones) and desire (competing with parents for the phone itself). The children observed in the fast-food study became considerably agitated, growing rowdier and misbehaving to turn their parent's attention. And what do parents often do in response to their child's frustration? Unfortunately, they tend to hand their child the device, teaching them, in turn, to de-tune and disconnect, just as they have been doing.

According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, "Today's children are spending an average of seven hours a day on entertainment media, including televisions, computers, phones and other electronic devices... Studies have shown that excessive media use can lead to attention problems, school difficulties, sleep and eating disorders, and obesity." By giving them so much screen time we are also not allowing children the opportunity to engage in imaginative play and to develop their creativity. It also breeds an attitude of not being able to engage in independent play or having to fill down time with entertainment. Children lose the ability to tolerate idle time, quiet time, and to just think and calm themselves. And we as adults are role modeling these habits for our children by our continued need to be on our devices. Disconnecting from these things sends our children a better message, that they are the most important thing in that moment. The emails, texts, posts and tweets can wait until later, even when the kids are in bed



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Social intelligence skills (recognizing ours and others' emotions, managing our emotions, motivating ourselves, and handling relationships) have been reported to be the best predictor of success in life, even better than IQ. If kids learn from their parents and are always on their devices, they are missing opportunities to socialize with peers. They miss those chances to pick up on visual social cues and body language in social interactions. With the emergence of social networking sites like Facebook, we have become a society that is deceived into thinking that these online friendships are a good substitute for real life friendships. Meanwhile, teens and even adults become more socially isolated.

Avoid the parenting trap, put down the devices and truly live in the moment with your kids. They grow up fast so don't be caught looking back and wishing that you had lived those moments with them. It's about making the time with our kids matter, putting away the phone and really looking at our kids, listening to what they have to say and responding in a way that helps them to feel seen and heard.



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Your Kids Are Watching...Taking Care of Your Emotions

By Michelle DeLaRosa, LCPC
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In a May 2014 article in psychology today, Dr Tamar Chansky wrote about the impact on kids of how their parents manage emotions. When it comes to emotions, we are all sponges. Other people around us, from a coworker to the crabby lady in the grocery store checkout lane, affect our daily moods. We realize that others' emotions have nothing to do with us, but we absorb them nonetheless. Emotions are important to attend to in our environment. They gives us cues to what is happening around us. However children depend on us for all their cues and, therefore, absorb our emotions as well. They learn how to navigate this world through their parents from watching us early on.

Researchers Dr. Wendy Mendes and Dr. Sara Waters at University of California, San Francisco, confirmed this finding in their lab research. They found that when mothers experience stressful or relaxed events (away from their babies), their baby's physiological responses "matched" or were synchronized to their mother's within minutes upon their reunion. These same things happen in our homes too. We bring home our stress and emotional reactions to stressors every day. How we manage and cope with stress clearly affects our kids. So how do we cope in this stressful world and role model coping effectively with our emotions?

One: Slow down and breathe

Although we can't control things that happen in life, we can control how we respond. But the key is to slow down, breathe, and think before we respond. This can save us from having to apologize for yelling or take back things we said later. We are also modeling for our children how to slow down, breathe and remain calm before responding. This will help them in managing their own emotions at home, at school or with their peers in everyday life.



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Two: Scrap the “perfect parent” model.

Psychoanalyst Dr. Donald Winnicott coined the term “the good enough parent”, one who doesn’t meet his/her child’s wants and needs immediately or rescue them from any challenges and frustration but rather one who allows their child to experience some frustration and challenges in order to teach them how to respond to small amounts of stress, cope with their emotions and problem solve through them. This will contribute to better emotional health for you as a parent and an investment in your child’s emotional health in the future.

Three: Have compassion for yourself.

Realize that life is stressful, and that sometimes you will respond in strong ways to stress and make mistakes. Don’t beat yourself up over these moments. Pick yourself up and just see it as a bad day, one moment in time. Tomorrow is a new day and an opportunity for you to look at and respond to things differently.

Four: Reconnect and repair.

We all lose our cool and yell at our kids or spouses from time to time; we are human after all. Use these instances, though, as a learning opportunity for your kids. Role model for them taking responsibility for our actions and apologize “Mommy got really mad at the spilled milk all over the floor, didn’t she? That made you scared didn’t it? Mommy is really sorry she freaked out over a little mistake in trying to get out of the house this morning after we all overslept. I will do better next time”.

Five: Rethink your pressures.

Are you stressed and over responding to stress in your life because you are juggling too many things? Is there a way to let go of some of those things? Are your kids overscheduled? Think about these questions to determine if there are ways to eliminate some of the chaos in our lives and our kids’ lives that create more stress than joy. If your kids’ activity schedule is overbooked, they may well be on edge too which makes unhappy kids and an unhappy mommy. Everyone is stressed getting where they want to be, and no one is happy as a result

Getting Your Emotions In Check

We all struggle with losing our patience and yelling at our kids. After all, we are only human. However, when those emotions become overwhelming or we don’t have adequate coping skills or those feelings lead to depression or anxiety, consider seeking out counseling services. Counseling can help you learn to deal with stress and emotions in more healthy and effective ways so that you can feel better and be a more effective parent. In addition to treating children and families, Michelle also has counseling services for adults. Contact her at (847)302-1196 for a free phone consultation and take the first step towards feeling better.



Six: Take a time out—or a time-in to connect with yourself, and give your children room to grow.

Try to find a few moments for yourself at home. Step away and take some deep breaths, stretch, do some yoga poses, read a devotional bible verse or just gaze out the window for a few moments to clear your head and refocus yourself. Even young children can occupy themselves for a few minutes with a favorite toy while mom takes a “time out”. After all, time outs aren’t just for kids! When you find that calm and balance, you are much more able to not over respond to the stress of daily life and to be more patient with your kids whatever the day brings



Preparing Your Teen to Leave the Nest

By Michelle DeLaRosa, LCPC

Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor

As we move into the middle of the summer, some parents are preparing to send their son or daughter off to college for the first time, in a few short months. This can be both an exciting and an anxiety provoking time for you and your teen. In order to make that transition as smooth as possible, it’s good to keep a few things in mind. Historically, the transition from adolescence to adulthood was the time period in which teens graduated high school, went on to college or directly into the work

world, found their own place to live, got married and started a family. Recent generations, however, have blurred that line between adolescence and adulthood. Many are delaying college or returning home after college to live with mom and dad. They are not ready to start their lives outside of their parents’ homes. According to Pew Research, a larger percentage of young adults live at home with their parents than in generations past.

Separation/individuation is a core developmental task of adolescence and builds as an adolescent prepares to leave the nest. As part of this process, teens stop idealizing parents, resist dependence on their parents and challenge limits and rules, seek out approval from their peers and explore who they are apart from the family. They shift from regulation by parents to self-regulation. They often struggle between individuality and connectedness. This can be a really challenging time for you as parents as you may start to feel as if you don’t even know your teen anymore or are losing connection with them, especially if you are a close knit family. This is all a normal part of the individuation process despite the fact that it is very uncomfortable. If individuation and separation doesn’t progress normally, teens can have separation anxiety on one end of the spectrum, or on the other end they can become rigidly independent and uncomfortable with emotional intimacy. Both extremes are associated with higher rates of self-criticism, anxiety, and depression.

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Allowing your teen to have more independence and face situations where they need to make tough decisions while still living at home can be a good learning experience as they have a safety net in you to help if things go wrong. Often the consequences of poor choices are smaller now than they will be at college (for instance the risks of a female adolescent being sexually assaulted at college when under the influence of alcohol and walking back to her dorm with a guy that she just met). Teaching your adolescent the risks involved in decision making (like choosing to drink) and how to make good choices is important before they leave the nest.

According to Dr Melissa Deuter in an article published in the June 2014 issue of Psychology Today parents should consider taking the following steps to give their teen the strongest chance for success in college and the transition to their adult life:

First, prepare yourself. Separation can be surprisingly difficult for parents who may be unprepared. Our job as parents is to raise our children in order to be able to launch them into the world to succeed. But, for many parents that is hard to do. You may worry about their safety, well being, or ability to make the tough decisions ahead. You have spent years building that relationship and now need to let them go and discover the world out there for themselves. However, if unchecked, your anxiety can also create anxiety in your teen or magnify it.

Studies on separation anxiety have long shown an association between parents' anxiety and children's anxiety. If your teen is not anxious, your difficulty letting go can create a rigid sense of independence on the other end of the spectrum with your teen which can lead to self-criticism and depression in later life.

Start as early as possible. As a parent you have already been preparing your child for independence since they were little, from learning to walk and feed themselves to talking to opposite sex peers and driving a car. But have you stopped to think about what they need to learn yet to be out on their own? Start teaching some of these things, like doing laundry and cooking) even when they are preteens.

Teach specific skills your child will need away from home. Does your teen know how to do laundry, cook a simple meal, balance their checkbook, maintain their car? Now is the time to teach them. Have your teen take on responsibilities and make mistakes while he/she still lives at home under your supervision. Give them responsibilities based on their skill level, emotional maturity and readiness to learn, not necessarily based on chronological age or what their friends are doing.

Discuss how you will (or won't) be available to help your emerging adult child after she moves out. Have a discussion with your teen ahead of time on what you are willing to help them out with, and what are scenarios that they need to problem solve on his/her own. Be up front about spending habits and whether you will bail him/her out if they blow their budget the first month at school. Also discuss any consequences to parents bailing them out (having to repay by getting a summer job after freshman year). Of course, continue to offer your teen emotional support throughout this transition, and let them know that you are always there to listen and are just a phone call away.



Plan for every possible contingency you can imagine. If you are paying for your teen's college education, have you discussed expectations such as grades, spending habits, and the like? Make sure that you and your spouse discuss how you might handle poor grades, calls home for more spending money, homesickness, and your teen wanting to change schools. Knowing these answers ahead of time can help you as parents if the occasion arises instead of making decisions in the heat of the moment when intense emotions are involved

According to Dr. Deuter, this is a checklist of skills that every teen should develop:

- **Emotional/psychological skills:** the ability to identify emotions, self soothe, exhibit self-control, wait patiently, solve problems, delay gratification, tolerate uncomfortable feelings, maintain control of behavior, know how to walk away from a fight and how to exit an out-of-control social situation, and resist peer pressure to use drugs
- **Friendship/interpersonal relationship skills:** Teens should know how to carry on a conversation with a person of any age, be good judges of character, speak up for a friend, keep a secret (or refuse to keep a secret), ignore bad behavior, and to confront someone who is out of line. Likewise they need to learn to really listen, admit fault and apologize, talk out a conflict with a friend (or roommate), say I love you, and hug.
- **Romantic/intimate relationship skills:** Teen dating can help kids learn to distinguish between love and infatuation. They can learn to ask someone to dance, to navigate romantic feelings, and eventually to break up with a boyfriend or girlfriend. They can also learn to cope with rejection, say no, and control the urge to advance physical relationships too quickly.
- **Financial skills:** Before leaving home, teens need practice budgeting, managing money, balancing a checkbook, saving for emergencies, maintaining bank accounts, and paying bills.
- **Academic/work skills:** Learning how to be a productive student or employee begins with learning basic responsibility. When teens know how to be punctual, stay on task, and pay attention to details they are better equipped for school and career. Volunteering or working part time while living with parents can build these skills further.
- **Domestic/maintenance skills:** Basic cooking skills, auto maintenance—like learning when the car should be serviced and how to change a tire—washing and folding laundry, cleaning skills for a dorm room or apartment, and handling small household emergencies like a clogged toilet are all skills necessary to build before teens move out.
- **Self-care skills:** Your teen should be equipped to ask for help, say no, and be assertive. Most teens need to learn to be in a quiet place to regroup, talk or write about difficult problems, and to plug into a faith community for support.
- **Medical care skills:** Every adult needs to have healthcare knowledge to be capable of giving a medical history, filling a prescription at a pharmacy, or knowing how to self-diagnose simple illnesses, use a thermometer, and take over-the-counter medications.



Child Psychology News Briefs



The Only Child

According to a study published in the August 2013 issue of Psychology Today by Lauren Sandler, only 3% of people surveyed call a single child family an “ideal”. Misconceptions include that only children grow up to be self centered, maladjusted individuals and are often pitied. However these turn out to be far from the truth. Only children fare just as well if not better socially to their counterparts with siblings. And research has also shown that marital happiness tends to decline with each birth following the first child. With the cost of raising a child today skyrocketing to \$226,920 there has been a recent trend towards smaller families. The number of families with only children has nearly doubled since the 1960’s to 1 in 5.



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How To Survive Summer With Your ADHD Child

Everyone, parents and kids alike welcome the summer break from school, schedules, and homework. It is a nice break from the hectic days of the usual routine.

However with an ADHD child boredom often quickly sets in as does frustration. Therefore to keep your sanity this summer consider these suggestions according to the website everydayhealth.com. Keep the routine constant even though the schedule has changed (getting up, eat breakfast, take medicine, get dressed, etc). Develop a list of things to do when your child gets bored. Keep your child learning by engaging in fun activities. Encourage creativity (chalk drawing, painting, blanket forts, hide and seek). Read aloud as a family.

Getting Help For Your ADHD Child

As a child and adolescent counselor I see a lot of children in my practice who struggle with inattention, distractibility, difficulty with task follow through, high energy, poor organizational skills, and impulsivity. Research shows that the most effective treatment for ADHD is a combination of psychotherapy and psychotropic medication. Therapy will focus on helping parents to structure the home environment to increase their child's success as well as teaching your child skills to improve focus and attention. I will also coordinate with your child's school staff to help make his classroom setting conducive to his/her learning.

If you think your child may be struggling with ADHD or if your child's ADHD is holding him back from his full potential or if you need help parenting through the challenges that come with ADHD, contact Michelle DeLaRosa at (847)302-1196 for a free phone consultation to discuss services.



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Co Parenting After Divorce with Parallel Parenting



Many divorces today are fraught with intense conflict between couples both during and after the divorce. Unfortunately in many cases, the children are negatively impacted by this continued conflict and often put in the middle of their parents' arguments even after the divorce is finalized and the parents have moved on. According to Dr Edward Kirk in a Sept 2013 article on the Psychology Today website, a new parenting arrangement, Parallel Parenting, can be a good solution for those couples who continue to have intense conflict and hostility. It aims to minimize contact between parents except through email communication and/or a parent communication log that is passed back and forth between households to keep each parent informed of concerns about the children during each parent's visits (emotions, sleep issues, illness, etc). The aim of this strategy is to continue to allow the children to have good relationships with both parents away from the conflict, and to eventually get both parents to be able to collaborate once the dust settles and time passes.

Divorce Is Hard On Everyone

Divorce is not just the end to a marriage but also the end to a family in many ways. Just as adults suffer emotionally through a divorce, children are struggling too. If you are in the process of a divorce or have divorced and want to give your child a safe place to work through his/her feelings, counseling may be a great resource for you. Children often blame themselves, struggle with loyalty conflicts between parents, have reunification fantasies or have begun to act out. Counseling is a place for them to talk about their feelings and work through the transitions that the divorce has brought.

Contact Michelle DeLaRosa at (847)302-1196 to get your child help during and after the divorce. Michelle can also help you with parenting your child through this difficult time.



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No One Told Me about That...the New Parent

Becoming a parent is supposed to be one of the greatest joys in the world, right? So why do I not feel that way or haven't instantly fallen in love with my little bundle of joy? Nobody told me that my son would sleep 14 hours a day, but that I would somehow only get 5 hours out of that. Why did we take an 8 week class to prepare us for childbirth, but there is nothing to prepare us for raising this little girl? These are many of the realities of becoming a new parent that we are often not told according to a December 2013 article entitled "The Truth about Becoming a Parent" on the Psychology Today website. Often, being a new mom or a new dad is a challenge. You are not alone. Reach out to new mom support groups or get help from a mental health professional especially if you are experiencing baby blues or postpartum depression.

Parenting Your Little One Can Be A Big Job

If you are a new mom struggling with the baby blues or postpartum depression, seek out support through counseling services. You don't have to go at it alone. Postpartum depression is treatable through psychotherapy and in some cases, medication. Taking care of yourself, mom, is just as important as taking care of your baby.

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