



Psyche Matters

The Newsletter of the Sullivan Center for Children

The Benefits of Grateful Thinking

By Nancy N. Doi, Psy.D.

The phone rings, the kids are crying, the TV is blaring and the pot on the stove is starting to boil over! How in the world could this be a good day? Robert A. Emmons and Michael E. McCullough are searching out the answer to this. How is it that some people, despite all of the difficulties that life throws their way, can be happy or look at the positive side of things? Emmons and McCullough think that one of the answers lies in being grateful.

Gratitude is defined as "the condition of being thankful". Gratitude has not been extensively researched and has just recently been given the limelight. Emmons feels that "gratitude is literally one of the few things that can measurably change peoples' lives...but it is also an effortful state to create and maintain. It is not for the intellectually lethargic."

Emmons and McCullough began their research examining participants who kept gratitude journals. Participants who kept WEEKLY journals exercised more regularly, reported fewer physical symptoms, felt better about their lives as a whole and were more optimistic about the

upcoming week compared to those who reported hassles or neutral life events (Emmons & McCullough, 2003).

In addition, participants who kept gratitude lists were more likely to have made progress towards important personal goals over a two-month period — these goals included academic, interpersonal and

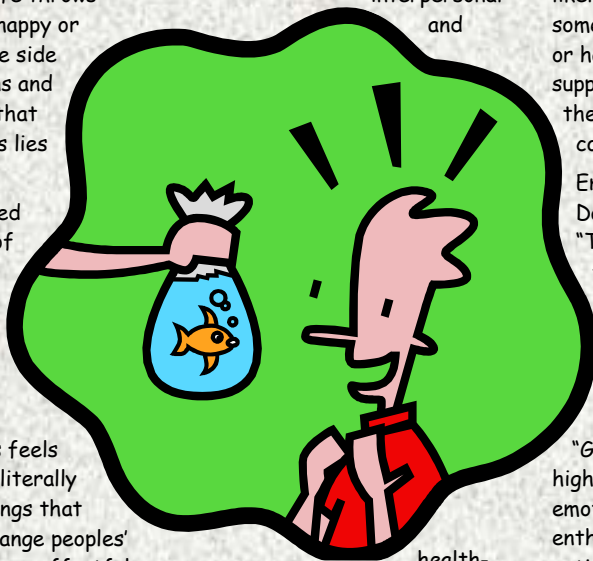
who recorded hassles they encountered during their day and participants who journaled how they were better off than others. No difference was found in the levels of unpleasant emotions reported in the three groups though.

Participants in the daily gratitude condition were more likely to report having helped someone with a personal problem or having offered emotional support to another, relative to the hassles or social comparison condition.

Emmons, a psychologist at UC Davis, writes in his book, "Thanks!" that "Preliminary findings suggest that those who regularly practice grateful thinking do reap emotional, physical, and interpersonal benefits."

Emmons further writes that, "Grateful people experience higher levels of positive emotions such as joy, enthusiasm, love, happiness and optimism. The practice of gratitude as a discipline protects a person from the destructive impulses of envy, resentment, greed and bitterness."

Emmons also feels that being thankful or grateful can help fight depression, and might protect us from heart attacks, lessen physical pain and have other physiological benefits as well.



health-based goals — as compared to participants in other experimental conditions.

The DAILY gratitude journal keepers reported higher levels of positive alertness, enthusiasm, determination, attentiveness and energy in comparison to participants in other experimental conditions. The other experimental conditions included participants

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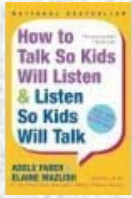
Inside this Issue:

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After reading Emmons and McCullough's findings, I have prescribed the grateful journal to some of my clients. To date, most of the participants in my own little experiment have reported positive results but with the need to "keep it up" when they falter. So, with that written, why don't you take a few moments to recount a half-dozen things you are thankful for. And would you consider beginning your own Gratitude Journal?!

Summer Reading for Parents — Reading That'll Make a Difference

by Nancy N. Doi, Psy.D.



"How to Talk so Kids Will Listen and Listen so Kids Will Talk" (Faber & Mazlish, 1980)

Why is it that each particular child does not come with a "how to" manual? A manual that we can reference if our particular model, say the Jackson 1-A 2006, is reluctant to go to sleep at night. If we had parenting manuals, we would look up the problem under "sleeping" in the index and reference all of the possible problem solving solutions it suggested as follows: "The Jackson 1-A 2006 model will at times become exuberant at bedtime due to a shortage of fuel taken in earlier in the day..." or perhaps, "In comparison to the Sarah 2-B 2007 model, the Jackson 1-A 2006 model becomes overly energetic if allowed to stay up later in the evening.

No, our children each require a personal journey of discovery and understanding, as each parent has their own unique approach to parenting and as each child has their own unique approach to learning about their environment and the world.

But we still need help such as a guide, a means of finding the path. One book that I have found especially useful in helping parents find alternative ways of communicating with their children without too much frustration or anger is "How to Talk So Kids Will Listen and Listen So Kids Will Talk" (Faber and Mazlish, 1980). This book has gone through several reprints and is still fresh and easy to understand as it was almost 30 years ago. The cartoon format doesn't hurt either. "How to Talk" proposes that children can listen and work with adults if adults adjust their approach to the problem. The suggestions and solutions are also presented in first person testimonial format that is inspiring and encouraging. The book however also discusses when these solutions do not work and possible reasons for these outcomes. Interestingly, many of my colleagues have come to the same conclusions independently with regard to this book. We have used it professionally and recommend it highly to any parent.

The book is built upon helping parents accept how the child is feeling. This however in no

way should be confused with accepting how the child is behaving. Techniques such as reflecting feelings, giving information, reducing lectures and "saying it with a word" are all discussed and presented in such an easy going, understandable format. The book can be read by busy parents while waiting at the Doctor's office, in the car...and need I say it? In the bathroom.

I did not truly understand and appreciate this book until I lived with toddlers and its usefulness was further underscored when my friend became a high school teacher and utilized the book to communicate with several of his more feisty students. We both found the book extremely helpful, and referred back to it several times when we fell back in the "old" communication patterns that were not helpful.



"The Co-Parenting Survival Guide: Letting Go of Conflict After a Difficult Divorce" (Thayer & Zimmerman, 2001)

Many of the children seen in therapy have been referred following divorce. Many of the children seen in therapy with a notable diagnosis have been referred following an acrimonious and difficult divorce. In searching for a good referral for parents attempting to cope with a difficult divorce, I have found "The Co-Parenting Survival Guide: Letting Go of Conflict After a Difficult Divorce" (Thayer & Zimmerman, 2001) especially useful. It is a good "go-to" reference book with regard to handling conflict in a mature fashion...no matter what the other parent says or does. Calm, thoughtful, and considerate conversation between divorced parents in comparison to high conflict arguments appear to be one key component in a child adjusting to the divorce

in comparison to developing diagnosable behaviors.

The "Co-Parenting Survival Guide" provides exercises which focus upon self-reflection regarding behaviors contributing to the difficulties, an acknowledgment of how powerful conflict can be, conflict resolution techniques and communication skills with examples. The ultimate goal of the book and for the child is

the building of a healthy co-parenting relationship. There are even suggestions regarding the scheduling of the phone call to the other parent and how to present an agenda. Discipline, structure, and how to present suggestions are all addressed and sometimes include line-by-line dialogue for assistance. A special chapter on reducing Parent Alienation Syndrome can help prevent much heartache and anger, not to mention legal fees.

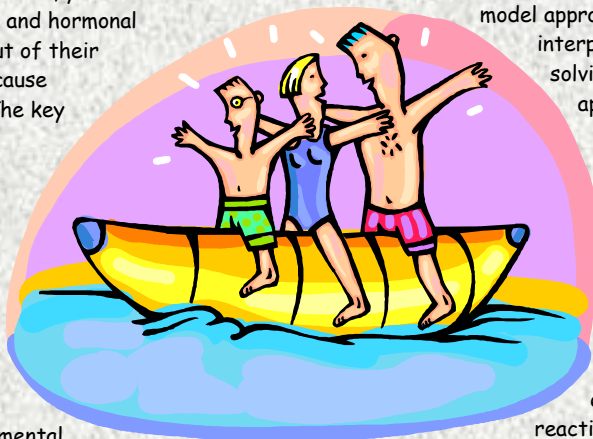
It would be nice if children did not have to experience conflictual divorce. But if conflict and divorce are present, the "Co-Parenting Survival Guide" can be a very good step-by-step manual on how to cope.

Here is one of my favorite excerpts from page 22: "Conflict is not what you feel. It is what you do. Popular thought suggests that conflict is caused by anger, feelings of superiority and the desire to intimidate, or feelings of inferiority and vulnerability. It is our opinion that 'conflict' is best used to describe behaviors that people exhibit (rather than the feelings related to those behaviors). This is an extremely important concept that can help you have a more positive working relationship with your ex. Put simply, decreasing conflict is about what *you* do, not what your feel and experience. It certainly is not about what your ex does or does not do... If you view yourself as a victim of your ex, you will not focus on your ability to reduce conflict. Your view needs to be centered on *your* behavior and options, not those of your ex."

Understanding Teens and Overcoming Challenges of Parenting Them

by Candice Mickett, MA

As your teen develops, seeking independence often takes the form of rebellion from parents. Adolescents have a strong desire to find out who they are and how they are different from their families. Although often difficult for parents to accept, this is a natural developmental progression toward a healthy sense of self and independence. In addition to this rebellion, your teen is undergoing physical and hormonal changes that are out of their control, which can cause changes in mood. The key is to support appropriate teen rebellion in respectful ways that teach important life skills. One way to do this is to prevent power struggles by taking your teen's developmental needs seriously: understand their need for privacy and increased independence, as well as the importance of friends and fitting in with their peer group. Despite the importance of peers, teens still need support and protection from parents: listen to your teen's worries; allow them to take more responsibility; teach problem solving skills after expected mistakes; and enforce clear,



reasonable limits and consequences. It is important to balance support and discipline in parenting your teen using a firm yet compassionate approach.

Some parents may feel completely overwhelmed by their teen's significant changes in mood and behavior, and eventually avoid discussing topics in fear of the adolescent's negative reaction. This may only intensify or prolong the problem. Parents can model appropriate

interpersonal problem solving by approaching their teens with concerns. In order to discuss problem behaviors with your teen, state your personal emotional

reactions that reflect

your loving concern in order to decrease the possibility of triggering a defensive reaction from your adolescent. For example, let your teen know that certain limits or consequences are safety measures out of your love and desire to protect. Do not allow your adolescent's threats to stop you from parenting, especially when it is necessary for his/her safety. Parents are encouraged to

seek any help, support, and resources possible in order to effectively parent and care for their teens.

If you currently feel as though you are less effective at parenting your teen, it may be helpful to think about times when you were able to parent with greater authority and effectiveness. What was different? What helped? Also, keep in mind that your teen is still learning and developing and needs you as a coach. When your teen makes a mistake, use it to create a learning opportunity. Describe the situation, your feelings, and what needs to be done in the future. Also, consider communicating an understanding of your teen's experience while providing natural consequences (i.e. "I know you're upset, but you were late for curfew and so you chose to have your curfew be reduced"). However, give your teen opportunities to make responsible decisions in the future (i.e. "If you meet your curfew for two weeks, you can try to keep the later time again").

Special Announcements:

CALENDAR: The Sullivan Center will be closed for Memorial Day (Mon. 5/25) unless you make prior arrangements with your therapist. Groups will be cancelled on the Saturday before Memorial Day (5/23) and on Independence Day (7/4) as well. Please check with your therapist to verify appointments for those days and to let your therapist know of upcoming vacation dates.

GROUPS: We currently offer 8 different groups: *Tuesday nights - high schoolers*
Wednesday afternoons - 3rd-4th social skills
Wednesday nights - 5th gr. boys social skills
Thursday nights - parents group
Friday afternoons - young adults
Saturday mornings 9am - 12-14 yr. olds
Saturday mornings 10am - 8-12 yr. olds
Saturday mornings 11am - 4-8 yr. olds

Meet the Staff: Mark Barnes, Ph.D.

by Candice Mickett, M.A.

Although Dr. Barnes is a licensed psychologist who holds a doctorate in Clinical Psychology and a Master's degree in Marriage, Family and Child Counseling, he is known by most kids at the Sullivan Center as the doctor with the Star Wars stuff. Dr. Barnes has worked with children and adolescents since 1984. He's been at the Sullivan Center since 1991. He is a well-respected and experienced senior clinician, who especially enjoys psychological testing. Dr. Barnes has diverse experience in treating children, adolescents, and their families in a variety of settings. These include hospitals, residential treatment centers, day treatment centers, and outpatient programs. He has also served as

an adjunct faculty member at Fresno State University and Alliant International University, and is a consulting faculty member for the Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary. In addition, Dr. Barnes has been the director of training at the Sullivan Center since the training program began in 1997, and serves as a clinical supervisor to pre-doctoral interns and post-doctoral fellows.

Dr. Barnes has a desire to see that children in the Central Valley receive quality mental health services, and is distressed about the long-term effects that the budget cuts may have as mental health services become less available in the area. In order to begin to address this worrisome issue, Dr. Barnes has

become the co-chair of the public relations committee of the San Joaquin Valley Psychological Association (SJVPA). He also has aspirations to one day help expand the services provided by the Sullivan Center (providing clinical services in group home and residential settings, and special education services) so that adequate resources are available for children to succeed.

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**"Understanding
the World
Through a
Child's Eyes."**

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Questions and Answers

by Mark Barnes, Ph.D.

Many parents have questions about their children and exposure to video gaming. The questions below represent a sample of the types of questions I have heard. If there are other questions you have do not hesitate to email me at markbarnes@sc4c.com and perhaps I can generate another column to focus more attention on this issue.

Q: Should I allow my child to play video games?

A: This is an individual choice. If you do allow video game play you should inform yourself as to the types of games, the content of the various titles and the potential effects the game play may have on your child.

Q: At what age should a child be allowed to play 'M' rated games?

A: Games that are rated 'M' are not all the same. The 'M' rating is designed to tell the parent what the player will be exposed to. The ESRB rating system describes the 'M' rating as follows: *Titles rated M (Mature) have content that may be suitable for persons ages 17 and older. Titles in this category may contain intense violence, blood and gore, sexual content and/or strong language.* Having said this, not all 'M' ratings are the same and I encourage each parent to view, play and understand the game before letting a younger child play an 'M' rated game. The ESRB is a free standing body that rates all games and encourages parental involvement. The reader is encouraged to visit their website at www.ersb.org.

Q: Can my child be negatively affected by playing video games? Will it make him/her become violent or dangerous?

A: Every child is different and is affected by exposure to stimulus (video, audio, picture and electronic gaming) differently. A parent should play the games with the child, know what he/she is being exposed to and watch the child carefully. If there are any negative changes in behavior consider modifying or stopping the exposure. As with any activity I would encourage moderation. A child can easily get strongly attached to the video game activity and may avoid real contact with others if he or she is allowed to focus all his or her energies on that activity. This is also true for adults as gaming can become quite addictive. Parental involvement and control are the best weapons against potential negative and/or harmful affects of video gaming.

From the Director: Our Philosophy

by Kathy Sullivan, Ph.D., ABPP

A child clinician can serve many roles. Traditionally only parents whose children were having significant problems took their child to see a psychologist. Ignorance led to some social stigma, with the notion that families should handle their own problems. Gradually that stigma has lifted with increased knowledge of the complexities of problems that can arise and be successfully treated in childhood. Increasingly however, it became apparent that if more effort were put into giving parents information and resources, problems could be avoided or treated earlier. The well child concept was developed and child clinicians took on the role, not only of providing ongoing services for those children in need, but also of being professional consultants for the parents of any child. Raising a child is a most important yet difficult challenge. The child's maturation and normal parental uncertainty, in combination

with the complexities of today's world makes recognition of problems, and knowing what to do to if a problem is identified, very difficult. The professional staff at the Center can work with parents and families as their children grow and as families go through changes, to provide information, resources, recommendations, consultations, periodic assessments and interventions as needed. With personal knowledge of the parent, the child and the family life circumstances, a clinician at the Center can provide personal, expert advice to parents and families throughout the child's developmental years. One way we do this is through our "How to Talk" workshop offered this Summer.

Summer Seminar:

by David Wolter, M.A.

We've recommended SO highly the book *How to Talk So Kids Will Listen* (Faber & Mazlish, 1980) that we believe it would be helpful for us to offer a Summer Seminar that teaches the principles in the book. These principles will help those who parent and work with children to improve their communication with children and ultimately with others.

The seminar will be conducted in six 2-hour sessions that will include worksheets and video vignettes to improve the learning process. We will be offering this seminar in a daytime format and an evening format so that participants can decide which would work best with their schedule.

Two "How to Talk" Seminar Times to Choose From:

Thursdays Noon-2pm: June 18,25, July 2,9,16,23

Mondays 6pm-8pm: July 13,20,27, August 3,10,17

Since enrollment will be capped at 20 to facilitate the learning experience, call early to reserve your spot.