



# Psyche Matters

The Newsletter of the Sullivan Center for Children

## Why Does My Child Get Bullied?!

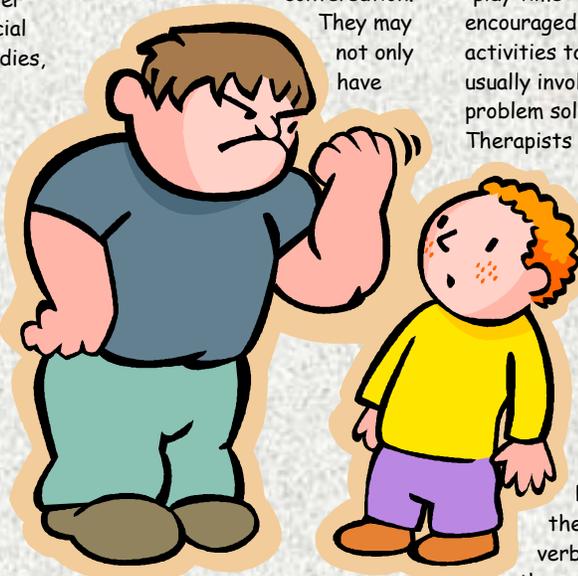
by Jamie Milotz, Psy.D.

Parents often wonder what it is that makes their children a target for bullies. Is it the way they dress? Is it that they don't have the newest iPod or gaming console? Research studies by McKown and colleagues offer another theory: lack of social skills. In two research studies, McKown had 284 children between the ages of 4-16 determine the emotions of others by looking at pictures and watching movie clips. Children were also asked what the appropriate response to various social situations would be. The children's teachers offered their accounts of the participants' social behaviors and friendships. After comparing the teachers' and children's responses, the experimenters determined that children who were determined by teachers to have social problems exhibited significant difficulties in at least one of three areas of non-verbal communication: reading non-verbal cues, understanding the social meaning of non-verbal cues, and coming up with appropriate options to resolve social conflicts.

Why is non-verbal communication important? A child having difficulty reading non-verbal cues from others doesn't

understand that someone rolling their eyes or saying something in a cynical tone is being sarcastic. They may have trouble realizing that when someone yawns or checks their watch frequently, that they may be bored with the conversation.

They may not only have



trouble picking up on others' social cues, but also with understanding the effect of their own non-verbal messages, resulting in frequent misunderstandings, rejection by others, and potentially, being a target for bullies.

Here at the Sullivan Center for Children, we offer a number of groups targeted at improving the social skills of boys and girls at a variety of ages. Our groups generally begin with an

opportunity for children to share difficulties they have experienced over the week, and to help each other determine appropriate solutions. Several groups for younger children then follow up with a less structured "play time" in which children are encouraged to determine activities to do together, which usually involves some level of problem solving and compromise. Therapists continually monitor

the communication between the children, and address any problematic issues as they arise.

Children are consistently taught and reminded to practice appropriate social skills, including being more aware of

the effect of the non-verbal communication they send and receive. At

home, you can help your child build stronger social skills by asking them to identify the role they had in a disagreement, ("Billy became upset after you took his toy.") to encourage empathy, ("How would you feel if Billy took your toy without asking first?") and to discuss alternative strategies for the future, ("Next time, if you want to play with a toy Billy is using, what could you do instead? Maybe he would let you play with it if you asked first."). Helping

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your children build a stronger awareness of appropriate social skills will likely help them be more successful in school and a variety of social relationships.

For more information, please read:

McKown, C., Gumbiner, L., Russo, N., & Lipton, M. (2009). Social-emotional learning skill, self-regulation, and social competence in typically developing and clinic-referred children. *Journal of Clinical Child and Adolescent Psychology*, 38(6), 858-871.

# For the Love of Pets!

by Marcelle Pratt, Psy.D.

What is it about pets that makes our life so much richer? These wonderful creatures provide us with a sense of joy that is mysterious and immeasurable. They can be an integral part of our family and offer so many benefits for our children.

Studies show that children who care for pets as part of their family are more empathic than children who do not have pets. Caring for another living thing can decrease feelings of loneliness and increase the ability to connect and feel needed. A pet provides a non-threatening and emotionally safe companion who accepts us as we are. This can be especially valuable for a youngster who is on the autism spectrum or has difficulty socializing with peers.

When we care for the needs of our pets we fill our own need for a sense of connection to the world, compassion for living things, and desire to find beauty in its unadorned state. In addition to the psychological benefits of pets, science tells us that caring for an animal can increase our physical well-being. Interactions with pets have been shown to decrease heart rate, blood pressure, cholesterol levels, and triglyceride levels. Exercising our pets also helps us engage in physical fitness activities that would not be nearly as fun without a companion.

With all these wonderful ways our pets can benefit us, we owe them the consideration of trying to offer them the kind of relationship that best suits them. Like any relationship, the better matched the personalities, the greater chance that the partnership will add to the enjoyment of life rather than make the experience more stressful. A mismatch is one of the most

frequent reasons for failed human-animal relationships. Given the desire to choose the type of pet that would best fit your lifestyle or that of your family, here are some thoughts on how to begin this process.

One idea for finding the right pet can be found at: [www.petloveshack.com/PETPERSONALITY.html](http://www.petloveshack.com/PETPERSONALITY.html).

Try writing a classified ad to help describe your perfect pet. An example might be -" Wanted: High Energy sportster to share hiking and bicycle rides" or "Wanted: Laid back couch potato to hang out with and watch movies". Your family pet could be a dog, cat, lizard, or rat. It could also be a hamster, guinea pig, chinchilla, bunny, or even a pot-bellied pig. It is the personality match that is the most important. Other tips for parents are provided on the website [www.petbehaviorproblems.com/othern.htm](http://www.petbehaviorproblems.com/othern.htm).



Parents are encouraged to take a five-part questionnaire that will

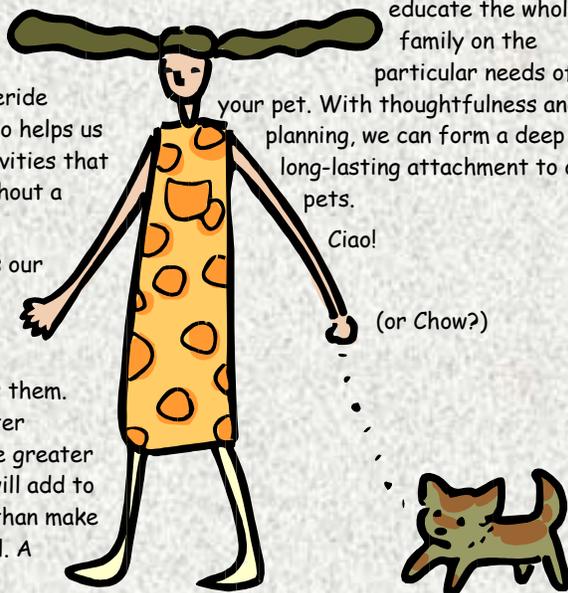
provide information regarding the best pet-family fit. Whether you already have a pet in the family or are thinking about obtaining one, both of these websites offer some thoughtful ideas about how to assess our pet's needs and provide them the best possible care.

Once the pet is welcomed into your home, it is very important to understand that time should be taken to allow the animal to adapt to its new home as well as for the family to adapt to its new family pet. Each pet is unique and so care should be taken to ensure that adults and children in the home understand how to treat the animal - (no, goldfish should not be held in a child's hand and carried around the house). Start from the basics and

educate the whole family on the particular needs of your pet. With thoughtfulness and planning, we can form a deep and long-lasting attachment to our pets.

Ciao!

(or Chow?)



## Special Announcements:

**CALENDAR:** The Sullivan Center will be closed for Memorial Day (Sat. 5/29 and Mon. 5/31). Groups will be cancelled on these holiday Saturdays: 5/29 and 7/3. Please check with your therapist to verify appointments for the holidays and to let your therapist know of upcoming vacation dates.

**GROUPS:** We currently offer 10 different groups:

*Tuesday afternoons—7-10 yr. old girls*

*Tuesday nights—high schoolers*

*Tuesday nights—Parental Guidance (see below)*

*Wednesday afternoons—10-12 yr. olds*

*Wednesday nights—6<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> boys social skills*

*Thursday afternoons—12-14 yr. old girls*

*Friday afternoons—young teen boys*

*Friday afternoons - young adults*

*Saturday mornings 10am - 8-12 yr. olds*

*Saturday mornings 11am - 4-8 yr. olds*

**PARENTING SEMINARS:** The Sullivan Center is proud to offer two seminars this Summer to help parents succeed. Both are based on the popular books by Elaine Mazlish and Adele Faber and will be led by David Wolter, M.A.:

### Siblings Without Rivalry

(six 2-hour sessions; cost \$25 each session)

### How to Talk So Kids Will Listen

(six 2-hour sessions; cost \$25 each session)

Watch for flyers in our lobbies (and on our newsletter page of our website) for more details on these important group seminars. You can also sign up now by calling our office at 271-1186.

**PARENTAL GUIDANCE:** The Sullivan Center offers a parenting class for those interested in adding to their skills and those court-mandated to attend. Skills for co-parenting are taught by Dr. Hinmon on Tuesday nights at 7pm. He can be contacted at 271-1186 x124 for more information..

## Some Thoughts on Medication Strategies

by David A. Fox, M.D.

Many parents have questions about how decisions are made regarding the use of medication to help with regulation of behavior and emotions in children and teenagers. The use of medication raises concerns about safety, side effects, and long-term consequences of their use. What are some reasons to try medication?

- If behavioral measures and psychotherapy have not produced significant benefits
- If symptoms are acute and severe enough to interfere with functioning
- Family history of positive response to medication for similar problems
- For specific syndromes and symptoms for which medication has proved most effective.

How is an initial dose determined?

- Some medication doses are determined by body weight
- Some medication doses are determined by measurement of blood levels
- Some medication doses are determined by preset guidelines
- Except for acute emergencies, it is usually best to start at a low dose

What are some side effects to look for?

- In most cases there is no need to look for them; they will find you
- A few medications have specific dangerous side effects ("black-box

warnings"), often of rare events that need to be watched for

- A few medications, particularly those that may also be used to control seizures, may have serious side effects if stopped abruptly
- A few medications have serious potential side effects if used over many years

How do we decide whether to continue medication?

- In general, if the benefits exceed the adverse effects and risks
- Dosage may need to be optimized
- Some medications may take weeks or longer to have an effect
- Sometimes switching to a different drug within the same class may be helpful

What about multiple medications?

- In general, the fewer the better
- Some combinations may enhance effectiveness and reduce side effects

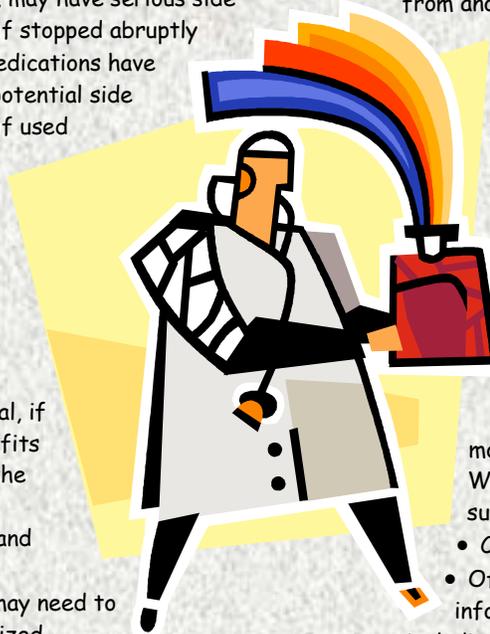
- It is generally best to start or change medications one at a time
- Occasionally, one medication is prescribed to deal with a side effect from another

How can we know when to stop medications?

- This is often the most difficult part, since it's not just a matter of "Now I'm better, so I don't need these anymore"
- A trial of reduced dose or discontinuation is often useful
- Anti-depressants, if helpful, should usually be continued for at least six months

What are overall strategies for success with medications?

- Communication is essential
- Often multiple sources of information about effects, including family members, teachers, friends, and significant adults can be extremely helpful
- It is important to recognize the limits of science: results with a large group of patients does not predict the results for any given individual
- Preferences of both parents and kids are important considerations
- Everything is negotiable except safety



## Meet the Staff: David Fox, M.D. (Director of Psychiatric Services)

by Anthony K. Lee, M.A.

David Fox, M.D., is Board Certified in Child and Adolescent Psychiatry. He graduated magna cum laude from Harvard University in 1962 with a degree in Social Relations, and cum laude from Yale University School of Medicine in 1966. He was on the faculty of Harvard Medical School from 1973-1977, and since 1977 has been on the Psychiatry faculty of the University of California at San Francisco. He worked at Valley Children's from 1982-2001 and came to



the Sullivan Center in 2001.

One thing many people may not know about Dr. Fox is that he is an accomplished musician! He has been studying the piano since the age of five and the cello since junior high. In 1979, Dr. Fox, along with a fellow musician, created the Rogue River String Quartet which performed in various outdoor locations including Half Dome. Within the last 5-6 years the quartet has been performing in conferences throughout Europe.

Another passion of Dr. Fox's is traveling. He has been all over the world, visiting and experiencing various cultures. Dr. Fox is also an avid gardener. If you see him eating a salad or some tasty looking vegetables during the day, chances are he grew them himself. He has been gardening ever since he can remember and truly has a green thumb.

Dr. Fox's tremendous breadth of knowledge, commitment to helping people, and unique sense of humor make him an invaluable asset and we are honored to have him here at the Sullivan Center!

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



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## Books to Help Kids Deal With Violence & Abuse:

by David Wolter, M.A.

Difficult topics can be tough to talk about. How about reading a book together to help you get the conversation started. Read together for healing. Here's a list of some very helpful picture books for kids who have witnessed violence or trauma in the home:

**A Terrible Thing Happened** by M. Holmes

**A Family That Fights** by S.C. Bernstein

**The Trouble with Secrets** by K. Johnson

**Something Happened and I'm Scared to Tell** by P. Kehoe

**The Words Hurt: Helping Children Cope with Verbal Abuse** by C. Loftis

**Something is Wrong At My House: A Book About Parents' Fighting** by D. Davis

**Hear My Roar: A Story of Family Violence** by G. Watts

**My Dad Loves Me, My Dad Has a Disease: A Child's View — Living with Addiction**  
by C. Black

Workbooks for Children by W. Deaton:

**No More Hurt (Recovering from Abuse)**

**My Own Thoughts and Feelings on Stopping the Hurt (Exploring Hurt and Abuse)**

**Living With My Family (Violence in the Home)**

**I Saw it Happen (Witnessing Violence)**

**Drinking and Drugs in My Family (Substance Abuse in the Family)**

Read together for hope. The following books are helpful for kids to prevent or deal with sexual abuse:

**Please Tell! A Child's Story About Sexual Abuse** by J. Ottenweller

**My Body is Private** by L.W. Girard

**The Trouble with Secrets** by K. Johnson

**Uncle Willie's Tickles: A Child's Right to Say No** by M. Aboff

**Your Body Belongs to You** by C.M. Spelman

**I Said No! A Kid-to-Kid Guide to Keeping Your Private Parts Private** by K. King

**The Right Touch: A Read-Aloud Story to Help Prevent Sexual Abuse** by S. Kleven

**A Touching Book** by J. Hindman

**Some Parts are NOT for Sharing** by J.K. Federico

**It's My Body** by L. Freeman



## From the Director: Hey Kids! Make the Best of Your Summer

by Kathy Sullivan, Ph.D., ABPP

All school year you want nothing more than to have free time. You long to have no school and be able to do what you want more of the time. The weather is great, and I know nothing sounds better than sleeping in, staying up late, and playing video games 24/7. But if that's all you do - time will fly by, your summer will be gone, you will have learned nothing new, had few new experiences, have zero feelings of accomplishment - and school will just start up again. I challenge you to take the summer by storm; create memories you'll never forget - ones you'll tell stories to your kids about... "In the summer of my \_\_\_\_\_ grade year, I \_\_\_\_\_." Your options are as vast as your imagination... Learned to swim... Went to a science camp... Volunteered at a hospital...built a fort...organized a garage sale...made my best friend at baseball...learned to ride a horse...got my first summer job...helped my parents organize the house...learned origami...found my favorite author...worked out and got in the greatest

shape...learned to eat healthy food and gave up junk food...wrote some short stories...spent amazing time gardening with grandma. You don't have to have a lot of money to do something exciting and creative. You can accomplish things if you're at home, or at daycare, if you're alone, or surrounded by others. Don't always depend on your parents or friends for ideas. Don't be afraid to try something new. You take the lead - suggest things to your parents. Brainstorm with parents, friends and other grown-ups. Try to think of things you can do with your family's help, things you can do that requires no one but yourself, and activities that don't cost much money. So often kids feel that they have to rely on mom and dad to do everything - and while you may need their permission - there is much you can do without having to depend on them too much. Video games are fine, and computers provide much to do as well, but don't spend your whole summer in front of them. And don't just sit around bored. **Get out and DO - CREATE - IMAGINE - LEARN - CONNECT WITH OTHERS** - you'll have a longer, healthier summer and you will create memories that will last a lifetime.