



# Psyche Matters

The Newsletter of the Sullivan Center for Children

## Parenting Classes: A View from the Inside

by Melinda Appleby, M.A.

Well, we have successfully completed another parenting seminar series! David Wolter, M.A., LMFT, facilitated the groups, who not only has the education and credentials but also lots of personal experience! Both seminars were based on the popular books by Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish. In October we started the six week series, *How to Talk So Kids Will Listen* and then we ended the year going through *Siblings Without Rivalry*. As we all know, there is no parenting manual, yet it is one of the hardest jobs many of us undertake. We feel validated and confident in our abilities when our kids are getting along, doing well in school, and behaving responsibly. The moments when they give us an unexpected hug, say something really clever, make a funny face when we need to laugh... we love

these times... but what about the other times?? There are times when we find ourselves frustrated, impatient, and thinking "what am I doing wrong?!" In these groups, parents benefit from the supportive atmosphere where other parents and professionals share parenting successes and struggles, problem solve



together, and learn new practical skills that can be implemented immediately. Each week a skill is taught (for example: dealing with feelings, engaging cooperation, avoiding comparisons) and then

practiced during group. An assignment for the week is given to apply the skill and then to report back to the group as to how it went. In this process of learning together and supporting each other, parents were able to grow in their awareness of how they interact with and respond to their children, while making strides towards

parenting each child in a unique and loving way. It is through experiences like these, challenging and expanding current ways of parenting, that one becomes better equipped and prepared for the future opportunities our children will undoubtedly bestow on us.

One guiding principle of these seminars is that feelings matter. The better able parents are at helping their children deal with their feelings, the better able the child is to deal with issues that come up. Many parents are wary

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of acknowledging feelings especially negative ones. If a child is angry and misbehaving, won't recognizing the anger just escalate things or possibly communicate that it is ok to behave that way when angry? As parents we just want the issue to stop! The irony though, is that for an issue to "stop" we need to address the emotion driving it. The very emotions that we want to close the door on and lock out need to be invited in, (continued on page 4)

## Staff Changes: Hellos and Goodbyes

by David Wolter, M.Div., M.A., LMFT

Summertime usually brings changes here at the Sullivan Center. Last Summer was the time for Psychological Interns to finish up their year of training and to move or to stay on for a Post-Doctoral Fellowship. This year is certainly no exception when it comes to staff changes. Here's a summary of some of our staff additions:

**Saying Hello:** Each Summer we get to know new interns who come as part of their psychological training. This year we welcomed four

interns. Melinda Appleby comes to us from Sacramento, though she did much of her schooling in the Bay Area. Jennifer Fanzo went to school in Chico and then in Southern California. Steve Castro is a local with his degree

at Fresno State and his further training at Alliant International University. Also from Alliant and Fresno State is Melissa Griffith. All four interns have committed to one year of training and will see a variety of clients here at the Sullivan Center.

We are also welcoming Rachel Viers, Psy.D. as a Post-Doctoral Fellow. Rachel did much of her undergrad and graduate work in the Midwest and East, but went to Alliant International University for her doctoral degree.

In addition, we have hired several new Psychologists. Pam Deroian,

Ph.D. just joined our staff after many years of practice in Florida at the University of Miami. Heather Soares, Psy.D. also joined our staff, having much experience locally in the juvenile justice system. Peggy Murphy, Psy.D. also joins our staff after a significant mental health career in both Hawaii and Seattle.

It feels a little like free-agent signing time in the big leagues around the Sullivan Center. Though we are sad to see familiar faces go, we do hope you will be able to meet the fine people who have recently started working here.



So here's a summary of our staff at the Sullivan Center:

### Senior Staff

Kathy Sullivan, Ph.D., ABPP  
(Clinical Director)

Susan Napolitano, Ph.D.

Mark Barnes, Ph.D.

(Assistant Director; Director of Training)

Laurie Rabens, Ph.D. (Special Programs)

Treon Hinmon, Psy.D.

Lisa Ganiron, Psy.D. (Continuing Ed.)

### Junior Staff

Peggy Murphy, Psy.D.

Heather Soares, Psy.D.

Pam Deroian, Ph.D.

Betsy Jost, M.S., LMFT

David Wolter, M.Div., M.A., LMFT

## Special Announcements:

**CALENDAR:** The Sullivan Center will be closed for Easter (4/7) and Memorial Day (5/28). Groups will be cancelled on these holiday Saturdays: 4/7 and 5/26. Please check with your therapist to verify appointments for the holidays and to let us know of upcoming vacation dates.

**GROUPS:** We currently offer 5 different groups:

*Tuesday nights—high schoolers*

*Friday afternoons - young adults*

*Saturday mornings 9am - 4-7 yr. olds*

*Saturday mornings 10am - 10-14 yr. olds*

*Saturday mornings 11am - 7-10 yr. olds*

**PARENTING SEMINARS:** The Sullivan Center is proud to offer two seminars 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.Div., M.A., LMFT:

### How to Talk So Kids Will Listen

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

Dates and times tba)

### Siblings Without Rivalry

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

Dates and times tba)

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 x125.

**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 info.

### Post-Doctoral Fellows

Anthony K. Lee, Ph.D.

Rachel Viers, Psy.D.

Miriam Fishman, M.A.

(Psych Assistant; Psy.D. candidate)

### Pre-Doctoral Interns

Melinda Appleby, M.A. (Psy.D. candidate)

Steve Castro, M.A. (Psy.D. candidate)

Jennifer Fanzo, M.A. (Psy.D. candidate)

Melissa Griffith, M.A. (Ph.D. candidate)

### Other Staff

Errol Leifer, Ph.D., ABPP

(Consulting Psychologist)

David Fox, M.D. (Child Psychiatrist)

Psyche (Cat Therapist; Feline)

Joey (Dog Therapist; Canine)

## Teenagers: How Close Do You Want to Be?!

by Mark Barnes, Ph.D.

In previous issues parenting developing teenagers has been discussed. The simultaneous developmental needs of the teen, to be independent and yet still need their parents, make for interesting and often highly conflictual times. One way to help minimize the conflict is to remain close, but not too close, to your pre-teen and early developing adolescent.

The primary manner in which a parent can foster this sort of relationship with their child is by starting early in allowing them some freedoms while guiding their decisions. As a pre-teen they may wish for some beginning autonomy. For example they may want to spend the night at a friend's, or go to the movies with a group of friends. By allowing a child, when it is safe, to engage in such social behaviors you allow them the freedom to choose what they want to do. As a parent setting up these choices with acceptable parameters is where your skills come in. When your child has a choice of acceptable activities you win by assuring their safety and they win by gaining control.

As your child becomes a teenager the choices they may wish to make will potentially become more problematic — choices like going to a party or "hanging out at River Park". As a parent you may find these choices bordering on the unacceptable (depending on the age of your teen). However, the trust and depth of your relationship should be

the key to making decisions here. If you have laid the proper foundation with your child in the pre-teen years you should know your child well enough to trust that whatever activity they choose, the behavior they engage in at that activity



will be safe. You will know this because you know your teenager well.

To get to know them well a parent needs to be involved. That means listening when they tell you about the drama at school. That means, as a parent, empathizing with their disdain or dislike of their History teacher. Become available to play their video game *with* them, go to their choir rehearsal (not just the performances, racing there after work and being 15 minutes late). Make your priority getting to know your teen as they grow into teenage years and they will allow you in as they get older. If you listen to your teen, really listen, they will value that and will honor that attention with love and respect as they age. This is the key to remaining close to your teenager and so navigating the often-conflictual time of adolescent development.

Ultimately, facilitating the safe autonomous development of a teenage child is challenging at best but is also rewarding and fulfilling as you, their parent, see them make safe and healthy choices. In doing so you can take credit for guiding, not **controlling**, your adolescent through the rocky years and safely into adulthood. It makes all the time of listening to trivial stories about other kids, watching practices, or enduring confusing and mind-boggling video games worthwhile.



## Parenting Classes: A View from the Inside (continued from page 1)

welcomed, and treated with respect. If we forbid the expression of unpleasant emotions, the danger is that it will go underground and reappear in other forms, such as physical symptoms or emotional problems.

Think back in your life on times when negative feelings weren't permitted. Have you ever been told, "That's nonsense, you have no reason to feel that way," or "If that's the way you feel, keep it to yourself because I don't want to hear it," or even "Just find a way to work it out and don't get all upset about every little thing." Did any of those responses make you feel better or make the feelings go away? How about an empathic response, one where someone is attempting to tune into your feelings: "Wow, that sounds rough. You must be feeling pretty upset". When we are hurting, to have someone listen to us and validate our experience taps into our inner pain and provides relief. When we feel like someone understands, we begin to feel less upset and to be better able to cope with the problem. This process is no different for our children. They too are better able to cope when they have a listening ear and an empathic response. The problem is that most of us grew up having our feelings denied so the language of empathy does not come naturally. One thing parents can start doing to help their children deal with feelings is to listen attentively and acknowledge their struggle. Listen to the contrast in the interaction when we deny feelings versus when we validate them:

Child (crying): My fish is dead. He was alive this morning.

Parent: Now don't get so upset, it's only a fish. We can buy another one.

Child: I don't want another one!

An empathic response could be:

Parent: Oh no. What a shock!

Child: yeah, I fed him everyday. I didn't even know he was sick.

Parents typically avoid naming the feelings because they fear they will make it worse. Just the opposite is true. Children who hear the words for what they are going through are deeply comforted by it because their inner experience has been acknowledged. Next time your child is distressed, practice attentive listening and acknowledge their feelings. When our words communicate empathy they can speak directly to our child's heart. This is one of the many skills we learn and practice during group in order to parent in a way that promotes healthy emotional development and positive interpersonal relationships throughout our child's life.



## Parenting Classes: A View from the Parents

*"I came to the Sullivan Center because of my three year old daughter. She was struggling with tantrums, self-esteem, communication issues and other physical problems. When I brought her to the Sullivan Center I knew that I was only fixing part of the problem; the other problem was my parenting. I learned about the "How to Talk" series from my daughter's psychologist at the Sullivan Center. I was told that the series may be helpful in how I talk with my children and how they respond to me. Words cannot express just how helpful this class was to my family. I initially took the class by myself without my husband. However, after applying the strategies and techniques from the class, my husband realized this had to be something we both committed to if we were going to change the way our family communicates. So I took the class again as a refresher and my husband took it for the first time. . . .We feel this class has offered us a second chance with our family. . . .Because of this class, the entire family communicates better. As parents we feel so much more in control of how we communicate as a family, how we encourage our children, and how our children communicate with us. It has changed the family dynamics: there is less yelling, less chaos, and more talking and respect. . . ."*

*"I took the "How to Talk" series after from prodding from my wife. Working with children is a part of my profession and so I felt I was already good at communicating. I learned how wrong I was. This class had a profound effect on how I communicate with everyone in my life. . . .I learned how to acknowledge children's feelings, praise in a more positive and effective way, as well as encourage my children to be independent. . . .Every time a session was finished, I felt empowered to go back home and practice the strategies I was taught. Most helpful for me was having a professional there to make sense of the information and also to make it applicable to my life, my family, and my children. I enjoyed the opportunity to hear of other families' struggles and successes and glean from their experiences. Being a parent is the toughest job I have had and this class has made me feel more confident as a parent. . . .My wife and I for the first time are on the same page with how we talk and parent our children. . . ."*



### The Sullivan Center for Children

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

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