

peptalk

Parenting Education

Practitioners Talk

Ideas and Information for Parenting Practitioners

Issue 49 ■ Summer 2010

Staying Effective While Multi-Tasking

by Linda Carlson

“Must be able to multi-task” is what job descriptions often say. Realistically, none of us *truly* multi-task: we don’t read and write at the same time, and even if we’re texting or phoning while driving (now illegal in many states), we cannot completely focus on both tasks at the same time.

What most of us do is *shuttle* between tasks: we spend a few minutes on e-mail before leaving home or while commuting, we teach a class, we meet one-on-one, we write a speech or a grant application, we edit a newsletter, handle more e-mail, introduce a colleague at a meeting, outline a budget for a new program, coach a new employee—not to mention making a grocery list, calling for mammogram results, and arranging to volunteer at our child’s school.

In an early 2010 “Work & Family” article that described such work schedules as “mini-shifts,” the *Wall Street Journal’s* Sue Shellenbarger wrote, “All the mental gear-shifting invariably creates hurdles for the human mind.” She quoted one professor/consultant who said, “The hardest thing I do is transitioning, taking off one hat and putting the other on.” Others told Shellenbarger that they often feel overwhelmed and inefficient with all the shifting back and forth.

With that in mind, we asked professionals across the country how they avoid mental stalls and what advice they have for our readers.

Berit Brogaard, who teaches in two departments at the University of Missouri in St. Louis, has a research project and a book manuscript underway, edits a journal, serves as the vice president of a professional association and writes on a free-lance basis, recommends devoting an entire day to each activity: “I teach my two seminars on Mondays, I handle journal submissions on Tuesdays, I meet with students on Wednesdays, I write Thursdays and during the weekend, and I schedule meetings for Fridays.”

Of course, a day per task is not possible for

many of us, Brogaard recognizes: “Make the lunch break or your work-out at the gym serve as the break between the different activities,” she suggests, adding, “It’s absolutely essential to have every one of your activities plugged into one and the same calendar.”

She uses Google Calendar (www.google.com/calendar), which can be set to send reminders: “This allows me to focus on the task at hand instead of worrying about what comes next.”

Let’s say you only have a few minutes between those transitions. Dinyah Rein of Grass Valley, California, who describes herself as a life coach specializing in career transitions, advises:

- Take a few moments to pause and imagine how you want your next task to go: let it unfold in your mind’s eye like a movie you’re directing.
- Shift your mood before you head into the next role. A few options: exercise quickly, do a few minutes of dance steps to uplifting music, sing the verse of a song or do a brief meditation.
- Document what you’d like to remember about the task you’re leaving, and where you want to pick up when you return to it. This process, which Rein says can be done in writing or with a voice recorder, frees her from worrying about one task when she’s moved on to the next.

Similar techniques for mentally leaving one assignment behind are recommended by Frank O’Neill, who writes, teaches at Western Iowa Technical Community College and, on a consulting basis, provides product training to pharmacists. Besides using meditation, writing in his journal or a brisk walk to make a transition, he advocates preparing yourself mentally for the next job. His favorite method includes goal setting, which is similar to Brogaard’s tip: “Envision the next task and how it’s going,” he says. Second, O’Neill recommends posi-

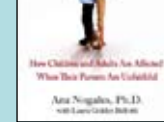
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Book Review

Parents Who Cheat: How Children and Adults Are Affected When Their Parents Are Unfaithful

by Ana Nogales, Ph.D., with Laura Golden Bellotti
Health Communications, Inc., 2009

Based on thirty-three years of practice in family therapy and a survey of the adult children of adulterers, Nogales believes that when one or both parents cheat, children are also betrayed. She identifies six common responses to parental infidelity:



- Loss of trust. When children of any age discover infidelity, they find it difficult, perhaps impossible, to trust that someone they love will not lie to them or reject or abandon them.

• Shame. Kids of almost every age are embarrassed about being part of a family in which at least one parent has betrayed

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they did not cause the infidelity. She repeatedly advises parents to accept blame and ask for forgiveness of their children, and she cautions both parents and children (regardless of age) to avoid being judgmental. She also describes how a parent’s infidelity, especially if tolerated within a marriage, may be perceived as the norm, and can be one reason for an adult child’s own cheating.

by Linda Carlson

What's on Your Mind?

Purpose:
To provide parent support and education practitioners with information and ideas

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PEP Talk (Parenting Education Practitioners Talk) is published quarterly by Parenting Press, Inc.

Cost: Electronic editions are \$10 per year (4 issues). Call for rates for paper editions, group rates or subscriptions outside the U.S. Phone: 206.364.2900 Fax: 206.364.0702 E-mail: office@ParentingPress.com

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Do you have thoughts to share with other parenting practitioners? Send them to: **What's on Your Mind, PEP Talk, P.O. Box 75267, Seattle, WA 98175 or e-mail to office@ParentingPress.com.**

What Can Parents Do When a Playmate Is a Bad Influence?

What can parents do about a playmate who seems to bring out the worst in their child? Clinical psychologist Eileen Kennedy-Moore, the mother of four, and author of several books including *What About Me? 12 Ways to Get Your Parents' Attention (Without Hitting Your Sister)*, has these suggestions.

- **Avoid snap judgments.** It's tempting to think the other child is the only source of problems but no child is "bad to the bone," and most children experiment with bad behavior. There must be something attractive about this child or your child wouldn't be drawn to him or her. The two might be egging each other on. It's also possible that your child's actions or comments trigger the other child's misbehavior. Your child could even be the ringleader but blaming another child! Yet another thought: both kids got carried away or didn't realize that what they were doing could be dangerous or hurtful.
- **Encourage your child to think about consequences.** Make observations and ask questions to help your child think through the kids' actions: "It seems like you and Matthew get into trouble a lot when you sit next to each other. Have you noticed that? I bet it's not much fun for you when Mrs. Murphy gets mad at you. What do you think might help?" or "Jennifer looked very upset after the three of you were playing. I'm sure you don't want to make another kid cry. What do you think you could do to make sure that doesn't happen again?"
- **Help your child avoid undesirable behavior.** Perhaps insist that play dates are at your home, where you can offer more supervision. It may help to talk to your child about patterns in the relationship: "Some friends tend to run hot and cold. They can be fun and exciting to be with one day and mean another day. It's easier to have

friends who are always kind and I hope that's the type of friend you are. If you want to stay friends with Meredith, you need to figure out how to handle the times when she's not being kind. You could tell her, 'This isn't fun for me.' If that doesn't work, you could find someone else to play with that day. Who else might you play with?"

- **Recruit the other child's parents to help.** Depending on the situation, the playmate's parents may have suggestions or explanations. Be careful not to accuse the other parents or child. The other parents could very well think *your* kid is the bad influence! Instead, talk about how "Our kids seem to be getting into mischief together. What do you think we could do to help them?"
- **Encourage different friendships.** Plan one-on-one play dates with different children to fan the flames of new relationships.
- **Ask teachers for help.** Without being judgmental, ask your child's teacher, after-school care provider and others who see the kids together to seat the children apart and pair your child with other children in the group to encourage new relationships.

Eileen Kennedy-Moore practices in Princeton NJ. Her new book, Smart Parenting for Smart Kids: Nurturing Your Child's True Potential, will be published by Jossey-Bass/Wiley in January.

Conferences

Sept. 25, "Strengthening the Threads of Professionalism," South Sound AEYC. Olympia WA. Contact: (360) 943-0921, Nthomas365@comcast.net.

Sept. 29-Oct. 2, "Reaching Potential Together: Joy in the Journey," Tennessee AEYC, Chattanooga. Contact: (615) 279-0111, taeyc8@aol.com.

Sept. 30-Oct. 2, "Growing Futures," Illinois AEYC, Springfield. Contact: (217) 529-7732, tonya@illinois-aeyc.org.

Sept. 30-Oct. 2, annual conference, Texas AEYC, Austin. Contact: (800) 341-2392, jactietaylor@texas-aeyc.org.

Oct. 1-2, "How to Prepare Children for a New World," North Dakota AEYC, Grand Forks. Contact: (701) 367-9558, ericakindem@yahoo.com

Oct. 1-2, annual conference, Wyoming Early Childhood Association, Casper. Contact: (877) 234-3162, weca@wyoming.com.

Oct. 7-9, annual work/study conference, North Carolina AEYC, Raleigh. Contact: (919) 510-5034, phendrickson@nceaeyc.org.

Oct. 8-9, "Together for Children," Georgia Association on Young Children, Duluth. Contact: (404) 222-0014, gayc@alxmail.com.

Oct. 9, annual fall conference, Colorado AEYC, Denver. Contact: (303) 791-2772, caeyc@Colorado-AEYC.org.

Oct. 15-16, annual conference, New York City AEYC, New York City. Contact: (212) 807-0144, office@nycaeyc.org.

Presentation Plan

Total Time: 54 minutes

What to Teach Kids about Gossip

Objectives:

- To help parents and children identify gossip
- To explain the risks of derogatory language
- To learn how to squelch kids' gossip

Materials

Whiteboard or easel with pad and markers
Copy of handout for each participant
Oversize copy of chart from handout
Celebrity-focused magazine or tabloid newspaper such as *Star* or print-out from a web site such as www.starmagazine.com

Background for Educator

Today, when web sites and talk shows present rumors as news, and mean-spirited sarcasm is rampant in what public figures say about each other, it's hard not to gossip. Too often, however, these comments turn vicious and get perpetuated fast—within minutes—through texting, Twitter, e-mail, and social networking sites. Worse yet, they can live forever, archived in our cyber communications. Unkind remarks can embarrass and humiliate kids and adults, ruin self-esteem and even drive kids to suicide. Perhaps worst of all, many adults applaud the snide and cruel dialog on television reality shows and unthinkingly model tolerance for gossip to their children.

Introduction (1 minute)

Some time ago, the *Wall Street Journal* published a story that started out "Before you gossip, ask yourself 'Is it kind? Is it true? Is it necessary?'" Too often, said writer Jeffrey Zaslow, children grow up without guidance about what is appropriate conversation. "They say harsh and hurtful things about each other. Encouraged by the snarkiness in pop culture today . . . they seem more sarcastic than past generations," he went on.

The three questions suggested in his article are centuries old, attributed to Socrates and Buddhist teachings. They've been repeated by the Indian spiritual leader Sri Sathya Sai Baba, who added, "Will it hurt anyone? Will it improve on the silence?" They are important today for those of us adults who want to think twice about what we say, who want to model truth and kindness for our children, and who need to squelch the nasty language and insinuations we hear from too many kids.

Large group activity (10 minutes)

Thinking about what you've heard in the last day or so, whether in person or on radio, television or Internet, what are examples of unkind comments you've heard? [If no one volunteers, continue by reading the headlines from the celebrity magazine or web site about celebrities' marriages, arrests, brawls, plastic surgery, and unflattering gowns.] What is typical about these comments? [If no one volunteers, ask, "Are they true?" and then wait for comments. Continue with, "Are they kind?" and "Are they necessary? Do we need to know this?"] How do we feel about the comments that are made about us or people we care about? How would we feel if the comments made about celebrities were also being made about us? [If responses do not include such terms as "humiliating," "embarrassing," "hurtful," "nosy," "disrespectful" and "unnecessary," suggest them as appropriate.]

Now, what about the comments we've made in the last few days. What have you said or e-mailed that you now realize might have been gossip? What were you tempted to say or write, and are now glad that you didn't?

Mini-lecture (10 minutes)

Thinking about what we have said, or are glad we didn't say, let's use *Is This News or Is It Gossip?* on the handout to help us evaluate what's appropriate to say. How many times have you heard people defend a gossipy comment by telling you, "But it's true!" [Pause for possible response.] Do facts excuse gossip or rude comments? [Pointing to your oversize copy of the chart, say] If I point out a stain on your shirt [gesture to class member], am I being truthful? [Wait for response.] Is my comment kind? Is it necessary? What if I passed one of you on the street and saw that you were receiving a traffic citation. If I stand here in front of the group and say, "Tell us about your ticket," am I being truthful? Kind? Is my comment necessary? [Pause for responses.]

Why *might* I say these things? Because when I do, I feel superior. I may not recognize this, but I have demonstrated to you that I see you are careless about what you wear, and that I know you broke a law and got caught. Most of us would probably describe me as being smug in such situations.

We may also feel important and superior when we have information that other people lack. Depending on our

The presentation plans are designed to help you present new or classic material. Each plan includes activities and discussion questions to help make the material relevant to parents.

Adapt this material to suit your groups. Permission to reprint the handout granted for educational purposes only.

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audience and how we communicate this information, it can make us the center of attention, which is something that we all want at least occasionally. Think of how disappointed you are when you have news and no one to share it with, or when you start to make an announcement and something distracts your audience, or when someone “one-ups” you with his or her news.

The drive to feel superior and be recognized is a powerful combination, and it’s no wonder we sometimes succumb to the temptation to gossip. Think of situations that make us likely to gossip or to “spill the beans.” We probably do it more often when we feel condescended to, when our self-esteem is flagging, or when we feel attacked or ignored.

Small group activity (10 minutes)

Pair up with someone you don’t know, and take a few minutes to practice responding to gossip. Whichever one of you is older should say conspiratorially, “I ran an Internet search on our instructor and discovered she has *quite* a past.” The younger person is to respond, and then the two of you should evaluate the response.

[After five minutes, reconvene your group and ask volunteers to describe responses as you jot them on the board. Also ask what participants learned about responding to gossip. If no one volunteers, ask such questions as, “Was it hard not to ask for details?”, “Did someone having more information about me than you had make you more respectful of that person?” and “Did you look at me differently, perhaps suspiciously? Did I have less credibility for you?”]

Mini-lecture (2 minutes)

One author listed as reasons that people gossip [write on board]:

- to entertain each other
- to influence one another’s opinions
- to identify and enforce social rules

Obviously, if you have interesting news, it’s easier to be entertaining. It’s hard to be the life of the party if you don’t have much to say. As we’ve seen, spreading information can also help us jockey for social position. It’s likely that the harder our information is to believe or the more it forces us to reexamine our values and way of life, the greater the payoff for us in terms of attention and status when people *do* believe us.

When some people who crave recognition cannot get what they want with positive information or action, they will try mean and unfair actions. This is what bullies do: they force us to pay attention to them by beating us up, and often today that bullying takes place with cyber gossip. For example, teenagers may use texting, Twitter.com and Facebook.com to spread rumors about

a classmate, or take an unflattering photo with a cell phone and then post it online.

Identifying and enforcing your society’s rules can also be done with gossip. Chit-chat at the office about someone who got fired can clarify what kind of behavior is acceptable in that workplace. With kids as well as adults, this talk can be hurtful: a clique or gang can use gossip to define what’s necessary to be a member and why certain people are excluded.

Large group activity (10 minutes)

To give us more practice in confronting gossip, let’s be parents of kids who are repeating gossip. I’m going to be the child, and you’re going to suggest ways of responding. [After each statement, wait for volunteers to suggest two or three possible responses.]

- “The principal took Steve out of class today, and I’m almost positive it’s because he stole Kevin’s GameBoy.”
- “Guess what, Marcy said she heard that the PE teacher and the librarian are having an affair!”
- “I heard that Molly’s older brother got killed by a bunch of illegal aliens because of some drug deal.”

Large group activity (10 minutes)

Thinking again about “true, kind, necessary,” let’s summarize all the possible ways of responding to gossip. [Write on board as you list; refer to “Responding to Gossip” on handout for examples if people do not immediately volunteer.]

One risk of responding with “true, kind, necessary” is that the gossip-teller may perceive that you’re being judgmental, and may be offended that you’re not impressed with this news. How can adults or your kids respond in a way that doesn’t offend the gossip-teller or others who may be enjoying the gossip? [If no one volunteers, suggest] What about claiming that the news is simply too distasteful? Especially if you’ve appeared to enjoy gossip before, you might say, “I’m just not in the mood today.”

Summary (1 minute)

Gossip isn’t always harmful. Sometimes it truly is a means of sharing or soliciting innocent news (“How is Jane these days?” doesn’t necessarily mean you’re looking for the latest dirt). Unfortunately, popular culture encourages us to be increasingly critical of each other, often about trivia. The Internet is making it easier for anything we say to be spread to more people very fast, and in a form that is virtually permanent. That’s why I hope you and your families will consider using the “true, kind, necessary” guideline before you pass on stories about other people.

Why Do People Gossip?

Distinguishing “news” from “gossip” can be difficult, but understanding why people often gossip—especially when the information being spread is inaccurate—can help us make the distinction.

Typical reasons for gossiping, including spreading rumors:

- **To feel superior.** Gossips often want to be perceived as people who know more than others. Or, if they feel badly about themselves, they may create or spread stories to make it sound as if others are worse off.
- **For attention.** Recognition (attention) is a human need, but those who do not feel adequately recognized for their actions may gossip to be the center of attention, even if briefly. (Similarly, kids may act out when they need attention.)
- **For control.** If gossiping makes you feel superior and if it makes you the center of attention, you’ll likely have more power in your group. Some people use gossip, distortions or rumors (think of recent political campaigns) to increase their status in a group or reduce someone else’s.
- **To feel included.** If you’re in a group where everyone is talking about people, whether truthfully or not, you may feel as if you have to come up with something—accurate information, gossip or rumor—to be included.
- **Jealousy or a need for revenge.** “Getting back” at someone is too often done with gossip, especially with gossip spread online.
- **Boredom.** People who are busy at something productive, or can always think of a new project, are less likely to gossip.
- **Unhappiness.** If you’re furious at your boss or your child’s teacher and complain to a group of friends in person or online, you may be able to encourage them to join your rant.

Is This News or Is It Gossip?

Comment	Is It True?	Is It Kind?	Is It Necessary?

Responding to Gossip

What can parents say when they hear a child gossiping? Here are examples of how to apply the “True/Kind/Necessary” test and how to model it for your children.

- **True:** Did you see or hear this happen? Do you know that the event occurred? [That Kevin’s GameBoy *was* stolen, that Steve has admitted stealing it.] . . . Is your source reliable? [That doesn’t sound like something Jane would say or do.] Has the information been documented? [For example, with a police report or obituary.]

Other possible responses regarding accuracy: _____

- **Kind:** Is this a nice thing to say? [Is it kind to refer to people this way? Is it a pleasant story to tell, or something that will turn my stomach? If you were Molly, would you want people saying this about your brother?]

Other possible responses regarding kindness: _____

- **Necessary:** Do we need this amount of detail? [How someone died, for example.]

Other possible ways to respond when “news” or amount of detail is unnecessary as topic of conversation: _____

An additional approach: make sure you talk about gossip with your children. The family dinner table is one example of a time when you can briefly describe gossip you’ve heard, and express your concern about the gossip’s motivation and the possible consequences of the gossip. If the gossip involves a topic you only want to discuss with an older child, a car ride may be an appropriate time. You can also use these times to emphasize your distaste for gossip with a comment such as “I know that I’m not blameless, but I’m working hard to only say things that encourage people, that engage us all in worthwhile conversation, and that enrich our lives.”

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

This presentation plan was created by Shari Steelsmith and Linda Carlson with the assistance of Laurie Kanyer. All are Parenting Press authors. Steelsmith also writes Parenting Press’s weekly tips, available at www.parentingpress.com/weeklytip.html, and Carlson creates *News for Parents*, Parenting Press’s monthly, available at www.parentingpress.com/ezone.html. All can be reached via www.parentingpress.com/interviews.html.

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“Recognizing and Preventing Bullying,” *Parenting Education Practitioners Talk*, No. 47, Winter 2010, available at www.parentingpress.com/peptalk.html

The Busier Your Brain, The Better Prepared You Are to Handle Stressful Situations

What helps people recover from fights, especially with family members? New research from a Harvard University psychologist suggests that brain activity—specifically in the region called the lateral prefrontal cortex—indicates how someone will feel in the days following a fight.

Individuals who show more neural activity in the lateral prefrontal cortex (LPFC) are less likely to be upset afterward, according to Christine Hooker, assistant professor of psychology, and lead author of a study recently published in *Biological Psychiatry* and summarized in the *Harvard Gazette*. The results of the research demonstrate that this area of the brain has a role in regulating emotions, and they suggest that improved function within this region also may improve day-to-day moods.

When contacted by Parenting Press, Hooker said she believes the findings are also relevant to sibling and parent-child relationships, and that they have broader application, that people with greater

LPFC activity may be better able to regulate their emotions in many different stressful situations.

The *Gazette* quoted Hooker as saying, “What we found was that everybody felt badly on the day of the conflict with their partner. But the day after, people who had high lateral prefrontal cortex activity felt better, and the people who had low lateral prefrontal cortex activity continued to feel bad.”

Research has previously shown that the lateral prefrontal cortex is associated with emotion regulation in laboratory tests, but the effect has never been proven connected to experiences in day-to-day life.

As the *Gazette* reported, Hooker found that participants who displayed greater activity in their lateral prefrontal cortex while viewing their partner’s negative facial expressions were better able to “bounce back” emotionally after the conflict. Those who had more activity in the lateral prefrontal cortex and greater emotional regulation after a fight displayed more cognitive control in laboratory tests,

indicating a link between emotion regulation and broader cognitive control skills.

Hooker noted that lateral prefrontal cortex function provides information about a person’s vulnerability to develop mood problems after a stressful event. This raises the question as to whether increasing lateral prefrontal cortex function will improve emotion regulation capacity.

Reference:s

Lavoie, Amy. “It’s All in the Cortex,” *Harvard Gazette*, March 8, 2010, available at <http://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2010/03/it%E2%80%99s-all-in-the-cortex/>.

Hooker, C.I., A. Gyurak, S.C. Verosky, A. Miyakawa, A. and O. Ayduk, “Neural Activity to a Partner’s Facial Expression Predicts Self-Regulation After Conflict,” *Biological Psychiatry*, March 2010.

How Can Family Members and Caregivers Help Boys with ADHD—and Men, Too?

Nearly 12 percent of all boys in the U.S. will be diagnosed with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder by their 18th birthday, more than twice as many girls as are diagnosed. According to the National Institute of Mental Health, at least a third of these boys will continue to have symptoms of ADHD into adulthood. And it’s not just an American problem: *Counseling Boys and Men with ADHD* starts out noting that across all continents, ADHD results in two symptoms:

- hyperactivity/impulsivity
- distractibility/disorganization

Kapalka points out that a combination of medication, parent training and contingency management may be effective in managing these symptoms, but that secondary symptoms such as defiance and anger management may require individual counseling. This one-on-one treatment may also help with the low self-esteem and limited motivation that usually results from negative response to behavior resulting from ADHD. He recommends cognitive-behavioral treatment to help boys improve their ability to think before acting, and to learn self-monitoring to address inattentiveness.

Because ADHD causes so many problems in the home—a child ignoring a parent, becoming frustrated when required to do something, not completing homework or chores—helping parents handle their ADHD children is emphasized by Ka-

palka. Among the reasons: medications alone do not resolve all hyperactivity or distractibility and they have no long-term effect on social relationships. Among Kapalka’s recommendations to parents (which would work equally well for teachers and caregivers) are that commands be made in a consistent series of steps:

- Obtain eye contact
- Use a commanding but respectful tone to tell the child to take *one* action
- Continue standing by and looking at a child who does not comply
- Repeat the command once, prefaced by “I said...”
- Warn of a realistic, immediate consequence if the child does not comply
- Implement the consequence if the child does not comply within 15 to 20 seconds
- Praise the child who complies both verbally and nonverbally (with a smile, for example), even if a warning had to be issued.

One consequence shown to be effective is time-out, and Kapalka repeats the common advice of one minute of time out per year of age for minor issues and double the time for serious misbehavior. He also advises that it conclude with the parent reminding the child why he was in time-out.

Behavioral contracts are another tool recommended with ADHD boys because they have been shown to be effective in reducing problems with

daily routines. With contracts, children earn tokens (points, stickers, chips) for responsible behavior, and can exchange these for privileges and rewards. For this to be effective, the responsibilities must be specific, detailed and easily monitored. Each complex task (cleaning the room, a homework assignment) must be divided into similarly specific components.

Although Kapalka questions whether young boys need to be told of their diagnosis, he recommends it for teenagers and men. To avoid making patients feel “damaged,” he writes, “It may be helpful to frame the symptoms as related to changes in brain function, caused by inherited differences and genetic factors.”

This, he says, may make patients feel less personally responsible. By comparing it to diabetes and hypertension, it may also be easier to discuss the lifestyle changes that are necessary to control ADHD symptoms. These usually include medication, which he notes that many men try to avoid; cues from spouses or other family members, which men may resent or find embarrassing when in public; and self-monitoring, which usually requires devices such as alarms on watches.

Reference:

Kapalka, George M. *Counseling Boys and Men with ADHD*, New York: Routledge, 2010.

tive affirmations. To get us started, he suggests three themes, and offers examples of each:

- The benefits that my jobs bring to the world: “I will give these nursing students my best so that they will be able to help more people and save more lives.”
- The real reason that I work: “I write self-help books so that people can learn from my mistakes without having to make their own.”
- Focusing on how well the next job will go: “I will make the most complex biology seem simple and understandable today.”

Many of those who responded to our inquiry emphasize the importance of setting aside personal time. However, as O’Neill pointed out, “We live in a society that seems to reward hard work with more hard work. Those of us who have several irons in the fire wear that fact like a badge of honor.”

Even if our supervisors expect us to have more and more and more projects underway, we are seldom rewarded appropriately, he went on.

“We put too much pressure on ourselves to do more work in less time, and because our employers and coworkers feel that we can be trusted, we are expected to handle more and more work... until we finally crack.”

New York City psychologist and executive coach Jeffrey Hull is among those recommending that we learn to say “no.”

If you are attached to a job, a role (“the problem-solver”), or a way of life that is no longer aligned with your goals and values, you will create a trap for yourself, he warns, “A surefire way to becoming overwhelmed, stressed out and miserable.” In other words, if you are no longer the chair of your department or of a certain committee, sit back and let the new chair learn to handle the job. If your office has cut certain programs due to declining funds, don’t feel you must continue to offer those services on an unpaid basis.

Other suggestions from Hull:

- Time-outs. Maybe you nap for 15 minutes at your desk at lunch, or walk around the block twice, or

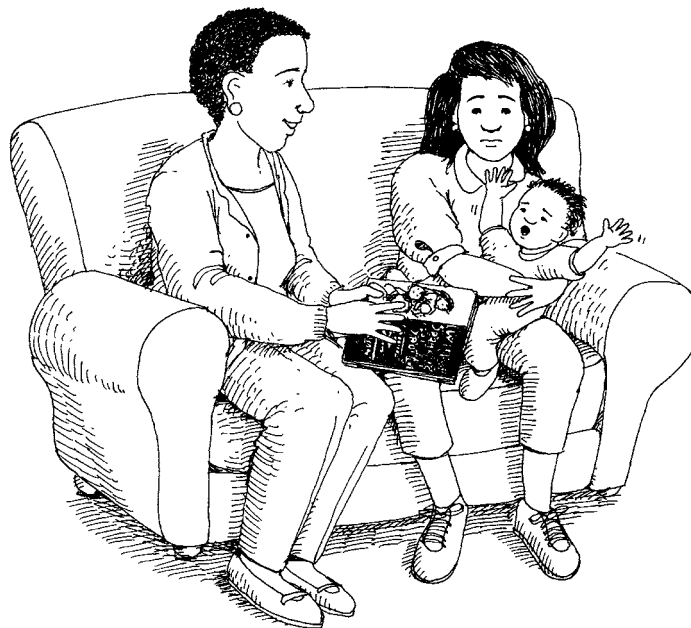
do what Hull calls a “squeeze-release” exercise with your entire body.

“The length of time is not what matters. A time-out can be two minutes or twenty minutes or three hours. The key is tuning out the world and focusing within, breathing deeply, and stretching or relaxing the body, which returns you to balance and a sense of equanimity.”

- Manage boundaries and transitions.

“Stress is really just the presence of fear: I’m afraid I’ll be late, I’m afraid I won’t be good enough. The key to modulating this stress is to observe yourself in action and recognize your weaknesses and blind spots,” continues Hull.

“For example, if you’re not good at ending



phone calls, be sure to add time between calls when scheduling your day, and learn to say, ‘I have to go now.’

“If you’re not good at making the transition from traffic to your workshops, then add a cushion of two or three minutes between the time you get out of the car and the time you step into the workshop to allow for a mini-timeout.”

Another valuable observation comes from Rory Cohen, a business coach in Wyncote, Pennsylvania: “People get overwhelmed when they think of everything they have to do or should be doing instead of focusing on the small tasks that lead to the goal. This is mostly done subconsciously, and it can drain a significant amount of energy, especially when you have to shift gears every hour.”

Cohen’s tips:

- Finish each business day by creating a five-point list on a wallet-size card for each current project. Write down the five most important tasks for that project for the next day.

Harriet Heath, a parent educator and author of Parenting Press’s *Using Your Values to Raise Your Child to Be an Adult You Admire*, has a similar suggestion: she mentally reviews her next day’s “to-do” list at night as she prepares for sleep, and again before she rises in the morning.

“Instead of making me uptight, it allows me to relax and sleep peacefully,” she says.

- When you feel overwhelmed, force yourself to focus on a single task, the smaller the better. “When you intentionally focus on one small thing (like a tennis player focuses on the lettering on the tennis ball) the brain goes into ‘slo-motion’ and time is actually slowed down,” Cohen believes.

- “If there is a job that you’re putting off, determine a time when you’re going to tackle it, and tell yourself you’ll give it only a certain amount of time—perhaps 10 minutes, perhaps 30,” she adds.

This echoes advice from Shellenberger in another early 2010 *Wall Street Journal* column, where she tested different methods of getting organized. One was seeing how much you could accomplish of a task in 10 minutes. The results, in her trial run and in my own attempts, are astounding: many of the tasks that we avoid can be completed—and satisfactorily so—in 10 minutes.

Donna Kasuka, a chemical engineer in Downingtown, Pennsylvania, who owns four very different businesses including an industrial engineering company and a craft and gift store, offers two other recommendations:

- Create written plans, strategies and goals for each business (or type of work).

As Kasuka shifts gears several times during each hour of the work day, she writes in her daily journal so that none of her goals for the day are overlooked.

- Employ simple organizational tricks.

Kasuka’s files, whether e-mail, on her hard drive or on paper, are titled the same, so she can easily retrieve information on a given topic. Paper files are also color-coded.

Tips from the Field

What Parent Educators and Counselors Can Learn from Leading Therapists

What really works in therapy was the question asked of the twenty-one professionals who contributed to *Clinical Pearls of Wisdom*, edited by Michael Kernon and published this year by W. W. Norton. Their comments have value for all of us, whether we work in parent education, as school counselors or social workers, or with difficult colleagues.

• **Use directed mindfulness.** Pat Ogden was one of several who recommends this, which she describes as teaching clients to “observe their . . . movements, sensations, impulses, posture and gestures—and to notice the interplay of these tendencies with cognitions, emotions and perceptions.”

• **Recognize that clients often can suggest solutions or partial solutions to problems.** Bill O’Hanlon points out that many people may not recognize their useful ideas, or may need help fine-tuning them.

• **Help the client develop boundaries.** Many traumatic experiences (assault and rape, for example) will cause people to lose a sense of boundaries, writes Babette Rothschild. Being able to control the distance between oneself and others will help many victims stabilize.

• **Contain your curiosity.** Rothschild also points out that requiring clients to repeat the details of what they have suffered is not always wise. Be prepared to treat people without knowing exactly what they experienced. Another therapist, Dusty Miller, recommends that instead of asking about the traumatic event, focus on your client’s pain of betrayal, of not having been protected from trauma or of having had one’s concerns ignored or dismissed.

• **Help clients believe they can cope with failure.** Reid Wilson writes, “You can never reassure anxious clients enough.” Help them develop coping strategies, he says, so that they can degrade “perceived catastrophes to manageable events.”

• **Encourage the grief-stricken to explore the prehistory of relationships.** Kenneth Doka says that describing the milieu can help both counselor and client gain insight into a loss. For people grieving the death of a child, he recommends reviewing birth order, whether the pregnancy was planned, and even further back, what the parents as teenagers may have had as dreams for their children. Examining all this can provide insight into what the child meant to the parents and the difficulty of coping with the loss.

• **Help clients create and use support systems.** When it’s clear that people do have a supportive community, another of Doka’s recommendations is that they be helped to assess who can provide what help during a time of need. He suggests that people who can be counted on to help with tasks be labeled “D,” or “Doer,” those who are good listeners “L,” and those who are pleasant to be with, “R,” for the respite that everyone needs during periods of crisis. Besides identifying which of their friends and family can be asked to fulfill which roles, Doka says this also reaffirms to clients that they *do* have a support system.

• **Help clients collaboratively create rituals.** One of Evan Imber-Black’s suggestions is to create means of marking life’s transitions: “Rituals alter and outline the shapes of relationships, frame beliefs, paint new identities, help heal losses and celebrate what it means to be alive.” Death, divorce, school changes, and developmental changes are among the reasons that old rituals may need to be altered or replaced. We often think of how holiday observances need to be modified, and too often that’s

couched in negative terms: families want to do something that doesn’t so clearly remind them of the person who is missing or an unwanted change. By contrast, new rituals can be positive. Especially for academically struggling children, we can create little rituals such as the public presentation of certificates to recognize minor accomplishments on the path to a significant goal.

• **Match your client’s nonverbal expression of emotion.** When children (and many adults) describe an event, they use facial expressions, tone of voice, gestures and other nonverbal signals to communicate how intensely they feel about an event or person. If you mirror your client’s intensity and rhythm, you’re more likely to make the client feel as if you “get” how he or she feels, writes Dan Hughes.

• **Express curiosity about children’s inner life.** Hughes encourages professionals to demonstrate a nonjudgmental fascination with who a young client is, rather than focus on factual events. Enthusiasm for the process of discovery, and compassion and empathy for what they are together discovering can help a child experience his or her inner life as important and meaningful, and this process of discovery as safe.

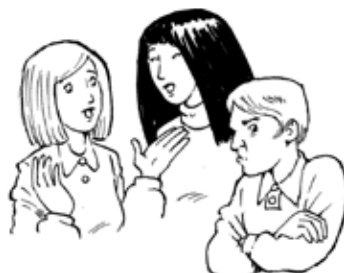
• **Give children names for their feelings.**

Lenore C. Terr points out that children, especially those suffering post-traumatic stress, often must be taught the words for emotions. This can be done by defining a doll’s feelings during various therapeutic play scenarios. Kids also have to be taught the words for gradations of feelings: the difference between “furious,” “mad,” “irritated,” and “annoyed,” for example, and that “horrified” and “uneasy” are not the same.

• **Establish credibility with adolescents.** This is more important than establishing rapport, writes Janet Sasson Edgette, because it’s the foundation on which credibility is created. In short, don’t allow inappropriate remarks or behavior to go uncontested.

• **Gaze with adoring eyes.** Referring to work with adolescents, Martha B. Strauss says, “We sometimes forget that people can only grow up whole if they know secure love.” Because so many of the teenagers who require help have not experienced secure love, she recommends that professionals give them full empathic eye contact. “When we make ourselves available in this way . . . we convey, without words, ‘I am so glad to see you. You are welcome here. I care about you. . . .’”

• **Make sure parents recognize that kids aren’t responsible for parents feeling good about themselves.** David B. Wexler starts out, “I do my best therapy with teens by doing therapy with parents.” Parents shouldn’t rely on their children to make them feel good, but they do, he says. “It’s as if the parent is constantly scanning the behavior of the child and secretly asking the question: ‘What does this say about me?’” Far too often, the parent aggressively turns against the child or teenager for making the parent feel ineffective or anxious.



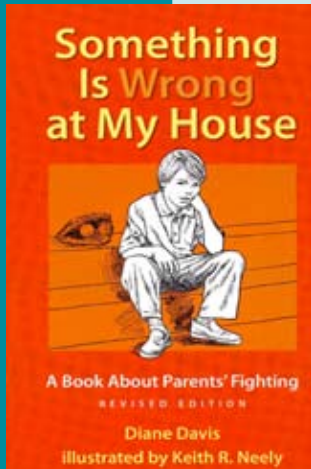
Excerpted by Linda Carlson

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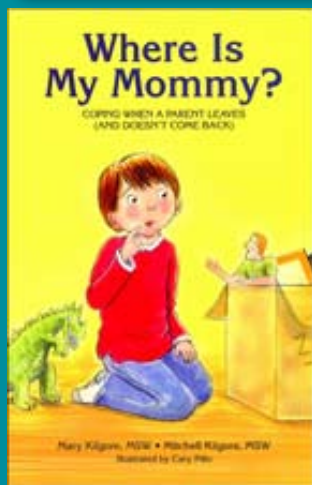
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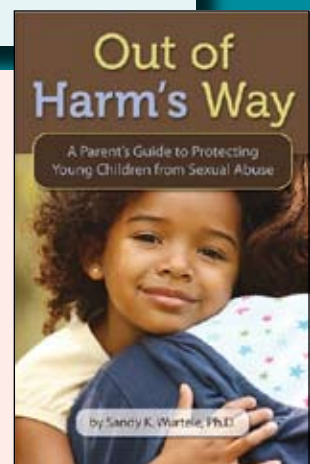
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