

# Letting Go of Our Kids

As parents, we've all been there. Our five year old is biking on the street and asks "Daddy, can I bike around the block by myself?", or our ten year old says, "Mom, when can I walk to school on my own?". I know that as a parent, I always pause for a moment. I want to challenge my children with new opportunities for growth and responsibility but at the same time fear creeps into my mind. Rational or not, I usually end up saying something like "No, I want to be able to see you!"

Things have changed since we were young. We rode bikes without helmets. We never had car seats. Our parents said good-bye to us in the morning as we ran out to play for the day, saying "Make sure you're home for dinner". Ahh, freedom.

Research tells us that anxiety and depression are on the rise in children and teens (Report on the Well Being of Canada's Youth). Could our approach as parents these days be a contributing factor?

According to Dr. Michael Ungar, author of "Too Safe for Their Own Good" (McClelland & Stewart, 2007) we parents are trying to make the world around our kids as safe as at home. We "bubble-wrap" our children, a phrase Unger uses to describe an unsettling trend that is creating a generation of kids that are so overprotected, it is stunting their growth. Why are we so nervous?

In the last two decades, mass



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communication via the internet, computers, television and magazines has increased. Each of these has the potential to bring horrifying stories into our households that tend to send parents into a whirlwind of caution and fear. Ungar speaks passionately on this. He describes kids that are so hemmed in by our efforts to protect them that they either rebel with risky behavior or become overburdened by fear. He says kids need to experience some measure of risk in their lives. They need to feel the exhilaration of testing their limits as a means toward developing competence and building mastery.

In his book, Ungar describes two groups of kids - risk takers and responsibility seekers. We all know the risk takers. These kids are at the bike jumps at 4 years old or rock climbing higher than we are comfortable with! Research shows that these are the kids that are more likely to trust their own judgment and can confidently assert their independence. The responsibility seekers search for challenge in order to feel more adult and grown up. These are the kids who as preteens offer to go to the store on their own to get our milk. If children aren't given the chance to spread their wings early on, by the time they reach adolescence they may search for risk or responsibility in negative ways. For example, teens engage in smoking and drinking in order to look older. Risk seekers may use drugs more frequently and tend to look for the adrenalin rush with peers, perhaps drinking and driving. In this case, our children are less in danger from others than they are from themselves.

So what is the message to us as parents? Ungar states that it is important for adults to realize that risk-taking isn't about being bad. It's a legitimate pathway into adulthood for our kids and it helps them find something to say about themselves that stands out. As parents, we need to continue to be involved in our kids' lives watching over their safety and well-being and intervening when there are real safety or moral issues.

What's really important is to give our kids space to take appropriate risks and learn from them. Here are some other ideas:

- ◆ Find some opportunities in their lives for your children to take risks - on the playground, the gym or playing with peers.
- ◆ Give your child age-appropriate responsibilities from an early age. Help them find out what they can do.
- ◆ Try not to put your worries and fears of the big, bad world onto your children.
- ◆ Listen to your child when he/she tells you what she needs. I want a cell phone. and You never let me go out on my own are signals to you that your child may be growing up.
- ◆ Help build your child's personality. If he is a daring biker, sign him up for BMX or lessons in jumping and tricks. Follow his/her lead and interests.

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## A Day in the Life of Ann Xiety

As the alarm went off signalling the start of another day, Ann could already feel an all too familiar sensation in her stomach. A knot was forming in her lower abdomen as she anticipated her day - a day at school.

As she lay in bed she became increasingly aware of her body's response to the thought of going to school. She recalled that as a younger child, she would often cry and complain to her parents of numerous aches and pains, often in the hope of being allowed to stay home from school. The thought occurred to her that as she got older, she learned to overcome her fear of leaving her parents, but would often feel anxious around her peers instead. Involvement in team sports and school plays were especially difficult - anticipating events

involving public performance could literally worry her sick for days, weeks and even months before the actual event.

Pulling herself into a sitting position, Ann also pulled herself out of her reminiscence. "Time to get started" she said to herself. Setting the timer on her wrist watch, Ann placed her feet flat on the floor and rested her hands comfortably in her lap; she then closed her eyes and began the relaxation/meditation exercise she had learned from her counsellor.

"Deep breath in, hold for a moment, and all the way out slowly" she repeated to herself three times as she filled, then emptied her lungs with air. Now clearing her mind of all thoughts and images, Ann concentrated on her breathing.

"Peace in" she said to herself as she

inhaled fully, pausing very briefly having filled her lungs. "Stress out" she said to herself as she exhaled, again pausing only briefly as she completely emptied her lungs.

She managed to do this only twice before she found herself thinking about her day. "I hope we don't have to practice for the play today" she said to herself as her stomach made a small leap. Noticing her body's reaction to

continued on page 3

### Also in this issue:

**Sexual Compulsions**  
Page 2

**Letting Go of Our Kids**  
Page 4

## Everything I Know About Parenting I Learned in Doggie Obedience School

Kids and puppies have a lot in common. Neither instantly obey our every command, they seem to leave a mess wherever they go, and they beg (or whine as the case may be) in order to get exactly what they want. They can be so doggone frustrating at times.

Nevertheless, everyone and their dog seems to benefit somewhat from attending a doggie obedience school. Maybe, just maybe, some of these same techniques would serve to enhance our parenting skills. You be the judge.

**1. Don't rub a puppy's nose in its mistakes.** It used to be that if your puppy made doo-doo on your Persian

rug, you were advised to rub its nose in it to teach it a good lesson. Dog experts now say this method is old-fashioned and ineffective. In fact, motivating through criticism and humiliation has rarely been effective for any species. For kids, it's highly discouraging to be constantly reminded on one's mistakes. It's been said that "a wounded knee will mend but wounded pride may last a lifetime." Children respond much more favourably to good doses of encouragement and understanding.

**2. Don't hit a puppy with a**

**rolled-up newspaper.** Forcing cooperation through fear and punishment is rarely effective in the long term. Ruling with force only serves to impress kids with the value of power and control over those weaker than themselves. Natural and logical consequences have replaced reward and punishment as a means to help children to learn from their mistakes without affecting their self-esteem or



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continued on page 3

# Sexual Compulsions

Compulsive gambling, overeating, shopping, exercise, internet use, and even TV watching all offer opportunities for individuals to develop addictive behaviors. This also applies to those who compulsively engage in repetitive sexual activities.

The hallmark of impulse control disorders, including sexual compulsions, is a failure to resist an impulse that is harmful to the individual or others but often starts out as pleasurable. This also involves an increasing sense of tension or arousal before actually undertaking the behavior, often followed by gratification, pleasure, relief, and then remorse and guilt over the consequences of the act.

Addictive behaviours alter brain chemistry in much the same way as psychoactive drugs do. And the reasons that people engage in compulsive behaviour are the same reasons that they engage in compulsive drug use: to get an instant rush, to forget problems, to control anxiety, to oblige friends, to alter consciousness, to self-medicate, and so forth.

Those described as Sex Addicts generally become focused on sexual experiences in this compulsive manner. They pursue sexual experiences like others pursue drugs and, in fact, this addiction often co-exists with an addiction to drugs, usually cocaine. While only 13% of sex addicts don't have some other addiction, 50-70% of cocaine addicts are also sexually compulsive; sex and cocaine become a stimulating package.

There is an abundance of easily available sexual material on both TV and the internet. On-line sexual addictions that develop through compulsively viewing

pornography or engaging in sexual chat sites are becoming more common. Unfortunately, participation in these compulsive sexual activities can result in him/her avoiding normal relationships.

Many people who become sex addicts are victims of trauma, usually physical, sexual, and/or emotional abuse. If a person gets treatment for the abuse, then his/her vulnerability to sexual addiction will often decrease.

There are various extreme measures people may undertake in response to trauma. One is to seek massive amounts of pleasure—thus sexual and cocaine addictions. Others may try to block all feeling, using substances like food, alcohol or drugs. Yet others use extreme abstinence as a way to keep distance from painful emotions and memories. Such are the anorexics, and some who engage in lifestyles where the body's pleasures are denied.

Others may deal with trauma by locking the memories into a mental compartment, and splitting up the personality into parts, as in multiple personality. Sexual abuse victims often report that while the abuse was happening, they separated from themselves and felt they were watching from the ceiling, or that their real self was somewhere far away from the actual events.

It has become known that people can have cross addictions, and that what ultimately counts is not what the person is addicted to but rather the intensity of the addiction. As an example, a man who was a severe sex addict discovered cocaine and in ten days stopped his sexual addiction. Unfortunately, he had become

just as strongly addicted to the cocaine.

Another reaction to trauma is for the person to re-create the traumatic situation from the past, even though this can be destructive. The mind does this as a way of trying to understand and master what happened. This is how sexual abuse victims can become sexual victimizers, or they may again enter the victim role. The sexual zone is a world they understand.

Research indicates that 87 percent of all addicts have other family members who are also addicts. A common pattern in such families is that they are very rigid and only allow certain realities to be recognized. To protect appearances, addictive behaviors are often done in secret, which ultimately reduces trust, communication and honesty.

There are two organizations in Vancouver which follow the 12-step model in trying to work with sexual addiction: Sex Addicts Anonymous and Sexaholics Anonymous. They are both in the white pages. There is also Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous. This organization also helps people who are addicted to romance and love, the perpetual honeymooners who like the high of new love, with sex being secondary. Their problem is they cannot confront the challenges of ordinary long term relationships. Online resources, [www.ncsac.org/main.html](http://www.ncsac.org/main.html), [www.sex-centre.com](http://www.sex-centre.com), and <http://onlinesexaddict.org> are available to help sex addicts.

Source: Patrick Carnes, PhD, Author of Don't call it love, and co-author of In the shadows of the Net: Breaking free of compulsive online sexual behavior and related titles.

## A Day in the Life of Ann Xiety (continued from front cover)

her thoughts, Ann also realized that her thoughts had wandered away from her breathing.

Again she recalled what her counsellor had told her. "If your thoughts wander, don't think about trying not to think, just return to your breathing." "That's easier said than done" she involuntarily found herself thinking as she refocused her attention.

"Peace in... stress out. Peace in... stress out. Peace in... stress out. Slowly Ann could feel her mind and body start to relax. After about three minutes of repeating "peace in... stress out", Ann moved to the second part of the exercise she had been taught.

"Now, let go of the words and continue to breath without any thought or image at all. Witness each breath as though it were your very first and be completely present in the moment".

Doing as she had been instructed, within about five minutes, Ann could feel herself become even calmer. Her breathing became slow and rhythmical and the difficulty she had quieting her thoughts previously had completely died down, now replaced with a deep sense of inner calm. Slowly Ann lost track of her breathing and became aware of a deep sense of peace, which seemed to come from the very centre of her being.

Ann continued to meditate for about another ten minutes until the chime on her wrist watch sounded. "Time to go" she said to herself, almost wistfully.

Slowly Ann raised herself from her sitting position, stretched, and walked out of her room to begin her day. Smiling to herself, Ann realized how much she enjoyed the peace she experienced in meditation. It was a sense of peace she worked hard at trying to maintain throughout the day. Whenever disturbed by anxious thoughts and feelings, Ann would return to her centre, and there find the calm she needed to cope.

## Everything I Know About Parenting... (continued from front cover)

fostering resentment and rebellion. Kids learn best if they're allowed to make the occasional mistake without the fear of some harsh punishment. In fact, kids with "the courage to be imperfect" will often accept and overcome many a challenge. Save that newspaper for lining the dog's kennel.

**3. Exercise a puppy daily.** Kids, like puppies, need lots of exercise. Obesity among children aged six to eleven has increased by over 50 percent in the last 15 years. One obvious factor is the high fat content of many of the foods aimed at children but the greatest threat appears to be the intrusion of television and the computer into our children's lives. Canadian children watch an average of 26 hours of television per week. This is slightly greater than the amount of time they spend in the classroom. This is a lot of inactive time that used to be spent running and jumping with Dick and Jane. Let's turn off those TV sets and get the kids outside. In fact, go out with them and take the dog for a walk.

**4. Keep your puppy inside the fence or on a leash.** Puppies and children have a natural curiosity and love to wander. If allowed to do so they can get into mischief or even get hurt. Limits are important if children are to learn the rules of social order in a safe environment. Boundaries provide a sense of security while teaching self-control. Too short of a leash stifles creativity and fosters rebellion. Let the leash out enough to ensure safety but sufficient to allow for exploration and a degree of self-reliance.

Allow your children lots of choices and try not to hamper their imagination. Put your foot down, however, if little Johnny starts chasing the mailman.

**5. Give your puppy lots of praise.** Puppies live to please and are most happy when praised. Kids are the very same. Don't just concentrate on accomplishments, however, as this leads to a self-esteem tied to success and the act of pleasing others. Use encouragement to acknowledge and reinforce effort, at times, no matter how small. Encouragement literally means "to give courage." A courageous child is able to face life and all its challenges straight on without undue fear of making mistakes or of failing.

**6. Train your puppy in a consistent manner.** Puppies get hurt and confused if they can chew on an old slipper but get punished for chewing on that new pair that your mother sent you for Christmas. Children, too, get confused when we are inconsistent or if parents contradict each other. Structure is important and children feel more secure knowing where they stand and what their limits are. If toys must be picked-up before they go out to play then stick to it. There are, of course, times to be flexible and occasional exceptions may be okay, but these should generally be few and far between. Puppies and kids love a predictable lifestyle.

**7. Be firm but not harsh in your discipline.** Puppies respond best to firm, calm commands. Yelling and threats create fear and the strong desire to hide

under the bed. Voice tone can convert a simple correction into a frightening and humiliating event. Parents are most effective when they express their firmness in a kindly manner. Firmness establishes and maintains limits while kindness models respect and protects their self-esteem. If both your child and your dog are living under the bed, they may be trying to tell you something.

**8. Maintain your position of authority.** Dogs are pack animals and will follow their designated leader. Parents should maintain their position as leaders in the family. In fact, a good role model is critical to a child's healthy development. Being Mr. Nice Guy is not always appropriate and at times we must say "No". It is important for children to at least know that they are being heard and that you are considering their opinions or requests seriously. It is respectful and often helpful to explain the reasons for a particular decision. It sure beats "Because I said so". Kids have a right to be treated with respect and will often respond in a respectful manner even if they don't agree with you.

In the cold, hard light of day maybe doggie obedience school does have something to offer to parents wishing to enhance their parenting skills. After all, you don't have to tell your neighbours or relatives where you learned how to raise such adorable, cooperative children. But if you do find yourself barking out orders or saying things like "Heel, Johnny, heel" then quite possibly your parenting skills have literally "gone to the dogs".

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Tuesday, Sept. 9 & 22, 2008 from 3:30 - 5:00pm**