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Resource Newsletter of

DENIS ROYD & associates
PSYCHOLOGISTS AND COUNSELLORS

202 - 1046 Austin Avenue,
Coquitlam, BC, V3K 3P3
Telephone: 604-931-7211
Facsimile: 604-931-7288

Coaching Your Child's Emotions

One of my most vivid memories of my childhood occurred when I was five. My father, an agonomist and farmer in Saskatchewan, had taken me on a trip to look at ponies, two of which he was considering buying. Having never ridden before, I begged to ride one. Although I don't remember how I got on that pony, I do remember how I got off. The pony, most likely responding to my complete lack of skill, immediately galloped off in the direction of the nearest hay pile and abruptly stopped. I was thrown head over heels.

Although I was crying more from fear than actual ailment, my father came over, offered a condolence and then picked me up, gently placing me on the back of that same pony, whose reins he now firmly held. Then he continued talking with the owner, unruffled. Gradually I was soothed, both by the sound of his calm voice continuing negotiations, and by the pony's own stillness. Two things happened to me that day. I realized I could rely on my father's calm approach to distress and I began a lifelong love of horses.



Joan Schultz
Registered Clinical
Counsellor

proach to negative emotions. Parents who are 'emotional dismissers' don't notice lower intensity emotions in their kids or themselves, they see negative moods as 'bad' and they want their children to avoid feeling sad, hurt or fearful. These parents may often appear warm and attentive to their children. However, they are either impatient with negative moods or distressed by them, and will try to change them quickly. They might do this by 'cheering up', with admonitions to "Be happy", or by distracting their children with entertainment, food or clothing. Feelings of sadness, fear or rejection are seen as a waste of time, and children are told to "Get over it" and to "Grow up". But this is the problem: the children are growing up, and they need some help. Dismissing the emotions serves only to intensify them, or to drive them in deeper without a way to deal with them.

On the other hand, a parent who is willing to be an 'emotional coach' for a child might sit with a sad child and be sad with him or her. There is no impatience with the sadness. The parent communicates acceptance of that feeling, an understanding that "You aren't alone; I'm with you. Your feelings are O.K. When you are sad, someone will listen". Through this, the child learns that he is acceptable no matter what state he is in, that he is cared for, supported, and that his experience is valid.

'Emotional coaches' function calmly and empathically, with clear behavioural limits. In the teachable moments of life, they provide just enough information as necessary to get started into discussion and problem solving. They listen more than they speak. They are not involved with the child's mistakes; in fact, they wait for the child to do something right, then praise the child's performance specifically. The child is included in generating solutions to problems.

The 'emotional dismissers', however, operate quite differently. They react intensely themselves when their child experiences a negative feeling such as anger, hurt or fear. They might lecture, or rant about the incident. They get very involved with the child's mistakes, often waiting for the child to make a mistake which can be criticized. The emotional dismissers then escalate the criticism to insults, mockery and belittling, which only increases the hurt and difficulty the child is experiencing.

In times of difficulty, parents who function as 'emotional coaches' help their children mature well. *These parents notice low moods in their child and can use times of negativity as an opportunity for understanding their child or to teach life lessons or problem solving.* They understand that a child's feelings of sadness, rejection or anger are a necessary part of life, and as such, are not to be avoided. They also understand that if children can comprehend and negotiate smaller life difficulties, their confidence and optimism increase, enabling them to handle larger difficulties later in life ■

For further reading in this area, Joan recommends: Goleman, D. (1995). Emotional Intelligence: Why it can matter more than IQ. New York; Bantam Books.

Gottman, J. (2001). Meta-emotion, children's emotional intelligence and buffering children from marital conflict. In C.D. Ryff & B.H. Singer, Emotion, Social Relationships and Health. New York; Oxford University Press.

A parent who is willing to be an 'emotional coach' for a child might sit with a sad child and be sad with him or her.

Moments of emotional intensity can be significant developmental points for a child if he or she is coached into handling the situation well. In a recent article* by John Gottman, he emphasizes the difference between two types of parenting styles: emotional coaching and emotional dismissing.

One of the major differences between these two parenting styles is in the ap-

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Heritage Languages: Tapping a "Hidden" Resource

Our children are born with the ability to become bilingual, if not multilingual. Yet the majority of children will never speak more than one language. And this is true for the majority of Canadian children born of parents who speak another language in addition to English. For most of them, learning English will mean the loss of their parents' mother tongue. This is most unfortunate if we consider the many social, educational, economic, cultural and political advantages associated with the learning of a second language.

A child or an adult who speaks more than one language is able to communicate with a more diversified group of people. Speaking more than one language allows



Jean-Claude Bazinet
Registered Clinical
Counsellor

Children who speak more than one language often display more complex and flexible cognitive abilities.

a person to create deeper connections with people from different cultures, divergent value systems and distant countries. (As an example, think of the cultural universe of the French language, with its European, West Indian, Arabic, African and Canadian constellations, and to the immense cultural complexity it puts us in contact with. The same could be said of any international languages, whether they be Chinese, Spanish or English.)

In addition to serving as a bridge between different cultures, a second language allows a child to communicate across generations. For some children, it makes it possible to communicate with their grandparents and extended families. It deepens their sense of belonging to their parents' family and culture of origin. And for the parents of these children, it will mean a more effective, natural and intimate communication with their offspring.

With the world becoming increasingly more like a "global village", with the creation of new means of telecommunication and with the globalization of the world economy, the learning of new languages is becoming essential. A bilingual or multilingual child is certainly at an advantage in this respect.

In terms of intellectual development, research has shown that children who speak

more than one language often display more complex and flexible cognitive abilities. Having at least two words to identify an object or a concept, and more than one syntax to communicate their thoughts, these children are generally more aware of the intricacies of languages and of the process of communication.

What can parents do to encourage their children to learn and speak more than one language?

First, it is important for parents to discuss the language development of their children. What are your goals, your fears, and your values in this area? What are the educational resources in your city to help you make an informed decision?

Secondly, and this is by far the most important element, it is essential to provide your child with as many opportunities as possible to use this second language. For bilingual parents, the quality of your relationship is crucial and it is important to always use the same language with your child.

Some suggestions to improve your child's use of a second language:

- Improve your child's attempt at communicating (i.e. Child: "Me outside home." Parent: "Yes it is time to go to the park.")
- Ask interesting questions (questions that require more than a yes or no answer)
- Read stories regularly and, occasionally, reverse the roles and ask your child to tell you a story
- Teach him or her your favourite songs and nursery rhymes
- Take your child to the library or the cultural centre regularly
- Play language-based games (i.e. simulated conversations on the phone) or role-playing games (i.e. with marionettes, dolls or costumes)
- Be attentive and communicate who you are by your words and gestures
- Make sure that the learning of the language is dynamic, fun and rewarding for your son or your daughter, and for you and others.

Finally, try to put your child in contact with other children who speak the language. Whether it is at the daycare, at the preschool or with other family members or friends, these ongoing contacts with other children who speak the language will help your son or daughter perceive this language as a living and valuable medium of communication ■

WORKSHOP MARRIAGE CAN BE GREAT!

A three hour workshop which offers practical suggestions on how to enrich a relationship.

Topics include:

- Making Peace with the Past
 - Growth Within Marriage
- Listening, Consulting and Co-creating
- The Ultimate Means of Reducing Stress
 - The Value of Co-operation
- Time-out Strategy to Alleviate Conflict
 - Unconditional Love
- The Importance of Playtime
- Self Esteem as a Product of Relationship
 - And More

Presented by **Denis Boyd** (Registered Psychologist)

Denis has been counselling couples to healthier marriages for 28 years.

He has a practical and relaxed presentation style.

Monday, October 4, 2004 - 7:00 to 10:00 PM

202-1046 Austin Avenue, Coquitlam, BC - Phone: 604-931-7211

Cost: \$25.00 (\$40.00 per couple)

(Handouts and refreshments included in the registration) Limited Enrollment

Defining Love

Sometimes when couples are contemplating separation, one partner may say, "I love you but I'm not in love with you." The one who issued the statement might mean, "I care about you but not enough to stay together", or maybe "My feelings for you aren't as strong as they used to be," or maybe even, "You're a nice person but I'm no longer attracted to you". Of course, none of these explanations adequately clarify the situation and the receiving partner is often left hurt and confused.

Part of this confusion stems from the difficulty in defining what love really is. Dictionaries will use statements like "a deep devotion or affection for another" or "a strong sexual passion" or "a great interest in or enjoyment of". These definitions seem to imply that love is something we have or feel. Therein lies a potential problem. If we lose that "feeling" does that mean we have also lost our love? And if so, will it ever come back?

Some will say there are different kinds of love depending on the person or situation. There is love for God, love for my friends, love for my kids, love for my partner, and so on. All seem to have different levels of feeling and each form of love implies a different form of commitment.

"Love is the decision to be there for someone in the way they need you to be."

Consider the following definition of love and see if it holds any promise for you. "Love is the decision to be there for someone in the way they need you to be". When I get up at 3:00 in the morning to be with my sick child, I am demonstrating love. When I visit my friend in the hospital, I am demonstrating love. When I treat my partner with dignity and respect even though I'm mad at her (him), I am demonstrating love. At these times we may experience feelings of affection and closeness but then again we may not. What really counts is our "decision" to be there for another regardless of how we feel. This new definition

also suggests that love is something we do. It's really a verb, "to love", and requires action on our part.

Anyone who is in a close relationship is likely to experience times when they don't feel close or loving. They might feel angry or hurt and not inclined to act loving for a time. Most would argue that it's only a temporary situation and because they care about one another, the crisis will soon be over. And that is what happens most of the time.

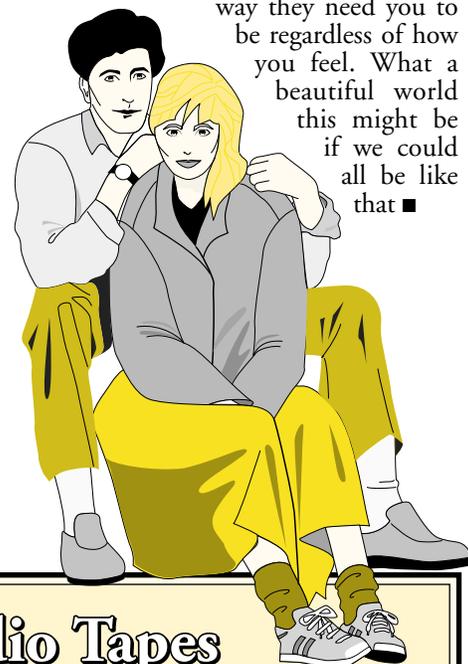
So when a partner says, "I love you but I'm not in love with you", could they really be saying, "I no longer choose to be there for you in the way you need me to be". This, of course, might even be prudent if someone is being mistreated or abused but for the most part it's a decision to no longer act in a loving manner. If nothing else, it seems like a more honest way of confirming where you stand.

Think of anyone you consider to be a truly loving person. Maybe it's your mother, grandfather, Mother Teresa, a close friend, or your partner. Don't you agree that they seem to possess that ability to be there for you or others in just the

way they are needed? And doesn't it make sense that we're all called to be that way? You can "decide" to be a loving person simply by being there for others in the

What counts is our "decision" to be there for another regardless of how we feel.

way they need you to be regardless of how you feel. What a beautiful world this might be if we could all be like that ■



CDs/Audio Tapes

by Denis Boyd, M.A., R.Psych.

Marriage Can Be Great!

Topics include Attitude, Daily Talk Times, Consultation and Collaboration.

Living Through Grief

Help yourself and loved ones live through this difficult time of life.

Stress Survival

Learn some practical solutions for managing everyday stress.

Cost: \$10.00 each for audio tapes or \$15.00 each for CDs

Book

Parenting Teens: Without Power and Strings

by Rick Hancock, Psy.D., R.Psych.

A Handbook for Parents Coping With Difficult Teen Behavior

Cost: \$9.00 a copy

Anxiety in Children

Robert smiled politely but cringed silently as his best friend, Tyler, passed out birthday party invitations. They'd been best buddies since preschool and Tyler had been talking about his ninth birthday party celebration at Silvercity for weeks. None of their friends would ever suspect that the excitement they shared in anticipation of this party was feigned on Robert's part; he himself could not understand why he had begun to dread leaving the house and going places that used to excite him. He did vividly recall the occasion when, a few months earlier, his dad had dropped him off at a soccer field in time for the pre-game warm up, promising to return after a brief errand and in time for the game. Robert shuddered as he recalled the panic he experienced when he discovered that the team assembling on the field was not his own and, moreover, that his game was not even at that park. Now he had to deal with this party invitation, and he wondered, "Would his parents understand and help him excuse himself from this party?" "What WAS wrong with him?" "Would he ever feel NORMAL again?"



Nancy Michel
Registered Psychologist

is confusing to the parents who are now further challenged in their efforts to support their child's recovery from symptoms while helping the child regain a more typical routine and lifestyle.

There is GOOD NEWS. Anxiety is a treatable disorder and even very young children can be assisted in understanding and learning to reduce their anxiety. There are a few key principles important for both children and their parents to understand as they address anxiety.

1. While recurrent anxiety is a REAL feeling, it typically doesn't reflect REAL danger or risk. Rather, it is the misleading sense that something might go wrong, that something bad might happen, or that one might re-experience the sense of helplessness and dread which occurred on an earlier occasion.
2. Anxiety is manageable because it is the product of our own imagination. Children who experience anxiety tend by nature to be creative and vigilant. Those same skills of creativity and foresight can be used to develop an effective personal response to feelings of anxiety.
3. We can talk to ourselves in ways that can either increase or decrease anxiety. For example, it helps a child to say, "I'll be okay. Dad will pick me up soon like he promised", rather than, "Oh No! What if dad doesn't come back. I don't know what to do".
4. A significant component of anxiety is physical, and includes symptoms such as physical tension, shallow breathing, increased heart rate, and stomach, head or neck pain. Through specialized visualization, breathing and muscle relaxation techniques we are able to reduce the physical sensations associated with anxiety.

Childhood should be relatively carefree. A child who is burdened and distracted by the experience of anxiety, needs support. Treating a child's debilitating anxiety requires effort and consistency in understanding, in approach, and in expectation by all significant par-

ties: the child, his family and his school. As the child is supported in learning to effectively understand and address his

Childhood should be relatively carefree.

own anxiety, it is encouraging to remember that he is developing life long skills on which to draw whenever circumstances later in life threaten to unsettle him. Developing, early on, an effective personal response to excessive anxiety can contribute to lifelong emotional health and resilience. ■

DENIS
BOYD &
associates

PSYCHOLOGISTS AND COUNSELLORS

Denis E. Boyd & Associates Inc.

202-1046 Austin Avenue,

Coquitlam, B.C. V3K 3P3

Tel.: 604-931-7211 Fax: 604-931-7288

Email: denboco@psychealth.com

Web Sites: www.psychealth.com

www.denisboyd.com

Denis Boyd, M.A., R. Psych. * - 00399

Tena Colton, Psy. D., R.C.C. **

Rick Hancock, Psy.D., R. Psych. - 01494

Farrell Hannah, M.A., R. Psych. - 00106

Nancy Michel, M.A., R. Psych. - 00477

Joan Schultz, M.Ed., Clin. M.A. Cert., R.C.C.

Intern

Maureen Chapman M.A. Cand.

Affiliated Therapists

Jean-Claude Bazinet, M.A., R.C.C.

Lorraine Crump, M.A., R.C.C., CCC

Simon Hearn, Ph.D., R. Psych. - 01194

Deborah Kors, Ph.D. R. Psych. 01465

Jean Toth, Ph.D., R. Psych. - 01081

Note: * R. Psych. (Registered Psychologist)

** R.C.C. (Registered Clinical Counsellor)

Anxiety is manageable because it is the product of one's own imagination.

Anxiety is not uncommon to children, and can be debilitating when worry, fear or the experience of panic interferes with the normal activities and tasks of childhood. The products of anxiety can include mental preoccupation, sleep difficulties, nightmares, physical symptoms with no apparent medical explanation, clinging behavior, avoidance behavior, and withdrawal, sometimes to the point of refusing to attend school. These symptoms are extremely disconcerting to the child and his/ her parents.

Sometimes, as for Robert, there are clues as to the origin or source of anxiety; however the reason(s) why a child remains burdened with anxiety are often not at all apparent. The child's suffering