

# PARENTING

BARBARA BURROWS

M A G A Z I N E

[www.barbaraburrows.com](http://www.barbaraburrows.com)



**Never too soon for learning to wait • Bully B'ware!  
When visitors come to meet the new baby • Feeling makes it real  
To be bare or not to be bare? That is the question • Happy Mother's day**

CANADA'S LEADING PARENT EDUCATION SERVICE • MOTHER'S DAY ISSUE – MAY 2002

**BARBARA BURROWS**  
**PARENTING**  
 M A G A Z I N E  
 (formerly Parent to Parent Magazine)  
 Canada's leading parent education service

**Publisher**

Your paper Name Here  
 (905) 000-0000

Barbara Burrows Parenting Magazine is published 6 times per year in conjunction with the Newspaper partners across Ontario in May, June, August, October, November and April.

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Readers are encouraged to submit parenting questions, their own stories or experiences to "Our Readers Share" and of course comment on anything in Letters to the Editor.

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 May 2002

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# Just watch me, Mom!

**B**ehind me in the line at the drug store at the mall the other day, was a mom with her son who looked about 3. Mom was talking with a friend she met at the store who was also in line. The little boy announced that he was going to wait outside the store. She said, "No, you need to stay with me." He ventured towards the door, just out of sight from Mom. He did not leave the store and returned within a few seconds to see Mom. Off he went again, coming back as he did before, smiling at her and others in the line. Mom was watching him as carefully as he was watching her.

Since I could see that he had not left the store, after a few minutes I looked at him and said, "My you are doing a good job staying inside the store." He smiled, looked at Mom who said out loud, "He's not doing a good job at staying with me. Michael come over here and stand right beside me." Michael ventures towards the door. "Michael, one, two....." Michael comes over and stands beside Mom. I hear Mom saying to her friend, "That same technique has worked for over 20 years and it still works now."

Looking back, I wished that I had not said anything. I felt that I may have intruded upon Michael and his mother involved in what turns out to be an important stage of development, (labelled for me by our advisor Judith Deutsch — Michael's "rapprochement" stage). This is where a mother and child feel quite connected and the child moves away and comes back from the mother and the mother watches and supports this process of separating. The mother controls the child and measures his safety with her watchful gaze while allowing him to move

away from her. I expect that Mom and Michael would have carried on with Michael enjoying his efforts to show his independence and his mother (slightly uneasy) tolerating his behaviour.

I had intended my comment to support both of Michael's

apparent wishes. One - to be grown up and show he could leave his mother's side without fear; two, to behave himself in a reasonable way and not actually leave sight of his mother for more than a few seconds. But in retrospect — neither Michael nor his mother needed support from me. They were doing just fine. My interference seemed to make Michael's mother feel criticised and therefore less sure of herself in her mothering. Once I commented, her

uneasy feeling increased and she exerted stronger controls and could no longer support Michael's playful leaving and returning.

I thought of how my message may have conveyed criticism to this mother and thought again of what we have learned over the years in publishing Barbara Burrows Parenting Magazine from our advisors, colleagues and contributors. Mothers (and fathers) are not given much recognition and validation for the many, many things they do to help their children through these various issues and developmental stages.

As always, I hope you enjoy Barbara Burrows Parenting Magazine, and to Michael's mother "Keep up the good work!" ❀

## What's Up?



ANGELA GREENWAY  
 Managing Editor

MAY 2002

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**To be bare or not to be bare?  
 That is the question.**

### Barbara Burrows Parenting Magazine: Mandate

**B**arbara Burrows Parenting Magazine provides insightful information that helps parents gain a deeper understanding into their children's behaviour, themselves and family dynamics. The goal is to help parents raise emotionally healthy, happy, responsible children.

The publication acknowledges how many "right" approaches there can be to parenting — as many approaches as there are mothers, fathers and children. Barbara Burrows Parenting believes that the "RIGHT" approach helps parents and children build their relationships.

Barbara Burrows Parenting provides expert opinion, current research and clinical findings from an international network of professionals in normal and abnormal psychological development. Barbara Burrows Parenting also relies on parents to share their own solutions to difficult child-rearing dilemmas. All editorial is presented in an enjoyable and easy-to-read format. ❀

*Angela*

# Sister's house out of control

## Dear Barbara

*My sister's household is, in my opinion, totally out of control. She is a single mom and has two children, age 5 and 7 and a teenager from a previous marriage.*

*My first concern revolves around the younger children. During the week, when they have to go to school in the morning, they consistently go to bed well after 9:00 P.M. and are often still running around the house at 11:00 P.M. The hours between 6:00 and whenever they finally go to sleep are pure and total chaos. The kids are literally bouncing off the walls. My friends and I with children the same ages usually put them to bed around 7:00 P.M. on weeknights and 8:00 P.M. on weekends. We think the kids are suffering because of this.*

*Is it healthy for children 5 and 7 to be going to bed as late as they are?*

*My second concern is that kids are rarely outside. In the winter, they are never in the yard, or out skating, skiing or tobogganing. It breaks my heart. Even in summer, video games are their best friends. We believe this is extremely damaging to both their physical and mental health. Our kids are outside after school until dinner, and spend pretty well every weekend outside. Don't kids need fresh air to survive?*

*Given that the kids are often screaming, crying, throwing tantrums and running around like maniacs, I think we already know the answers.*

*I am sure there are many households where the parents are too lazy or too tired to do what's best for their kids. It's really sad, because these lives are in our hands and the effects are permanent.*

## Dear Brother

**Y**our sister needs support, not advice. Underneath laissez-faire attitudes, there is often depression. It sounds as if your sister is feeling quite over-whelmed. The "bouncing off the wall" children although almost unbearable can be better than experiencing depression once the children are settled. Therefore many depressed parents let children stay up late.



**BARBARA BURROWS**  
Director,  
Barbara Burrows  
Parenting

Photo by Murray Pellowe

It has been demonstrated in many studies that children can sense their parent's emotional pain, and keep up rambunctious misbehaviour to distract the parent. When emotionally drained, it is more difficult to respond to the demanding behaviour of the children. This lack of response provokes the children to further wild behaviour because they *want* the parent's attention. Without it, they feel unnoticed and unimportant. A vicious circle is created.

I agree with you that there are many households where parents are too tired (emotionally weighted down, not lazy) to do what is best for the children. Perhaps life would run more smoothly in your sister's home if the children went to bed earlier, played outside with friends

and she organized her home differently. I bet your sister would agree.

You may be able to help her by asking how things are for *her*. If you are not comfortable talking about emotional issues, perhaps you could give your sister a break by inviting her children over to play with your children. "Time out" for moms can help them "recuperate" emotionally — and therefore respond more easily to the incessant emotional demands of young children. ❀

## Barbara Burrows Parenting International Advisory Board

*Advisors to Barbara Burrows are professionals with extensive experience in both clinical work and research in child development. They are committed to helping families resolve the underlying difficulties that lead to psychological symptoms in children, without the use of medication wherever possible.*

*The members of the advisory board contribute articles to the magazine on a regular basis, and oversee the professional integrity of articles published in the magazine.*

*This advisory board insures that material printed in Barbara Burrows' publication reflects the body of knowledge developed by child psychoanalysts, together with developmentalists (attachment theory, developmental neurobiology and infant research).*

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F E A T U R E

# When visitors come to meet the NEW BABY

by Diana Mandel

*Diana Mandell M.Ed.; Certified Mental Health Counsellor works with mothers and their babies in Redmond Pediatric, Redmond Washington helping mothers get a deeper understanding of the emotional needs of themselves and their infants. She is married and she and her husband have two grown daughters.*

**A**fter leading many groups with new mothers and their babies at Redmond paediatrics for the past 9 years, I realize that I probably have enough stories to fill a book on what helps and what hurts when visitors show up to meet the new baby.

Family and friends are important. The relationships that may be established with the baby can be unique and significant. We certainly want to preserve these connections. Visits seem to get sticky in the following specific areas: length of visits, sensitivity to new mothers/parents in their new role, (surprising) competitiveness with the new parents, and a lack of open communication which would permit new parents to comfortably share what their needs are.

Over the years many mothers have come into group bemoaning the fact that someone will soon be visiting. The distress doesn't seem to be because of a lack of fondness for who is coming as much as for how long the visitors plan to stay, coupled with expectations of needing to be entertained. I've observed that new parents seem to fair better when visitors stay in a nearby hotel (at least for part of the stay).

There are so many adjustments going on with a new baby in the family. It seems to be the exceptional visitor who thinks to pitch in with housework, cook meals, offer to let the new mother nap or the couple have time alone by babysitting if the new parents are ready for this. I remember one new mother sharing that she and her husband walked around the block three times. That's as far as they wanted to go and it felt like a gift. Mothers have asked me to please write about this for their sakes, and for the sake of the visitors who may just not be aware of the complexities of this time, because it is such an exciting event to wel-



come a new baby into the world.

Recently a mother shared the following experience that she had with her own mother during a very satisfying visit. Her own mother said to her "I know there are a lot of changes and new recommendations about parenting these days. I don't know what they are so you will need to tell me about this." This set the tone for a mutually satisfying visit. Many relatives really aren't aware that they carry myths about what babies need. These myths have been dispelled by research over the past 20 years, which in turn has shifted the course of parenting. Myths like you will spoil the baby if you hold him all the time or if you respond readily to his cries; babies can manipulate; or, if he sleeps in your bed you will never be able to move him out. (Many of

the mothers I've seen over the years share with their group that they just don't tell family members if the baby is sleeping with them.)

**Over the years many mothers have come into group bemoaning the fact that someone will soon be visiting.**

In response to the idea of spoiling, babies need generous holding and some will protest louder than others to have this need met. As an infant grows over the first nine months, he learns to roll over, grasp objects, socialize, sit up, and then to crawl. With these and other new skills his horizons broaden. Though holding will still be an emotional need, excitement about the world around him captures his attention. The new mother of a six week old raised concerns about how quickly she was responding to her baby's cry. She worried that she was creating a demanding child. I explained how over the next few months she would

## When visitors come to meet the new baby Continued

most likely know on an intuitive level when to wait a bit, balancing the baby's needs with her own, and thereby gradually increasing the baby's frustration tolerance. Her own instincts would guide her if she allowed this. She was comfortable with this perspective. Concerns about spoiling and creating demanding children seem to interfere with the new mother being in sync with the developing relationship.

I have observed many, many mothers initially behaving tentatively with their newborns. As they get to know their infants their confidence grows. After 3 or 4 months mothers naturally start to balance their own needs in degrees with those of their infants. These mothers find ways of helping the crying baby understand the world is not caving in, as it may seem. They speak soothingly and they put words to the causes of distress. I have a wonderful example of a mother's response to her 3 month old, being her second child. The baby was fussing. Normally she might have just picked him up. This time, though, she observed that he wasn't able to manoeuvre his thumb into his mouth. This sensitive gal said to the baby "Sometimes your body just doesn't do what you want it to and that's really frustrating isn't it." This empathic comment settled him.

The intensity of the emotional desire to be held will never be so great as it is for the first six to nine months of infancy. It is over in the blink of an eye. Many mothers feel

the loss of infancy when it has passed. This is the prime time to indulge the need to be held. It is also helpful to keep in mind the notion of balancing needs. Most mothers have a healthy inner voice, which can help her to distinguish between the baby's need to be held and when her own needs may be urging her to hold the baby beyond what he may need. I have had a number of mothers comment to this effect. This inner voice also is aware of when she isn't taking good enough care of herself. If attuned as so many mothers are, it signals the idea that she can begin to vary her responses.

Babies don't know how to manipulate.

Manipulation implies a sneaky way of getting what one isn't really entitled to. Babies do know how to let you know they want you. Years ago a young mother of 3-month-old twins told her group that her babies were "manipulating" her. She said that when she left the room they cried and when she returned they would smile. This felt like a manipulation. When I suggested to her that the babies missed her this surprised her and gave her a different, needed perspective. These myths are obviously not just held by older generations.

In terms of the sleep issue (and this can be a huge issue), I've known many mothers who have slept with their babies for differing lengths of time. Some have had difficulty moving the baby out of the bed and some have managed this with ease. There are a number of variables involved here

having to do with differences in babies and differences in the parents. There are also many babies who have not slept in the parental bed as infants and yet at other stages of childhood development end up there.

When visitors do come to visit, I've gleaned the following suggestions from the mothers in group. Building naptime into each day provides for a breather for everyone, and a necessity for the new mother. This means of course that when baby naps so does his parents. Having the new father be available if his parents are the visitors makes a difference. Sending company out and about for some time each day decreases the stress of the constant pressures of entertaining. Though not always possible, I mentioned earlier that a hotel accommodation has its benefits. The next suggestion is something that may take some thought, but when understood provides guidance for the new parents. Being able to build emotional boundaries around the new parents means considering first and foremost what their needs are. This they do together with awareness of the potential stresses in given situations and they protect one another from the source of stress. If there are conflicts or tensions around certain company (his parents? her parents?) before the baby is born, it is unlikely that these will ease after the birth. Often they will intensify. A useful rule of thumb under these conditions, which are all too common, is to focus on the quality of time together with company, not the quantity of time together. Quality versus quantity of time has two specific dimensions. One idea would be to request visits be scheduled over a long weekend as opposed to a full week. The other dimension refers to how time is structured during a visit. Instead of being together all day plan to reconvene for dinner and or an activity. Consider having visitors who come a distance spend a weekend, take a side trip for several days, and then return for a final few days. All of this is designed to reduce the feelings of invasion that visits create and focus on enjoying reasonable amounts of time together. In order to manage visits with this in mind the couple will need to understand and agree upon the advantages, and present their thoughts to the visitors as a unit, and seeing this as a priority.

Raising children is a remarkable journey. New parents are raising their babies in a different time and a different world than those of us who parented in previous times. There is better information available about the capacities of infants. Experience counts and new parents will gain this valuable experience as they get to know their babies. They will also ask more freely when supported sensitively. Visitors rarely intend to create tensions for the new parents, but we all recognize that this can happen. As new parents thoughtfully communicate their needs to visitors, the visit is bound to go more smoothly. ❀

**Visitors rarely intend to create tensions for the new parents, but we all recognize that this can happen.**



FEATURE

# FEELINGS

## MAKE IT REAL

by Lyn Kirst,

Glenview Center Director

Parents justifiably view with pride every step of progress their child makes as he is growing up: the first time he takes a few steps by himself, the first endeavours at feeding himself, the first words spoken, the first day of school. The parents help the young child to perceive the world around him as he uses his eyes, ears, nose, skin, and mouth and helps the child to label what he is doing. With much encouragement, the child learns to verbalize what he sees and wants.

However, the child in many cases is not helped to verbalize or label his feelings in his early years because he can express them without words - by crying, laughing, facial expressions, etc. Usually the feeling of pain or hurt is the first to be expressed verbally, then the feelings of fear or being scared. But the feelings of sadness, excitement, happiness and anger are often not labelled for the child and consequently may be more difficult for the child to learn to verbalize.

Labelling is important. If a child can say what he is feeling it acts as a "delaying action" to a kind of behaviour that may not be appropriate or acceptable. For example: Tommy's little brother breaks his favourite toy. The first impulse is to physically strike out and hurt the brother. But if Tommy can label his feelings of anger he can yell at his brother, "You broke my toy...that makes me so mad...I'm so mad I could hit you a good one..." He may not have to express his anger by physical abuse then, because he has expressed it verbally.

Dr. Anny Katan, a respected early childhood educator, states, "Verbalization of feeling leads to an increase of mastery by the ego. The young ego shows its strength



by not acting upon its feelings immediately, but by delaying such action and expressing its feeling in words instead."

Labelling is also helpful as the child grows up. How often have you heard parents or teachers say, "if I only knew what was bothering the child I could try to help him..." When a child can verbalize what he is feeling (I feel sad... scared... angry... worried), adults can then dig a little deeper, offer suggestions or reasons why the child may be feeling the way he does, and thus help the child to deal with the problem when it is finally recognized.

**Verbalizing his own feelings thus becomes a tool for emotional growth for the child.**

Helping the child to label his feelings can start as early as the high chair or the playpen. "You can't reach that, can you? You're crying because you're angry." "When I hug you it means I love you and that makes us feel happy inside." "You're feeling mad because I'm making you do something you don't want to do." "You're feeling sad and left-out because Joey is going with his daddy now and you are not."

And he does have the ability to verbalize, he can say them himself. Parents teach the child that a shoe is a shoe, meat is meat, and so on; it is as much of a learning experi-

ence and just as important to label a child's feelings also.

Another way in which a child learns to label his feelings is by having adults label theirs. He learns that others around him have feelings and that it is acceptable to have these emotions. If a child sees mother crying his whole little world does not have to fall apart since mother can tell him she is crying because she is sad...lonely...frustrated - or whatever may be bothering her at the moment. The child can learn that his mother is not crying because she is upset with him or doesn't love him any more, but because she is upset about something that has happened. When adults say they are angry (frustrated, upset...) they are identifying their own emotion and thus modelling for the child to do the same in the future.

At times most families have problems or concerns relating to a job, finances, personal relationships, illness, etc. parents should have no hesitation about labelling the accompanying feelings with children. Specifics do not need to be shared with the child, but by labelling the worries for what they are, adults are setting an example for the child and can assure him that the parents' concerns have nothing to do with him or his behaviour. It does not weaken the adult image in the eyes of a child when feelings or worry are shared; rather it can be a relief to know specifically what is bothering the adult, or, understand the reasons why the adult might be more angry, upset, or impatient with him than usual.

Verbalizing his own feelings thus becomes a tool for emotional growth for the child. An emotionally secure child can feel good about himself, can be more aware of others around him, can help him to understand his own world better, and learn to cope with his own feelings more appropriately. ❀



## Tip for Kids – Let's talk behaviour

by Margery Fridstein  
MA, LPC

The outlandish behaviour of your child may be more than “just a stage”, it may be a “cry for help”. It is strange the way children go about showing us that something is wrong. It is not a conscious plan — it just happens. There is a tendency on their parent's part to dismiss inappropriate behaviour as wanting attention, being over tired, not really meaning it, it was the other person's fault or his teacher doesn't understand him. It is my firm belief that children want to please, be liked and be successful. When they are doing things that don't please, cause them to be disliked and undermine success, their behaviour is sending us a message. It is their “cry for help”. All inappropriate behaviour has a meaning. If you can't hear the meaning of your child's inappropriate behaviour — turn to a professional who can help you. Early intervention to “cry's for help” may rescue your child from ever-increasing high risk! ❀

Margery Fridstein is the author of *GRANDPARENTING: A Survival Guide*, available from Tageb Press, PO Box 401, Glenwood Springs, CO 81602. This book explores the complex dynamics of contemporary grandparenting. Cost is \$14.95 US funds. To order, call the author at 970 923 5512 or fax at 970 923 6153.

## GOOD BOOKS - MORE THAN A REVIEW

# BULLY B'WARE!

**B**ullying is becoming an ever-increasing problem in schools and neighbourhoods across Canada today. We call for harsher penalties for young offenders...hoping this will curtail the bullies. Three educators in British Columbia

have developed a program that is making a difference. It is not based on punishments but rather respectful limit setting, with clear, thoughtful ideas of reducing the aggressive behaviour or the perpetrator and strengthening the self-esteem of the victim. Bullying in their schools has been reduced by 40%. The programme, developed by Gesele Lajoie, Alyson McLellan, Cindi Seddon is available through video tape and books - for schools and for parents. With this program, the bully is treated respectfully. Adults try hard to supervise and intervene especially in troublesome areas - making an effort to “nip the problem in the bud” before an incidence of bullying occurs. Children and staff think carefully about what “bullying” really is, so all can become more alert to reporting incidents.

The program is called “Bully B'ware” and it offers a number of ideas to help schools implement a program to combat bullying. It helps parents respond when

their children are either bullying or being bullied. Bully B'ware can be reached at 1421 King Albert Avenue, Coquitlam, B.C. V3J 1Y3. 1-888-552-8559 or at [www.bullybeware.com](http://www.bullybeware.com) ❀

The following gives schools and parents a place to start, and comes from “Take Action Against Bullying” - the manual developed for schools.

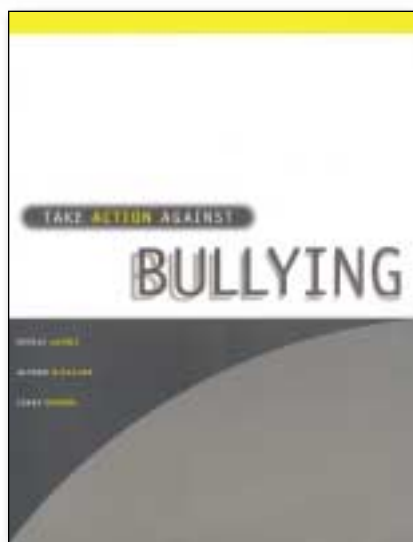
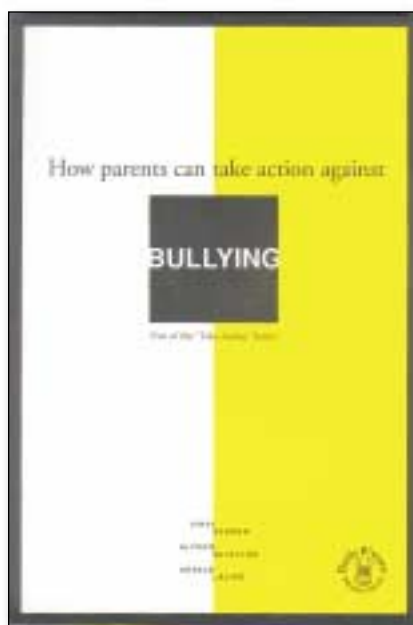
## What to say when confronting a bullying incident

By Gesele Lajoie, Alyson McLellan, Cindi Seddon

**A**s teachers, counselors, noon hour supervisors, administrators and other support staff move through the school, it is important they are aware of the interactions between students. When confronted with bullying, the situation must be quickly assessed and a decision made as to how to effectively intervene. The adult's first reaction in this situation often determines the success of the intervention. Although safety is the first priority, everyone involved needs to be treated in a respectful manner. School personnel have the power to take action to stop the bullying and ensure that there is no retaliation. Listed below are some effective interventions suggestions:

- Hey, what's going on here?
- Should I be concerned about what I see here?
- Do you people need some help?
- Looks like some nasty things are happening to \_\_\_\_\_.
- Hey, I just heard some things that are really inappropriate.
- You know our rules on rough play.
- Looks like \_\_\_\_\_ is not having fun.
- Are you upset, you look angry?
- Come here \_\_\_\_\_, I need to talk to you for a minute.
- Be careful feelings are not being hurt here.
- Hey this looks (sounds) like bullying to me. You know our school rules.

This excerpt comes from “Take Action Against Bullying”.



## LETTERS

## To be bare or not to be bare? That is the question.

### Dear Mrs. Burrows

Could you please forward to me the names of the studies that indicate all the horrible behavioural issues that result from nudity in the household? I am very interested in this. As a good researcher, you must know of studies that contradict that theory - could you forward those as well? I would also like a biography including your qualifications if I am going to be able to cite you as an authority.

Why are societies (mostly primitive) with no 'closed door policies' and almost constant nudity result in no higher behavioural issues - is it because they are third world societies? Isn't that passing judgement on a society? Lastly could you please give me your response to the fact that there are no significantly higher behavioural and sexual violence issues in a country such as Sweden where nudity is commonplace within the household and outside of the household.

Regards, Brenda Bowman, C.A. and Alan Smith

### Dear Ms. Bowman and Mr. Smith,

You have taken exception to the article in Barbara Burrows Parenting Magazine that children can get too excited and over-stimulated by being "bare naked" (Tips for Tots - February 2002), where I explained that children can become stimulated by naked bodies and this can effect behaviour at the time, or later.

In fact, research is very expensive and time consuming, so this information is known more from clinical work. One study I can refer to is the Infancy Research Project headed by psychologist Dr. Sylvia Brody at the Menninger Institute, Topeka, Kansas (1964). Dr. Brody's study followed infants, from the 3rd day of life into adulthood and onward, studying patterns of mothering and the effect on children. (Patterns of Mothering - International University Press) I reached Dr. Brody today in New York City, where she said that children can definitely become over-stimulated by their own or their parents' nudity, and when over-stimulated, children have more trouble managing their behaviour. She pointed out that in family life, certainly there will be times of family members seeing one another's bodies, and it is not helpful to become rigid, but that generally covering up and encouraging children to do the same will keep children calmer.

I asked Dr. Otto Weininger, Professor Emeritus at O.I.S.E. (University of Toronto) and experienced clinician about family nudity as well. He takes a slightly different position. He feels it is difficult for young children to be excluded from the bathroom or bedroom of parents, and that as long as parents are low-keyed about their nudity, it can help youngsters get the information about human bodies when they ask questions about the adult body. Dr. Weininger says that children themselves will start to want privacy around the age of 6, when he stresses it is very important to respect their requests.

So, there you have opinions on both sides of the question. As far as primitive societies and Sweden, I'm afraid I am not knowledgeable on either subject.

*Editors note: I answered Ms. Bowman and Mr. Smith's question in my weekly newspaper column, and received this reply.*

### Dear Ms. Burrows,

Thank you for your fine work on parenting, of which I am aware. However: I read your column yesterday in the Sault Star, about nudity in the home. While you attempted to be fair, the statement that research is expensive, so we should turn to outdated reports is not exactly helpful.

I deal with and occasionally speak and write about social and artistic issues of the body and especially nudity. From my reading, the notion that nudity overstimulates children is a crock. It is based mostly on incomplete anecdotes, which in popular language I would call flimsy stories. I will admit to not having read Dr. Brody's 1964 material, and I should look it up. Did she conduct any real research?

Reports based on substantial and more recent research indicate that nudity itself isn't the issue; parents' attitude towards it is the key factor and in fact the key problem. Parents who react to nudity as if a bomb had been dropped cause their children to adopt similar negative attitudes, to think that parts of their bodies are bad or wrong. Indeed, countries like Sweden with fewer sexual problems have a better attitude towards nudity. While correlation does not prove causation, the connection is clear.

Obsessing over home nudity is, in my view, a poor habit. That is what probably "overstimulates" children — not the nudity, but severe negative reaction to it. Accepting nudity casually is the way to go, and seems to lead to better adjustment in children as they grow up. So say several researchers from the 1990s especially, whose names and articles I have readily available.

I would be appreciative if you would forward my note here to the person who asked those excellent questions which you nicely repeated in your column.

With kind regards, Paul Rapoport

*Dr. Paul Rapoport, School of the Arts, McMaster University, rapoport@mcmaster.ca*

### Dear Barbara,

I am writing in response to the discussion taking place in Barbara Burrows Parenting Magazine about nudity (Tips for Tots - February 2002). It reminded me of my family's experience a number of years ago, when I was a participant in your parenting classes.

At the time, my daughter was 5 or 6 years old. I was concerned because she was engaging in frequent masturbation while watching television in the family room. I wanted her to feel that masturbation was a normal, healthy way for a person to explore his/her body, and I remember telling her "It feels nice to touch our private parts, but because they're private, we do it in our rooms". However, it seemed that she was spending excessive amounts of time engaged in this activity with no sign of going to her room. Had I encouraged her too much?

When I brought up my concerns at parenting class, you immediately intuited that our daughter might be over-stimulated by our relaxed attitude towards nudity at home. Not infrequently, she was around when we were dressing or showering, and I was still helping her with her bath. You suggested that we 'cover up' and encourage her to bathe herself. In addition, we should express this to her in a very 'matter-of-fact' way. I still remember what a dramatic and immediate difference this made in her behaviour! Within a few weeks, her activity in the family room stopped. We all seemed to feel comfortable with the new approach; it didn't seem restrictive or 'stuffy', it just felt right.

I know my daughter would insist that I withhold my name!

Any comments? Send them to LETTERS via e-mail to:

[www.barbaraburrows.com](http://www.barbaraburrows.com)

or by mail to: Letters, 3516 Mainway Drive, Burlington, ON L7M 1A8.



## Tip for Tots – Were you a good girl today?

by Barbara Burrows

A private home day-care operator says I wish I could explain to parents what they do to their children when they arrive and say, "Were you a good girl today?"

None of us wants to feel we have to be "good" every day. The days we are "good", we produce by working well, getting along with others and generally feeling "in tune" with the world. Everyone also has bad days, and we must be entitled to them occasionally, without feeling we are viewed as failures by those around us. On our bad days, we already judge ourselves as failures.

Children are placed under undue pressure when each and every day is evaluated and they are expected to "be good". Their flights into misbehaviour are expressions of frustration or anger and the child cannot always control those impulses.

No one wants to be evaluated every day by superiors — especially children. Consider rephrasing that question to "Did you have fun today?" or "Was today a happy day for you?"

If your child answers "NO" you then have an opportunity to let her express her frustrations. There is no need to point out how she might have done things differently to prevent her problem. Would WE want someone to start giving us suggestions of how we could do things better when we came home mad at everybody at work? She just needs a good listener, and she will feel better soon if you can be that for her. ❀



## Tip for Class – “A teacher takes the cake”

by Anita Hammermeister,  
Dundas Ontario

**B**eing a stay-at-home mom of three boys, I have always put my time and energy into raising them. Now that they are all in school, the job of “mothering” is partly shared by their teachers. Knowing how much effort it takes to teach as well as instil values, and knowing how much my son’s particular teachers give to my children, I wanted to acknowledge the dedication and commitment these teachers have for my boys, and the other children in the class.

Therefore, the Monday after Mother’s Day, I send a piece of cake to school for my son’s teachers with a little note that read, “Thank you for being a second mom to my son.”

I hope this small gesture would convey my thankfulness and let them know their hard work is appreciated. ❀

## About Barbara Burrows

**B**arbara Burrows is a psycho-therapist in private practice. She is founder of Parent to Parent Magazine and Positive Parenting. In 1999, these companies merged to form Barbara Burrows Parenting. Her syndicated column runs in newspapers across Canada.

Barbara helps parents raise emotionally healthy children and experience joy in parenting. After graduating from McMaster University in sociology and psychology, she worked to help parents with children’s behaviour in Hamilton at Chedoke-McMaster Hospitals before developing her own parent education program.

She and her husband have two daughters and a son, and live in Burlington Ontario. ❀

In researching various approaches to parent education, CBC TV’s “the fifth estate” found that parents made the most gains with Barbara Burrows.

## Tip for Babies – Never too soon to learn to wait

by Barbara Burrows

**T**oday’s common advice to mothers is “you can’t spoil a new baby”. Mothers are encouraged to feed “on demand” and gratify infant needs as quickly as possible. Barbara Burrows, at the 90th Annual Meeting of the American Psychoanalytic Association this spring, had the privilege of discussing this child rearing practice with Dr. Sylvia Brody, and was surprised at what she learned.

Dr. Brody’s longitudinal study on mother-child relationships is the most comprehensive study that has been done to date. Over 100 children in this study have been followed from their infancy over a 30-year period. One fact that emerged in this research is that Dr. Brody’s observations about the level of emotional health and well-being in the first year of life was supported by follow-up studies 18 and 30 years later. In other words, when things were going well between mothers and babies in the first year, things went well throughout the child’s life. Conversely, problems during the first year carried on in different ways and influenced the subjects negatively throughout their lives.

One very important factor in helping infants cope well, Dr. Brody discovered, is helping them learn to wait which begins within the first half of the first year of life. She says, “well timed gratifications and realistically necessary deprivations provided to the infant consistently.” (The Evolution of Character - Brody, Siegel p. 10 - International Universities Press) are very important.

Understanding that their frustrations will pass

and don’t last forever helps children tolerate the frustrations and feel they can cope. One way they learn this is by letting them experience little frustrations that end when a loving mother (or father) comes and helps elevate the problem, again making the baby comfortable and satisfied. Sometimes, when parents do not immediately solve the problem for the baby, she finds a way to make herself happy.

What is a “little” frustration? Dr. Brody stresses that babies shouldn’t be left hungry, lonely or in pain. She is not suggesting babies be left to cry. Mothers can help babies learn to wait by delaying gratification a little, but by bridging the time gap that the baby waits by talking to the baby and letting the baby know that help is on the way. This helps babies wait without experiencing too much distress and they learn that their mother will momentarily offer them comfort. BB

Sylvia Brody Ph.D. started working with children in 1935 as a teacher. After she received her masters and doctorate in Clinical Psychology from New York University and did her residency at The Menninger Foundation in Topeka, she began her private clinical practice, seeing children, adolescents and adults. The author of five books, numerous papers and seven films on infant and childhood development, Dr. Brody has also done extensive research in the field and for many years taught at a post-graduate level in Child Psychiatry, Psychology and Doctoral Program in Psychoanalysis in two American universities and the paediatric departments of several teaching hospitals. She acts as an advisor to Barbara Burrows Parenting. ❀

**One very important factor in helping infants cope well, Dr. Brody discovered, is helping them learn to wait.**



## FEATURE

# Happy Mother's Day

by Maria Keiser

**S**ome of the most difficult events for children are the ones that we all celebrate joyfully with parties, cards and other rituals. Often these "special days" elicit feelings of shame or shyness in children. These emotions are often hidden from others but exist in a young child's mind and body to dramatically shape how a child feels, thinks, and behaves. The child's reactions come from feeling different and feeling as one child put it, as though they "come from a different planet"

And so it is with the days that celebrate parents, both mothers and fathers. These are the days that provide retailers with so many ways to let a special parent know how much you love them. Teachers, too, are pleased to have a theme around which to build a week's worth of crafts, gardening activities and literacy activities. But these are also days when certain children must make adaptations to the world around them: children whose parent has died, who have "two" mothers (or fathers), are adopted or live with relatives because of an ill or absent parent. Some make these adaptations quietly, feeling different, but going along with planned activities. Others proclaim loudly; "my mother died," "I live with my aunt," or "Daddy lives somewhere else".

Many who work with young children struggle with how best to approach these special days. Activities are planned with the majority of the children in their programs in mind but teachers are haunted by how to deal with the children who cannot make a card for a mother or father. They sometimes approach the situation from their own perspective, feelings so sorry for children not living in traditional families. They imagine a child's feelings from an adult perspective and either deliberately ignore the whole issue because they don't know what to do or say or pity the child and overemphasize the alternatives. Others go blithely on their way, oblivious to the many ways some children are experiencing oddness, loss or pain.

Parents respond with a side

range of feelings relative to their situation. For some, it is the way they have chosen to live and they easily swing into the theme of the special day by suggestion cards or gifts for an aunt, grandfather or big brother. Or they may disregard the event entirely, leaving the child to deal with it at school or church.

Others agonize and try to protect the child, and themselves, by not talking about the day. Or they may feel so sorry for the child that the alternatives are exaggerated. "Uncle Saul would just love to have a card from you. He doesn't have any children so getting a card from you would thrill him."

So how can the adults in a child's life help him live in a world that has many well-publicized traditions that don't seem to fit with the circumstances of this particular child's life? How can we approach this issue to lessen the

child's feeling of "being from another planet" or of feeling shame for a situation he did not create?

Perhaps the first thing to consider is the truth of the situation. If a parent has died, or married someone else, if there are two mothers or fathers, if a child has been adopted or the parents are divorced, the adults in the child's life must be truthful and put the situation clearly into words. This doesn't mean the child won't continue to wish for different circumstances or ask many, often painful questions. But it does

mean the child can begin to deal with the situation in a realistic way. If the truth is circumvented or the child's questions are dismissed or the feelings passed on are ones of anger, or pity or impatience then the child will fill in the things that are missing and most often, the "filled in" truth is far

more frightening, shame provoking or debilitating emotionally than the thoughts and feelings that can be built on the simple truth. Any feeling a child experiences can be managed as long as it is understood, not ignored.

Circumstances can't be changed. If a child's parent has died, nothing can change this. We cannot run before a young child protecting him from all the things that relate to mothers or fathers. We can't help children forget. We can't assume that because they were too young to remember a mother or father other situations can be filled in. What has happened to an individual belongs to the individual and they should have the story. Each child's sense of self must be built from his own story. A caring adult should talk about the story in its simplest form for the youngest children and revisit it as they get older and understandings become more abstract.

Children at different stages, will always imagine themselves to be somewhere more wonderful, more understanding, more giving than they are experiencing in their own homes. "If my mother were here this wouldn't be happening!" "If I lived with Mr. & Mrs. Berkley, things would be better because they never get mad." "If we all moved so that we were closer to Grandma and Grandpa, I wouldn't have to do all these chores."

Certainly situations of loss are difficult for the child and for parents who bring to each situation their own history of different circumstances or losses. They also bring their enormous need to protect their children. They can best deal with these situations by giving children the truth. And they can also think through with their children concrete ways they could respond to other children, other adults and to times when activities are reminders of the differences they feel. Parents can then begin to trust that, although there will be awkward and painful times, their children will eventually learn how to incorporate this knowledge into their emerging selves. And their children will be able to deal, not only with the anticipated, but also the unanticipated events that happen throughout life. ❀

**Any feeling a child experiences can be managed as long as it is understood, not ignored.**





## Thoughts for Mother's Day

*Maybe you've seen this already - it came via the Internet -, author unknown - and asked that it be shared. So...we're sharing.*

This is for all the mothers who froze their buns off on metal bleachers at football games Friday night instead of watching from cars, so that when their kids asked, "Did you see me?" they could say, "Of course, I wouldn't have missed it for the world," and mean it.

This is for all the mothers who have sat up all night with sick toddlers in their arms, wiping up barf laced with Oscar Mayer wieners and cherry Kool-Aid saying, "It's OK honey, Mommy's here."

This is for all the mothers of Kosovo who fled in the night and can't find their children.

This is for the mothers who gave birth to babies they'll never see. And the mothers who took those babies and gave them homes.

For all the mothers of the victims of the Colorado shooting, and the mothers of the murderers.

For the mothers of the survivors, and the mothers who sat in front of their TVs in horror, hugging their child who just came home from school, safely.

For all the mothers who run car-pools and make cookies and sew Halloween costumes. And all the mothers who DON'T.

What makes a good Mother anyway? Is it patience? Compassion? Broad hips? The ability to nurse a baby, cook dinner, and sew a button on a shirt, all at the same time?

Or is it heart?

Is it the ache you feel when you watch your son or daughter disappear down the street, walking to school alone for the very first time? The jolt that takes you from sleep to dread, from bed to crib at 2 A.M. to put your hand on the back of a sleeping baby? The need to flee from wherever you are and hug your child when you hear news of a school shooting, a fire, a car accident, a baby dying?

So this is for all the mothers who sat down with their children and explained all about making babies. And for all the mothers who wanted

to but just couldn't.

This is for reading "Goodnight, Moon" twice a night for a year. And then reading it again. "Just one more time." This is for all the mothers who yell at their kids in the grocery store and swat them in despair and stomp their feet like a tired 2-year old who wants ice cream before dinner.

This is for all the mothers who taught their children to tie their shoelaces before they started school. And for all the mothers who opted for Velcro instead.

For all the mothers who bite their lips sometimes until they bleed - when their 14 year olds dye their hair green.

Who lock themselves in the bathroom when babies keep crying and won't stop.

This is for all the mothers who show up at work with spit-up in their hair and milk stains on their blouses and diapers in their purse.

This is for all the mothers who teach their sons to cook and their daughters to sink a jump shot.

This is for all mothers whose heads turn automatically when a little voice calls "Mom?" in a crowd, even though they know their own offspring are at home.

This is for mothers who put pin-wheels and teddy bears on their children's graves.

This is for mothers whose children have gone astray, who can't find the words to teach them.

This is for all the mothers who sent their sons to school with stomachaches, assuring them they'd be just FINE once they got there, only to get calls from the school nurse an hour later asking them to please pick them up. Right away.

This is for young mothers stumbling through diaper changes and sleep deprivation.

And mature mothers learning to let go. For working mothers and stay-at-home mothers. Single mothers and married mothers. Mothers with money, mothers without.

This is for you all. So hang in there. ♣

*Please pass along to all the moms in your life. "Home is what catches you when you fall - and we all fall." Please pass this to a wonderful mother you know.*



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of Barbara Burrows Parenting Magazine

**COMING JUNE 2002**

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