



BARBARA BURROWS
PARENTING

M A G A Z I N E

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**Mommy knows what's best for her • The Complete Idiots Guide to Parenting Teenagers
Well intentioned "fooling" • I really hate you! • Body feelings in children
That's Mommy's Job! • Helping our Son become "Bigger" • Summer fun • Apology**

CANADA'S LEADING PARENT EDUCATION SERVICE • JUNE 2004

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The making of a good father

When the publisher asked me to write this article about Father's Day I asked myself what it takes to raise a son to be a good father. In the end I decided I had no idea but I was sure it wasn't about making sure he could clean toilets. My husband is a good father but has no idea how to clean under the rim. Which brings me to a 16-year-old whose family I know well. I learned

recently that he has been assigned the dubious task of cleaning the household toilet bowls. When I asked why, the response was something to do with making a "contribution" to the household and being "responsible". Perhaps his mother thinks this will help make him a good man and then possibly a good father. I should ask his Dad whether he had to clean toilet bowls as a boy.

I ask my kids to help out around the house too. I really appreciate it when they let the dogs in after letting them out so they don't bark all day when no one is home. I love it when they manage to put the dishes in the dishwasher instead of leaving them on the counter on top of the dishwasher. And I am so happy when they remember to give me the messages from the home phone voice mail instead of just deleting them and forgetting.

Many of my friends ask their kids to do their own laundry. Some have to take turns making dinner for the family. I'm lucky if my teens make their bed, hang up the bath towel and flush the toilet. Which brings me back to the toilet cleaning. To me, this is probably the least popular task that needs to be done in a household. In our house, I do it. I don't think it will encourage responsibility or help develop maturity to ask a teenager to

What's Up?



ANGELA GREENWAY
Managing Editor

clean the bathroom, do the laundry or cook the meals.

If they want to do it, great - but I never insist. As an example, my 16-year-old loves to bake so we always have homemade cookies in the house. She does it - and contributes to our household at the same time - because she wants to. It makes her feel valued because we all appreciate her efforts and can enjoy them together.

I'm thinking about how often in this magazine, we've spoken about the ways unconscious parent feelings can influence our behaviour and the rules we set for our children (and the jobs we give them!) Could giving a son the job of toilet cleaning mask some difficult feelings in a mother? Some resentment or anger about always getting stuck with the crappy (sorry folks) jobs she dislikes? Does this support his masculine development? Is it a job that can make him feel he's made an important contribution?

No matter how good they are at it, cleaning the family toilets doesn't make teenagers (boys or girls) feel great. Yes, they do need to know how to do and they will learn when they have to, usually when they move out.

My soon to be 20-year-old son doesn't know how to clean toilets - next year at university when he lives with a bunch of guys, he'll learn - I hope. In the meantime, he is a smart, kind, responsible young man who has a mother who does his laundry and cooks for him, a father who works hard to provide for him and a pigpen for a room.

I really think that he will make a great Dad some day - just like his father.

Angela

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DEAR BARBARA

Fourteen year old will be going to party with drinking**Dear Barbara**

Our 14 year old is finishing grade eight and will be going to a graduation party where she tells us there will be drinking. She has asked for our permission to have just one beer. My husband and I both feel that she has taken a very responsible approach and we have given our permission. We prefer this to having her lying and sneaking around. Our friends seem to think we are crazy. Please comment!

Dear Parent

Your daughter's honesty and willingness to discuss this issue must make you feel very proud. However, there may be more to her question than either of you realize. At this stage of development, for most adolescents, there is a strong desire to be more grown up and to handle life in an independent manner without parents.

Fourteen year old girls often seem outwardly to have a maturity one would expect of an 18 or 19-year-old. They talk, look and act very grown up. Inside, they are not as secure as they appear. Your daughter will feel partly excited about a drinking party and partly frightened. To acknowledge scared feelings makes teens feel immature, so rarely do parents hear of these doubts.

Your daughter knows that teenage parties have gotten out of control. She knows police sometimes come. She has heard about serious harm coming to drinking teenagers. Deep down, she must wonder what this party will be like.

She may feel safer if you say that you do not

think that she should drink. You can stress that although she is very mature, you worry about her being at a party with inexperienced drinkers. Point out that alcohol can distort judgement and make people behave differently. Stress that you want her to have fun but also to have a plan should she become uncomfortable (i.e. call you for a ride home early). She might be angry with you but it is possible she will accept your position reasonably easily. Easy acceptance usually means teens feel safer with what the parent has decided. (Teens cannot usually recognize this.)

She may be mature enough to handle a beer in a responsible manner. She may choose to drink the beer anyway, despite what you say. Even so, it is likely better for you to

take a stricter rather than more lenient position. When teens feel comfortable with what they are asking parents for, they push and push to convince parents to lighten up. If a teen feels frightened by too much freedom, they will never let their parents know.



BARBARA BURROWS
Director,
Barbara Burrows
Parenting

Photo by Murray 13

Tip for Babies – Mommy knows what's best for her

One way to maximize the benefits of the feeding process of an infant is to find that method that allows the mother to feel the deepest level of satisfaction. It is easy to see why the baby should enjoy the feeding, but why does it matter if the mother enjoys the feeding process? The baby can only learn who she is by how others respond to her. The baby develops good feelings about herself when she is loved - she eventually recognizes that she is loveable. When the baby gazes into the mother's eyes while feeding and can see the "loving" mother enjoying the experience as well, the baby feels she offers the mother something that makes mother happy. This is what makes the baby feel valued and loved.



Today, the tremendous value of breast milk to the infant is well-known. Also understood is the value of the pleasurable sensation of the mother's nipple in the baby's mouth, with the warm flow of milk in the infant's mouth, throat and digestive tract. When so much is understood about the value of breast-feeding, it may be difficult for a mother to choose another option without feeling guilty. For a variety of reasons mothers may feel more comfortable bottle feeding their babies. Some mothers are unable to nurse, no matter how deeply they may wish to. If the mother finds she does not enjoy nursing, a wise mother will try to find a method of feeding that will allow her to experience the greatest level of comfort and pleasure.

We know either breast and bottle-feeding can give babies a fine, healthy start to life, as long as the baby develops a deep, positive attachment with one special person, who comes to know intimately what the baby wants and needs.



Don't miss the next issue

of Barbara Burrows Parenting Magazine

COMING AUGUST 2004

BARBARA BURROWS
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Canada's leading parent education service

Misconceptions

by Andi Buchanan

*Andrea J. Buchanan, is a writer whose book of essays on motherhood, **Mother Shock: Loving Every (Other) Minute of It** (Seal Press 2003), is available wherever books are sold. Watch for a review of this book in the October issue of Barbara Burrows Parenting Magazine. Before becoming a mother, Andrea was a classical pianist. Her last recital was at Carnegie Hall's Weill Recital Hall, back before she knew how to play the Teletubbies theme song. You can read more about her adventures in motherland in her weblog at <http://www.mothershock.com/weblog>. For more information about the book, visit mothershock.com*

The first time I was pregnant, I had no idea what was going on. I was weepy over commercials, shaky and dizzy if I skipped breakfast, prone to sobbing over a paper jam in my printer or a fax that failed to go through. Finally, realizing that in addition to all the hypersensitivity I had also missed my period, I took a home pregnancy test: two lines. Positive. It felt reassuring to know I wasn't crazy, just pregnant.

I was elated. We had just moved from New York to Philadelphia, where my husband was beginning medical school after a career on Wall Street. We had found a spacious apartment with a wonderful view. I had somehow managed to convince my bosses to let me continue my New York work from Philly, telecommuting from the comfort of my new bedroom. And now a pregnancy. It seemed perfect, all these new beginnings at once.

Just days after taking the test, my body already seemed to be changing. In addition to the emotional sensitivity, I was queasy, yet hungry — no, ravenous — all the time; my breasts were incredibly sore; I was already gaining weight, changing in shape. I felt as though I was carrying a secret inside me. After a week or two we told my husband's parents. The next day, I lost the baby. I have always been terrible at keeping secrets.

I woke up that morning and discovered I was bleeding. Even though I had read that some bleeding could happen and that everything still might be fine, I was sure it wasn't a good sign. As the morning progressed, the bleeding became worse, and I knew in my heart it was over. I sat on our new bed, in our new apartment, looking at our new view, crying my eyes out and wondering what, if anything, to do. New to



town, I hadn't even set up an appointment to see an OB. New to the endeavor of pregnancy, I had no idea whether I needed to go to the hospital or simply let things happen as they happened. My husband was unreachable, sitting in some classroom somewhere, diligently scribbling notes as he listened to his professor lecture on embryology.

I managed to remember, in my confused and sad state, that one of his good friends from college, who had taken the direct route to becoming a doctor, going straight through school instead of detouring through another career, was working as a physician somewhere in town, so I tracked her down. I called the hospital where I thought she worked, somehow managed to talk a nurse into giving me her emergency pager, managed to wait until she finally called me back and then choked out the words to communicate to her what was happening. She told me what by then I reluctantly already knew: that I was losing the pregnancy, that there was nothing I could do. She told me to rest, to call her back if the bleeding got worse. I cried to her over the phone, telling her I couldn't understand what was happening, why it was happening. I told her that even though it had only been a few hours since the bleeding started, I was already starting to lose my "pregnancy feeling" — no more swollen breasts, no more nausea, no more.

"I know," she told me. And as it sunk in that she meant more than just sympathy,

that she really knew, she repeated it. "I know." How could she know? Until I experienced it myself I had no idea miscarriages were so common. True, I had leafed through Gil's embryology textbooks and marveled that babies were born at all, given every minuscule thing that had to go right in order to create human life. But still I hadn't realized how, for lack of a better word, ordinary it was for an early pregnancy to end in miscarriage. My husband's friend and I shared our stories with each other, and though I still felt sad and confused, I felt a little less alone.

As strange as it had been to be pregnant — with my body taken over by uncontrollable urges — it was stranger to no longer be pregnant. The bleeding continued like a long, heavy period. Every once in a while I would feel nauseated and it would hit me that it wasn't because I was growing a life inside me but because I was losing one. Every once in a while I would get a hunger pang and it would remind me of the intensity of my hunger during those few fleeting weeks. Yet I do admit to feeling a guilty relief at being back to myself.

I was still sad, though. Even though I knew intellectually that I hadn't lost an actual baby — a moving, thinking, feeling thing — but merely the beginnings of such a thing, I still felt grief, I still felt loss. I was somewhat jarred out of this when my boss happened to call me during one of my weaker moments. I told her, through tears, what had happened, and her upbeat response was, "That's great — at least you know you can get pregnant." What was she talking about? I thought. But then she told me: she had been trying to conceive for years with no luck. From her perspective even a spontaneously aborted pregnancy was a positive sign. "This one wasn't meant to be; it was off; there was something wrong with it. It was a misconception," my boss told me. "Just be glad your body knew what to do with it. Don't be sad about it, just try again. Really, it's for the best."

I remember being struck by two things: one, the marvel of our bodies' secret lives, the personal revelations I suddenly heard as a result of my own loss, the stories everyone seemed to have that I never knew before. And two, the dawning realization that things might not be as simple as I'd imagined when I first thought it would be a fun thing to get pregnant and have a baby. What if it happened again? What if I did manage to get pregnant again only to miscarry at eight weeks, just like this time? What if, like my boss, I found that I was unable to get pregnant? What if I was infer-



Misconceptions

tile? What if my best efforts at motherhood were effectively thwarted by my own body?

A week after my miscarriage, a friend came to visit. We spent a lot of time just walking around town, exploring the neighborhoods, talking about people we both used to work with and the restaurants we used to go to. I spoke a little about what happened with my brief foray into gestation, and she reassured me the way a good friend does, offering sympathy and a completely unfounded assurance that next time everything would work out fine. Our long walk through town took us to the Philadelphia Museum of Art, where we admired the Van Goghs and the Eakins, and I lost myself for a little while in the satisfaction of looking at beautiful things. Before we left, we hit the contemporary wing, where there was an installation on display.

"Oh my god, look at that," my friend pointed, and, obediently, I did. I was caught off guard by what I saw.

It was a room full of what looked like fruit, oranges and bananas and grapefruit carefully laid out on the floor. Museum patrons were allowed to interact with the exhibit, and the sight of casually dressed tourists tiptoeing around the fruit, careful not to disturb it, peering closely and in some cases taking pictures, made me laugh out loud. Then, as we came closer, I saw that it wasn't just fruit strewn about the room, it was dead fruit. Rotten bananas, oranges and grapefruits gone soft. As I walked even closer, I saw that the fruit was not merely decayed: each piece had been carefully hollowed out, the rotted inner flesh scooped and scraped away, and the outside peels stitched up to make the fruit appear whole again.

Some were sewn up with thick, brightly colored yarn, the kind used to tie bows in little girls' braids. Some were held together with thread in fanciful cross-stitch patterns. Some were laced with surgical stitches. Some had glittery buttons, some had jaunty bows. As I finally came into the room, I found myself crouching to the ground with

the rest of the tourists, unable to stop myself from touching the yarn and bows and buttons, the futile attempts to infuse the dead things with life again.

My friend put her hand on my shoulder as I sat on the floor of the exhibit, unable to stop myself from crying. She told me, "It's called 'Strange Fruit.'"

Two weeks after my miscarriage we went to a friend's voice recital. I said hello and made small talk with everyone, never letting on about the truth of what had happened inside my body. I scanned the crowd for women, mothers, grandmothers, wondering how many had a story like mine. How many of us had invisibly nurtured our own strange fruit? How many of us had stitched up our grief with optimism? On the way home, I helped Gil study histology by reading him his lecture notes, a strange, polysyllabic vocabulary of reticula and haemopoiesis and mesenchymal something-or-others.

I read aloud for the entire two-hour trip, and at some point in the middle of the B-cells chapter I felt a distinct pain on the lower right side of my body, near my hip about where my right ovary would be, according to the pictures. I'd never had pain around the time of ovulation before, but I'd read about mittleeschmerz and I had a fair idea that this dull aching, this tightness, was the sensation of an egg's being released, a message from my body that it was time again. The sensation lasted almost the whole evening, through the rest of the car ride, through our having sex, through dinner with a friend, through the walk home. I felt like the pain was deliberate, a message, someone tapping me on the shoulder and whispering, "It's time for me to be born."

Two weeks later, I was pregnant again. At my first ultrasound, at seven weeks, roughly around the same time I had miscarried the first pregnancy, I was halfway convinced they were playing a videotape of someone else's visit, so foreign did it seem that there could really be a living creature inside me. I was so worried there would be only an empty sac there, and at first that

was all I could make out on the little screen, without my glasses. But then as the picture began to take shape, I could see a little piece of fuzz clinging to the top of this blob, which they informed me was the gestational sac. The doctor said, "There's your baby!" and zoomed in closer. Then all of a sudden that little fuzz was pulsing with life; we could see the whole shape of it flashing with its heartbeat. My husband squeezed my hand hard and I started to get a little choked up, from realizing it was real, from the relief of finding it to be real, from the sheer terror of it being real.

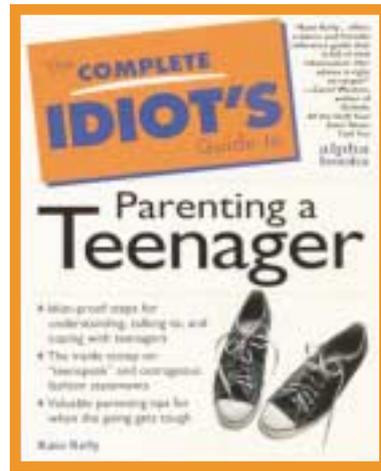
Then the doctor asked us if we wanted to hear the heartbeat. At first, there was just silence as the tech tuned the equipment, and I was sure I wouldn't be able to hear anything over the sound of my own heart, but after a few minutes the whole room was enveloped in sound: whoosh-whoosh, whoosh-whoosh. The doctor took some measurements and then looked around inside, checking my ovaries. He found the corpus luteum on the right, which meant that the egg came from the right ovary, exactly where I'd felt that surprising pain. We left the appointment with our little shiny ultrasound picture, our first picture of our first baby, proof that it had really happened, that it was really there.

I kept that picture with me like a talisman, looking at it every time I was dogged by the fear that this pregnancy, too, would be lost. This time I felt the tenuous nature of my endeavor, the unsettling knowledge that at any moment it could be taken from me. My misconception, my miscarriage the first time around, was an abrupt introduction to the pure essence of parenting: the intensity; the joy; the grief; the fear of loss; the surprising connection to other people; the incontrovertible fact that the life you have created is simply out of your hands, beyond your control, beyond the scope of any other experience. It readied me, in ways I could not know until I was finally there, for motherhood, for the powerful rush of love and other overwhelming emotions, the depth and breadth of which I mistakenly thought I already knew.

PARENT'S CHOICE

The **COMPLETE IDIOT'S** Guide to Parenting a Teenager

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of Macmillan General Reference
A Simon and Schuster
Macmillan Company
Author: Kate Kelly



by Ann Tyrell

Ann Tyrell is a public health nurse in Hamilton and she and her husband have two teenage daughters.

When I was asked to review this book, I initially hesitated, as I have never been a fan of anything that has been written for idiots, dummies or any other such pronoun. I find these terms demeaning, offensive and recommend they be eliminated from general usage. Nonetheless, I agreed to review a book that is marketed as *The Complete Idiot's Guide* and whose author is a writer as opposed to an "expert" in parenting.

The author addresses the reason for the title by stating, "The day she (my own teenager) looked at me like I was a space alien was the day I knew I had to write this book because I did, indeed, feel like a complete idiot". She also acknowledges her advisors for the content: her own teenager, many teenagers who answered online questions, a paediatric gastroenterologist, a nutritionist, another writer and mother of four, two doctors of no specified specialty, a college admissions officer, a director of college information, a planned parenthood trainer, a staff member at a consumer information group, and her husband. The publisher also adds special thanks to Dr. Levin, a Diplomate in Clinical Psychology, who has worked with children, adolescents, adults and families, for technical review.

Overall, the book is well planned. Part one deals with home and family issues such as communicating with your teen, family involvement and obligations, pitching in with household responsibilities and chores, and liveable solutions for teen rooms. Part two addresses teens inside and out; how they grow physically and emotionally. It includes teens' appearances, accepting a new reality and keeping tabs on self esteem. Part three tackles school life, academics, making the grade, learning disabilities, extracurricular activities, social life and looking ahead to continuing education. Part four looks at special interests and privileges, including television, telephone, video games, computers, sports, and has a section on creating a responsible driver. In part five, the author examines the healthy body and mind, keeping fit, diet, sex and sexuality, alcohol, smoking and drugs, with a section on teens in crisis. Part six is titled 'Practically Speaking' and discusses money for today, tomorrow, continuing education and hints about working for a living. The book concludes with a resource directory listing organizations in the United States where one can access information, support, refer-

**your greatest
 anger
 is losing
 communication
 with the pilot
 (teenager)**

als, or publications (since it is a 1996 edition are these still up to date?)

I found the book easy to read and full of practical information. I enjoyed the sidebars that flow through the book such as the Info Flashes, Tuning In and the Danger Zone. Info Flashes provide facts or recent statistics concerning the issue being addressed. Tuning In emphasizes what the topic can mean to a family while Danger Zone lists warning signs.

My favourite analogy appears in chapter one and is the explanation of why parenting a teen is a lot like being an air traffic controller, "You have to keep the aircraft (teenager) on your radar screen at all times...your greatest danger is losing communication with the pilot (teenager)..." Some of my other favourite sections are where the author describes what teens worry about and offers examples of how values are communicated in families. Many expert speakers have confirmed the statement on self esteem that "as whole teenagers are probably the least complimented group. Stereotypically they are viewed negatively..." Dr. Phil has talked about acceptance as being the greatest need of humans. The author uses a quote from

psychologist Dr Bruno Bettelheim's book, *A Good Enough Parent* to illustrate what is meant by helping a teen find their rightful place and acceptance.

Published in 1996, some of the information about sexuality is no longer accurate. For example, the concept of safe sex is now a misnomer; instead the term 'safer sex' is used. Evidence now demonstrates that some sexually transmitted diseases can be transmitted even when a condom is used properly. Genital herpes and genital warts, for instance, can be transmitted through skin-to-skin contact with the genital area alone. STD's may be transmitted through oral sex. As well, a person with a sexually transmitted disease may not experience any symptoms!

A proven disadvantage of using spermicide is that a component of many spermicides, nonoxynol 9, may irritate the entrance of the vagina or tip of the penis. For this reason using a spermicide alone can increase the risk of HIV transmission. With respect to the emergency contraceptive pill, also known as the morning after pill, it is now available for up to 5 days after an incident requiring attention such as rape or a condom that breaks.

I question the accuracy of the statement found on page 47, "early menstrual periods are almost always painless, because cramps don't usually occur until ovulation takes place (which can be 6-20 months after the onset of menarche)." Ovulation precedes the start of the menstrual cycle. If teens believe they might not be ovulating they may think pregnancy is not a possible consequence. Another fact is that some young females do experience painful cramps.

In conclusion I felt this book has much to offer to parents of preteens and teens. My suggestion would be for parents to research for themselves the latest information on sexuality. Talk to your doctor, check out you local library, the web site of the Society of Canadian Obstetricians and Gynaecologists: sexualityandu.ca, or your nearest public health department to name a few resources.

Tip for Teens – I really hate you!

“Putting feelings into words” is a way that emotions can be discharged, we can “get over” big hurts and the air can be cleared. Relationships often improve once feelings are articulated.

What about when teenagers hate their parents? What if these feelings are expressed in an aggressive and vicious way?

Parents often ask me just how much they should tolerate, when it comes to the powerful negative feelings that their teens may have and express towards them.

This is a hot topic because normally developing teenagers do hate their parents at times. There is a wide range of what different

parents can tolerate and accept. Generally, it is important to listen to some of a teenager's strong, negative feelings and to tolerate some degree of “talking back”, as we know that too much repression of negative feelings can lead to all kinds of health issues (migraines, insomnia, depression etc). We also know that parents must let up on some control, or their children will not reach psycho-

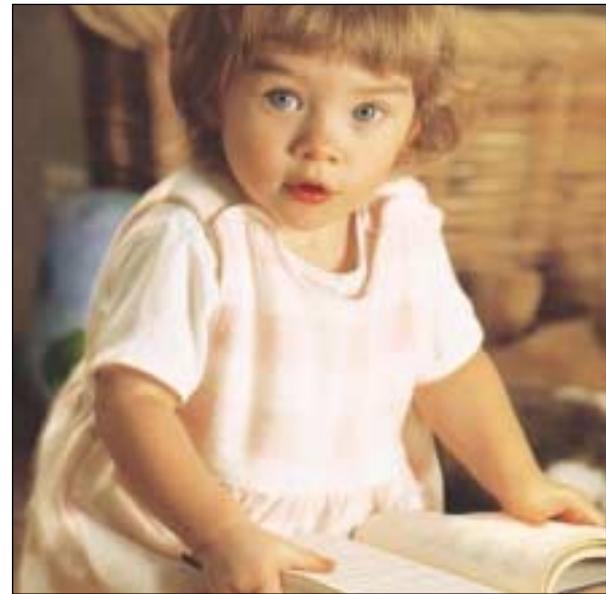
Generally, it is important to listen to some of a teenager's strong, negative feelings and to tolerate some degree of “talking back”

logical independence.

On the other hand, too much verbal abuse by teens can lead to parents feeling deeply hurt and teenagers feeling very guilty. This isn't a good situation either.

One solution to this might be to invite a teenager to write down everything he or she is upset about and to feel free to express all the negative feelings on paper. This will immediately give the teenager some distance between the strong feelings that she is experiencing and her wish to blurt it out in a hurtful, aggressive manner. When we make an effort to express feelings through writing, we must pause to gather our thoughts. This pause usually allows us to gain some control of the “mean” part of our feelings.

When teens are venting, it evokes very powerful feelings in parents. The strong parent reactions can throw fuel on the volatile teenager's fire. It may help parents to express their strong feelings on paper as well. The idea is to welcome the feelings, but keep them “toned down” enough that neither the teen nor the parent feels excessively hurt or guilty. The emotions can be expressed and out in the open, but the aggressive component is subdued.



Tip for Tots – Well intentioned “fooling”

By Barbara Burrows

Understanding the world around is a formidable task for the toddler. Many misunderstandings can lead to tremendous difficulties for parents who are left dealing with a child who is mixed up about what is real.

A common practice is to intentionally make up “half truths”, ostensibly to protect toddlers from certain realities, but this tactic makes things more difficult for the toddler and the parent in the long run.

Erna Furman, author of “Helping Young Children Grow” discusses this question. “Some parents, unfortunately, deliberately fool children, perhaps to “spare them” upset: they tell them “Grandma went on a trip” when Grandma is ill in the hospital and everyone is upset about it: or to coerce them (“The boogey man is waiting outside to get you if you don't go to bed”.) To avoid being pestered parents may say: “The ball went bye bye, all gone” when it is really hidden out of sight because it is time for dinner; or to provide a surprise (“No, I didn't buy anything for you” when the birthday present is hidden in the closet”). However kind the intent, when the caring adult's stated assessment of the reality is at odds with the truth and with the child's own potential observations, the capacity for observing and understanding is diminished.” (P143)

Each of these approaches undermines the toddler's capacity to understand reality. The better the toddler can understand, the easier parenting becomes. It is surprising how well toddlers can manage “the truth” when parents are there to help. An alternative approach would be to tell the toddler simply, “Grandma is not feeling well. She is in the hospital and the doctor is trying to help her get better. Grandma is too sick to play and you can't see her until she is better. She misses you.”

Talk of the “boogey man” can stimulate a child's imaginary fears, and make life more difficult for the parent faced with a terrified child awakened by nightmares. Simply tell the child clearly that it is time to settle down and go to sleep. Say, “I put the ball away, because it is time for supper.” And “It is hard to wait, but on your birthday, in 3 sleeps, you will get a birthday present.”

Understanding reality helps with the development of language and intelligence in the toddler. Finding ways of talking about realities simply and in a straightforward way supports positive psychological development. This means children are better prepared for and do better at later stages of development - and this positive development makes parents feel very good. There is much to be gained from finding simple ways to talk about realities - even realities parents wished their children didn't have to face.

Ed. Note: For further discussion on “Observing Reality” see Chapter 10 of “Helping Young Children Grow” by Erna Furman, published by International University Press. To order, call (800) 835-3487.

WHAT'S HAPPENING IN CLASS?

Accounts here are written by parents who have attended Barbara Burrows Parenting programs. The stories are submitted anonymously to protect the confidentiality of the children. Thank you to the parents who have taken the time to share their experiences.

Making up after a horrible morning

I have a four-year-old very hyper son and a nine-month-old daughter. I work part-time away from home, we have a part-time business run from home. My husband works very long hours away from home as well and we have little “family quality time”. On one particular day, I was feeling very tired from working and waking up continuously with my daughter through the night for several nights in a row. The laundry was piled high, dirty dishes falling off the counter, few groceries in the house, and my fuse was short from fatigue. My son decided he wasn't going to listen to me at all, was wild and hyper so much so that he would crash into walls and fall down, was enjoying teasing his little sister, and babbling very loudly—especially during business phone calls. I tried very hard to keep my cool, but when my daughter started screaming also, I just lost it and yelled very loudly at my son and told him to leave the room. I felt like a tyrant in a rage and could barely stop myself from spanking him. As he ran to his room and cried, I felt terrible for being so mean to him but at the same time, I needed the peace and quiet that followed. My son got over the crying soon, and started watching TV quietly and solemnly.

Meanwhile, I fed my daughter and put her to bed. A couple of hours had gone by, and I had collected my thoughts and temperament and went to talk to my son. I asked him if it was ok to turn off the TV because I needed to talk with him and he said yes. Then I sat closely to him and held his hand and told him how sorry I was for yelling at him and sending him out of the room. I tried to explain to him that I was very tired from working and from his sister not sleeping well and I had a lot of work to do at home to clean up and make phone calls. I told him that it wasn't very nice of me at all to yell at him, that I was very sorry for it and that I will try very hard not to do it again. This 4-year-old boy took my hands and covered them with his, sat up straight and said “It's ok, mama. I understand you're tired. I don't like to be yelled at, but I wasn't acting very nice either and I'll try to act nicer too.” At this point, the understanding of this little child touched me



very deeply and I started to cry. Then he told me that it's ok and not to be sad and cry and asked me if I wanted a hug. I asked him if he knew why he was so hyper and didn't feel like listening to me today. He told me that he missed his dad very much and wished that he didn't have to work away from home so much and that he wanted me to play with him also. I immediately picked up the phone and called my husband so that my son could hear his voice and feel a little better. That worked and he said he wasn't missing him as much anymore and asked if I could play with him “just a little”. The day was “perfect” after that.

I know I can't always be the mother I'd like to be — keep my cool, be understanding and empathetic. But without realizing it at that time, I guess I was teaching my son that it's ok to face these realities and that everyone (even parents) can become overwrought at times and it's good to talk about these troubles and try to do better the next time. My son is only 4, but many times, he is the teacher, and I'm the student always learning.

Barbara's comments:

When things have gone “haywire” for parents and children, it is extremely beneficial for both parents and children to find a way to get things “back on track”. It eases the guilt for both generations and allows a fresh start, with feelings in tact. The various ways families find to “recover” are unique and specific to the individuals involved. No one else can give instructions on how this is achieved, but

when it happens, both feel better. It has to do with getting angry feelings worked through or under control and being able to forgive both yourself and your child. This is a tall order - but so worth the effort when one is able to struggle to find the path that allows this resolution. It is infinitely more effective than punishments or consequences.

**It's ok, mama.
I understand you're
tired.**

WHAT'S HAPPENING IN CLASS?

That's Mommy's Job!

Sydney who is four likes to do everything independently. One thing she enjoys for her bed-time routine is reading her books. Therefore, her two-year-old brother does the same. One evening before bed my daughter, my son and I were evolved in this night-time routine on Sydney's bed. We were sitting linked together with our legs wrapped around each other. Sydney in front, me in the middle and Cole on the end. We each had one or two books we were looking at. Unfortunately, Cole accidentally dropped a book on the floor. Linked like a train, it was near impossible for either Cole or me to reach from the bed without toppling us over.

I asked Sydney to help her brother by getting down to get his book. My daughter does everything she does very intensely. While she reads, or pretends to read as she immerses herself in the pictures and walks through the book, she becomes a part of the book, one of the characters. So intense is her enjoyment that she flaps her arms with excitement, talks out loud, nods her head and speaks with expression for each character. She lives the story she makes up as she "reads" her book.

Anyway, when I asked her to help she promptly and succinctly said, "No." Having not expected her refusal, I was quite taken aback. In my eyes it was a quick trip off the bed and back on. In her eyes, it wasn't written in the script.

After her refusal I repeated my request, explaining that neither Cole nor I could get down as easily as her. Sydney swung her legs off the bed, sighed quite dramatically, picked up Cole's book and slammed it down on the bed. With her hands clenched, her teeth grinding and her little nose turning up on one side, she yelled, "There. There's Cole's book. You wrecked my story. I hate Cole. I hate my brother. I hate being a big sister."

She picked up her book and sent it sailing through the air. The hard copy of "Olivia" hit my hand leaving a paper cut behind. With tears streaming down her face, Sydney yelled, "Get a bandaid, get a bandaid!" in a panicky voice, over and over. Her brother clamoured to see my "wound".

I explained to Sydney that when we are angry at others it is not the best choice to throw things. I also explained that I felt getting Cole's book wasn't really that big a chore for her. Her reply stopped me in my tracks. She said quite seriously, "But Mommy, it's your job to look after Cole, not mine." Point taken.

Barbara's comments:

At first glance, one might wonder why this mother wouldn't just give this little girl a quick smack - after all - doesn't a mother have to teach her child not to throw books, and be willing to do one small little thing for others? If not a smack, should she not have at least a consequence?

If we look a little deeper, it becomes very apparent how short sighted such an approach would be. Bedtime is the time of day when children's fears and worries begin to surface. It gets dark, things quiet down and small minds have difficult emotional work to do. (This is why children find many ways to keep parents engaged at this time of the day). During the day, they may have been angry with their loved ones. They may have wished harm to siblings, or parents if they were especially upset. They may feel guilty for treating somebody badly. All these leftover feelings from the day need to be mastered to some degree before the child can relax and go to sleep.

Sydney, it appears, uses her stories

"But Mommy, it's your job to look after Cole, not mine."



to master the emotional "residue" from the day. In this scenario, she is in her "relaxing" mode, and settling herself down. Sydney didn't like to be interrupted from her important emotional "work". In anger, she throws a book, which is a fairly minor offence. The book injures her mother in a very small way. This Sydney had not expected, but perhaps had privately wished to do. Sydney's reaction is huge. The guilt she experiences is as if she had done something enormously bad. She frantically wants to make her mother better, by getting a band aid. In her mind, she feels she has injured her mother in a serious way, because her anger was big and serious. All children, in fantasy, imagine hurting others in big ways at times of anger and frustration. It is hard for Sydney to differentiate her fantasy from her real (but small) loss of control in throwing her book. If one loses control by throwing a book, could one also lose control if one had an impulse to destroy one's two-year-old brother? Or get rid of the mother who made you do something you didn't want to?

Sydney's mom sensed she needed help. Her mom likely didn't understand the deeper unconscious issues Sydney struggled with, but was able to understand that Sydney was upset at being interrupted and being asked to help her brother. Her mother's calm, kind approach helped Sydney calm down and understand her mother was not seriously injured. Even though Sydney's raging feelings were big (hands clenched, her teeth grinding and her little nose turning up on one side), her mom's calm approach helped her understand she didn't do the kind of damage she felt like doing (and worried that she had done). Sydney's anxious, frantic talk about getting a bandaid reveals that she believed she had done serious damage (as expressed in her inner fantasy).

By getting some insight in the psychological issues that come into play, Sydney's mom can continue to help her daughter differentiate between her big, angry inside fantasy wishes that may be scary but do not hurt others, and her throwing impulses which lead to a real action. This is a far more effective way to help a child develop impulse control than the smack on the bum, that doesn't help either parents or child gain any deeper understanding of the child's thinking and fantasy life.

WHAT'S HAPPENING IN CLASS?

Accounts here are written by parents who have attended Barbara Burrows Parenting programs. The stories are submitted anonymously to protect the confidentiality of the children. Thank you to the parents who have taken the time to share their experiences.

Helping our Son become “Bigger”

Our son was born 7 weeks premature weighing 3 lbs 10 oz. He is now just turning four years old and, by all indications, is a healthy toddler with no residual mental or physical problems arising from his premature birth. He has one older sister (age 7) and no other siblings.

Relative to his older sister and, to many other children I have been around and observed, I would categorize our son as a “difficult child”. Although there were very early signs of this during his infancy, this difficulty has especially manifested itself in the time since our son was about 18 months old.

From about that time onwards, most daily tasks with our son, including bathing, dressing, eating and even play, have become a tedious and tiring battle of wills. Although I’m sure it wasn’t actually the case, I seem to recall his first words were “ME DO IT!”. With the development of his language skills, “ME DO IT” became “Shut up” or “You’re stupid” whenever we dared to direct or assist him. Physically, this behaviour and attitude later took the form of punching us when we attempted to help him or direct his activities in any significant way. These outbursts could be the result of something as significant as taking a bath or as small as moving his sock three inches towards him when he was trying to put it on. The reaction was often the same.

To the contrary, in areas requiring independence and control, our son has excelled. These have included potty training, climbing and gymnastics. He has also advanced quickly with activities requiring concentration and understanding such as operating the television set, DVD player or home computer.

All the way along, our son has demonstrated a special determination to complete, without any assistance, just about every physical task there was to do, all without any apparent fear of the consequences of failure. In the past, I have attributed this to having an older sister to follow and emulate. However, this cannot be valid since, in a number of activities, he has surpassed the abilities of his older sister but continues unchecked.



**...by letting him
do things for himself
whenever possible
even if,
in the short term,
it takes more time.**

Until recently, the only way I had attempted to deal with our son was through the application of strict discipline. By this I mean that, as far as our son’s behaviour was concerned, it was “my way or the highway.” It was my belief that, unless I drew the line in the sand and prevented him from crossing it (at all costs), I would be encouraging and compounding the bad behaviour. Military camp was just around the corner.

In practice, this meant that an outburst caused by yet another determined

attempt to get his own way meant a swift trip over my shoulder (to keep him from hitting me) and up to his room where he would stay until he was ready to come out and apologize.

From my involvement with Barbara Burrows and my observation of our son, I have come to realize the importance to him of accomplishing a task without help. From the beginning, my son has been small for his age and remains so. More than anything, he desires to be “big” and to do things on his own. In addition, I can now better appreciate the daily struggle that he has faced to complete tasks that to me seemed simple. In these circumstances, I can see that my offers of assistance or direction humiliate him and undermine his efforts.

Fortunately for us, as my son has acquired greater skills, the necessity to intervene and assist has been reduced. In addition, I can now better understand that, so long as his choices do not place him in harms way, it is better to let him proceed in his own way.

The best example I can think of involves the simple task of arriving home in the car. Not only would my son climb all over us to get out of the door of his choice, but he simply had to be the first one to arrive at the front door to open it. In the past, I would have struggled to force him to exit through his own door at all costs. Now, I realize that, unless he is trying to exit into oncoming traffic, it makes no difference to me which door he uses on a particular day and he is no less disciplined as a consequence.

We have been able to apply this insight on a daily basis with our son mainly by letting him do things for himself whenever possible even if, in the short term, it takes more time. Believe me, the time saved by avoiding the inevitable confrontation more than makes up for any extra time spent. As result of this basic change, we have noticed that he has settled down somewhat and appears to us to be coping better in his daily activities. Our need to intervene has decreased and, even when intervention is required, our son’s negative reactions are more manageable and much less serious.

F E A T U R E

Apology

by Virginia Steininger

Mimi, a young mother in our discussion group was clearly agonizing over an episode she'd had the night before with her three and one-half year old son, Alan. She had confessed, "I think I handled it badly and I feel terrible." She related that earlier on the previous evening, Alan had started doing little, mean things to Jack, his older brother. Jack had tried to ignore Alan at first, but when Alan hit him, Jack said, "What did you do that for? I'm not doing anything to you!" At this point Mimi had been somewhat aware of Alan's meanness felt it was time to intervene said, "That's enough, Alan. Apologize to Jack right now." The minute she said it, she wished she hadn't. She revealed that lately she had noticed it was impossible for Alan to say he was sorry for any hurtful thing he did. She declared, "His ego is just getting bigger and bigger and he thinks he's the boss. Every ornery thing he does is always someone else's fault."

When Mimi and her husband commanded Alan to apologize, he angrily responded that he would not and that it was Jack's fault anyway—he was in the way. His parents insisted that if he could not apologize, he would have to go to his room and think about how mean he had been. When he could come downstairs to let them know he was ready to apologize, Mother would go with him. (Later, when she'd had time to rethink, she knew that condemning Alan to his room to face his guilt alone can feel intolerable for a young child and lead him to denial of any transgression, in fact to feel the victim.)

After crying all the way to his room, loudly protesting that he would not apologize, he later quieted, came downstairs and picked up one of his games. When his parents said that they guessed he must be ready to apologize, he flatly refused and was sent back to his room. This was repeated several times, Alan acting as though he thought (or hoped), that everyone had forgotten or that none of it had ever happened in the first place.

At last Mimi, in desperation of anything being resolved, had an inspiration. She asked Alan if he remembered the day when a playmate at pre-school said, "You stink!" Alan instantly responded heatedly, "He hurt



my feelings." Mother replied, "Well, the way you felt then was how Jack feels now and I know you really don't want to hurt his feelings." Alan quickly answered, "But Jack didn't cry!" Mother explained that even when bigger people don't cry, they still feel bad. She felt Alan soften a bit and said, "You do need to tell Jack you're sorry—I'll go with you."

At Jack's door, Alan, barely looking up, muttered a brief "Sorry," and quickly scooted down the hall to his room. Mimi said it was on the tip of her tongue to call for a more sincere apology, but it was getting so late, she let it go. After a few moments, she went to Alan's room. He was already in bed and in a very chatty voice began to remind her of what he had to take to pre-school the next day.

In our discussion group, when she reflected on all of this, she lamented she felt Alan's apology had not been sincere. She felt that Alan 'just wanted off the hook'. She concluded, "Even though he finally did what we told him he had to do, it didn't come from him, and I don't think he learned from it. We really messed up."

"Wait a minute!" I responded quickly, "But you have sorted out and learned a lot about some very difficult child develop-

ment issues—the necessity for one to develop the ability to feel compassion, of being able to feel remorse for one's hurtful actions and growing in the ability to face up to and become responsible for one's own behavior." I suggested that perhaps Alan's mastery and integration of these issues still felt incomplete to her, but that her intuitions about what was needed were right on target. The parents had let him know that their family valued kindness instead of meanness, and that there had to be amends made for hurtful actions. They were thoughtful in showing empathy and compassion when Alan was hurt by his playmate in pre-school. Then, in turn, they had supported him when the right thing felt hard to do when he was the transgressor. She still had trouble with her fear that 'his ego seems to get bigger and bigger'—"I don't want him to be a bossy bully," she said.

This thought led to our discussing that often when a child is at his bossiest or meanest, inside he is so overwhelmed with conflicting feelings of anger, meanness, guilt and remorse, he cannot find that better side of him he really wants to be. The adult's compassion for a child's conflicting bad feelings and defensive reactions can help him know that he can bear facing up to those hurtful, destructive things he has done—this becomes helpful remorse. We can help him know that remorse or feeling bad about what he has done will enable him to make amends, thus help him feel again that better person he wants and likes to be.

Mimi called me the next evening to let me know how much she had thought about our discussion on the day before. She had gone back to the incident with Alan when, as she put it, they were both more 'loving' toward each other. During that time she had pointed out to him, "Alan, maybe the best way not to feel so bad about yourself is to help Jack feel better." Later that afternoon, Alan was looking at a new book when Jack asked him if he could see it when Alan was finished. Alan leaped up spontaneously and eagerly pressed it into Jack's hands saying, "Oh, you can see it right now!" Sounding relieved and pleased, Mimi said, "I really think that was his true apology. It took awhile, but it came from inside him."

Tip for Kids – Body feelings in children

Young children (pre-school) are very closely connected with their bodies, their body feelings and have strong worries and emotions about their bodies. Band-aids, for example are very important and what appears to be a very minor “boo boo” to the adult can seem a major catastrophe to the child. They have powerful genital feelings – they often masturbate, sneak away to look at each others genitals (as in playing doctor) and can become very excited at times, over their own or their parents’ naked bodies. With pre-school children there is lots of excited “showing” and “looking”.

These body feelings can lead to pleasure, curiosity, worries, and misinformation. If children are overly excited and if body feelings become too intense, children may have difficulty settling down to play calmly and productively and to learn at school as they mature.

Children struggle to bring certain body feelings and emotions under their control as they mature. For example, a child might try to stop playing doctor because her parents don't like it; another may try to stop masturbating because his what he thinks about while doing it frightens him. The struggle goes on inwardly and often unconsciously.

When parents' sense children are “keyed up” or misbehaviour is increasing, this outward behaviour may be related to inner body feelings or worries the child cannot master. Parents can help children master these powerful impulses by talking and explaining when they sense a child is over-stimulated and reducing the “showing” and “looking”. Encouraging privacy in the home can help. Keeping things “toned down” and reducing anxiety around these issues helps children, perhaps surprisingly, can help children manage better in many other areas.

DOCTOR DOCTOR

Summer fun



by Lydia Furman M.D.

Dr. Lydia Furman is Assistant Professor of Pediatrics, Division of General Academic Pediatric, Rainbow Babies and Children's Hospital, Cleveland Ohio. She is also consultant to Hanna Perkins School in Cleveland.

It can be a lot of fun to have a day at the beach or the pool or the amusement park. Having a safe trip in which everyone comes home smiling requires attention to just a few safety tips.

Dehydration and heat related illnesses can be serious. Plan to drink lots of water and cool fluids throughout the day. Encourage kids to drink even before they are thirsty. Bring along water or juice or sports fluid type drinks, because often only soda and pop are available for purchase - these are fluids too but the caffeine found in most popular pop and soda acts as a diuretic, causing the kidneys to urinate more than the body needs. Resting times and time in the shade are helpful. If anyone becomes at all lightheaded or dizzy or looks very red, get the child or adult to a cool or shaded area, place a cool washcloth on the neck and forehead, and encourage them to drink. If this doesn't help, medical care is needed.

The sun is hot and fierce, especially between 10 in the morning and 2 in the afternoon. Avoid being out at those times if possible, or at least limit the time, and have kids wear a visor and sunglasses. Also, make sure to use sunscreen for yourself and the kids. Replenish the sunscreen after swimming even if it is “waterproof”. Swimming can give more sun rather than less, because one feels cool but is getting extra rays through the water. There is unfortunately good evidence that summer tans and burns are not good for the skin and can lead to skin cancer and problems later in life. If

someone does get a burn, they should soak in a cool not cold bath or shower, drink lots, and lay down.

To avoid poison ivy or poison oak rashes, don't let the kids run through a woods or meadow you are not familiar with. If you are not sure which plant is poison ivy, stick to the path! If you think someone had contact with poison ivy, wash off with soap and water promptly. If anyone gets mosquito or fly bites, put an anti-itch medicine or 1% hydrocortisone on promptly to reduce scratching and swelling. If stung by a bee or wasp, ideally put a baking soda-water mixture on immediately. If there is local swelling, a cool compress is helpful. If the sting itches, give benadryl by mouth. If the child seems to have lip or mouth swelling or be short of breath or wheezing, this is an emergency and get medical help immediately. This type of severe reaction is very unusual. It is smarter to be calm around a bee or wasp, and give it space, rather than swatting, which may aggravate it. Avoid running through the grass barefoot- it is a perfect way to find a bee!

make sure to use sunscreen for yourself and the kids

Finally, respect the schedules of infants and toddlers. They need their regular nap and meal times, and will become unmanageably cranky if expected to manage without. What is fun for an older child, like a long day at a fair, is not fun for a two year old. You can plan a shorter outing, or bring a portacrib, or let “nap” be on the ride home. New sights and sounds that are stimulating and interesting for older kids may be overwhelming for infants and toddlers and preschoolers.

Take a few first aid items on your outing. Include a few band-aids, some bug spray, a tube of anti-itch crème of your choice for bug bites, a cool washcloth in a baggy, and the sunscreen. The most important thing is to listen to your children, and pay attention to their level of interest and fatigue. Going home before everyone is exhausted is the best way to have fun.

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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.

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Barbara Burrows Parenting Magazine

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