

The Wellness Family

Drs. Patrick and Gerri Ryan Keep You Informed

Children and Stress

We don't typically associate childhood with stress. Children don't have bills to pay, demanding jobs or kids of their own to worry over, so why would children possibly be stressed?

This may be how we think, but the sad fact is that children today are being diagnosed with high-anxiety, depression and a myriad of other psychological disorders resulting in more children being on psychosomatic drugs now than ever.

Bullying

There was a time when playground bullying was probably the worst source of stress that we could imagine for our children. Someone at school was making their little lives miserable and it was usually a child who was bigger, meaner, tougher, etc. Today we have a whole new arena for bullying. With internet social networking sites so popular, they have opened a door for children to be bullied 24/7, instead of just the seven or eight hours a day that they're at school.

Recent studies have reported that bullying is affecting more than 1/3 of all school-age children and that more than 160,000 children will miss at least one day of school because of this. Most children reported a fear of speaking to an adult about the bullying out of fear of repercussions or the abuse escalating, so the cycle of stress is never broken.

Hyper-Parenting

Unfortunately another cause of stress for children comes from a surprising source: the parent. We all want what's best for our kids, like a bright and successful future, but sometimes in our zeal we forget to allow time for them to be children.

If we over-schedule them with organized sports, dance classes, music lessons and self-improvement programs we don't leave them time to be children. We convince ourselves that it's best to keep kids busy but we forget that boredom is a catalyst for creativity.

Many children who have been over-scheduled grow to resent the attention placed on their lives and begin to wonder what's wrong with them. They question why they need so much improvement and refinement, then retreat into a shell of insecurity, finding escape in video games and internet surfing. We lose the child in the pursuit of perfection.

Critical Self-Image

More typical of girls, the time between elementary school and junior high finds young women becoming more critical of their looks. Studies have found that 50% of 13 to 15-year-olds believe that they are overweight and 80% of 13-year-old girls have dieted at least once. Is it any wonder then that young girls are suffering from eating disorders like bulimia and anorexia nervosa? Additional studies have shown that 85% of anorexia patients developed this disorder in their teens.

Fractured Families

Another source of stress for children is the fractured family. Unfortunately, whether we like or not, the divorce rate is high and when children are involved the



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collateral damage is greater. Recent studies have concluded that children of divorced parents are statistically more likely to have their own marriages end in divorce.

While every effort is made to help children not place the blame on themselves for the divorce and to teach children healthy ways to resolve issues, the anger between the parents will still sometimes be transferred to the children, increasing their anxiety.

The Serious Outcome

Children today are responding to emotional stressors in ways that we can't imagine and generally don't understand. Recent studies have shown that over 10% of all teenagers are self-mutilating, and of this number, 64% are “cutting”. Despite the appearance, self-mutilation is not a precursor to suicide but, according to the young people who will talk about it, “the only thing that makes [them] feel better.”

Additional studies are finding that about 20% of all teenagers are experiencing depression. What used to

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be just typical teenage angst is becoming a problem of epidemic proportions. Less than 1/3 of these teens will seek help and, statistically, 30% of them will develop a substance abuse problem in an effort to drown their feelings in a drug-induced haze or stupor.

What is being done?

Many parents have turned to the medical profession for help with their children, which typically includes drug-therapy. The problem with the typical modern medicine routine is that most anti-depressants are being prescribed off-label to children. Since they haven't been tested on children, doctors are making a best-guess as to the correct dosage.

Studies published in 2004 found that there is an increased risk in suicide for children ages 10-18 who are taking serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs). As a result the FDA published a Public Health Advisory expressing concerns over certain antidepressants being given to children and teens. However, a recent study published by the American Academy of Pediatrics has basically refuted those concerns claiming that there "appears to be no clinically meaningful variation in the risk for suicidal acts by antidepressant agent within the class of SSRIs".

During the first 12 months of treatment 266 subjects attempted suicide and three were successful. This was an event rate of 27.04 suicidal acts/1000 person-years. Yet, they find this to not be "clinically meaningful"?

What can we do?

A dangerous contributing factor is general practitioners and increasingly pediatricians writing the majority of antidepressant prescriptions, not the psychiatrist. If concerned parents would take their child to a psychiatrist first, where psychotherapy would be the first defense, antidepressants would be a last resort.

Peter Breggin, M.D. a psychiatrist, medical expert and author, has been a watchdog of the underreporting of side effects from antidepressant and psycho-stimulant use. He believes that "those struggling with severe depression essentially are feeling profound hopelessness and despair that can be addressed by a variety of psychotherapeutic, educational and spiritual or religious interventions."

It's time to consider other options besides the promised (typically unsuccessful) quick fix offered by chemicals.

Alternatives to Chemicals

There are many natural remedies and healthier options to help children overcome feelings of anxiety and stress. First of all, it's important to remember that our bodies can be negatively affected by a lack of rest. It is important for many more reasons than this to be sure that your child is getting their required rest every night.

Nutrition also plays a huge role in how we function mentally. Besides an increase in green vegetables and protein, a reduction in high-calorie/high-carb junk foods can have a positive effect on our mental health.

Progressive parents are recognizing the benefits of yoga for their children as it requires specific meditation techniques that quiet the mind and create a calming influence. This typically helps children become more focused, resulting in a reduction of stress and anxiety.

Finally, a recent study published in the Journal of Vertebral Subluxation Research shared the case history of a 19-year-old female diagnosed with General Anxiety Disorder (GAD). After a four-month course of chiropractic care, the young woman reported an 80% reduction in her anxiety symptoms, including a 90% decrease in her headaches. The patient was able to resume a normal lifestyle without resorting to prescription or over-the-counter drugs.

Dear Patients,

Drs. Patrick and Gerri Ryan are dedicated to providing you with the absolute best in family wellness care. So take a moment today to discuss with your Family Wellness Chiropractor any concerns you may have regarding your child and stress.

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