


CONNECTING

Healthy Information from the Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center  July / August 2003

Risk and Resilience: Ways to Protect Our Children

Over the past few decades many research studies have been conducted to determine what types of physical or environmental factors place children at risk for adverse behavioral, emotional, and social development. Some of the risk factors for poor adjustment in children can be identified in the following four domains: 1) child factors – a difficult temperament (highly active, intense reactions to situations, negative mood, distractible, unsociable), a medical condition or disability; 2) parent factors - negative, harsh, inconsistent parenting, chronic and/or severe mental health problems that decrease the involvement and increase the negative emotions displayed to the child; 3) family factors - marital discord, single-parent families, high levels of conflict among family members; and 4) ecological factors - poverty, a significant number of stressful life events (e.g., loss of job, new job, birth of a child, move, death in family).

Although many children are exposed to these types of risk factors, not all of the children develop behavioral and/or emotional problems. In the Isle of Wight studies, Rutter and colleagues (1976) found that a single stressor, even if chronic, did not lead to increased rates of psychological problems when compared to others who were not exposed to the risk factor. However, the rate of psychological problems climbed to 6% with the presence of two or three concurrent stressors and to 20% with four or more risk factors. It seems that risk factors have an additive effect, with the number of risk factors present greatly increasing the likelihood of poor adjustment for children.

Knowing that there are numerous risk factors to which our children might be exposed and understanding that these stressors might negatively impact their adjustment, we are left with the question, “What can we do to protect our children?” In current times, with an increase in ecological stressors that can seem beyond our control (e.g., threats of terrorism, war, a struggling economy, job and budget cuts), reassurance is needed that there are ways to buffer our children from stressors that usually would lead to poor adjustment. In Garmezy’s (1985) review of the research on stress-resistant children, he identified three broad categories of protective variables: 1) personality characteristics of the child,

2) supportive family environment and lack of significant discord, and 3) the availability of external support systems. Personality characteristics, or temperament, are the stable, innate, behavioral responses to the environment across various situations. Therefore, children who are sociable (openly, positively respond to new people, situations, and experiences), adapt to their environments, and have an overall positive mood (more positive moods than negative moods) tend to cope with stressful circumstances. Children also tend to cope better with stressful situations when they have parents and families who are warm, sensitive, and responsive to the child’s needs in addition to providing consistent and appropriate limit-setting. In addition, children are better able to cope with stress when they have supportive people outside of the immediate family (e.g., grandparents, aunts, uncles, close neighbors, daycare provider, minister, teacher, coach, friends) consistently involved in their lives. The external support systems become more critical when a child’s parents are unable to provide the consistent, nurturing environment. For example, some children are unable to develop a secure attachment relationship with a parent due to the parent’s

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Risk and Resilience: Explore This Topic Further

The Center staff includes mental health professionals who are available to speak on the topics listed below. For information on scheduling and cost, call Eileen Burtle at (515) 274-4006.

- Building Self-Esteem in Children
- Beyond Time Out
- Early Childhood Development
- A Father’s Role in Child Development
- Grief in Children
- Proactive Parenting
- Understanding and Communicating With Your Teen
- Traits of a Healthy Family
- Fathers Communicating With Sons
- Fathers Communicating With Daughters

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inability to be emotionally available and responsive to the child. However, if the child develops an emotionally close, consistent, and secure relationship with another adult, such as a grandparent, this external supportive relationship may buffer the potentially negative effects of the insecure parental relationship. As children get to an age when emotionally close friendships are able to be developed, close friends become important in the resistance of stressful circumstances.

Helping children to cognitively process events in their lives in an optimistic manner also may help them develop resilience. In *The Optimistic Child*, Martin Seligman (1995) describes a program that parents can use to help their children think about the causes of negative and positive events in an optimistic manner. Seligman's research has found that children who incorporate this optimistic thinking pattern express their feelings more effectively, have decreased risk for depression, and have overall better physical and mental health.

Children today are faced with many stressors. Some are within and some are beyond the boundaries of our control. However, we are able to provide them with nurturing, consistent, stable environments, familial and external support systems, and teach them ways to process the events in their lives in a manner that promotes resilience.

Kelli Hill Hunt, Ph.D.
Child and Adolescent Psychologist

Garnezy, N. (1985). Stress resistant children: The search for protective factors. In J. Stevenson (Ed.), *Recent research in developmental psychopathology*. Oxford: Pergamon Press (a book supplement to the *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, Number 4).

Rutter, M., Tizard, J., Yule, W., Graham, P., & Kingsley, W. (1976). Isle of Wight studies, 1964-1974. *Psychological Medicine*, 6, 313-332.

Seligman, M. (1995). *The optimistic child*. New York, NY: HarperPerennial.

C.O.O.L. Expansion

In May 2003, a remodeling crew broke through the wall of the Center's conference room in order to add two offices and more waiting room space to C.O.O.L., our children's department. C.O.O.L.'s recent expansion allows them to serve more children than they did last year (450 children and adolescents in 2002), and it provides parents with a more comfortable waiting room.

Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center Foundation

Only four out of ten Americans across all age groups have current wills. Do you have a will? If not, consider that a current will allows you:

- One last opportunity to express your values to your heirs;
- A chance to care for your heirs according to their special needs
- The occasion to make gifts to the charitable organizations that have touched your life.

(From the Leave a Legacy Iowa website:
www.leavealegacyiowa.org)

Please let the Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center know if you have already included a gift to our Foundation in your will. We would welcome the chance to recognize your legacy gift!

Help Us Serve People in Need

Contributions from people like you help the Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center serve people from all walks of life. Please consider making a donation to the Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center. Your gift could make a significant difference in the life of a man, woman, child, or teenager who needs counseling but is unable to afford it. For more information, call the Center at (515) 274-4006, or simply mail your contribution to Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center, 550 39th Street, Suite 100, Des Moines, IA 50312.

C.O.O.L. Corner

Swim! Swim! Swim!

Unplug the electronics!

Make time for family play!

Meeet new neighbors!

Enjoy friends and relatives!

Read a lot!

Attachment Theory in Adult Psychotherapy – A 10-Week Course Offered by the Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center

Dates: September 12 – November 21, 2003
Time: Fridays, 8:15-9:45 a.m.
Instructor: Susan Pierce, M.S., M.S.W.

This course will provide the participants with an understanding of attachment theory and how it can be applied in psychotherapy with adults. The important work of John Bowlby, Mary Ainsworth, and Daniel Stern will be covered, as well as more recent studies on the neurobiology of attachments. An understanding of attachment theory will provide the therapist with new ways of looking at and working with the emotional and relationship problems individuals and couples bring to therapy.

This course will be particularly relevant for those who work with adults who experienced childhood abuse and neglect. Attachment issues that surface in working with personality disorders, complex PTSD, and chemical dependency will be addressed, including common attachment dynamics that occur between client and therapist.

The Instructor



Susan Pierce, M.S., M.S.W., is a staff psychotherapist at Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center working with individuals, couples, and families. She is a Licensed Mental Health Counselor, a Licensed Master Social Worker, and a Member of the American Association of Pastoral Counselors.

The Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center is an Iowa Board of Social Work Examiners approved provider #0087 and Iowa Board of Behavioral Science Examiners approved provider #AS98-13. This course is approved for 15 hours of continuing education credit. The Center has applied to Des Moines Area Community College for nursing CEUs.

For more information or to register, call (515) 274-4006.

MANifest Events

Manifest Workshop: Manifest for Women

Date: Saturday, August 2, 2003
Time: 9:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.
Location: Queen's Point, 2793 St. Charles Road, 6 miles west of St. Charles
Cost: \$50, includes lunch

Male/female communication will be the focus of this first ever Manifest for Women workshop. The content will focus on the cultural changes in our society that have intensified the “Battle of the Sexes” and created a great deal of frustration for both men and women. The goal of the workshop is to assist women in understanding why the men in their lives may “just not get it” when they express themselves. Coming to a new understanding can promote empathy, new appreciation, and less frustration.

Manifest II Weekend: Men and Losses (for alumni only)

Date: Friday-Sunday, September 5-7, 2003
Time: Begins Friday evening. Ends Sunday noon.
Location: Retreat center southeast of Winterset (2412 St. Charles Road.)
Cost: \$175 – includes lodging and 5 meals.

Men talk easily about work, sports, and politics, but there are few opportunities for men to talk about their journey as a man. Manifest weekends provide opportunity for this discussion. Men often grow up with a deficit of masculine nurture. Our culture fails to provide a rite of passage to manhood where older adult males offer younger men affirmation and official recognition as men. Manifest weekends seek to create a sense of community that addresses these issues. Retreats are held in a rustic, outdoor setting that provides a sense of connection with nature.

Group size is limited to 12 participants for the weekend and 20 participants for the workshop. Reserve your place early by calling (515) 274-4006. Participants must pre-register. For more information about Manifest, call Lowell Houts or Mike Sears at (515) 274-4006.

Autumn 2003 - Pastoral Care Specialist Program

This two-year program is designed for the purpose of professional development and renewal for pastors, chaplains, and other persons involved in ministries of pastoral care. Participants meet once each month for learning about areas critical to effective pastoral care and for support, encouragement, and consultation on their work. The program begins in September and runs through June. Participants meet from 8:45 a.m. to noon on the second Tuesday of each month. Registration is limited to a total of eight persons each year.

For additional information, contact J. Jeffrey Means, Ph.D., Director of Clinical Services and Professional Education, at (515) 274-4006.

Proactive Parenting Class

Offered through West Des Moines Community Education
Instructor: Kelli Hill Hunt, Ph.D. (Pediatric Psychologist, C.O.O.L.)
Date: September 30, 2003
Time: 6:30 - 8:30 p.m.
Location: Stilwell Junior High
Details in the next issue of *Connecting*, or call (515) 274-4006.

Connecting Available Through Email

Please let us know if you would like to receive this newsletter through email rather than having a paper copy sent to you. To be added to our newsletter email list, email info@dmpcc.org and indicate in your message that you would like to receive *Connecting* by email. Make sure to include the name and street address to which we have been mailing the newsletter so that we can remove your name from our newsletter postal list. You will need Adobe Acrobat Reader (free software) to access the newsletter by e-mail.

www.dmpcc.org

Visit the Center's website for information on Center counseling services, Center staff members, support and interest groups offered by the Center, special events taking place in the coming months, and classes the Center offers to mental health clinicians and clergy.

CONNECTING

is a publication of the Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center, an independent, interfaith, not-for-profit organization. For over 30 years, the Center has been providing counseling and educational services to individuals, couples, and families for the purpose of enhancing emotional, spiritual, and relationship health. The Center has satellite offices in West Des Moines, Altoona, Ankeny, and Urbandale.

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