



The Labyrinth

NEWSLETTER

News from The Temenos Center

Fall 2010

In This Issue

Oiling The Wheels
Nothing To Be Fixed
What We Are Doing



"Sun & Flowers"
by Chloe

Beauty is eternity staring
itself in a mirror.

But you are eternity
and you are the mirror.

Kahlil Gibran

Oiling All the Wheels: How the Gifts of Praise and Attention Can Help Families Coping with ADHD

By Miriam Kazansky Horn, Ph.D.

Family life is all too often already a delicate balancing act that involves juggling careers, school, mealtimes, chores, and quality time with our children. When a child is identified with symptoms of ADHD, such as hyperactivity, not following through on tasks, difficulty listening, and being impulsive, the balancing act becomes a bit more complex, especially when there is a "typically developing" sibling. One of the biggest challenges for parents is trying to meet the different needs of both, or several, children.

In this case there is evidence for the old saying "it is the squeaky wheel that gets the oil." Research tells us that children diagnosed with ADHD tend to receive quite a bit of attention, in particular negative attention, from their parents; these children receive significantly more negative attention than their siblings. The child may be perceived as "the difficult one" and can exasperate parents easily. The child may need to be told something many times, or have a tendency to be disorganized and need parents to help them with structure during the day.

Meanwhile, it is easy for the more "typically" developing sibling to receive less attention, whether it is positive or negative. How does this child respond to getting less attention? Depending on age, disposition, sibling order, and many other mitigating factors, she may prefer to be quietly independent or introspective; alternatively, she may attempt to become the squeakier, noisier wheel, to make sure she gets noticed.

Two strategies can help families maintain balance and take care of the needs of two very different children:

1. Practice catching both children being "good." Instead of relying on our all-too-human tendency to focus on the negative, try to become increasingly aware of the times that your children listen, follow instructions, do something surprising without being asked, do their homework without too much complaining, put their shoes away, or complete a chore. Praise, a form of positive reinforcement, can go a long way. Catching your children being good can be very beneficial for both the child with ADHD and the sibling. For the hyperactive child, having parents begin to focus on giving positive attention can help boost self-confidence and support the child in feeling that they are not always in trouble and frustrating their parents. For the sibling, praise can help her to feel that she is being noticed. Praise can help a child to avoid having to become the squeaky wheel.

2. Try to spend at least 15 minutes, several times per week, doing an activity that is selected by one of your children. If it is possible to divide the children up and focus on one of them at a time, this exercise works even better. If it is not possible, have your children alternate choosing an activity. Preferably, the activity should not revolve around a screen (TV, computer, videogames, etc.). Research tells us that parents tend to, consciously or unconsciously, avoid spending quality time with a child who is perceived as "difficult." Giving the gift of time to a "difficult" child can help them to seek out less negative attention. Giving the same gift to their sibling can help him or her feel appreciated and valued, even if you continue to have to spend more time overall with your other child.

In both of these strategies, it is the parents who are changing the focus of their attention, and increasing their own awareness of the positive in their children. Whether a child has ADHD, or is just perceived as "difficult," the approach and attitude that parents take towards their children can make all the difference in creating a positive family environment.

Nothing Has To Be Fixed: A Conversation with Dr. Dan Gottlieb

By Natasha Horsley, MA, LPC



The theme of this edition of *The Labyrinth* is about families and how they learn to cope with disabilities, so Dr. Dan Gottlieb seemed like an ideal person to interview. Not only has he had quadriplegia for many years, but he also has a grandson who has been diagnosed with autism. Dr. Dan, as many call him, was a psychologist before his accident, but has since also become a nationally known radio show host, author, and speaker. Much of his work has been informed by his own personal experiences, and his openness is a large part of what makes him so popular and well loved.

Those who are willing to be open teach us that there is much less shame and stigma than we would ever have imagined in sharing our vulnerabilities with the world. Dan might say that he hasn't had a choice: because of his disability, his vulnerabilities have been obvious. He would probably also agree, however, that we all have a choice about how we handle our misfortunes, and that there is a paradoxical strength in exploring and sharing our vulnerabilities.

In fact, one of the first things he said when I asked to interview him about this topic was, "It's never about the disability Natasha. It's like when couple's fight about money, it's never really about the money." In the same way, family problems around disability are more about what the disability symbolizes.

He said that discussions about disability are always more productive when we talk about the underlying fear that disability will define our family; our fear of discovering our own or our loved one's limitations; of not being fully able to explore all our possibilities; or of our fear of being judged and even of succeeding. If we can explore and share these fears and limitations, we have a chance to feel whole again, at least in our hearts.

Dan said that all of his greatest insights began with two words, "Holy S*#t!" These two words are followed by, "This is terrible and it's not going to go away." And then two more words, "Now what?"

When Dan realized he had lost the use of his limbs permanently, the worst realizations were that he had lost his independence and even his sense of who he was and what his life was about. He said he was "overwhelmed with guilt about what I was doing to my family."

His daughters were 7 and 6 at the time. His eldest was most aware of what had happened and how it changed their lives and she said to him one day, "I hate you Daddy for breaking your neck and ruining my life." He added, "Of course she hated me. I hated me. My wife hated her life. Debbie (his youngest) was too scared to hate."

"After that," he said, "every developmental stage brought different reactions. After a little bit, I was just Daddy again. Then they were embarrassed about all the attention I got. Their elementary school built a special ramp just for me. Eventually they [the children] accommodated. That's when I realized that the bigger impact was not the disability but all of our reactions to the disability."

"Depression, mine and my wife's, affected the children more than the disability itself. I don't want to suggest that we weren't good parents. There was a lot of structure and a lot of support and encouragement. They had good lives. Now I have two grown daughters who both take a larger view of the world. My eldest is more private and loves animals as much as I love people. She's a veterinary nurse who now trains nurses and vets. She also travels around the country lecturing and wanting to make the world a better place. We just have a different focus."

Dan's younger daughter Debbie has a wonderful family of her own and her son, who was diagnosed with autism, is doing marvelously well. From her own experiences with disabilities and with her family's support, Debbie figured out how to get her son Sam tremendous care and he is now getting straight A's at school and is on the baseball team, things that were unimaginable a few years ago.

Despite their successes Dan realizes that, "I got broken wide open and I think they did too." He notices this more in Debbie, who he said was so scared when the accident first happened, and he notices that she still struggles with anxiety to this day.

He understands the tendency after a tragedy to "wait for the other shoe to drop." It might make more sense to believe that since the other shoe has already dropped we can stop worrying now. It is much more common, however, to be even more worried about when the next "other shoe" will drop.

Dan said, "I know that there are lots of 'other shoes' that can and will drop, but I am not that afraid. I've fallen down and broken so many times, I get how it works now: you fall down, and then you get up. The vast majority fall down and get up."

His favorite story about this, and the best therapy he can give, is about faith. He says that one day he was on his back deck and he was looking at a bank of windows. "I'm looking there and I see a dead leaf between the stucco and glass and then I look closer and I realize that it's not a dead leaf, it's a living piece of ivy. Where did it come from? That ivy burrowed through drywall, insulation and stucco to find its way to the sun, and you'd be making a mistake if you think that we humans are any different."

"My job," he says, "is to help people develop faith. Nothing has to be fixed."

Dr. Gottlieb will be giving a talk "Emotional Health of Families Who Have a Member with Special Needs" on March 2, 2011 at Campbell Special School. Please see Dr. Gottlieb's website www.drangottlieb.com for more information.

What We Are Doing

Jane Fox, LCSW, taught a class in mindfulness-based stress reduction for about 50 of the assistant teachers at a school for multiply challenged children aged 3 to 14 at Cerebral Palsy of North Jersey in Livingston on November 5. She has also been accepted into the Comprehensive Training in the Hakomi Method of Psychotherapy, a 375-hour, 2-year program which will start in late April in Princeton. Hakomi is based on mindfulness and is a body-centered method for deep healing (see the summer 2010 issue of *The Labyrinth* for an interview about Jane's previous Hakomi training).

In September, **Pat Duffy, LCSW**, and **Flavia Herzog, RD**, co-facilitated a ParentTalk for *A Chance to Heal* at Hatboro-Horsesham High School. ParentTalks are conversational workshops intended to help parents open communication, raise awareness, foster self-esteem, and positively influence their children in a society obsessed with thinness. In October, Pat and Flavia also attended another *A Chance to Heal* event, "BodyTalk: Empowering Our Kids in a Body Conscious World." The evening's presenters included Courtney Martin, author of *Perfect Girls, Starving Daughters: How the Quest for Perfection is Harming Young Women*. Both Pat and Flavia were very impressed with Ms. Martin's presentation and looking forward to reading her book.

Natasha Horsley, LPC, was interviewed for the article "Eating Disorders: Mysterious Menace" that appeared August 30 in the *Courier Post*. A portion of the article has been reprinted in an Eating Disorder blog found at <http://www.eating-disorder.com/blog/>.

In September, **Flavia Herzog, RD**, appeared in a live segment for CBS 3 on healthy lunch ideas that kids will actually eat and lunches that will keep kids fuller longer. On October 15th she appeared in another live segment, also on CBS 3, on healthy snacks for Phillies' game day that are all red and white.

Our newsletter The Labyrinth is published quarterly. We look forward to receiving submissions from you, our readers. Please feel free to submit your artwork or short writing pieces (no more than 750 words, please) or poetry on recovery-related themes to any of the Temenos therapists or by email to Catherine Ambrose at catherineambrose@temenoscenter.com. To protect your confidentiality, we will only use a first name or initials on your piece if we use it.

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"Lost in a Crowd"
by C.B.



"Tulips"
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