

Small boys need love

In 2000 Dr Martin Teicher MD, PhD of McLean Hospital, Belmont, MA in the United States reported on his research of 253 adults who had, as children, been physically neglected or sexually abused. He discovered something intriguing.

He found that for boys, neglect rather than sexual abuse was the main factor in limiting their development. His research suggested that neglect reduced the size of the corpus callosum, the neural fibers in the brain which connect left and right hemispheres, by between 24 – 42%. In the case of girls there was the same devastating effect, but in response to sexual abuse.

“These changes are permanent,” says Teicher. “This is not something people can just get over and get on with their lives.”

According to Prof. Steven Kermode of Southern Cross University, Australia, around 90% of children with behavioral problems are boys and over 80% of children with learning problems are also boys. Young men are also four times more likely to commit suicide than young women.

“Boys are affected by divorce or breakups very deeply as they get very little input from a male father figure, and then go on to become disconnected fathers themselves,” says international educator Joseph Driessen who is based in New Zealand. “The relationship between how they feel and how they act leaves them as sitting ducks for depression, drug and alcohol abuse, child abuse, family violence, personal and social failure. It is a damaging cycle.”

Unfortunately, it is a global problem.

The Center for Disease Control and Prevention in the United States reported that in 2010 assault was the third leading cause of death for children in the age group 1- 4 years. In the majority of cases either the father or a recent male partner was responsible. CDCP reported specific factors associated with these cases were parents who had themselves been abused and maltreated and lacked understanding of a child’s needs and development. Being victims as children caused them to fail in later life as men and fathers.

Two leading American child psychologists, Dan Kindlon, PhD and Michael Thompson, ask a crucial question: What do boys need that they are not getting? The answer is straightforward. Boys do not receive sufficient nurturing in their early years. They do not receive the emotional training they need to develop qualities such as empathy, compassion, sensitivity and warmth. They do not get the chance to develop secure attachments within their family and, importantly, they are deprived of loving touch.

Kindlon and Thompson make a compelling case that emotional literacy is the most valuable gift we can offer our sons, urging parents to recognize the price that boys pay when we hold them to an impossible standard of manhood. Parents play a major role in helping boys cultivate emotional awareness and empathy, giving them the vital connections and support they need to navigate the social pressures of life.

According to Dr Vera Fahlberg, a retired paediatrician and psychotherapist, touch deprivation in childhood is directly responsible for:

- Addiction to sensory stimulation in adulthood (sexual abuse)
- Lack of trust in others
- Depressive and autistic behaviour
- Violent and aggressive behaviour
- Demand for constant attention
- Difficulty recognising feeling in others and trouble recognising own feelings
- Demand for constant affection
- Lack of depth in relationship
- Impaired social maturity

How do we break the cycle of abuse? One way is with massage. I would like to share a story from my fellow friend American massage therapist, Tina Allen, who is using touch massage in a centre for family rehabilitation:

“During one visit at a shelter, I sat on the floor with the mothers and their children. We had a mixed group of mothers with infants, toddlers and children. One little boy, Sam, was six-years-old and sat next to his mother during the class. The director of the shelter had shared with me that Sam was quite an aggressive little boy and would often lash out. Throughout our lesson, Sam refused to have his mother massage him. As we began massage on each body area, we took time and asked permission. Every time mum asked Sam's permission, he said no. He instead asked a teddy bear's permission and would massage the bear. As it came time to massage the face, I had an idea. I suggested Sam ask mom if she would like a massage on her face. He liked this idea and scooted in front of his mom, warmed his hands and asked permission. Sam watched diligently as I demonstrated each massage stroke on my face. He lovingly placed his hands on mom's cheeks and provided gentle strokes. Sam asked her if the massage was too hard. Mom said no, it felt good, as the tears streamed down her cheeks. Together, they shared a special moment I felt privileged to witness.

Both mum and the shelter director have credited our massage time as the intervention that broke the cycle of abuse. The traumatizing effects of abuse might be felt for a very long time. Many times it is not only our hands which provide the best care, but rather our hearts and minds sharing the information to empower others to be successful.”

What about older boys, those who already attend schools? Can massage offer something for them as well?

There is a large amount of academic research data confirming the positive influence of massage for decreasing the level of aggression and improving academic and cognitive skills of students. For example just to name four, Touch Research Institute , through Carolynska Institute /Uppsala University in Sweden and in New Zealand, Eastern Institute of Technology www.childconnection.org.nz/research

I would like to share a story from our own backyard in New Zealand. It is the school holidays in Auckland. A “Children Massaging Children” massage in schools programme is in action as part of Holiday Programme at Woodlands Park, Kereru. The children are excited as today there will be massage lessons. Children will practice “real” massage on each other.

Yoka is a trained CMC instructor and sports massage therapist and is running today's lesson. She will teach massage techniques that are similar to those massage therapists use in their

clinics. She knows the main benefits will be learning empathy and enhancing brain metabolism by secretion of endorphins or good mood hormones like serotonin, dopamine, oxytocin – all natural antidepressants.

The children sit in silence as Yoka gives a short explanation which is followed with a song. First technique, she calls, massage a back. You can see the smiling faces of children. They love it. Scratch, scratch like a little Siamese cat, says Yoka, play the spine like a gigantic piano, knead like making some dough to make some bread. The song lasts for 4 minutes and then the children change roles so that each gives as well receives the massage. For the next technique, Yoka says, we will use a beautifully smelling massage wax for a hand massage.

The door opens and the manager of the centre enters. She sits on a bench near the wall observing the children practicing massage. Yoka has explained to the manager that all products used are a gift from Tui Balms of Takaka who have sponsored Child Connection for more than a decade by providing their products free of charge. In our programmes, she explains, smell plays a vibrant role. It is one of the important senses that positively influences young brain development by being stimulated with fragrances. The fragrance stays on the skin for a long time “doing its job” by prolonging the influence of the lesson and producing neuropeptides /good mood hormones over a longer period.

Yoka explains to the children the hands massage is named “Hands Aerobic” and tells the story of three generations of a family uniting all 3 generations as fingers of one hand; father is the thumb – mother, grandmother and grandfather fingers and the child who is the little finger. All fingers need a massage.

Boys have chosen boys to practice; girls are working on their friends. The 45 minutes lesson goes very fast. At the end of the presentation children ask to repeat once more their favourite technique: “massage a back”.

At the close of the lesson the manager expresses her deep surprise and says, “If I had not seen it with my own eyes I would never have believe it. Here are my “boisterous” boys performing so quietly without any interruptions and hassles for the whole programme. What an uplifting picture.”

Next day she reported to me that the children spontaneously repeated the lesson by themselves without instructor and music or wax. They remembered all of the techniques. Why ? They enjoyed it so much.

It is good to know that schools and the whole education system can have a significant contribution to this process.

Working together parents at home and the education system in classrooms using positive touch we can break the viscous circle of family violence.

And this is what PREVENTION is all about.

Mc Lean Hospital study ;

http://www.mcleanhospital.org/PublicAffairs/20001214_child_abuse.htm

The Centre for Disease Control and Prevention

http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nvsr/nvsr60/nvsr60_04.pdf

Massage Today

<http://www.massagetoday.com/mpacms/mt/article.php?id=14562>