

Issue 10

the Parenting *ideas* magazine



Helping today's parents raise exceptional kids

MAKING CHILDREN'S
**BIRTHDAYS
SPECIAL**

TWO HOMES,
ONE HEART

Page 02

**AUTISM
SPECTRUM**

Page 10



INSTAGRAM

"MAKES PHOTOS FUN"

Page 08

IS YOUR CHILD READY TO
ATTEND A **FUNERAL?**

Page 12

**THE NIGHTMARE OF
ADOLESCENT SLEEP**

Page 06





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VIP (Very Important Parenting) Saturday was a fantastic half day of parenting fun, learning and inspiration with Michael Grose and Bruce Sullivan. It was a blast!

We captured all the action, learning and laughter on film and it's now available for you to enjoy in high quality DVD. [ORDER HERE](#)

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Welcome to the tenth edition of Parentingideas magazine, designed to give you up-to-date advice and to make your parenting easier.

The number of Australian children of separated parents now exceeds one million, and there's much at stake when coordinating their back-and-forth movement between two homes. Parentingideas journalist **Karen Fontaine** explores the complex issue and has some surprisingly simple solutions.

There's no doubt children's birthday parties are now bigger than ever. But BIG doesn't necessarily mean better. In fact, children don't always need to celebrate their birthday with a party. I've written an article suggesting some fun and meaningful ways to celebrate your children's birthdays without the BIG birthday bash.

Maggie Dent is one of Australia's wisest parenting educators and in this issue she shows her smarts once more. She turns her attention to the issue of teenage sleep.....or rather lack of sleep. It's an important article with great suggestions to help parents get teens on the right sleep track.

First there were mobile phones. Then along came Facebook and now there's a new fad capturing the attention of young people. I'm talking about Instagram, the new social media phenomenon that's overtaking Facebook as the go-to-platform for teenagers. Kidproof's **Catherine Gerhardt** unravels the riddle of Instagram and gives savvy advice for parents about regulating its use.

New contributor **Angelica Rose** poses the question, "How do you make friends when you're busy studying insects?" This is the title of her insightful contribution for parents to help kids on the autism spectrum make friends. Welcome to the magazine Angelica.

Any parent who has experienced the death of someone close will know how difficult it can be talking about it with children. New Parentingideas journalist **Kath Walters** explores this sensitive issue, providing a lovely insight into how children experience the death of loved ones. She also provides sage advice for readers about the delicate issue of whether kids should attend a funeral or not.

Sometimes we can over-complicate things as parents, trying to be the best we can be. Parentingideas favourite **Bill Jennings** has continued a story he began in the previous issue that reminds us all that sometimes great parenting is about simply 'turning up' for your kids. You'll love the message.

Yes, there's a lot to love about this issue of Parentingideas magazine.

Enjoy!

Michael Grose

PS: If you enjoy this edition of Parentingideas magazine then do all the writers a favour and PASS IT ON to a friend, colleague or family member. Email it with a personalised message. Best of all, It's FREE!



About Michael Grose

Michael is widely regarded as Australia's No. 1 parenting educator. The author of eight books for parents his latest *Thriving!* has been described "as the new roadmap for raising 3-12 year olds with confidence, character and resilience." He supports over 1,000 Australian schools and hundreds and thousands of parents with his practical, easy-to-read resources. An in-demand speaker Michael is one of fewer than 100 Certified Speaking Professionals (CSP's) in Australia. Contact 1800 004 484 to find out how to have Michael liven up your next conference or event.



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BY KAREN FONTAINE

TWO HOMES, ONE HEART

With the number of Australian children of separated parents exceeding one million, there's much at stake when coordinating their back-and-forth movement between two homes, writes Karen Fontaine

A divorced Canadian couple made international headlines last month with the construction of a duplex-style home – at the centre of which are the bedrooms of their children, aged eight and ten.

Doors at either end of the duplex's central hallway lead to each parent's self-contained 'wing'. Each week, one parent has custody of the children; during that week the door to the other parent's wing is locked, maintaining a relative privacy for that parent. This arrangement provides stability for the kids, who don't have two homes but rather two parents who alternate their care from week to week.

It's certainly a novel approach at a time when parental divorce affects the lives of nearly one in five young Australians under the age of 20 – "a disruption related to long-term social and economic disadvantages", according to the Australian Institute of Family Studies.

This is a position supported by Sydney family law professor Patrick Parkinson. In a recent research paper entitled *For Kids' Sake*, Parkinson brought together extensive evidence showing that parental separation is a significant risk factor for children's long-term emotional wellbeing and educational performance.

Another expert, Dr Nicky McWilliam, a lawyer/mediator with Sydney Mediation Partnership, spends a third of her working week dealing with separating parents. She notes, "there are always issues with contact arrangements for the children".

Unlike in times gone by, when children automatically lived with their mother and might have spent every second weekend with their dad, shared-care situations are becoming much more common, says McWilliam.

"Most of the time the children are split evenly from week to week and sometimes even from day to day," she says.

In a shared-care situation, academic challenges can arise, says Jacqui Marquis-Conder, Principal Psychologist at Youth Psychology. This is particularly the case if there is a



lengthy commute to one parent's home on some weekdays, allowing less time for homework.

"Routines are also usually different in each home and some parents are better than others at supervising homework," says Marquis-Conder. "Academic challenges and even learning difficulties will most certainly arise if there are behaviour issues associated with unresolved and ongoing emotional distress."

A recent study on the effect of divorce or separation on young children and older children found that, contrary to what many public policy makers believe, children are most affected by changes to their family structure in the first five years of life.

Leading a study of 3,492 children into how remarriage and integration into a blended family affected behaviour throughout their early and mid-adolescent years, Rebecca M. Ryan of the Department of Psychology at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C. found that children of married parents demonstrated the most dramatic behavioural changes later in life if their parents divorced prior to their first year of school.



When handled sensitively, there are many benefits to shared care as it allows children to build meaningful and ongoing relationships with both of their parents, says Jacqui Marquis-Conder.

“Logistics aside, if parents are able to form an amicable shared-care arrangement, and work out a communication style that does not involve the children in their conflict, then shared care can be ideal for children as well as parents. It breaks from what is often single parenting after separation,” she says.

Interestingly, Ryan’s study also showed that children who are integrated into a new blended family have fewer behaviour problems than those who are not. “In fact, children of blended families actually receive protective benefits that seem to help them avoid some of the negative behaviors exhibited by children who remain in single-parent households,” Ryan says.

For Marquis-Conder, what this study highlights is that “step-parents and step- and/or half-siblings can play a very crucial role in a child’s life if they are able to form a relationship built on warmth and trust”.

“I have certainly seen many cases where a child has a warm, loving and close relationship with their step-parents and siblings and this certainly provides protective benefits and potentially increases the child’s resilience,” she says.

Dr McWilliam agrees. “I have dealt with parents whose separation caused a lot of hurt and anxiety but they have managed to sort out two homes for the kids in a very loving and stable way,” she says.

“A lot of that, I think, is due to giving the kids lots of information – making them aware of what’s happening for the next hour, the next day, the next week, the next year – and doing a lot of talking and communicating.”

“It’s about explaining to the kids that although they are no longer in a relationship with the other parent, they respect that every parent has a different style. And no matter how young a child is, what’s bearing out from my practice is that that really makes a difference.”

Jacqui Marquis-Conder, Principal Psychologist of Youth Psychology, a private practice in Sydney (<http://www.youthpsychology.com.au/>), offers tips on how parents can ease the pressure on children for whom they share care:

1. Establish a shared-care arrangement that is **child focused** not **parent focused**. “A shared-care arrangement should always reflect the needs of the child first, not the parent. Parents need to ask themselves: ‘Is this about me wanting to get my way or have control of the situation, or is this about what is best for my child?’. For example, if the child must be at both before- and after-school care or do a very long commute in order to spend a particular day with a parent, is this actually in the best interests of the child? This is for the parents to decide, depending on their child’s age and particular needs.”
2. **Establish a routine**, particularly during the week. “This can be a huge challenge but if it can be achieved for both parents to enforce regular homework, meal, and bedtimes for their children, this will help the school week go smoothly.”
3. No matter how tempting, **never speak badly about the other parent to the children** (this goes for new partners as well). “This doesn’t mean that you have to say nice things about the other parent but in this case it is wise to follow the good old-fashioned advice ‘if you don’t have something nice to say, don’t say anything at all’. This includes subtle jokes, hints or sarcastic comments – even very young children understand the meaning behind these! And do not under any circumstances share communication from the other parent with your child such as showing them email or text message correspondence.”
4. **Make pick-ups and drop-offs as stress free as possible for the children**. “If the conflict is so high that parents cannot even be in the same room, then try to establish a neutral pick-up and drop-off spot such as a public park or café. All heated discussions should be held well away from the hearing or sight of the children (whether in person, on the phone, or through text message).”



BY MICHAEL GROSE

MAKING CHILDREN'S BIRTHDAYS SPECIAL

Children's birthday parties seem to be getting bigger every year. But bigger is not always better when it comes to celebrating children's birthdays

There's no doubt a child's birthday is a special day. It's one day of the year when they legitimately become the centre of attention for their family and friends.

It's not just children for whom birthdays have significance. A child's birthday is also a milestone for mums and dads. Another year older means another year along the parenting journey and plenty of fond memories too.

Traditionally a child's birthday has been recognised with gifts, a family gathering, and perhaps a special treat with a few friends. Essentially it's been a relatively low-key family affair with parties to celebrate milestones such as fifth, tenth and thirteenth birthdays.

Over the last decade children's birthday parties have become an annual celebration; and they've become increasingly bigger events.

Where once a few good friends would gather; we are now seeing the emergence of the BIG party where everyone, or close to everyone, in a child's class gets

an invitation whether they are close friends or not. This **Big Birthday Party Phenomenon** is interesting to say the least.

It's obviously beneficial for the 'birthday child' as the number of presents they receive increases astronomically. Somehow there is something not quite right about a child receiving twenty or more presents, not to mention the gifts from his or her family.

Having the whole gang along removes the special opportunity for celebrating a birthday with their closest friends.

I know many parents organise whole class parties to encourage friendships. However in wanting to promote friendships they may inadvertently be making it more difficult for kids to form friendships as little differentiation is given between a good friend and a child in their wider social circle when invitations are issued en masse. Good friends need to be recognised as such.



Some parents invite the whole class so that no child is left out or feels disappointed. That's a great intention, but it removes the chance for parents to teach the 'birthday child' to be discreet when issuing invitations and to be mindful of the feelings of those that aren't invited. It also removes the difficult decision-making process of choosing whom to invite from a child, which can be a great learning experience in itself.

The **Big Birthday Party Phenomenon** places enormous pressure on parents to come up with something bigger and better every year. Backing up a BIG PARTY year after year is hard work.

If you are over the **Big Birthday Party Phenomenon** here are a few ideas to make celebrating your child's birthday special, keep the budget and your sanity in tact and incorporate your child's friends as well:

1. **Alternate** birthday parties with gatherings or sleepovers of a few friends (without presents) every two or three years.
2. If you have a party each year then consider **matching** the number invited with their age. That is, six year olds can have six friends and so on.
3. **Identify** the different groups your child is in and allow him or her to invite a small number from each group. So school friends mix with friends from outside school.
4. **Involve** children in choosing and preparing the activities, food and treats for their party.
5. If organising a BIG BIRTHDAY BASH is for you, then keep it for your child's **milestones** such as their tenth birthday.

Birthdays like a lot of things can get out of hand. It's probably better to aim for SPECIAL rather than BIG and that means surrounding your child by his family and **close** friends to celebrate his or her special day of the year.

NOTE: Get your Kids' Chores & Responsibilities Kit when you subscribe to Happy Kids, Michael's FREE weekly parenting guide at parentingideas.com.au



A CHILD'S BIRTHDAY IS A SPECIAL DAY

Michael Grose, Parentingideas

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BY MAGGIE DENT

THE NIGHTMARE OF ADOLESCENT SLEEP

Most teenagers are sleep-deprived, but it doesn't have to be this way.

One clear casualty of sleep deprivation is learning. That's a tragedy – a recent tragedy. — Professor William Dement, Stanford University

Poor sleep impacts on every level of an adolescent's health and wellbeing: it can make them sick, dumb, grumpy, negative, fat and depressed.

Adolescents need more sleep than pre-pubescent or adults. This is a biological need due to the massive changes happening physically and within the brain during this period. With sudden growth spurts, particularly in boys, adolescents experience huge waves of intense lethargy.

Hormonal changes create more melatonin which means, chemically, the body is demanding more sleep. There is also a big shift in the adolescent circadian rhythm. Suddenly they are more alert in the afternoon and evening and need more sleep in the morning.

For approximately 75 per cent of adolescents, their sleep clock moves up to 1.5 hours later, which means they are not ready for sleep until much later. As our school starting times don't adjust to this, our adolescents are frequently operating on much less sleep than they need.

To beat the frustration of sleeplessness, adolescents will often go online to entertain themselves, connect on social networks, play games or chat with their equally awake friends.

This re-stimulates them and the light emitted from screens delays the natural night-time build up of melatonin that would otherwise make them sleepy. Then, when their body is finally ready for sleep, it will be even later than the 1.5 hour difference. Is it any wonder so many adolescents can be so difficult to wake up in the morning?

The sleep deficit

Most adolescents run on a 'sleep deficit'. This has significant negative effects on their wellbeing. Research

has shown that when more is learnt during the day, then more sleep is required at night. This is so the brain can process and consolidate the memories.

Vital gene activities need to occur during Rapid Eye Movement (REM) sleep to ensure synaptic plasticity, or the strengthening of neural connections. Basically, without deep sleep we don't store or process what we've learnt during the day.

New spaces for learning grow every night after the existing spaces for learning have been filled. Without REM sleep, there are no new cells, and adolescents arrive at school tired and with a brain that is like a motel with a 'NO VACANCY' sign up.

This information is critical for adolescents to know because they often think they are dumb when they don't retain information or they fail tests ... when they have simply not given their brain a fair go.

The high cost of poor sleep

Many adolescents sleep with an active mobile phone and get woken by texts or social media alerts. When I share this



information about sleep with adolescents, they often tell their friends that their mobile will be on silent for school nights. We must remember that time management is not a strength that has developed with adolescence and they can genuinely waste hours in the middle of the night without realising it – and without their parents realising it!

Researchers have also discovered sleep deprivation can result in depression (especially among girls), anxiety, daytime sleepiness, moodiness, hyperactivity and emotional vulnerability. Other problems include a reduction in motivation to initiate long-term or abstract goals, and a decrease in persistence to want to work towards such goals.

The consequences of insufficient sleep in adolescents can be frightening. They include:

- ▶ Missed school
- ▶ Sleepiness – including micro-sleeps
- ▶ Negative synergy with alcohol
- ▶ Decreased creativity
- ▶ Tiredness (decreased motivation)
- ▶ Lower school grades
- ▶ Irritability and low-frustration tolerance
- ▶ Higher risk of car accidents
- ▶ Increased anxiety and stress symptoms
- ▶ Over eating and yearning for high-fat foods
- ▶ Difficulties with self-control of attention and positive behavior choices
- ▶ Difficulties with focused attention and emotional stability
- ▶ Direct effects on learning and memory consolidation, and memory deficits
- ▶ Health consequences: illness, poor skin, delayed growth and development.

Switching on to sleep

The influence sleep has on today's adolescents is deep. Too many survive the crippling effects of sleepiness by consuming high caffeine energy drinks, eating high sugar and high fat foods and playing loud music. Adolescents think this is normal behaviour, but they are quite ignorant of the effects these stimulating forces have on their sleep-deprived bodies.

So what can you do to help your adolescent get a better night's sleep? Talk to them about the consequences of poor sleep and give them some tips to build a better sleep pattern.

Tips for better sleep:

- ▶ Avoid stimulating substances.
- ▶ Create clear sleep boundaries before puberty.
- ▶ Get plenty of sunlight.
- ▶ Avoid alcohol—especially at night.
- ▶ Create a pattern of sleep preparation such as: shower, teeth, toilet.
- ▶ Avoid TV and all screens (including phones) at least an hour before bed.
- ▶ Turn mobile phones off or on silent.
- ▶ Use calming music or a relaxation recording.
- ▶ Try to be in bed at the same time each night.
- ▶ Aim for eight to nine hours of sleep each night.
- ▶ Create a calm bedroom by removing clutter and using aromatherapy.
- ▶ Drink calming teas like chamomile or warm milk based drinks.
- ▶ Spend two minutes in bed breathing deeply and relaxing the body.



Maggie Dent

Author, educator and speaker dedicated to quietly changing lives through commonsense wisdom. This article is based on an extract from her book, *Saving Our Adolescents: Supporting Today's Adolescents through the Bumpy Ride to Adulthood*. Check out her blogs, newsletter and other resources at

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BY CATHERINE GERHARDT

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL WITH INSTAGRAM?

Kidproof's Catherine Gerhardt gives the parenting lowdown on Instagram, the new social media phenomenon currently sweeping across girlworld.

Earlier this year my 11-year-old asked me if she could have access to Instagram. Heard of it? It's a social networking phenomenon that is taking the tween population by storm. In a nutshell, Instagram is a photo sharing app that makes photos fun.

Instagram is steadily growing in popularity among young and teen social networkers. At first it seems a relatively harmless way of sharing photos with each other via a smartphone. You can crop, adjust, reduce red eye and add filters. Even very ordinary photos can suddenly become appealing and interesting.

However, we are hearing from a lot of schools that Instagram is quickly taking over the social networking circuits and creating havoc within and between social groups. It is a sideways slide into social networking. Set up an account and within seconds you are able to comment, like and check out what your friends are doing. Facebook is out, Instagram is in.

What parents need to know

Instagram is a social networking service, and just like all other social networks "You must be at least 13 years old to use this Service". Why 13? The age of 13 has to do with COPPA – the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (in the USA) which simply applies to the online collection of personal information by persons under 13 years of age. A child who provides a fake birthday to get onto a social networking site is helping that site break the law, as they are unknowingly collecting information from an under-age child. The internet is the biggest public place our kids can possibly hang out in. Rules and guidelines are there for good reason.

How does it work?

Users can upload a photo from their smartphone

photo album or take a photo right then and there and use Instagram to change the way the photo looks. Instagram may be used as a photo-sharing social network on its own, but users also have the option to upload the photo to a number of other social media sites simultaneously, including Twitter, Facebook, Flickr, Tumblr and Foursquare –depending on which one(s) the user syncs their settings with.

Privacy

The most important thing for users and parents to be aware of is that Instagram defaults to a public setting. Your profile and photos are public unless you tell it otherwise. Many parents may feel more secure knowing that their child has set their account



INSTAGRAM IS A PHOTO SHARING APP THAT MAKES PHOTOS FUN

to private, but watch to see how many followers your child has allowed onto their site. A child with a private setting that claims to have 222 followers means they have accepted 222 people to follow them, and not many tweens can say they genuinely socialise face-to-face with that many kids – no way! Remember even a private setting is still in a global public space, and the user's profile information is always public.

Signing up for an Instagram account requires that the user provide a username. In many cases young children use their real first and last names to create their accounts. To make matters worse, the sign-up process has an optional phone number section where users can submit their phone number as part of their **public** profile. Talking with your kids about what is private information, such as a phone number, and explaining why we don't give this away is a great place to start.

Geotagging

Once a photo has been taken and is ready to share, the option of 'geotagging' – including details of the location of the photo – comes up. This option has to be checked, however as with most touch screen devices errors can easily occur and a photo can be inadvertently geotagged. Geotagging is a great way to showcase where a photo was taken, but it can also



alert others to where the photographer has been, if not where they might be at that moment.

Blocking and reporting users and content

Although it seems innocent enough, there are users out there who will post inappropriate pictures. People will and do upload nude photos, drug use, and other inappropriate content. Social networking sites such as Instagram provide tools to block or report content and users and it would be a good idea to learn how to use them.

What can I do?

As a parent, continue to monitor your child's internet presence. At this time, it is not possible to sign up for an Instagram account on their website – it must be done by downloading the app to a smartphone. The app may be on your child's mobile device without you even knowing about it.

Help your child adjust their privacy settings at the outset so that their photos are only shared with face-to-face friends. Speak with your child about the safety concerns you may have if they accept requests from people they do not have real-life relationships with.

Sign up with Instagram yourself and have a go so that you understand how it works. If your child has an account, follow your child and monitor their behaviour to determine if Instagram is an appropriate hang out for them.

The answer for my 11 year old daughter was "not yet". However, she is welcome to use my account with my permission as we learn to navigate this new world of social media and digital citizenship together.

Catherine Gerhardt, Kidproof Melbourne

Kidproof provides proactive and preventative child and family education programs. We work with schools, community groups and other child centric organisations. We provide peace of mind for parents and create safer communities for everyone.

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HOW DO YOU MAKE FRIENDS WHEN YOU'RE TOO BUSY STUDYING INSECTS?

Help your child on the autism spectrum build friendships by learning about non-verbal cues

"I get by with a little help from my friends"

The Beatles had it right when they sang these words. We all need a little help from our friends from time to time. Friendship enriches our lives, helps us get through the tough times and celebrate the good times. It's well established that children who have even one friend throughout their school years will handle transitions and stress better and are less susceptible to bullying. Children and adolescents with high-functioning autism spectrum disorders (the 'spectrum') can struggle to make friends, potentially making the social world more confusing and overwhelming for them.

Many children on the spectrum want to make and maintain friendships, but don't know how to go about it in a socially appropriate way. I have spoken to many parents over the years who describe their own sadness and frustration as they watch their child make social attempts which are either ignored or openly rejected by other children. Or they observe their child not noticing or responding to offers of friendship.

Being on the spectrum affects a child's ability to understand 'theory of mind' which, put simply, is a person's ability to understand that someone else has different thoughts and feelings to you. This translates into the playground in the challenge a child can have with understanding that another boy wants to play with the trucks in the sandpit while he or she is completely consumed by his/her interest in insects.

Donna Williams, famous author, autism consultant and self described 'autie', likens being autistic to being on one track, whereas the rest of us 'neurotypicals' (those not on the spectrum) can multi-track.

This means that she finds it challenging to talk with another person while noticing that person's non-verbal cues simultaneously. In face-to-face communication, research has shown that non-verbal communication makes up a significant amount of all messages sent and received between people, with words making up the rest.

Non-verbal Communication Channels:

1. Facial Expression
2. Body Language
3. Tone of Voice
4. Personal Space

Do you remember learning how to recognise facial expressions? Many of these skills are learnt naturally through play at an early age. Most of us neurotypicals notice others' cues while we are speaking and can respond to them appropriately, usually without much conscious effort. For people on the spectrum it is often not so easy.

The good news is that children on the spectrum can learn to recognise and respond to non-verbal cues. If they do, it becomes easier for them to notice and respond to an offer of play, even when they've been studying their favourite insect!

Greetings: a great place to start learning about non-verbal cues

Greetings are a natural and integral part of our social world and relationships, and while it may seem obvious to us neurotypicals, it may not be so for a child on the spectrum. Greetings are actually

incredibly complex. There are many factors that affect the way a greeting is made: your relationship with the person, any age difference, the situation, the length of time since you've seen that person. For example, do I have to say hello again to my friend who I walked past in the classroom two hours ago? How much eye contact should I make? All this is a lot to take in and make a decision on in an instant!

One of my students once asked me, "Why should I say hello to someone when they say hello to me?" This is a really good question. It's helpful to explain to a child why it's important to respond to a greeting. A simple, logical answer is that one day you might want to play with that child, or have to do a project together, so it's good to say hello back to them. It's part of positive relationship building. Sometimes a child might not respond to a greeting because they haven't processed the words and situation quickly enough to respond, but with practice it becomes easier.



Here are some tips on helping a child on the spectrum become more aware of non-verbal cues:

- ▶ **Notice how the child communicates when greeting people:** If you notice a difference between the child's expression and the message they are intending to send, then have a chat with him/her about their messages.

Tip: Once a week have a chat about a social situation that recently occurred. For example, "I noticed you didn't respond to the other kid when he said hello. What happened there?"

- ▶ **Notice how you communicate when greeting others:** A parent is the most important person in a child's life and modelling good communication yourself will go a long way towards helping a child.

Tip: Once a week ask the child to see if they can guess how you are feeling when you greet them after school. For example, you may have smiled and made eye contact even though you were feeling tired after a long day.

- ▶ **Have a chat about other people's communication:** Noticing how other people communicate is an effective and powerful way to help a child become more aware of the non-verbal cues that occur between people.

Tip: A fun activity could be to watch 10 minutes of a TV show together and then discuss how the characters greeted each other and why.

Angelica Rose

Founder and principal of Voice and Movement, an organisation dedicated to helping children make and maintain friendships. For the past 11 years, her unique Drama for Everyday Life Program has been delivering social skills in a practical and fun way to children and adolescents with Asperger's Syndrome and high functioning autism, with outstanding results. For your invitation to a free information evening and other events email

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Voice & Movement
Drama for Everyday Life Program



BY KATH WALTERS

IS YOUR CHILD READY TO ATTEND A FUNERAL?

Allowing your children to attend a funeral is a very personal decision and few make it without guidance.



Darren Eddy has been a funeral director for 25 years. Without exception, every family asks him the question: should we bring the children to the funeral?

Eddy, that national president of the Australian Funeral Directors Association, knows the answer is an intensely personal one. Nevertheless, he tries to reassure parents that attending a funeral is unlikely to cause children distress -- as long as they have the choice -- and will likely to be a positive experience.

Many parents disagree. They are worried that children will be overwhelmed, confused or frightened. They also worry that young children might disturb others.

The research does not support this view, however. In a study conducted by a British educational psychologist, Dr John Holland, a specialist in grief and children, reveals that attending funerals does not harm children.

Holland made a study of adults who had lost a parent while still at school. Of the 47% who attended the funeral, none

reported any negative consequences. Two-thirds said it was a positive experience; they reported that they felt able to "say goodbye" and to "grasp reality".

Melbourne-based grief counsellor, Bette Phillips, is a passionate advocate of demystifying death and grief. She helps families and communities recover after workplace deaths. "There is a lot of fear around grief and death," she says. "The more our kids are exposed -- sensitively and carefully -- to death, the more they realise that grief is a natural emotion."

Eddy agrees. In fact, children can sometimes show us the way. When his own Grandmother died, Eddy's father declined the chance to view her in the casket. It was then that Eddy's daughter, aged eight, stepped in. She had no fears (having been around funerals all her life). After getting on a chair to look into the casket, she ran out and look Eddy' father by the hand. "She look beautiful," she re-assured him. After initially hesitating, he followed the child's lead and spent a precious half an hour saying goodbye.

Fears and choice

Few children would be so at home around a casket as Eddy's daughter. However, prevented from seeing a coffin, the deceased, and even seriously-ill relatives, some children blame themselves, feel personally rejected, or dream up gruesome images in their minds. Eddy recalls: "One little boy, protected from seeing his dying grandfather, said sadly to his father, 'Pop doesn't want to see me'."

In Holland's study, the majority of respondents (53%) did not attend their parent's funeral as children. The impact on them as adults was closely tied to the issue of choice. The 75% who later wished they had gone to the funeral -- reporting regret, exclusion, hurt and frustration -- were either forbidden or distracted from attending the event. The 25% of non-attenders who experience no negative effects

were those who made their own choice not to attend.

However, Phillips has a caveat: not all children – especially young ones – should go to the graveside for the burial. “Some little ones – 10 and under – might find it very frightening that the person in the coffin is covered up,” Phillips says. “It is very much a case of how mature your child is, what your child understands.”

Why children see death the way they do

Children are aware of death – they see insects die, or have pets that die, Eddy says. Nevertheless, families struggle to discuss death with children. “Just because we don’t talk about death, doesn’t mean we don’t communicate,” he says. (See box: “Tips for talking to kids about death”)

Pre-school children see death as temporary, while those aged six to nine see it as inevitable for everyone *except themselves*, according to the National Institute of Health (US).

Above 10, children realise that death takes us all, and teenagers often grapple with the philosophical issues raised by death. Individual experience, temperament and background also play a role. Children mature at different rates.

Grief involves many emotions including pain, sadness, anger, anxiety, loneliness and often a sense of shock, unreality and withdrawal.

Eddy is careful not to use “soft words” such as “Grandma has ‘gone to sleep’ or ‘gone away’ because of likely misunderstandings. He uses simple words: “Grandma has died, which is sad, but that is what happens. We are all sad because we will miss her. It is okay to cry.”

Phillips finds some children (and adults) can express their feeling more easily in drawing or in play.

Preparing children for funerals

Explaining what happens at funerals helps children decide if they want to participate, and prepares them.

They need to know, for example, that there will be a lot of people, many will be sad, and some will be crying, including mum and dad. “They need to know that the reason people are sad is because the person who has died has left us now,” Phillips says.

Some funeral celebrants involve children in the ceremony, and some facilities have play spaces for children.

Acknowledging that people believe different things about death can be comforting for children,” the Institute of Health says. “By indicating our acceptance and respect for others’ beliefs, we make it easier for our children to choose beliefs different from our own but which are more comforting to them.”

Violent or accidental deaths and suicides tend to have a broad community effect. The issues are the same when it comes to attending the funeral, but such deaths mean children are likely to overhear comments from many people. This puts the onus on parents to communicate with great sensitivity with their children.

Professional help

When parents feel overwhelmed, angry or unable to talk calmly with their children, professionals can help. “Family and friends have very different opinions,” Phillips says, and can complicate the picture. Grief counsellors, doctors, psychologists or members of the church can help.

If, after reading this story, you are in need of grief assistance, please contact your local doctor. If you need to talk to someone straight away call: Lifeline 13 11 14 (Australia local call) Kids Helpline 1800 55 1800 (Australia free call)

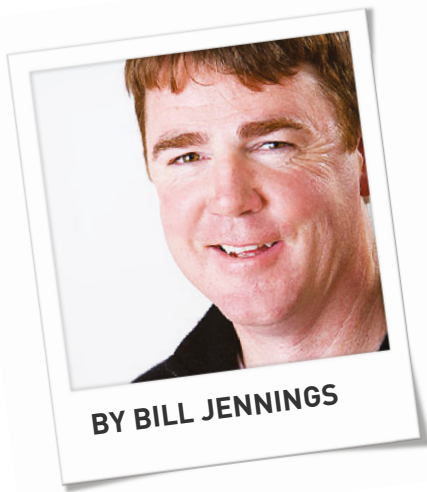
Tips for talking to children about death

1. Keep the language simple, age appropriate, and use as few words as you can.
2. Listen to the question and answer only what your child has asked, not more.
3. Be honest. Admit when you don’t know the answer to a question about death, funerals or your feelings.
4. Try not to apologise for your emotions. Instead, reassure children that it is okay to feel sad and cry when someone dies.
5. Encourage your children to other forms of expression, drawing or playing for example.

Kath Walters

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TURNING UP – PART 2

Bill Jennings continues the story he began in the last issue about being there for your kids.

In the last edition I shared with you my very inauspicious, [short-lived career as the coach](#) of a junior soccer team. In 2011 I coached the last five games of my son's team's season in the under 15s at a club called Moreland City.

In 1979-80, a similar set of circumstances found my dad becoming my Aussie Rules footy coach when our coach couldn't do the job any more. Dad put his hand up to take on the East Camberwell Under 13s.

Dad had played the game a bit. He also did a coach's course with David Parkin (AFL premiership player and coach), who ran sessions for amateur coaches at the local teachers' college. Dad threw himself into the role. I remember he said the training was fun with a lot of variety.

The club decided to change competitions for the 1980 season. We moved from Hawthorn to Waverley. Unbeknown to us we had joined a competition that was full of teams of giants. Our team wasn't! Either over the summer we hadn't grown much or these fellas ate really healthy food on their side of town.

This is where my dad's and my coaching careers have similarities. We lost a lot.

In that 1980 season, we trained on the Wednesday night and the Saturday morning before we played on the Sunday. Training was innovative, fun and the kids in our team kept coming along. That was a small miracle because we had some *hefty* losses. In fact there was a period of three weeks where hefty was an understatement.

During week one we played Kew Rovers – an away game. If you understand Aussie Rules, you know that the scores are higher than soccer or Rugby League. Still, teams don't usually kick forty goals. That's what Kew Rovers did ... They scored over 240 points to our zero.

The kids still came to training on Wednesday and Saturday. Dad was positive with his charges. He had new learning from his coaching course, new, fun drills and, together,

we got ready for the next game. We played at home to another team from the top three on the ladder. They kicked over 40 goals and, again, we didn't score.

The players came to training Wednesday and Saturday and we headed off on the Sunday to play Glen Waverley Hawks – the top side playing the bottom.

You guessed it, we lost by over 40 goals again and, yes, we didn't score. In fact this time, they kicked over 300 points to our zilch. The final scoreboard looked like this:

	Goals	Behinds	Points
Glen Waverley Hawks	49	13	307
East Camberwell	0	0	0

The kids still came to training. The following week we were back at home and playing a team two places above us on the ladder.

Dad approached the umpire. Apparently, the conversation went something like this:

"Ump ... I don't want to influence you in any way but I thought you might appreciate knowing a bit of background about our kids."

The umpire said, "Go on coach, I don't mind. What do you want me to know?"

"Well ump, these kids have had 130 goals kicked against them in the last few weeks and they haven't scored a single point."

"Strewth," said the umpire. "I don't quite get why you are telling me this."

"Well Ump," Dad continued, "it's just that we think we are a genuine chance today."



WE MIGHT ACTUALLY SCORE TODAY

"Of winning?" said the umpire.

"No, we think we might actually score today. It might only be a point but I didn't want you to be surprised if that happens."

"I appreciate you letting me know coach." With that the umpire ran off to start the match.

So there we were. In fact there I was, a skinny red-headed kid at Lynden Park, East Camberwell on a wintery Sunday afternoon. No siren in those days, the bell went, the umpire blew his whistle and bounced the ball in the centre circle. From my position on the wing I had a perfect view of our ruckman jumping up for the ball against the ruckman of Oakleigh Citizens. It looked to be very fair contest.

Then the umpire blew his whistle.

"Ruck infringement. Free kick, East Camberwell."

The ruckman from Oakleigh looked dumbfounded. "What was that for Ump? I did nothing wrong."

The umpire blew his whistle again ...

Now if you know the history of Aussie Rules, you'd understand that in 1980 if you argued with the umpire he could call the infringing team back for a fifteen-metre penalty, and that's what happened ...

"Fifteen-metre penalty against you, Oakleigh Citizens!" yelled the umpire and he proceeded to run and measure out the extra distance our ruckman Dennis had for his free kick.

The umpire ran the fifteen metres ... and kept going. He ran all the way to the goal square. Now, it was the mid-1980s before the fifteen-metre penalty was replaced by a fifty-metre penalty, so you might be reading about the first ever fifty-metre penalty in the history of Australian Rules Football.

The Oakleigh kids were tearing their hair out as Dennis slotted the goal. Yes. It was a goal, not a point, and yes we

had scored for the first time in four weeks and yes, we were in front!

Of course the fairy tail ends there. (We went on to lose the game.) But allow me some license as the story stretches on.

When Dennis' goal went through the two big sticks, every player on our team ran to Dennis, including the full back. The game on the adjacent oval stopped and the younger kids streamed down to join in the celebration. Ladies in the canteen threw down their aprons, jumped over the pie counter and ran to the milling huddle in the goal square. The under 14s had scored. We had scored!

Okay, I am stretching the truth a bit here. But I still remember that moment. The jubilation and excitement that all of our team-mates felt. Dad still tells the story with a smile (and he tells it often).

Thirty-three soccer seasons later, I now understand that dad and I were both doing something that is within all of our powers as mums, dads and other significant adults in young people's lives.

We were turning up.

Little did Dad know that he was teaching the dad I was to become about what I could do: turn up. We all can turn up. And, in light of how ordinary a coach I was, my hope is that many seasons from now my son will remember that I was there.

Bill Jennings, Time & Space

Bill Jennings is Australia's leading parent-child program facilitator. As director of Time & Space, Bill offers your community exactly that... 'time & space' for young people and their parents to share important memories and, in doing that, create a new one.

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