

# Successful Parents Happy Families

## 12 Strategies for Stressful Times!

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**Autism**ONTARIO

*see the potential    voir le potentiel*

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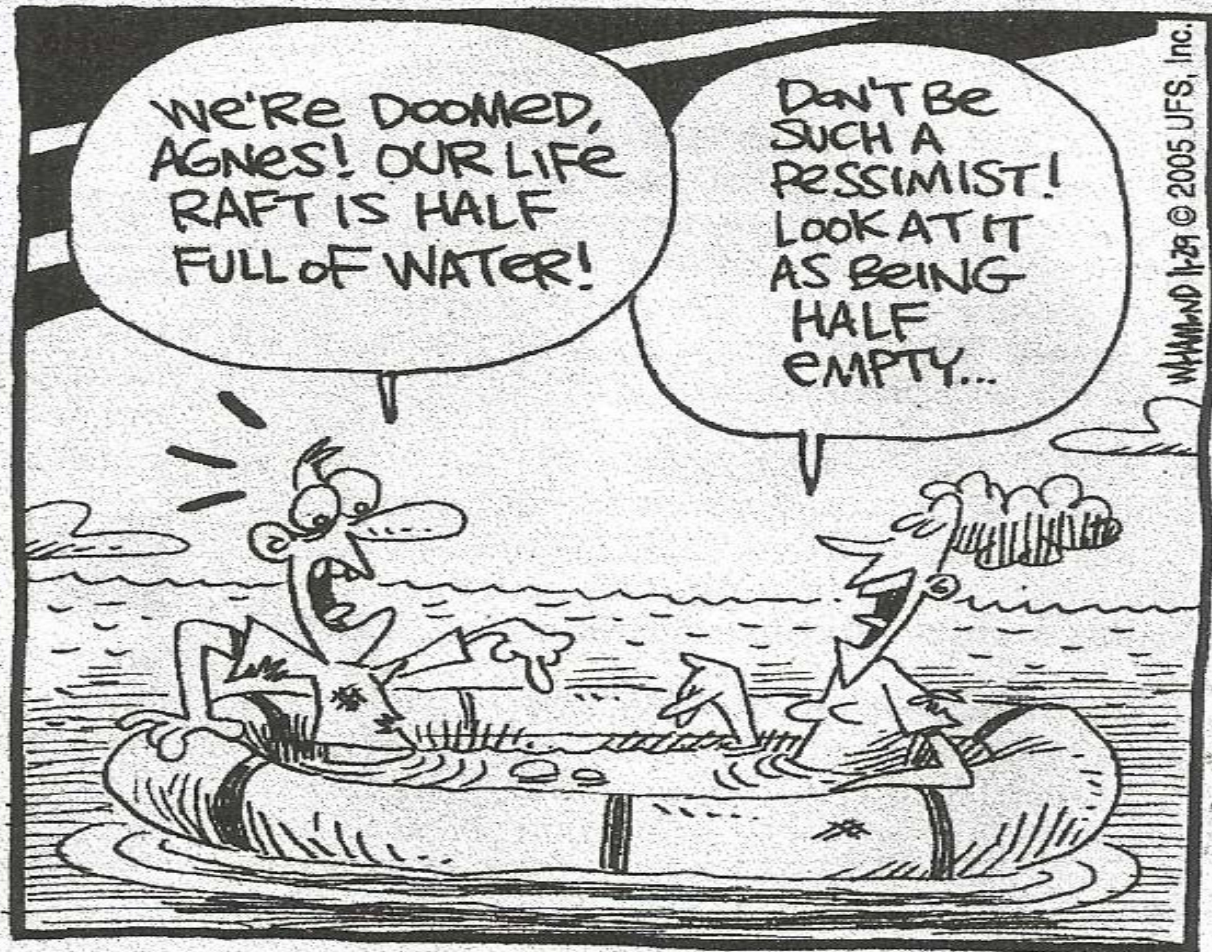


# Causes of Distress

- **SOCIETY** – perfectionism, pace of life
- **WORK**
- **BIOLOGY** – temperament, behaviour
- **LIFE CRISES**
- **FAMILY TENSION**
- **POOR STRESS MANAGEMENT**
  
- **OUR THINKING!**



# REALITY CHECK — By Dave Whamond



# Parent Coping Patterns

- Emotion-focused
- Problem-focused
- Accommodative



# “Distress” Symptoms

- Mental exhaustion
- Physical conditions
- Look, act & seem depressed
- Over-worry about past/future
- Couple/relationship problems
- Kids/adults show:
  - Behaviour problems
  - Health concerns



# What is Your Optimal Stress Level?\*

ARE YOU:

- A Racehorse?

or

- A Turtle?

\*We need some stress to be successful!



# Parent Stress Levels

- Can be as high as soldiers returning from active combat
- Typical = 4% depressed
- ID = 8%
- ASD = 16%

Eliz Dykens, Vanderbilt U

Marsha M. Seltzer, U. Wisconsin-Madison





# 1. Parenting Skill

**Parents need to work  
as a team!**

[Establishes a foundation for the family!]



## 2. Parenting Skill

When under enormous stress,  
make really healthy decisions about...



- Food & caffeine
- Alcohol or drugs
- Tobacco
- Workaholism
- Borrowing/Spending
- Gambling
- Friendships
- Risky driving

## Stress Management

- Diet/Nutrition
- Sleep
- Exercise
- Time for fun
- Meditation



## 3. Parenting Skill

# Create sensory favourable environments

Elspeth Bradley & Phoebe Caldwell (2013)



# Inside-Out Approach

- Turn down bright lights/Wear sunglasses
- Use ear plugs, white noise, music, headphones
- Allow some rocking & self-stimulation
- Understand sensitivities to medication
- Offer comfort drinks (e.g., herbal tea)
- Speak quieter, more slowly, more succinctly, more calmly, & maintain a positive attitude



# Inside-Out Approach (cont.)

- Manage aromas & use soothing paint colours
- Minimize unwanted visitors
- Comfortable, supportive furniture
- Handshakes on their terms
- Have private recharge areas



# 4. Parenting Skill

- YOU'RE PROBABLY HEALTHIER THAN YOU THINK
- Jealousy is normal, but...
- ...every family struggles...  
...every day!



# Distorted, Negative Thinking

- Thoughts playing tricks on us
  - Black or white thinking
  - Discounting the positive
  - Jumping to conclusions
  - Catastrophizing
  - Should statements
  - Labelling
  - Blaming self



anxiety & depression





# Parents Today

**They are the best  
in history!**



**Allow yourself three “dumb  
decisions” per year\***

**\*That do not  
involve violence**



# 5. Parenting Skill

## **Become sex-perts!**

Common counselling topic



- Dating
- Living together
- Marriage
- “Sexual insurance”



# 6. Parenting Skill

## Manage your expectations!

Pace Yourself: “This is a marathon, not a sprint!”



- High Expectations/Perfectionism leads to:
  - Burnout
  - Whole family is hurt
- Accept what you cannot change
- Focus on changing what you can
- May be “a very complex situation”
- Avoid shaming
- Focus: Next 3 months



# 7. Parenting Skill

**Turn to great  
escapes!**



# Great Escapes

- Reading
- History
- Games
- Hobbies/passions
- Hot bubble bath
- Physical exercise
- Sports: special teams
- Part-time job
- A cause
- Sports
- Outdoors
- Spiritual life
- Meditation/prayer
- Writing
- Humour/comedy
- Volunteer





# 8a. Parenting Skill: Single Parents

**Strengthen  
your  
support network!**



# Support Networks

- Tap into family, friends & respite support
- Do favours for others
- Cheap nights out/try dating again?
- Weekends away, without the kids
- Vacations without kids
- Join Autism Ontario, faith community, other community groups



## 8b. Parent Skill: Couples

**Re-marry or  
re-connect with your  
Partner!**



# Making Love\*

- Kind words
- Holding hands
- Hugs & cuddles (e.g., if exhausted)
- Random acts of kindness/Service
- Being playful, joking, fun
- The “Big Kahuna”
- Sexual insurance

\*The Five Love Languages

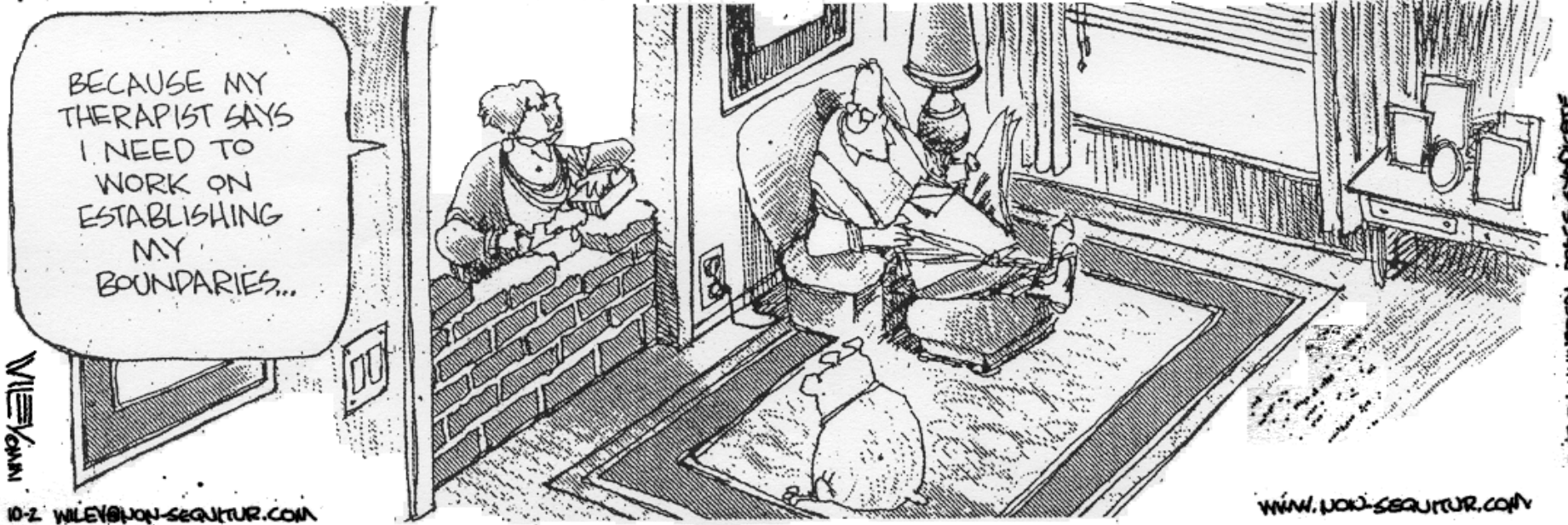


# 9. Parenting Skill

**Set healthy  
boundaries!**



**NON SEQUITUR** – By Wiley e-mail: [sequitoo@aol.com](mailto:sequitoo@aol.com)



# Tighten Boundaries

- Avoid or limit visits with negative or unsupportive relatives
  - Holidays
- Set rules around kids sleeping with parents
- Protect confidential information
- Go out or vacation without the kids
- Set limits on volunteering
  - Boards
- Rule: One hour on/One hour off technology
- Saying “No!” to unrealistic demands
  - Presents, money, dangerous activities, extra food



# Relax Boundaries

- Go on outings without partner
- Returning to work/school
- Join fitness program
- Spending special time with siblings
- Use respite





# 10. Parenting Skill

## **Ignite your spirit!**

Faith group

Prayer & Meditation

Find a place of solitude to recharge



# Your Cheering Squad

- Surround yourself with positive, fun people
- Family
- Friends
- Professionals



# 11. Parenting Skill

## Watch for little miracles to happen!

- **Myth:** They don't happen anymore
- **Fact:** They happen everyday... Maybe they are different than expected



# The Miracle and Joy of Parenthood

- Is helping your children overcome obstacles and hurdles
- Watching them accomplish something you weren't sure they could do...

**AND THEY DO IT!**



# 12. Parenting Skill

**Go for individual,  
couple or  
family therapy?**



# Munro one minute rule

**30 points**

**60 points**



# Speak...

- More quietly
- More slowly
- More calmly
- More succinctly
- Remain positive

Hug with eyes, your voice, your listening... & your positive attitude!



# Family Gatherings

## Request that:

- **Family members** take turns spending 4 or 5 minutes talking to individual about “special interest”.





# **Learn how to advocate without exhausting yourself!**

Don't go it alone!



# Good Parents

What makes a good parent?

- Scientific American Mind  
Nov/Dec 2010  
Research review over 50 years



# A Good Parent

- Provides love, physical affection, acceptance & quality time
- Practices good stress management, relaxation & positive thinking
- Has a healthy relationship with partner or co-parent
- Encourages self-sufficiency
- Positive behavioural approaches



# Great Book

- More Than a Mom: Living A Full Life When Your Child Has Special Needs

Amy Baskin & Heather Fawcell

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