

The Bereavement Buddy

Your link to keeping up to date with the NALAG Centre for Loss & Grief's continued commitment to Grief Support and Education.

ISSUE 3, July 2008

They hover, monitoring their kids' every move

Helicopter Parents

By Louise Waterson

Soon after the London bombings in July 2005, a 15-year-old girl arrived with her parents at the Melbourne clinic of psychologist and family therapist Andrew Fuller. They had been referred by the girl's school counsellor who was concerned she had stopped attending school.

"So," Fuller began, addressing the teenager, "what's led to this?" "I don't feel safe there any more," she replied. "Mum and Dad have warned me about the dangers of making friends with some of the kids at school. I can't tell who's friendly and who isn't. It's easier if I just stay at home."

The girl's father was quick to explain: "She's our only daughter and we're worried about who she mixes with. There are so many dangerous types out there." Both parents mentioned terrorism and drink spiking as examples of how frightening the world can be. "We



worry about her safety but she doesn't like us following her everywhere," added the girl's father. "She's developed nightmares."

After talking it through with Fuller, the parents came to see that their protectiveness wasn't preparing their daughter for life. It then took six weeks of exercises in learning how to identify trustworthiness in others before the teenager felt reassured enough to return to school. Gradually she has been able to find a small group of friends she feels she can trust again.

Parents have always worried about their children. It's part of the job description. But today we worry more. Many see the world as a frightening, competitive place in which their kids' very survival, let alone success, depends on their constant vigilance. "There's no disputing it – today's parents monitor their own children much more than their own parents



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ever monitored them," says Michael Grose, one of Australia's leading parenting educators and author of seven books on the subject. "Parents have developed an aversion to letting their kids learn through exploring, for fear of the child making choices, and a wish to make life easy and keep them happy," he explains.

When parents experience such anxiety it can distort their notion of success and wipe out common sense, says Andrew Fuller, also the author of *Raising Real People*. "I see parents who are on an endless quest to maximise their child's potential," he says. "If their child is ranked second in their class, they immediately ask, 'What can I do to make them top of the class?' It's an attitude that's toxic to good childhood."

The hypervigilance noted by Grose and Fuller has spawned the term "helicopter parent." Just as helicopters hover over scenes of disaster, such parents hover over their children, fearing disaster at

"Parents with three or more children tend to relax more about their kids' behaviour and have more perspective"

every turn. They arm their six-year-old children with mobile phones in case disaster strikes in the school yard, use webcams to assure themselves of their preteens' comfort at overnight camps, pack their free time with more lessons and line up academic coaching sessions to supplement school courses.

Why is this happening? Grose points at least one finger at the media. "The daily bombardment of bad news portrays the world as a dangerous place and parents' natural reaction is to closet their kids," he says.

Sweeping changes in family and community structure may also play a role. The demise of the multigenerational family isolates children from other adults. It also means grandparents and neighbours no longer keep watch over our kids as they walk to the corner shop or ride their bike to a friend's house. It's all up to the parents.

In all families, parents have hopes and dreams for their children. In smaller families these aspirations are carried by only one or two children. "Parents with three or more children tend to relax about their behaviour and have more perspective," Grose explains. "When there's only one or two children the focus remains with the parents." The result is that parenting becomes a performance sport, a measure of prowess. If Johnny turns out well, Johnny's mother gets an A. If Johnny does poorly . . . It's no wonder today's parents work so hard to guarantee their

children's safety, success and self-esteem.

The Fear Factor

More than anything else, today's parents fear for their kids' physical safety. In parents' minds, the proverbial monster – in the shape of a rusty nail or a child molester – lurks at every

corner. Such fears assailed Leah Macpherson when she learned her five-year-old daughter's kindergarten class was scheduled to go on a field trip to see a film in a local cinema. "Parents weren't invited because there was no room on the bus," she says, "and I thought the adult-to-child ratio was too low. I didn't allow my daughter to go. But then I regretted that she missed out."

Even as their children gain in years and maturity, many parents keep constant tabs on their whereabouts. Alison Bjurstrom, a mother of two girls, says she allows her ten-year-old to ride her bike only "three quarters of a block in either direction from our house." As for her 16-year-old, Bjurstrom lets her go to the shopping centre "with much hesitation – and it has to be in a group." And she's not allowed to travel into the city by train. Why? "Because she's not street-smart." How then will she become street-smart? "Good question," Bjurstrom says sheepishly.

Contrast this child-rearing style with Bjurstrom's own experience as a child. "I was a wild child," she says. "I was always riding my bike, and I started catching buses at seven or eight. The rule was, 'When the street lights come on, it's time to come home.' There wasn't this worry about abductions."

But is the world really a riskier place? The statistics say not so. Between 1985 and 2001, death rates from traffic accidents in Australia fell by just over 50 per cent – despite an increase in vehicles. Childhood deaths from any type of injury have fallen even more dramatically. Over the past 20 years, deaths among Australian boys aged 5-9 years have dropped by 33 per cent, by 53 per cent among boys in the 10-14 age group and 43 per cent among girls aged 1-9 years. The overall crime rate in Australia has fallen steadily since 2000. While certainly not free of risk, the world today poses fewer physical dangers to our children than it did ten or 20 years ago. But many parents clearly think otherwise.



Bringing Up Einstein

Along with safety, today's parents worry about their children's futures in what they perceive as an intensely competitive world. Facing this pressure, they often see it as their job to oversee Johnny's homework, sometimes sacrificing their limited free time to the cause.

Take Sydney caterer and mother of three school-aged kids Amanda Lockyer, who every night spends at least an hour helping them with homework. "My 13-year-old son, Harry, is in Year 8 at a private school. His homework can take up to two hours a night," says Lockyer. "I tend to monitor how he's going – in case he needs any help or his attention wanders."

But it's exam time that Lockyer finds the most stressful. "Other parents we know cancelled everything over the weekends leading up to the exams so their boys could concentrate on revising," says Lockyer. In response, Lockyer drew up a study timetable for Harry. Each night in the month prior to the exams she added 30 minutes' revision to his usual homework. "I'm hoping this will teach him to manage his time better in later years," she says. "I know it's only going to get harder."

Kathy Hirsh-Pasek, a psychology professor and co-author of the book *Einstein Never Used Flash Cards*, takes issue with the current tendency of parents to "take over."

"Research has shown that a perfectionistic environment makes kids nervous and anxious," she says. Not only that, but insisting on perfectly completed homework "deprives kids of the essential experience of making mistakes and learning from them."

Hirsh-Pasek also questions the notions that we need to "fill up" our kids. "Kids are not just vessels, they're explorers," she says. "We would do well to remember that kids learn through play."

As teachers know all too well, however, many of today's parents find it hard to give up control. Angela Rossmann, writer, ex-educator and author

"Research has shown that a perfectionistic environment makes kids nervous and anxious,"

of the bestselling *When Will the Children Play?* acknowledges that parental involvement and support helps with a child's schooling – up to a point. All too often, Rossmann says, "teachers are frustrated that parents don't trust them to get on with the job." And as for the children, "they can feel suffocated." When parents are constantly hovering around school, children "can feel anxious about being watched and can feel pressured by the expectation that this interest creates."

Don't Worry, Be Happy

Most parents want their kids to be happy with themselves – to have high self-esteem. Nothing wrong with that, of course. A problem arises when parents can't tolerate their kids' sadness even temporarily and feel compelled to step in and make it go away.

Stephanie Maestri,* a mother of two young girls, pleads guilty in this regard. On one occasion, her eight-year-old daughter, Amber,* was looking forward to a play date that got cancelled at the last minute.

"She was crying," says Maestri, "so I went around the playground, desperately trying to find a pal to come over and play with her. I found another girl and got her into the car, but Amber was still upset and didn't even want this girl over. I could tell the play date wasn't going to work, so I ended up driving the girl home and apologising to her mother."



ILLUSTRATION BY MARK ULLRICHSEN

So where do we draw the line between protecting and overprotecting our kids?



Maestri says the experience taught her a valuable lesson. "Rushing in prematurely doesn't make the hurt go away – it just makes it worse."

Fran Kammermayer, a certified family educator, understands the temptation to step in when our children get hurt. "We feel their hurt, too," she says simply. But we need to remember that "always

stepping in prevents our kids from developing the skills to get over their sadness." When we allow kids to sit with their sad feelings, "they learn the valuable lesson that life is full of grey areas. Kids tend to see things in black and white: 'If my friend Sarah snaps at me, she must be a bad person.' The reality is that she may be snappy because she has a stomachache or a sick pet."

Our insistence that our kids be happy at all times may lead us to cry "bully" every time they get their feelings hurt. While applauding today's heightened awareness of bullying, Kammermayer says parents do their kids a disservice by "wrapping them in cotton wool." The best way to prevent kids from being bullied is to give them the space to develop self-reliance. Rossmannith agrees. "Being overprotective can make some children more vulnerable to bullying," she says. "They lose the opportunity to develop their own initiative if their parents are always stepping in and fighting their battles."

Compulsively protecting children from their own sadness may also hamper their resilience as adults. "A university professor I met recently told me she has students bursting into tears and asking for extensions on term paper deadlines because their boyfriend broke up with them," says Kammermayer. In some

cases, "it's the parents who are sending the notes [requesting extensions]. These parents are teaching their children that they're not strong enough to function when they're unhappy."

Recipe for Sanity

Stuff happens. It's rare, but kids sometimes do get seriously hurt or traumatised. So where do we draw the line between protecting and overprotecting our kids? "There's a simple rule," says Fuller. "Try not to do things for your child that they could do for themselves."

To make an informed decision, Grose suggests you arm yourself with the facts. "When you don't know anything you fear it – so find out the real risks of your child surfing the internet and help them identify the dangers," he says.

Along with the facts and figures, you need also to consider your own child's temperament and maturity. Karen Jones, a Hobart travel agent and mother of two school-aged children and a toddler, lets her nine-year-old son, Oliver, walk the ten minutes to school and sports practice as well as run errands for her to the local shops. "He started asking for more independence last year," explains Jones. "He has to cross a busy road, but we walked him through it once and he knows to use the pedestrian lights." Jones also pointed out the safety houses along the way – should he ever need help. "Oliver is reliable," she says, "and has a good sense of direction."

Not all nine-year-olds are like Oliver, of course, and no family is quite like your own. But if parenting has become more stressful than joyful for you, if you suspect your anxious hovering is clipping your kids' wings, Fuller suggests you consider the price you – and your kids – may be paying. "Placing pressure on your kids to achieve what you want for them can only backfire."

The bond between you and your spouse may also suffer, warns Grose. "It's a couple's role to raise kids but lack of confidence and pressure to get it right can create tension and conflict in a marriage. I believe a lot of parents today have their priorities all wrong. You're a person, partner and parent last."

Finally, Grose exhorts us to revisit some of our notions of success. "Too much value is placed on productive

activities that have measurable outcomes. Perhaps parents need to remember that having a happy and contented child is the greatest achievement of all."

Ten Hints for Creating Resilient Families

By Andrew Fuller

Resilience is the fine art of being able to bungee jump through life. The pitfalls are still there but it is as if you have an elasticised rope around your middle that helps you to bounce back from hard times

No. 1 Promote Belonging

Resilience is the happy knack of being able to bungee jump through the pitfalls of life. It is the strongest antidote we know of for self-harm, depression and drug abuse and it's built on our sense of belonging.

No. 2 Have some moom time

We live in a world that suffers from attention deficit disorder. We rush children from activity to activity, from lesson to lesson and from one organised event to another. Then we wonder why, when there is a lull that they say "I'm bored". Be a counter-revolutionary. Find some time each week just to be at home without anything structured happening.

No. 3 Rediscover some family rituals

It doesn't matter whether it is the family walk after dinner, the Sunday roast, the Friday night pizza or the Saturday morning clean up, rituals are highly protective. The best rituals often cost nothing. These are the activities you hope that later on your children will reminisce and say "Mum always made sure we did." or Dad always made sure we did."

No.4 Spontaneity and curiosity

Spontaneity and curiosity are the building blocks of good mental health. You cannot tell someone how to have better mental health and you can't

give it to them by getting them to read a book. So the really hard message here is that if you want to raise your children to have mentally healthy lives you are going to have to have a good time yourself. If you want your children to succeed you need to show them that success is worth having.

No.5 Love kids for their differences

When families' function well people are allowed to be different and to be loved for those differences. We all know that children take on different roles. A father of three said "it's as if they have a planning meeting once a year and say 'you be the good kid, I'll be the sick kid and the other one can be the trouble-maker'! And then just when you think you've got it figured out they change roles again". Having children who are strongly individual and who have a sense of who they are is a sign of good parenting. The problem may, of course be that they will then express their independent spirit in ways that you don't like. The ideal is a mix between someone who preserves their own uniqueness and is able to work with others without becoming dictated to by them. Someone who has their own independent nature but is comfortable enough with themselves to allow interdependence.

No. 6. It is clear who is in charge

Families do not work well as democracies. In fact they seem to work best as benevolent dictatorships in which the parent or parents consult a lot with their children but at the end of the day, the parent has the final say.

Some parents fear that if they take charge that they will lose the friendship of their children, but often the reverse is true. In families where parents fail to take their own role seriously, children may feel that to express their independence.

No. 7 Consistency

Consistency is the ideal. Having parents who agree on rules and standards and who convey the same sorts of messages and who value compassion over coercion, clearly has the best outcome in terms of children's well being. It is also important that parents not be open to manipulation and work together as a team. Life however is not always so simple and we all know from sad and sour experience that parents cannot always be consistent. Sometimes parents have different value systems or can't come to a consistent way to handle particular areas. In these situations, a



second possibility is to for one parent to take charge of a particular area. This is not the most desirable solution but it is better than having parents in conflict over management issues or worse, undermining one another. In single parent families or where parents are separated the same principle applies.

No. 8 Teach the skills of Self-esteem

Families that work well seem to praise one another a lot. Compliments are made, positive efforts are commented on. Optimism is in the air. Even in these families, teenagers still shrug and say, " yeah Mum" or "yeah Dad" whenever a compliment is made. Teaching the skills of self-praise is useful. One way of doing this to ask questions extensively about any achievement or accomplishment. Asking questions that like " how did you do that?" "How come you did so well at that test?" " What did you do?" and "have you been doing homework behind my back.

No. 9 Know how to Argue

Families that work well know how to argue. It seems strange to say this because we all have the sense those families that work well don't have conflicts. The family is really where we learn to resolve disputes fairly. The way that parents teach children to resolve differences of opinion with their brothers and sisters provides the basis for sharing, negotiating and problem solving in the world beyond the family. While differences of opinion should be allowed to be expressed, children also need to learn that they will not be able to win at all costs 10. Parents are reliably unpredictable. With young children it is important to provide consistency and predicability.

This allows them to feel sure of you. After a while though, a bit of predicability can go a long way. To many children, most parents are about as predictable as a washing machine cycle. It is important to have structure and consistency but it is also useful to act in ways that your children wouldn't expect. This keeps them interested in learning from you or least wondering what you are up to. Perhaps the most important feature of parents in healthy

families is that they realise that all of the above is desirable but not always possible and so they look at how to promote good functioning while not wasting energy on blaming themselves for the times when things don't quite work out as they had planned.

For more Andrew Fuller articles please see his website www.andrewfuller.com.au

From the Editor

I hope you enjoyed our featured article by Louise Waterman and her commentary on Andrew Fuller's advice. It is sometimes difficult to find the balance between being a protective and overprotective parent. Andrew Fullers' hints for creating resilient families are well worth a read. The NALAG Centre for Loss & Grief in Dubbo will receive Andrew Fuller as our special guest as a part of Grief Awareness Week 2008. For more information on his appearances please see details below.

Counselling Young People at Risk

The NALAG Centre for Loss & Grief in Dubbo will hold a 1 day workshop with Andrew Fuller on Thursday 28th August, 2008 which will cover working with children and adolescent loss, grief and trauma. This workshop will provide participants with practical skills in engaging adolescents in a counselling relationship.

Guerrilla Tactics for Parents

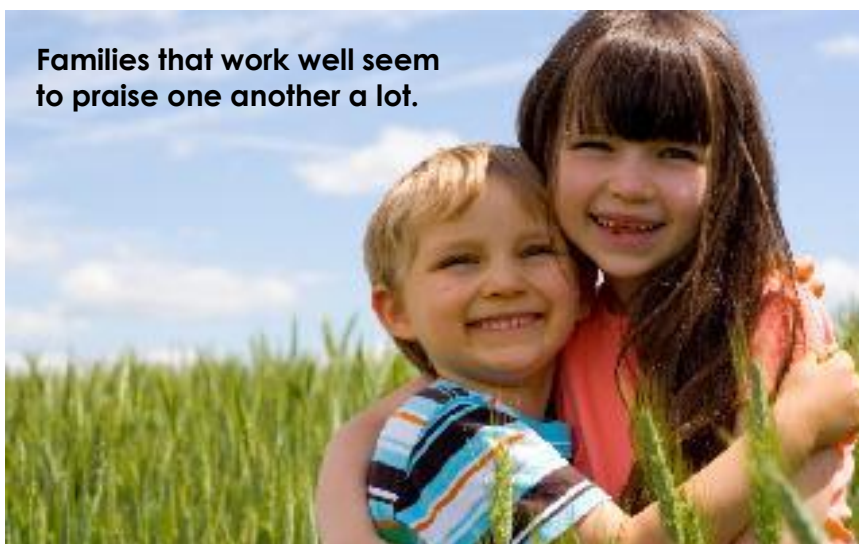
Andrew Fuller will also provide a free evening for parents on Thursday, 28th August 2008. This presentation will give parents strategies and nifty tricks to survive raising your children. This seminar is FREE, please RSVP to the Centre on 02 6882 9222.

Grief Awareness Week

Acknowledging Loss - Promoting Resilience

24th August - 30th August 2008

Grief week will commence on Sunday 24th August 2008 with a Church Service at St Bridgitt's Church in Brisbane Street Dubbo and close with the Father Chris Riley dinner on Friday 29th August, 2008.



Families that work well seem to praise one another a lot.

Children - Grief, Trauma and Resilience 1 Day Workshop

This seminar will explore grief, trauma and resilience in children with guest speakers Dr Cecily Knight, Kerrie Noonan, Mary Ellen O'Donoghue & Caroline Dale from Good Grief Australia and NALAG (NSW) Inc President, Julie Dunsmore.

An Evening with Father Chris Riley

The NALAG Centre will host "Kids on the Edge", an evening with Father Chris Riley from Youth Off The Streets. Tickets will be available at The Book Connection in Macquarie Street, Dubbo. Cost of the evening is \$40.00 which will include a 2 - course meal and entertainment by the Palmer Street Singers and the Aboriginal Youth Performing Arts Group.

The evening will celebrate *Grief Awareness Week 2008 - Acknowledging Loss - Promoting Resilience*, but will also give local agencies and organisations an opportunity to network with each other and exchange promotional material relating to their service. Local agencies and/or services are asked to book a table and bring information regarding their services. For more information please call the NALAG Centre.

For more information regarding Grief Awareness Week events, please see the for your diary section in this issue of the *Bereavement Buddy* or visit our website to download registration forms www.nalag.org.au.

Please check out the coming events for the NALAG Centre below especially the invitations for your clients to the Remembering Ceremony to be held during Grief Week.

Don't forget to book your table for the Father Chris Riley Dinner, tickets are now on sale at The Book Connection in Macquarie Street Dubbo. We have reserved a few tables for NALAG members, so please advise when purchasing your ticket if you wish to suit at the NALAG table.

I hope you will take advantage of the education on offer for Grief Week, registration is now open and are filling fast. Please register soon to avoid disappointment.

Hope to see many of you at Supervision.

Cheers for now.....

Trudy Hanson

Trudy Hanson
Manager

NALAG Centre for Loss & Grief, Dubbo
Editor - *The Bereavement Buddy*

NALAG Centre News & Events for Your Diary

Grief Awareness Week Remembering Ceremony Invitations for Your Clients

All current Support Volunteers who wish to invite their clients to the Remembering Ceremony to be held on Sunday 24th August at St Bridgitt's Church at 11.30am are asked to contact the Centre and request an invitation to be sent to your client or collect one and hand to your client at their next appointment.

Supervision

Supervision will be held on Tuesday, 22nd July at the Centre commencing at 10.00am - 12 noon. Bring your own lunch and join us after for a catch up. Supervision will be conducted by Julie Dunsmore.

Blue Healers Depression Groups

The NALAG Centre will commence another Blue Healers Depression Group commencing on Wednesday, 23rd July 2008. If you would like to recommend any of your clients for the program or you are able to provide help with catering for the sessions please contact the Centre.

Discoveries Support Group For Survivors of Child Sexual Assault

Greater Western Area Health Service will be conducting a women's group for survivors of child sexual assault. The group will meet on Tuesday 22nd July, 2008. For more information please contact Nadine, Sarah or Jenny on 6885 8999.

If you believe this program would be beneficial to your Client, please discuss with Trudy.

Seasons For Growth Companion Reconnector Training Children & Young People

The NALAG Centre will conduct Seasons Companion Reconnector Training on Friday, 25th July from 9am - 1.00pm. This is FREE to all NALAG Members, \$50 for Non - Members. Any Seasons Companions that have not conducted a group in the last 12 months will need to complete this training in order to run the program. To Register please complete a registration form and return to the Centre.

For Your Diary...coming events

July

8th International Conference in Grief & Bereavement in Contemporary Society Consequences of Loss: Resilience and Complications in the Grief Experience 15-18 July 2008 - Melbourne

NALAG representatives Geoff Glasscock and Trudy Hanson will be presenting this year at the international conference.

To attend the conference please contact Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement Phone: 02 9265 2100, email conference@grief.org.au or visit www.grief.org.au

Seasons For Growth Companion Reconnector Training Children & Young People Friday 25th July 9am- 1.00pm

The NALAG Centre will conduct Seasons Companion Reconnector Training on Friday, 25th July from 9am - 1.00pm. This is FREE to all NALAG Members, \$50 for Non - Members. Any Seasons Companions that have not conducted a group in the last 12 months will need to complete this training in order to run the program. To Register please complete a registration form and return to the Centre.

August

Grief Awareness Week 2008 Acknowledging Loss - Promoting Resilience 24 - 31 August 2008

SUNDAY, 24th August, 2008

**Church Service - St Bridgett's Catholic Church,
Brisbane Street, Dubbo, 11.30am**

If you would like to attend the Church service please contact the NALAG Centre to RSVP on 02 6882 9222.

THURSDAY, 28th August, 2008

Counselling Young People at Risk

1 Day Workshop

Clinical Psychologist Andrew Fuller

Where: Theatrette RSL Memorial Club **Time:** 8.45am - 4.30pm
Cost: \$100.00 (\$75.00 NALAG Members)

This seminar will explore and promote practical ways to create improved counselling outcomes for teenagers. The course is suitable for support workers, counsellors, youth workers and psychologists.

Guerrilla Tactics For Parents

Evening Seminar - Clinical Psychologist Andrew Fuller

Date: 28th August, 2008 **Where:** Theatrette RSL Memorial Club **Time:** 7.00 pm - 9.00 pm **Cost:** FREE

This FREE evening Seminar will explore strategies and nifty tricks to survive raising your children., The seminar is FREE and open to the whole community to attend.

FRIDAY, 29th August, 2008

Children - Grief, Trauma & Resilience

1 Day Seminar

Date: 29th August, 2008 **Where:** Theatrette RSL Memorial Club **Time:** 8.45am - 4.30pm **Cost:** \$100 (\$75 NALAG Members)

This seminar will explore grief, trauma and resilience in children with guest speakers Dr Cecily Knight, Kerrie Noonan, Mary Ellen O'Donoghue & Caroline Dale from Good Grief Australia and NALAG President Julie Dunsmore.

Kids on the Edge - An Evening with

Father Chris Riley (Youth Off The Streets)

Date: 29th August 2008 **Where:** Auditorium, RSL Memorial Club **Time:** 7.00 pm **Cost:** \$40.00

Tickets will be available for purchase at The Book Connection in Macquarie Street, Dubbo. Cost of the evening is \$40.00 which will include the keynote address by Father Chris Riley, a 2-course meal and entertainment by the Palmer Street Singers and the Aboriginal Youth Performing Arts Group.

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