

Family Focus

Parental anxiety

By Margie Ryerson, MFT

The recent news about some wealthy parents making unethical and illegal decisions to ensure their children would gain admission to a top college reflects in part the extent of parental anxiety in our competitive society. Most parents would not break the law to help their kids succeed like this. But setting this type of extreme behavior aside, many in this day and age are experiencing extreme anxiety about their parenting and their children's well-being. Being responsible for children who are so dependent upon them can trigger unanticipated feelings and reactions.

Natalie, a married mother of two boys, ages 6 and 2, had a high level of anxiety over keeping her children safe. She had difficulty taking her children to parks and public areas for fear of germs and kidnapping. Natalie refused to hire a babysitter so she and her husband could have alone time together. She described the huge pressure she felt to safeguard her children and to always be a wonderful and protective parent. When it was time to send her older son to kindergarten, she thought seriously about home schooling, but wanted to make a decision that was not based on fear and worry.

Natalie grew up in a loving family in a small community where she felt nurtured and secure. She had never experienced this type of debilitating anxiety before she had children. There was no history of extreme anxiety in her family. In working with Natalie we looked at many factors: her shaky confidence in herself as a parent, her distrust of others, her heightened fears each time she heard about a tragedy involving a child, and her tendency to be obsessive-compulsive. Over time, we were able to help Natalie overcome many of her fears on a step-by-step basis through cognitive therapy, which gently challenges existing belief systems. When she saw that she could master challenges like leaving her children for just a few hours at first with a highly recommended babysitter, Natalie grew more confident that she could continue to tackle roadblocks that were sabotaging not only her happiness, but her family's as well.

Most parents are lower on the anxiety continuum than Natalie. But many have worries and anxieties that interfere with their sense of happiness and well-being. Almost every parent I work with expresses concerns for his or her child, even if the child is currently doing well. They worry about future issues that could arise or they compare them to other kids who are doing better in school or in sports.

In this era of social media and 24-hour news, stories spread quickly that can easily arouse anxiety. We all see how the proportion of tragic or disturbing news to positive news has increased significantly these past decades. Constant exposure to trauma can derail our ability to cope healthily and interfere with our ability to return to a relaxed state. Stress hormones such as cortisol and adrenaline are released in continuous streams, resulting in heightened stress, anxiety, and/or pessimism.

When parents experience this kind of shock to the system, the tendency is to want to protect themselves and their loved ones, and to control all that they can. If they can't trust the world we live in, they try that much harder to ensure that their children will be safe and able to thrive.

The result of this escalation of anxiety among parents unfortunately can filter down to our children. The incidence of child and teen anxiety and depression is higher now than in past generations. When children look to their parents for ways to behave and handle situations, they need calm guidance that comes from a place of confidence and strength.

Emotions of those close to us can be contagious, even if not directly expressed. We absorb the sadness or anxiety of our loved ones, and it is hard to shake off. We know that dogs pick up on emotional states of their owners, and children, of course, can be even more susceptible to our moods.

When you are in a social setting with other parents who express anxiety about whether their children will do well on their high school final exams or SATs, or get into a college they want to attend, it is possible that you will become more anxious after listening to them, especially if you have a child in the same situation. Once a potential problem is implanted in our minds, it can be hard to dismiss.

In order to be the best parent you can be, it is important to address any anxiety or depression you may experience. Taking an active approach can be beneficial. You can limit your exposure to the news and social media. You can avoid prolonged anxiety-producing sessions with friends by changing the subject after a while. We all need our venting time with friends, but you want to set some limits. Or, alternatively, you can suggest doing fun activities together. Many self-help strategies can help: Massage, yoga, exercise, healthy eating, getting enough rest, and having a good social network are all proven stress-relievers. In addition, finding distracting pleasures such as reading uplifting articles and books and watching entertaining movies and television shows can provide relief.

But if you are struggling and nothing is working, it is important to get professional help for yourself. You deserve to be able to reduce and manage anxiety and stress, and your family will benefit as well.



Margie Ryerson, MFT, is a local marriage and family therapist. Contact her at 925-376-9323 or margierye@yahoo.com. She is the author of "Treat Your Partner Like a Dog: How to Breed a Better Relationship" and "Appetite for Life: Inspiring Stories of Recovery from Anorexia, Bulimia, and Compulsive Overeating."

All smiles on LP third-grade field trip



Photo provided

Submitted by Lindsay Garrity

During the annual Moraga History Field Trip on May 8, Los Perales Elementary School third-grade students met up with the owner of the historical Moraga ranch, Joan Bruzzone, who shared some of the personal stories

behind the property with the students, teachers and chaperones. Bruzzone, center, is shown here with a few of those students after they engaged in a quaint conversation with her. From left: Hannah Buchman (partly cut off picture on left), Aillie Hall, Ethan Luo, Ellie Cook, Conner Jaeger, Bodhi Harris, Joan Bruzzone, Simran Datta, Kian Malekafzali and Drew Davis.



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"It's BARTable!"

In Memory

Barry Balamuth



Barry Balamuth, 73, died Saturday, May 4, 2019 at his home surrounded by loved ones following long-term, cascading illnesses.

He leaves his high school sweetheart and wife of 51 years, Kath (Siefert) Balamuth; his daughter Kelly Balamuth and her husband, Bryan Kemler; his daughter Brett Anne Balamuth; his sister Barbara Andrews, her husband Lyle, two children Heather and Brian; three grandchildren; and many friends.

Barry grew up in Berkeley, attending Thousand Oaks, Garfield, and Berkeley High. He was an alumnus of UC Davis and UC Berkeley. He

earned scholastic honors, including the Order of the Coif and The Thurston Honors Society, during his attendance at UC Hastings School of the Law, from which he received his J.D. degree in 1971.

Barry had a passion for justice and practiced trial law as a consumer attorney for 48 years. Over the course of his career, he helped thousands of clients with tenacity, grace, and a high level of success. He served on the board of directors of the Alameda-Contra Costa Trial Lawyers Association for 25 years and was a proud member of the Consumer Attorneys of California. He was also a bar member of the U.S. Supreme Court. The latter quarter of his career, he formed a law firm with his daughter Kelly, which continues under her stewardship.

Barry was a member of the Orinda Country Club for over 20 years, serving on numerous committees and as chairperson for the Seniors for two years. He was an avid softball player, tennis player, golfer, and gambler. Barry loved "the action."

In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to Barry's favorite charity, the Contra Costa County Food Bank. A celebration of life will be held on July 28 from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. at the Orinda Community Center. If you would like to attend, please RSVP to ksiefert1946@gmail.com.

In Memory

Edward Hazarabedian

June 7, 1958 – February 23, 2019

Resident of Moraga



Ed Hazarabedian passed away suddenly from complications of the pancreatic cancer he'd been diagnosed with just 11 days earlier. Thankfully, his pain was brief – only a few hours – but ours is lasting and immeasurable.

Ed was raised in Albany, California and graduated from Albany High in 1976, where he was a violinist and concertmaster of the school orchestra, an officer in the service organization DeMolay, and a member of Boy Scout Troop 12, earning the Eagle Scout rank.

He received his BS degree in Statistics from the University of California, Berkeley, in 1982, having also attended Robert Gordon's Institute of Technology in Aberdeen, Scotland when his family was living there. While at Cal, Ed was a member of the UC Rally Committee, an organization committed to the perpetuation of the spirit and traditions of the University of California, and was an active alumnus, assisting with the Cal Band's pre-game pyrotechnic display at Memorial Stadium for many years up until his passing. He enjoyed cheering on the Bears with the same Rally Committee alumni friends – some going back to the '70s – in their section at Memorial Stadium each fall. He was a true Golden Bear.

Ed's professional life was as an account executive with various tech companies in the Bay Area, but he also gave his time to the community as a coach to many of his children's sports teams and as an Assistant Scoutmaster in Boy Scout Troop 234. Sunday mornings were always spent playing pick-up basketball with his friends at Oakwood Athletic Club.

Ed leaves behind his wife of 31 years, Bonnie, his son, Zack, and daughter, Callie. Also surviving him are his father, Shavarsh, his brother, Greg (June), niece, Laura King, and nephew, Michael Sokalski. He was preceded in death by his mother, Lala.

He requested "A party... a BIG party" instead of a funeral, so all who knew Ed are invited to his Celebration of Life on Sunday, June 9 at the Oak Hill Park Ballroom, 3005 Stone Valley Road in Danville; program at 1 p.m. and refreshments to follow. Requested attire is casual and colorful (Cal Blue and Gold, aloha shirts, etc.)

Please RSVP to EdHazCelebration2019@gmail.com.