



Harvard Researchers Say Children Need Touching and Attention

America's "let them cry" attitude toward children may lead to more fears and tears among adults, according to two Harvard Medical School researchers.

Instead of letting infants cry, American parents should keep their babies close, console them when they cry, and bring them to bed with them, where they'll feel safe, according to Michael Commons and Patrice Miller, researchers at the Medical School's Department of Psychiatry.

The pair examined child-rearing practices here and in other cultures and say the widespread American practice of putting babies in separate beds - even separate rooms - and not responding to their cries may lead to more incidents of post-traumatic stress and panic disorders among American adults. The early stress due to separation causes changes in infant brains that makes future adults more susceptible to stress in their lives, say Commons and Miller.

"Parents should recognize that having their babies cry unnecessarily harms the baby permanently," Commons said. "It changes the nervous system so they're sensitive to future trauma."

Their work is unique because it takes a cross-disciplinary approach, examining brain function, emotional learning in infants, and cultural differences, according to Charles R. Figley, director of the Traumatology Institute at Florida State University and editor of *The Journal of Traumatology*.

"It is very unusual but extremely important to find this kind of interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary research report," Figley said. "It accounts for cross-cultural differences in children's emotional response and their ability to cope with stress, including traumatic stress."

Commons has been a lecturer and research associate at the Medical School's Department of Psychiatry since 1987 and is a member of the Department's Program in Psychiatry and the Law. Miller has been a research associate at Harvard Medical School's Program in Psychiatry and the Law since 1994 and an assistant professor of psychology at Salem State College since 1993. She received master's and doctorate degrees in education from Harvard's Graduate School of Education.

The pair say that American child-rearing practices are influenced by fears that children will grow up dependent. But parents are on the wrong track. Physical contact and reassurance will make children more secure when they finally head out on their own and make them better able to form their own adult relationships.

"We've stressed independence so much that it's having some very negative side effects," Miller said.

The way we are brought up colors our entire society, Commons and Miller say. Americans in general don't like to be touched and pride themselves on independence to the point of isolation, even when undergoing a difficult or stressful time. Despite the conventional wisdom that babies should learn to be alone, Miller said she believes many parents "cheat," keeping the baby in the room with them, at least initially. In addition, once the child can crawl around, she believes many find their way into their parents' room on their own.

American parents shouldn't worry about this behavior or be afraid to baby their babies, Commons and Miller said. Parents should feel free to sleep with their infant children, to keep their toddlers nearby, perhaps on a mattress in the same room, and to comfort a baby when it cries.

Ways to Create more Happiness in Your Life

Live intentionally and purposefully: You only have one life to live.

Invest in taking good care of yourself: Ensure balanced life style; reduce stress; adopt healthy habits and coping styles; seek help when necessary; and engage in small pleasures of life.

Vanish the ideas of blaming other people and conditions for your unhappiness: Happiness comes from within.

Encircle yourself with encouraging and positive people.

Highly commit yourself to create more happiness in your life.

Assert yourself and learn to speak your mind tactfully.

Pursue your dreams, goals, hobbies, and passions.

Present kindness to others.

Install *positive thinking*: recall your accomplishments, talents, positive experiences, and blessings.

Learn to forgive others and yourself: Have realistic expectations of yourself and others and learn from mistakes.

Yield to higher source/power: It helps to realize that we don't have all the answers and total control of our lives.

by June Swan, Ph.D.

continued from page 1

"There are ways to grow up and be independent without putting babies through this trauma," Commons said. "My advice is to keep the kids secure so they can grow up and take some risks."

Besides fears of dependence, other factors have helped form our child-rearing practices, including fears that children would interfere with sex if they shared their parents' room and doctors' concerns that a baby would be injured by a parent rolling on it if it shared their bed, the pair said. The nation's growing wealth has helped the trend toward separation by giving families the means to buy larger homes with separate rooms for children. The result, Commons and Miller said, is a nation that doesn't like caring for its own children, a violent nation marked by loose, nonphysical relationships.

"I think there's a real resistance in this culture to caring for children," Commons said. "Punishment and abandonment has never been a good way to get warm, caring, independent people." BY ALVIN POWELL, CONTRIBUTING WRITER, HARVARD GAZETTE

4 steps to understand and get help for depression:

1. Look for signs of depression.
2. Understand that depression is a real illness.
3. See your doctor. Get a checkup and talk about how you are feeling.
4. Get treatment for your depression. You can feel better.

Put a check mark by each sign that sounds like you:

- I am really sad most of the time.
- I don't enjoy doing the things I've always enjoyed doing.
- I don't sleep well at night and am very restless.
- I am always tired. I find it hard to get out of bed.
- I don't feel like eating much
- I feel like eating all the time.
- I have lots of aches and pains that don't go away.
- I have little to no sexual energy.
- I find it hard to focus and am very forgetful
- I am mad at everybody and everything.
- I feel upset and fearful, but can't figure out why.
- I don't feel like talking to people.
- I feel like there isn't much point to living, nothing good is going to happen to me.
- I don't like myself very much. I feel bad most of the time.
- I think about death a lot. I even think about how I might kill myself.

If you checked several boxes, call your doctor. You may need to get a checkup and find out if you have depression.

Getting in Touch Through Poetry

by Suzie Mee

I believe one way to get in touch with your feelings is through poetry. Poetry is a means of expressing our inner selves - our thoughts and our feelings. Writing poetry is a way to get our feelings out.

This exercise in particular is an excellent way to get in touch WHO we are, WHAT we are, WHAT we like and so on. I have found this exercise to be very helpful in learning about oneself.

I have used this exercise with my college students and not only was it enjoyable to create but to share with one another.

I AM

I am (two special characteristics you have).
 I wonder (something you are actually curious about).
 I hear (an imaginary sound).
 I see (an imaginary sight).
 I want (an actual desire).
 I am (the first line of the poem repeated).

I pretend (something you actually pretend to do).
 I feel (a feeling about something imaginary).
 I touch (an imaginary touch).
 I worry (something that really bothers you).
 I cry (something that makes you very sad).
 I am (the first line of the poem repeated).

I understand (something you know is true).
 I say (something you believe in).
 I dream (something you actually dream about).
 I try (something you really make an effort about).
 I hope (something you actually hope for).
 I am (the first line of the poem repeated).

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