The Signs of Spring have come to brighten your days!!!

FEATURING...

- Giving Our Kids What They Need To Succeed In Life: It’s just a matter of time
- Stress in Children
- Growing Resilient Children
PRESIDENT'S REPORT

With spring upon us, I hope that everyone had a good winter season. I am sure that, like me, everyone is looking forward to the spring season. To me, spring is a special time of the year. It is a time when Mother Nature comes to life after being dormant for so long.

The year 2007 has already proven to be very busy at this point and getting busier as the year progresses.

Our TV Awareness Commercial on CTV Edmonton ran from the 4th week in December through to early February. It proved to be very successful. We are planning on airing the commercial in Calgary, Lethbridge and Medicine Hat in April and May.

In January, we held an AFPA board meeting followed by two days of board training. In March and April we will have another 4 days total of board training.

In February, the provincial steering committee met to discuss many agenda items brought forward by the AFPA. Some of the agenda pertained to the financial needs of children and foster parents. These matters are being reviewed by Children’s Services and we will keep you updated as we get the answers to our requests.

A very special thank you to all the volunteers who helped out in February and March at the James River Children’s Camp. We had a great turnout and we are making some needed improvements to the Main Lodge and cabins. We are planning on having another work bee on April 13, 14, and 15th with our official camp rental starting on April 20, 21 and 22nd through to the end of September.

Please book early and plan to attend our 8th Annual Aboriginal Awareness Weekend. This year we are holding the program on June 8, 9 and 10th. Our maximum capacity is 300 people. This is a very special program and we are proud to host this event. Please check for more information in this issue of the Bridge.

Have a great spring,
Norm Brownell, President

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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

The past three months have proven to be extremely busy, challenging and rewarding for the Board of Directors and the staff of the Alberta Foster Parent Association. It is hard to believe that three months have passed since I last wrote a report for the Bridge; time just seems to fly.

I would like to begin by thanking our dedicated, hard working volunteer Board of Directors for the work they do on behalf of the foster and adoptive families throughout Alberta. We are fortunate to have so many wonderful individuals working on our behalf and we could never thank them enough for all they do.

The AFPA staff has had its struggles trying to keep on top of things with various viruses and illness affecting each of them at some point over the past few months. I want to thank our members for being so patient with us during these times. I also want to thank my staff for working so hard to keep on top of everything even when they weren’t feeling well. Hopefully springtime will be a better time for all of us.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Margaret Zachow for her years of work on the AFPA Board of Directors. Margaret has taken on a position with Alberta Children’s Services in Region 7 in the area of Family Counseling for permanent placements for children and youth in care. Margaret worked extremely hard in her position as Regional Director for Region 7 and contributed greatly to the success of the AFPA. We thank you Margaret and wish you well in your new field. You will be missed by all.

As most of you are aware, the AFPA developed a commercial promoting foster care and adoption and it was aired on CTV Edmonton. We found the commercial to be very successful in generating interest in foster care and adoption. Because of the success, the AFPA has decided to run the commercial again during the months of April and May. It will be aired on CTV Edmonton, CTV Calgary, CTV Medicine Hat and CTV Lethbridge. I would like to thank our spokesperson, Joffrey Lupul, number 15 of the Edmonton Oilers for donating his time to support foster and adoptive families. We really appreciate the wonderful job you did for us. The AFPA made request in to the Calgary Flames for a spokesperson for another commercial that will please all our Flames fans. We do not expect to get started on this new commercial until after the playoffs are completed.

Norm Brownell, President, Sylvia Thompson, Vice President and I attended the Provincial Steering Committee (Negotiating Committee) on February 26, 2007. Most of the discussion was focused on what the AFPA members have brought forward as priority areas of need. We have asked for an increase in the basic maintenance allowance, the holiday allowance, recreational allowance and childcare equal to what is covered for training. We hope to receive word soon regarding our request and will notify you as soon as we hear. In addition to financial issues we discussed the following items:

- Mutual Assessment Guide - this item is being looked at and it is thought that perhaps it can be worked into the new Casework Practice Model.
- Appeals - the concern/issue of the removal of children from foster homes during an investigation was discussed and the issue of the confusion around time frame for filing an appeal was discussed. We are awaiting a legal opinion regarding the time frame for filing an appeal.
- The right for individuals applying to foster to appeal a decision not to allow them to foster was discussed.
- Ex-gratia payments under $10,000.00 - Each case is looked at individually. Foster parents must apply through their region for ex-gratia payment.
- Vehicle Insurance for Youth in Care - There was discussion regarding some workers pressuring foster families to allow youth in care to get their drivers license when they reach the appropriate age. This places a burden on foster families due to the fact that their own vehicle insurance is affected by this and that some of the youth expect to drive the foster families’ vehicle.

The next Provincial Steering Committee Meeting will be held in April at which point the committee will be reviewing all outstanding items from past agendas.

The raffle tickets on the playhouse that was donated to the AFPA have been distributed to the Regional Directors. This playhouse is beautiful and is valued at $10,000.00. If you are interested in purchasing a ticket please contact your Regional Director or the AFPA office. The second prize for this raffle is $2,000.00 and the third prize is $1,000.00. Please support us by purchasing a ticket.

I have travelled extensively throughout the province the past few months and have enjoyed meeting and talking with many of you. It is always a pleasure getting to know some of the people our association serves.

In closing, I would like to thank the many volunteer that work diligently on behalf of the AFPA and its members. It is because of your dedication and support that the AFPA is able to carry out its mandate.

Have a wonderful spring.
Katherine Jones RSW
My greetings to all, I have been absent with the AFPA for ten years, still most committed to the Annual A.G.M. I was elected a Chief of Piikani First Nation. Children will always be priority especially First Nation children, regardless of their social conditions. I continue to encourage members to focus on the importance of our responsibility to the health and safety of a child. Empowerment of a positive model will develop the ability of a child to make the right choices. Fostering is a gift needed to every child in a community with appreciation of ongoing recognition to the families in the fostering system.

As I look back over the past few months I’ve seen how busy Region 4 has been. We’ve offered training through the teleconferencing program and even though were feeling growing pains with this new format it is allowing more foster parents to take the training they require in their own district offices, this making the travel time shorter and much more convenient. This method also allows for smaller numbers to receive training. So saying all of that I would ask for your patience and understanding and help us smooth out any difficulties during the transition period.

I am very happy to welcome the Wetaskiwin Association back on board, they have been greatly missed. I wish them the best of luck and look forward to meeting with them.

I would like to also remind you all of Region 4’s Spring Retreat out at the James River Campground in April 27, 28, and 29th. We will be having a full training agenda. We will also be having our Regional Annual General Meeting where we will be electing the new Regional Board and new AFPA Directors.

So plan on coming to learn and expand your knowledge and take some time for yourselves to enjoy the beautiful surroundings of your camp.

I look forward to seeing all of you out there.
Heather Guard
P.S. Don’t forget your marshmallows

Things are not going very well in Region 5 right now, the Oilers are sliding fast and guess what? We just got rid of Ryan Smyth, but on the bright side of things it’s snowing again and it’s -22C. We are having a great winter.

Region 5 seems to keep busy, we had a sleigh ride and a BBQ after the New Year. That was very well attended. Some people drove 1 ½ hrs to come and they felt it was worth the drive. There is even talk of making it an annual event.

Hopefully by the time you read this we are having nice spring weather. I wish you all the best.

Where is Spring? Where are the flowers? It is time for a change and that is what Margaret is doing. I’m resigning as a board member.

As I look back over the years there have been many changes within foster care. Fifteen years ago I started fostering as a Receiving home. I still have two of my boys that were placed with me when I was a Receiving home. Fifteen years ago we never had a skill fee or core training. We have had many increases throughout the years. Major increases in recreation and vacation, supports for permanency and new training developed. We now have a camp for children. There is a foster parent handbook so that foster parents know what they are entitled to financially and what supports are available to them. We have the Foster Parent Entitlement document and a new Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act. Let us not forget that we also have the Foster Allegation Support Team. Without the Alberta Foster Parent Association negotiating with the Ministry none of this would be possible.

It has been a privilege to be a member of the Alberta Foster Parent Board. I have met many foster parents, met many department staff, gone through a number of Board Members, and I have made many good friends. I truly will miss Katherine and Norm. These two wonderful people are the backbone of Foster Care. They are your biggest support and we would not have what we have if it wasn’t for Katherine and Norm.

So do you to know what I am doing now? I work for WJS and I am the Family Group Conference Facilitator. My job is just another way of helping children in care. I have been working since September and I love my job and the people I work with are fantastic.

I will miss many people in foster care land and I wish each and every one of you good health and a beautiful summer with many

Good Bye,
From the Lady with the Hat

Continued on Page 6
FOSTER ALLEGATION SUPPORT TEAM MEMBERS (F.A.S.T.)

Albertain Foster Parent Association is responsible for the F.A.S.T. Program.

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Participants Needed for Study on Successful Foster Placements

Participants are needed for a study investigating which factors lead to successful foster placements with traumatized children. Little research has been conducted, to date, from the perspectives of Canadian foster parents. This study aims to expand current knowledge of the difficulties and needs of foster families caring for traumatized children and what interventions are needed to ensure successful placements. Participation is voluntary and confidential and will not involve contact with foster children.

If you are or have been a foster parent and are interested in contributing to this study please contact:

Samantha Pekh,
Graduate Student/Researcher,
Dept. of Counselling Psychology,
City University.
Email: samanthapekh@cityu.edu
Tel: 780-710-9567
Hi everyone. Every morning I wake and know that we are one day closer to spring. This winter seems to have gone on forever!

Region 7, what can I say. Wonderful things have been happening. Core training has been going on with exceptional attendance and facilitation.

Our work in our positions as advocates for you and your families has been ongoing. We are currently enrolled in Board Development training, which will result in enhanced skills and therefore enhanced results for all foster and adoptive families provincially as well as at local levels.

Special acknowledgement of appreciation goes out to Margaret Zachow and Ray Lavallee. Both of these hardworking, knowledgeable, committed, and well experienced individuals are going to be working in the area of Family Group Conferencing. To do so they have had to step down from their positions. The work done by both colleagues has been exemplary and has resulted to the betterment of Region 7, and all of Alberta’s foster and adoptive families. Margaret, your tenacity and spirit will be missed in all the events and meetings. Ray your gentleness of manner and your profound insight into areas of what is truly in the best interest of our children, as well as foster families will be missed. We do invite you both to stay active where possible and keep in touch.

I was both humbled and honored to speak at the recent Time for Action Conference in Edmonton along with Jim Toner. Jim and I were asked to present on Foster Parenting. Thank you to Steven Fraser and the Metis Nation of Alberta for providing this opportunity for us to do what we love to do because Jim and I love what we do and with foster and adoptive families.

Our Spring Retreat in Slave Lake is approaching quickly. We are so very excited and going with exceptional attendance and facilitation.

In closing I would like to extend a warm and heartfelt acknowledgement to some people who has resulted to the betterment of Region 7, and all of Alberta’s foster and adoptive families. The committee has been working hard and effectively to ensure that everything possible has been done to make this a positive event for all. One of the areas that we are most proud of is in the area of training, because the quality of trainers is the best of the best.

In closing I would like to extend a warm and heartfelt acknowledgement to some people who has been working very hard as your “volunteer” Regional Council Executive. The leadership of Emile Pelletier is evident. He had some pretty amazing shoes to fill and has done so. (I still miss you Larry, give me a call, remember me, (whispering) the ex-other woman in your life).

Keep your issues and concerns coming and looking forward to seeing many of you in Slave Lake.

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Region 7
Paulette Kopp

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Keep your issues and concerns coming and looking forward to seeing many of you in Slave Lake.

I would like to introduce myself. I’m Denise Wade, the new Alberta Foster Parent Association’s Director for Region 8. Firstly, I would like to thank Janet Porter for all her hard work as the Director for Region 8 over the past two years. She will be missed by many. We wish her well with her new daughter and the ventures that life takes her on.

Once again the Alberta Foster Parent Association’s Annual Training and Awards Conference was a great success. The training offered was second to none and provided many courses to choose from. As a new Director on the AFPA Board I look forward to being involved in next year’s conference.

Grande Prairie is hosting a training retreat from April 27th to April 29th, 2007. We are excited about the excellent training we will be providing for foster parents in Region 8. Marie Brownell and Graham Jones will be at the conference providing training to the much needed new F.A.S.T. representatives for our Region.

I look forward to working on the Alberta Foster Parent Association’s Board of Directors and working with the many awesome people who share my interest in ensuring that the children and youth in care receive the best care that can be provided and ensuring that the foster parents of Alberta receive the support they are entitled to.

I look forward to working with Carole Anne Patenaude, CEO of Region 8 and her exceptionally dedicated team. Carole Anne is very supportive of Region 8’s foster parents, and is extremely approachable and willing to give us a hand when we ask; sometimes she will even check in with some of us to see how things are going. Thank you Carole Anne for all you do and thanks to your team of dedicated workers who work so hard to do provide a quality foster care system.

In closing I would like to remind everyone to watch for the AFPA’s new raffle tickets to be out soon. We are raffling off a two story playhouse valued at $10,000.00. If you are interested in selling or purchasing tickets please contact your AFPA President or me, Region 8’s AFPA Director.

In closing I was wondering if winter would be leaving anytime soon as we still have about four feet of snow here. I wish you all a wonderful Spring season and hope to see you at the training retreat in April.

Region 8
Denise Wade

Here is a short list of his work:

- Edmonton Alberta: Current Manager of Children Services, Metis Nation Alberta
- Prince George/ Burns Lake British Columbia: First Nations Guardianship/Resource social worker;
- Government of British Columbia, Fort St. John: MCFD (Intake/Family Service) social worker;
- Government of Quebec, Montreal: C.L.S.C. community development;
- Ottawa, Ontario: Volunteer community worker;
- Winnipeg, Manitoba: Probation officer;
- Regina, Saskatchewan: Parole officer;
- Regina, Saskatchewan: Social Services Aboriginal Family Connections Unit;
- Calgary, Alberta: Native Social Services;
- Calgary, Alberta: Native Employment Services;
- Mount Royal College: Peer Support Centre;
- Member of the Canadian Psychology Association;
- Member of the Canadian Association of Social Workers;
- Canadian Criminal Justice Association; and
- Member of the Metis Nation of Alberta.
8th Annual
ALBERTA FOSTER PARENT ASSOCIATION'S
Aboriginal Cultural Awareness Weekend
June 8, 9, 10, 2007
Come join the fun.....
Plan to participate in an abundance of cultural activities
Meet and visit with new and old friends

Place:
Alberta Foster Parent Association
James River Children's Retreat
Sundre, Alberta

From Edmonton: QE 2 South past Red Deer. Take Hwy 587 west until you hit Hwy 22. Turn South (left). James River Camp is just before the bridge on the west side of the highway. (0.4 km)

From Calgary: Take Deerfoot/Hwy 2 North, merge on to Hwy 27 (Olds/Sundre) going west. Turn North (right) on Hwy 22, Drive 15km, James River Retreat is just after bridge on west side of Highway (0.4 km)

Fun-Time After-School Snacks!

Peanut Butter Banana Shake
2 bananas, peeled sliced and frozen
2 cups milk
1/4 cup Skippy peanut butter
2 tbsp sugar
dash vanilla

Remove banana from freezer and place in blender. Add all other ingredients. Blend until creamy. Immediately pour into glasses. Delicious!

Frozen Chocolate Banana Pops
1/2 cup Skippy Peanut Butter
1 cup semi-sweet chocolate chips
1/4 cup vegetable oil
8 large bananas
16 wooden sticks
coloured sprinkles

In small saucepan, combine peanut butter, chocolate chips and oil. Melt over low heat, stirring constantly until smooth. Pour into a tall glass.

Peel each banana and cut in half. Place a wooden stick in one end of each half.

Dip bananas in chocolate mixture. Spoon sprinkles over each coated banana. Place on waxed paper-lined tray.

Freeze for at least 6 hours or overnight. Store in freezer in airtight container for up to 1 month.

List of Events
- Pipe Ceremony
- Puppet Play with singing & dancing
- Drumming
- Children's Arts & Crafts
- Cultural Mural Project/ Arts & Crafts
- Youth Activities
- Children's Games
- Indigenous Healing Swing workshop
- Youth- First Nations Teachings
- Round Dance
- Tipi Raising Events & More.......

March 28, 2007

An CEO's of the Child and Family Services Authorities across the province, we recognize the incredibly important role foster parents have each and every day in supporting children, youth and families in all of our regions. Foster families provide an invaluable service to our communities by supporting children and youth in need. You provide stable, secure and loving homes and you serve as positive role models and heroes who make a difference in a child's or youth's life, even if your time with that child or youth is brief.

We recognize that most events have shown a positive on foster care in this province and we want to ensure you that we are committed to supporting foster families and that we greatly appreciate your ongoing dedication to fostering. We know that you have challenging roles and we see the first to admit that we could not do the work we do without foster families like you.

Many of you are not only wholeheartedly committed to your families and your role as foster parents, but also volunteers to mentor new foster families, share your experiences and be a mentor for other foster parents. Whether you are an agency, foster parent association or currently in foster care, by sharing your time with and on behalf of other foster families, our community becomes a whole a better for it.

We know that there is an ongoing need for foster families as children and youth can be best matched to have their needs met. As a CEO team, we have identified foster care recruitment as a priority, and as part of this priority, the need to identify best practices to recruit and retain foster families. We know that there is always room for improvement and we want you to know that your voices are important. You have valuable first-hand knowledge of fostering and what it takes to provide care to children and youth in need. Only by understanding your experiences can we make things better and we can’t stress enough how much we appreciate your opinions and input. We would invite you to get in touch with your local Foster Parent worker or team to share your input and it will make a difference in our collective efforts.

Once again, thank you for your ongoing commitment to serving children and youth in need.
Were talking here about the personal time you and I spend – or dont spend – encouraging and supporting our communities and kids. Its about what becoming increasingly apparent: that as a military operation, our current attack on the social ills facing children, youth and families is in disarray. Every day television, radio and the press remind us were in retreat; that after decades of launching wars on violence, drugs, poverty, family breakdown and illiteracy, current research and a thoughtful citizenry tell us we have violence, drugs, poverty, family breakdown and illiteracy in abundance and its destroying many of our kids and their families. As if that isnt discouraging enough, we seem to be running out of the ideas, energy and foot soldiers necessary to achieving success in any war. Our situation is somewhat akin to that of the World War II Canadian pilot whose aircraft plummeted to earth, leaving him the inglorious task of explaining the circumstances. In response to the question, “What caused your plane to crash?” he wrote, “I ran out of airspeed, altitude and ideas, simultaneously.”

The bad news is that in our battle for social reform were running out of airspeed and altitude at an alarming rate, particularly as it affects young people and their families; the good news is that there is a new idea out there that has little to do with whats going wrong and everything to do with what is or could be going right in communities throughout our province. Its called Healthy Communities – Healthy Youth and is the result of nearly ten years of research and work by the Search Institute of Minneapolis, Minnesota. It suggests that when you and I witness families and young people in difficulty in our communities, we are not innocent bystanders. And we can no longer hide behind the claim that we dont have kids, never had kids or that weve already got our own kids to worry about – because the kids in our communities are the responsibility of all of us and the society will be served better when we feel obligated to act accordingly.

Like many of the worlds great ideas, the Healthy Communities – Healthy Youth concept is really a matter of getting back to basics, more importantly, of understanding why people today do not feel empowered to take personal action in a society organized around services, not community; of a citizenry living in communities which no longer have expectations that anyone other than the parents and those paid to do it should take any responsibility for the well-being of children and adolescents. John McKnight write, “Many of us have come to recognize that as we exiled our fallible neighbors to the control of managers, therapists, and technicians, we lost much of our power to be the vital centre of society. We forgot about the capacity of every single one of us to do good work and instead, made some of us the objects of good works – services of those who serve. As institutions have grown in power, we have become too impotent to be called real citizens and too disconnected to be effective members of community.”

As a result, weve been relegated to a position of being powerless onlookers, adopting a problem-solving approach in addressing youth issues in our families, in our neighborhoods, and in the communities in which we live.

What the Search Institutes Healthy Communities – Healthy Youth initiative proposes is that we redirect our attention to 40 developmental assets identified as the foundation upon which healthy development of all young people will take place. Built around eight key asset topics – support, empowerment, boundaries and expectations, constructive use of time, commitment to learning, positive values, social competencies, and positive identity – the Institute goes on to define what parents, young people, neighbors, schools, youth programs, and interested adults can do in a practical way to assure that every youngster within their influence has maximum opportunity to acquire as many assets as possible.

Whats different about the asset-building approach? First of all, it builds on community capacity, not weakness. In the words of Kretzmann and McKnight, “Building a team of community leaders who are clearly oriented toward finding and mobilizing the already existing gifts and capacities of residents and their associations is crucial to the success of the community-building enterprise … fortunately, every community is blessed with residents who are fundamentally committed to what might be called a capacity-oriented view of the world. These are the folks who understand well the fact that the proverbial glass is both half empty and half full, but who insist always on focusing first on the fullness, on the gifts and capacities of their families, friends and neighbors.”

As a result, asset builders talk about focusing on the positive, not the problems of proactive rather than reactive solutions, and of mobilizing the public as well as all youth-serving organizations in a community rather than relying heavily on professionals. Asset builders are committed to unleashing the caring potential of all residents and organizations so that public resources can be focused on areas of greatest need rather than promoting further reliance on public funding to provide services. Asset builders are driven by a hope that change is possible rather than a sense of despair about entrenched problems.

In his recent book All Kids Are Our Kids, Search Institute Peter L. Benson made it clear how simple yet profound this asset-building notion is. “Much of the work of asset building occurs for free. It is the stuff people do in their everyday lives.”

And were talking powerful, life-changing stuff here. Through its research, the Search Institute has identified forty factors in young peoples lives that make them more likely to grow up healthy, caring, and responsible. Theres much evidence the presence or absence of these developmental assets in the lives of young people has a significant impact on their healthy development. If Canadian research mirrors the experience south of 49th parallel and focus groups of Canadian parents and teens suggest it will, well find there are many young Canadians not acquiring these “building blocks” to the future so important to their healthy development.

The Search Institutes finding offers evidence of the power of assets to protect youth from harmful or unhealthy choices. Theyre represented in four ranges – those young people with 0-10 assets, 11-20 assets, 21-30 assets, and 31-40 assets. In studies of nearly half a million teens across a wide range of cultural and socioeconomic groups, the results were alarming if one accepts the premise that all youth should have at least 31 of the 40 assets in their lives. Only 8% of those surveyed experience this level, with 30% having 21-30 assets, 42% with 11-20, and 20% with 0-10 assets in their lives. There is strong evidence in the research that the average number of developmental assets present in the lives of young people diminishes from a high of 21.5 in Grade 6 to 17.2 in Grade 12.
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All this becomes even more worrisome when these findings are compared with the importance the assets play in protecting kids from high-risk behavior and in promoting positive attitudes in behaviors.

Three percent of teens with 31-40 assets reported problems with alcohol, while 53% of those with 0-10 assets reported they’d used alcohol three or more times in the past 30 days or got drunk one or more times in the past two weeks.

Violence was found to be a concern of 6% of teens with 31-40 assets; 61% of young people with 0-10 assets reported they had engaged in three or more acts of hitting, fighting, or injuring another person during the past 12 months.

At the same time, there is convincing evidence that assets protect young people from negative behaviors and increase the chances they’ll grow up demonstrating positive attitudes. For example: while 7% of teens with 0-10 assets reported success in school, 53% of those with 21-40 assets reported they got mostly As on their report cards. Twenty-five percent of kids with 0-10 assets were concerned with their physical health compared with 88% of those with 31-40 assets, who attributed high priority to maintaining good health.

So what does or can this mean for those potential asset builders among us? Let me defer to a comment I heard recently which I can recall but not attribute to one person. It went something like this: “There is a sleeping giant in this country and it will be found in the passion Canadian parents and communities have for their children.”

It is time for us to become passionate about our young people, to make it our goal that every young person experiences many points of formal and informal relational support on a daily basis. Even those seemingly small gestures – calling children by name, acknowledging their presence, exchanging greetings, smiling when passing a young person on the street or in the mall – are important elements of support that when accumulated over time create a critical mass of positive nurture. And it is time that those of us concerned about the well-being of young people become unreasonable.

That’s because it is unreasonable that 1,472,000 children in Canada were reported living in poverty in 1995, an increase of 58% since 1989. In British Columbia those numbers increased 85%. It is unreasonable that 30% of Canadian young people failed to complete high school. It is unreasonable that the average Canadian teen reportedly spends less than 17 minutes per week in meaningful conversation with their parents yet by the time they graduate from Grade 12 they will have spent nearly 15,000 hours in front of a television set.

And so two important questions for all of us to contemplate as we enter a new year: Who was there for you when you were growing up? Whos there for the kids in your life and within your influence today?

References
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Stress in Children

Children experience stress just as adults do but it often goes unrecognized. Today the pace of life is faster and changes occur rapidly and frequently. There are many factors that could contribute to stress in children’s lives. Children often experience stress from ongoing situations, some of which may be beyond their control. David Elkind, in his book, The Hurried Child, states that “stress is the wear and tear on our bodies that is produced by the very process of living.” Elkind also says that one of the greatest contributors to stress in children’s lives is hurry - to get ready, to go from one place to another, to do well and to grow up. Family upheavals due to death or divorce, family health problems, tension and quarrelling in the home lead to children’s fear, anxiety and emotional overload, and contribute to chronic stress.

“Stress can infect and affect the physical, emotional, social, intellectual and academic well-being of children. It can interfere with their motivation, attention, perception, memory and the entire learning process,” says Dr. Harold Minden, a psychology professor and expert on stress at York University. Children respond and react to stress in their own individual ways. Just like adults, they have different coping abilities and what causes stress in one child may cause none in another.

Signs and signals that indicate a child might be experiencing undue stress include:

• recurring headaches, tummy aches or neck pain
• increased irritability, sadness, panic, anger
• being more quiet than usual
• trouble relaxing or sleeping
• lethargy, daydreaming, withdrawal from activities
• excessive energy or restlessness
• reverting to less mature behaviours
• nervous habits such as nail biting, hair twisting, thumb sucking, or sighing deeply
• subtle reactions, a strained look, frowning
• trouble getting along with friends.

Stress Management Techniques

Children who have experienced stress for some time need extra patience and reassurance. They might respond to a combination of the following:

• physical contact – hugging helps children relax and builds self-esteem
• listening – ask children how they feel
• encouragement – help children find something they are good at and tell them how proud you are of them
• honesty and openness – talk and encourage children to express their feelings openly
• security – try to be consistent
• physical exercise – exercise helps burn off stressful feelings
• humour – help children see the funny side of things
• quiet – allow for quiet time
• balanced diet – encourage children to eat a healthy, varied diet

Teach children to recognize the symptoms of stress and the changes they feel in themselves — e.g., rapid heartbeat, sweaty palms, fast breathing, headaches, tummy aches, tight tense muscles and nervous panicky feelings. Find out about any significant events in the children’s lives. Caring adults are very important for children. Provide an environment that promotes a relaxed lifestyle. Model peaceful living and good relaxation techniques.

Quick Ways to Relax

Kid Cuddle.
Standing or sitting, stretch arms out wide, wide, wide. Slowly bring arms forward, cross in front. Each hand holds onto the opposite shoulder. Squeeze, rock and cuddle the kid in your arms.

Cloud Push (to stretch out tight muscles).
We are going to practice stretching up and pushing the clouds away. Stand tall. Place your hands on your hips. Bring one arm way up over your head and stretch it straight up. Try and reach a cloud and push it away. Push, push, push! Now let your arm fall slowly to your side. Bring the other arm up and push the cloud. Push, push, push! Now let your arm fall slowly to your side. Lift both arms up. Clasp hands together; turn the palms up and push and bounce the cloud. Slowly, slowly, let your arms float gently back to your sides.

Who Knows?
Stand at attention, or sit up straight with hands along sides. Raise shoulders up to your ears. Hold. Let shoulders drop. While your shoulders go up, say, “Who.” When you drop your shoulders, say, “Knows.” Repeat five times.

Deep Breathing (to slow down the body and quiet the mind).
Get into a comfortable position, either lying flat on your back or sitting comfortably with both feet flat on the floor and if you like, close your eyes. We are going to practice breathing slowly and deeply. Imagine you have a balloon in your tummy. Place one hand below your belly button. Breathe in slowly and deeply through your nose to a count of four. Feel the balloon fill up with air. When the balloon is full, breathe out slowly, using a count of four, to flat ten the balloon. Your hand may rise and fall as the balloon fills and empties.
1. Slowly blow up the balloon ... 1 ... 2 ... 3 ... 4 ...
2. Now, slowly blow out and flatten the balloon ... 1 ... 2 ... 3 ... 4 ...
3. Repeat five times and then breathe normally.
Caution. Remember to breathe out as slowly as you breathe in. Breathing in deeply without relaxed slow exhalation can lead to dizziness or hyperventilation.

Go Tight – Go Loose.
Stand at attention, hands along sides, fingers pointing down. Make a fist with each hand, squeeze each hand tight. Squeeze... Squeeze... Squeeze... Relax. Now, while you squeeze your fists again, tighten your arms to squeeze your body, Squeeze...Squeeze... Squeeze... Relax. Now, this time also squeeze your legs together while making a fist and squeezing your arms together, Squeeze... Squeeze... Squeeze. Relax. Repeat. Shake out your hands, arms and legs. Enjoy the sense of relaxation.

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Growing Resilient Children

As a psychologist concerned with the well-being of children, one of the most exciting current research developments for me is this: Parents can inoculate their children against stress.

Despite the increasing and potentially damaging stressors that are being placed on children today, some children manage to survive and even thrive under high stress conditions. Psychologists call those children: “resilient children.”

But parents who raise resilient children by successfully inoculating them against stress don’t do it with injections or pills, they do it with a specific set of parenting behaviors. And that’s why it is so important for parents to know the key behaviors needed to grow resilient children.

Resilient children bend but don’t break. Resilience is the ability to bounce back, the ability to cope with crisis and challenge, the strength to turn the stresses of life into opportunities. Here’s what we’ve found about resilience in children:

Young children at high risk for school failure, as well as for social, behavioral and emotional problems, will instead thrive if key protective factors are present to counteract stressors. Some of these protective factors are personal and some concern the support systems around children - the family, school and community. But study after study has now identified four key characteristics of resilient children. Resilient children are those who first of all develop:

1. Strong feelings of self-esteem and self-efficacy (i.e. a child who can say to himself “I am a good person” and who has a “I can do it” positive attitude - sometimes called “learned optimism”).

2. Resilient children also develop systematic problem-solving skills, especially as applied to interpersonal problems (i.e. the ability to look at choices and options and to set realistic goals when faced with a personal problem - liking having to share toys or agreeing about game rules or getting your feelings hurt).

3. Resilient children have the ability to recognize and describe their feelings to an interested adult.

4. Finally they are children with parents who clearly and consistently demonstrate warmth and caring and who take the time and effort to teach their children the positive attitudes and skills which I've already mentioned.

Some people I talk to say ‘what’s all the fuss about? It’s adults who have the stress, kids have it easy’. But let’s look at the facts:

- There are 14 times as many divorced Canadians as there were 30 years ago. As a result, 1 child in 5 these days grows up in a family headed by a single parent. Almost an additional 10% of children live either in a reconstituted family or with adults who are not their biological parents.

- Over 70% of families with young children have two working parents who are clearly less available to children than they were in the past.

- 41% of Canadian parents in one study said it was hard to find time and energy for parenting. Increasing numbers of nuclear families (parents and children) are separated by hours or days of travel from their extended family, especially grandparents, a traditional source of support for both parents and children.

- Today 1 in 5 Canadian children are also living in poverty. That represents an increase of 60% or over half a million more Canadian children living in poverty now than in 1989.

These statistics signal serious stressors in the lives of children. Professionals who work with children know that they are most affected and most stressed by changes in what I call the 3 R’s - not reading, writing and ‘rithmetic, but the 3 R’s of relationships, roles and routines. Marital breakdown, changes in family membership or location, changes in schools and neighborhoods, separation from traditional sources of support, uncertainty with regard to the availability of parents and sometimes with regard to the necessities of life, including food, housing, and physical safety, unpredictable and changing expectations to carry adult responsibilities including caring for younger siblings, refereeing a marital conflict, becoming the primary housekeeper - all these conditions challenge the stability of childhood and present children with the need to keep adjusting to changing relationships, roles and routines. In short - this is a formula for overwhelming stress.

So why should we be concerned about all this? Maybe these things can cause children to feel worried, tense, uncomfortable, angry or scared for a little while, but won’t they simply get over it? Maybe the upset will be serious enough to cause a child to lose her appetite or some sleep or have a stomach ache for a short time, but won’t she outgrow it? The answer is that some children will cope, even when stress piles-up and becomes chronic. But many other children subjected to high, continuing levels of stress start to experience serious problems. Here are just a few examples:

It’s been found that children’s adjustment to and achievement in the education system is closely related to a variety of stressors, including mother’s mental and physical health, the family’s financial situation and a variety of stressful life events. Stress levels in children have been found to be related to respiratory-tract illness, bacterial throat infections and frequency of accidents. Recent studies suggest that levels of stress hormones in infants are directly affected by the quality of physical and emotional interactions between baby and parents. Early experiences of stress can influence patterns of brain development in infants, with profound effect on future brain functioning.

It is important to note that damaging levels of stress in childhood may result not only from dramatic or traumatic life events like divorce, death or disability but also from a prolonged and unrelieved pile-up of minor everyday stressors like conflicts with siblings, being teased or bullied, being pressured around school performance or being too hurried and overprogrammed. Damaging stress is like an alarm bell going off constantly in a child’s ears, telling him that there is danger, but never telling him what to do about it, nor giving him a chance to turn off the alarm. The bottom line is that chronic stress in children puts them significantly at risk for behavioral, social, academic and psychosomatic problems which can remain with them into adulthood.

You already know who can do the best job of inoculating children against stress. It’s not psychologists, family doctors, nurses or teachers - it’s parents. Take the time and effort to practice positive parenting and you will be rewarded with resilient children.

About the Author: Dr. Mark Frankel is a registered psychologist and is founder and President of the BusyFamily Resource Centre (www.busyfamily.com). Copyright 2001 Microchip Human Services Inc. Article Reprinted with permission from the author.
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The membership fee is $50.00 per household per year (one card for each parent will be issued). A fee of $10.00 will be charged for all NSF cheques. If you would like your membership card laminated, please enclose an additional $0.75 per card.