Growing boys, each with his own unique skills, talents—and front teeth.

Seven things we can do to help boys develop healthy emotional lives

By Dan Kindlon, Ph.D. and Michael Thompson, Ph.D.

Eighth grade girls today score significantly higher than boys on tests of reading and writing. Boys are much more likely than girls to drop out of high school, and the percentage of male undergraduates in college has dropped almost 25 percent since 1970. These alarming trends spotlight the difficulty many American boys are having in school—and in getting on with their lives.

When we start talking about gender differences, people often raise the nature vs. nurture issue. Some say, for example, that boys are simply more prone to this or that behavior because of their biology. But human behavior defies simple explanations.

It’s both nature and nurture

All behavior is influenced by multiple forces, and research has found inextricable links between biology and experience. Environmental factors can affect the brain’s structure, and brain functioning can be enhanced by our various learning experiences. For example, a boy’s early ease at throwing a ball or climbing a jungle gym may begin with developmental readiness. But when he receives encouragement for his efforts, his interest and skills are likely to grow. Likewise, a girl’s ease with reading and language may begin with an early neurological advantage—and it, too, will increase with encouragement.

Appreciating gender differences

Boys and girls alike manifest curiosity, energy and a desire for success in school, but these gifts may come in different gender-based patterns. And while boys’ “differentness” is not inherently bad, it can present a challenge to teachers, the school culture and the boys themselves.

The average boy’s gifts include high activity, physicality and impulsive responses. But whether these traits are valued depends on the teacher, the boy and the moment. Where there’s room and respect for bold strokes of action, these qualities serve boys beautifully. But in the classroom—alongside girls, who may be more organized, coop-
Healthy emotional lives...
Continued from page 7...

Greer and accomplishments school learners—these “boy qualities” may turn from assets to liabilities.

Since girls typically mature earlier, they may achieve cognitive milestones at a younger age. For example, many girls learn to count, learn colors and learn the names for objects sooner. And that puts them a step ahead of boys in their prereading skills.

As a result, the early age at which we teach reading puts boys at a disadvantage. They tend to catch up later, but in the early grades especially, boys may not feel as able or valued as the girls in the central learning tasks of elementary school.

How to encourage our sons

We know from research and our own experience that it is within the power of every parent—indeed, every adult in a boy’s life—to give him the emotional grounding he needs to make his way in the world. The following suggestions have the potential to transform the way you nurture and protect the emotional lives of the boys you know and care about.

Every boy’s internal life and journey are unique, but in these seven ways, all boys’ needs are precisely the same. These are the foundations of parenting, teaching and creating communities that respect and cultivate the inner lives of boys.

1 Give boys permission to have an emotional life. Give them approval for the full range of human feelings. Help boys develop a vocabulary that allows them to put their feelings into words—so they may better understand themselves and communicate more effectively with others.

Speak consciously to a boy’s emotional life whether or not he is aware of it. Respect it, make reference to it and share your own. If you act as if your son has an internal life, the sooner he will take it into account. For example, instead of saying, “You should try out for soccer or the school play,” you might say, “I know you were disappointed about not getting a part in the play last year. Do you want to take the challenge and try it out again?”

2 Recognize and accept boys’ high activity level and give them safe places to express it. Boys need space for their jumping, their energy and their exuberance. The increased emphasis on test scores and standardized assessments in schools means that children are required to spend more time sitting still and listening.

At the same time, recess has been eliminated in many schools and physical education programs have been cut back or eliminated. So make sure to give your child time for activity outside of school.

3 Talk to boys in their language—in a way that honors their pride and masculinity. Be direct. Use boys as “consultants” and problem-solvers. A good way to find out about your son’s emotional responses is to ask him questions such as:

“How did your friends feel about that? How did you help your friend? Could you have used some help too? What do you think about the way the adults handled that situation?

Asking for your son’s opinion doesn’t mean doing everything he wants you to do. It means giving him a hearing—starting when he’s young. If you’re willing to ask consultative questions, put your emotional cards on the table and not be disappointed with brief answers, you can communicate with boys.

4 Teach boys that emotional courage is indeed courage—and that the sources of real strength in life are courage and empathy. Recognize the people around you who, even in small ways, show emotional courage.

Mark Twain’s description bears repeating: “Courage is resistance to fear, mastery of fear—not absence of fear.”

Boys have fears, boys have needs and boys are vulnerable. Acknowledging these fears will not make boys weak. It will free them from shame and make them stronger. Teach boys to honor their own fears and respect the fears of others. That is empathy—and every boy has the capacity for empathy. Develop this capacity by giving boys opportunities to take care of animals and younger children and to be helpful to older people, the needy and the environment.

5 Use discipline to build character and conscience. Getting in trouble is a normal part of growing up. Boys need discipline that is clear, consistent and not harsh. The best discipline is built on the child’s love of adults and his wish to please.

If children’s desire to please is respected and cultivated, this fosters good communication between them and their parents—and it keeps kids reachable. But if they are unduly shamed, harshly punished or encounter excessive adult anger, they will soon start reacting to authority with resistance, rather than with a desire to do better.

6 Model a manhood of emotional attachment. Boys imitate what they see. If they see emotional distance, guardedness and coldness among men, they will copy that behavior. The potential for loneliness among men as adults needs to be addressed in the lives of boys.

Help boys maintain their friendships even through inevitable conflicts. And recognize that male friendships do not always look the same as a woman might wish or expect. They are not as close or reliable and may seem too competitive.

7 Teach boys that there are many ways to be a man. Boys grow up to be many sizes, possess many skills and do a wide variety of things. Don’t disregard their offerings or make them feel as if they do not measure up. We ask a lot of boys morally and spiritually, and we need to support their efforts to please us. And if they try to please us, we must communicate to them that they are not a disappointment to us.

“What a long kick! I can tell you’ve been practicing.”

How did your friends feel about that? How did you help your friend? Could you have used some help too? What do you think about the way the adults handled that situation?

Asking for your son’s opinion doesn’t mean doing everything he wants you to do. It means giving him a hearing—starting when he’s young. If you’re willing to ask consultative questions, put your emotional cards on the table and not be disappointed with brief answers, you can communicate with boys.

Develop this capacity by giving boys opportunities to take care of animals and younger children and to be helpful to older people, the needy and the environment.

This article was adapted from the authors’ book “Raising Cain: Protecting the Emotional Life of Boys” (Ballantine).
A gift of hope does good throughout the year

A reader writes

I received a wonderful Christmas present from my adult children this year. They gave $100 to the group First Book (firstbook.org) in my name. My gift will supply 50 books for a mentor to tutor a low-income child in reading for one year. As a retired teacher, this was a very thoughtful choice.

My children found First Book in a New York Times column by Nicholas Kristof. He listed several small humanitarian groups that do good work, but rarely make the media spotlight. I’ve told my family I’d like more gifts from the list—for Mother’s Day, my birthday and next Christmas, such as:

The Nurse-Family Partnership (nursefamilypartnership.org). Works with first-time moms in the U.S. to try to break the cycle of poverty. It sends nurses to at-risk women who are pregnant for the first time and continues the visits until the child turns 2. A $150 gift provides coaching and support for a young nurse by a senior nurse.

Fonkoze (fonkoze.org). A poverty-fighting group in Haiti. A gift of $20 will send a rural child to elementary school, $50 will buy a family a pregnant goat, and $100 will support a family for 13 weeks while it starts a business.

Arzu (ArzuStudioHope.org). It hires women in Afghanistan to make rugs and bracelets for export. The women get decent wages, and their families must commit to sending their children to school. A donation of $20 pays for a water filter for a worker’s family.

Edna Hospital (ednahospital.org). It’s in Somaliland, which has one of the highest maternal mortality rates in the world. A $50 gift pays for four prenatal visits, a hospital delivery and one postnatal visit. A gift of $150 pays for a lifesaving C-section.

To see more of these groups such as camfed.org in Zambia and somaly.org in Cambodia, enter the search words Kristof Humanitarian Gift Guide at nytimes.com.

Make-believe play builds thinking skills

R esearchers have been looking at how kids played years ago and how they play now—and the change is remarkable. “When we talk about play today, the first thing that comes to mind are toys,” says Brown University cultural historian Howard Chudacoff, Ph.D., author of Children at Play. “When I think of play in the 19th century, I think of activity rather than an object.”

As late as the 1950s, American kids tended to hang out in large or small groups, more or less unsupervised. They engaged in improvised play in back yards or on street corners and made up their own rules. “Basically, they spent most of their time doing what looked like nothing at all,” says Dr. Chudacoff.

With the advent of TV advertising, children were supplied with ever more specific toys and predetermined scripts for play. Instead of playing pirate with a tree branch, for example, they play Star Wars with a toy light saber.

In recent years, out of concern for their children’s safety, parents have enrolled kids in structured activities in gyms and other inside environments. As they also seek opportunities to enrich their child’s mind, what may once have been “play time” now includes a wide variety of lessons and classes.

Psychologists now believe that time spent in make-believe play actually helps develop the ability to “self-regulate,” one of the brain’s executive functions. It means being able to exert self-discipline, control one’s emotions and resist negative impulses.

Make-believe becomes such a powerful tool for building self-discipline because—during this kind of play—kids engage in what is called “private speech,” says researcher Laura Berk. They talk to themselves about what they’re going to do and how they’re going to do it, which is great practice for regulating their behavior.

When parents monitor children’s play too closely or when kids’ entire time is spent on lessons and leagues, they aren’t getting a chance to practice policing themselves, says Berk. In his book The Second Family, Ron Taffel says that the “ability to play or to just be—without constant input from mom or dad—strengthens a child’s imagination and self-motivation.”

Play is not a waste of time. It’s one of the activities that help kids the most. 

This is your column. We invite you to send questions about work and family life or tell us how you solved a problem that you think a lot of people face. Write: Dr. Susan Ginsberg, Work & Family Life, 305 Madison Avenue, Suite 1143, New York, NY 10165. E-mail: workfam@aol.com.

3 year olds show ability to judge others’ intentions

I t’s not just lawyers and politicians who need to understand other people’s intentions. We all need this ability sometimes. And researchers at the Max Planck Institute in Germany have found that children as young as 3 are able to judge a person’s intentions and act accordingly.

In their study, children were less likely to help a person if they had seen that individual engage in harmful behavior (in this case, the kids observed adult actors tear up a drawing or break a clay bird).

When someone even tried to do something harmful but didn’t succeed, the toddlers in the study were also less likely to help that person later on. But when they observed someone cause harm accidentally, the kids were more willing to help that person later on.

“To help those who help others is a very sophisticated ability,” says developmental psychologist Amrisha Vaish. Researchers thought previously that this ability didn’t kick in until age 5 or 6. Their study was reported in the journal “Child Development.”

INTERCHANGE

WFL February 2011 ◆ www.workandfamilylife.com
What we all need to know about home health care

The number of Americans of all ages who receive home health care has risen dramatically. Home care is used now for everything from basic nursing after surgery to kidney dialysis, respiratory therapy and hospice care for patients who are approaching the end of life.

New demonstration program
In response to this new reality, a small section of the 2010 health care reform law is a demonstration program that covers doctor visits to patients in their homes. Called “Independence at Home,” the purpose is to show that home visits can improve the quality and reduce the cost of care to some of the country’s sickest patients.

Why home care is so common
The emotional factor is key. Most people feel safer and more comfortable with their families in familiar surroundings than in a hospital. Cost is a factor too—and home health care, increasingly, is part of a hospital discharge plan.

Services such as antibiotic infusion, nutrition infusion and care for an infant with breathing problems cost about a third as much at home as they do in the hospital, to name just a few.

Alternative to the hospital
Home health care is used not only after a hospital stay but, more and more these days, as an alternative to hospitalization. “Doctors can often prevent or forestall the need for hospitalization by assuring that patients are getting close supervision of their symptoms and proper administration of medication at home,” says Peter Rogatz, M.D., an expert in home health care. “Just be aware that many doctors are not as familiar as they should be with available home health services, and they may not have heard about the home-visit program in the health reform legislation.”

Education is key
Because we don’t know for sure about our own or our relatives’ future needs, it’s important for all of us to have a working familiarity with the home health services that are available and how they are paid for.

Home services now include physical and occupational therapy, wound and bandage care, infusion of pain medication and follow-up monitoring for heart attack patients.

“Most patients with diabetes, chronic heart failure, AIDS and other long-term illness can be cared for at home,” says Dr. Rogatz.

Home health care providers also teach families members how to care for patients and patients how to care for themselves. Nursing services can train patients to perform daily activities, suggest ways to make a home safe and, in some situations, even teach family members and patients to manage high-tech equipment such as ventilators. Families providing home hospice care also learn how to support and comfort their loved one.

“It was a relief to hear from a visiting nurse that we were doing everything possible to make Mom comfortable and to know what to expect in the days and months to come,” says Jane Duell of Goshen, Indiana, who arranged for home hospice care for her mother.

The hospital social worker was really helpful.

Who pays the bill?
Most home care services are paid for by Medicare, Medicaid, private insurers or directly by patients and their family members.

Typically insurers pay for home care by skilled professionals only during the first, acute part of a patient’s recovery. Insurers almost never pay for home care aides, whose services may be essential for a short or long recuperation.

“There’s a big misconception about what home health care is and what services are covered by insurance,” according to Heather McKenzie of the Visiting Nurse Associations of America.

For example, with a doctor’s order, Medicare will cover skilled nursing care, some forms of therapy, a limited number of health aide services, social services and health equipment.

Medicare provides some reimbursement for home visits by doctors but does not cover 24-hour care, homemaker services or services from uncertified agencies. Private insurance plans may reimburse for specific prescribed services.

Online information
www.nahc.org Check the FAQs on the National Association for Home Care and Hospice website to help you get started.

www.vnac.org See the Visiting Nurse Associations’ tips on choosing health care agencies.

If your relative needs temporary home care after a hospital stay

Many patients go to the hospital as a result of an emergency. But a surprising number know in advance that they will be convalescing at home after a hospitalization.

► If you or your parent know that you will be hospitalized for surgery or other procedures, ask your doctor how long your recovery will be and what you will or will not be able to do as you recuperate.

► If home care is a viable option, start planning for it as soon as possible. Contact Medicare or a private insurer regarding available benefits. Check out your long-term care policy if you have one.

► If you go to the hospital in an emergency, talk to the discharge planner (usually a social worker or nurse) as soon as possible. If need be, designate a family member to speak on your behalf. Be realistic as to your home situation and how much support is available.

► If you don’t have the time or stamina to figure out what’s needed, you might turn to a health care advocate or geriatric care manager. This service is not typically reimbursed by insurers, but a one-hour consultation could save you precious hours of time.

► Be aware that doctors can also refer a patient to a home health agency, whether or not the patient was hospitalized.
Yes, you can get your kid to stop whining

By Nancy Samalin

When kids start whining, all you can think of is getting them to stop. Whining is like chalk scratching on a blackboard. It can drive the most even-tempered parent over the edge. But ordering a child to stop whining is about as effective as ordering an infant to stop crying.

Whining typically progresses in stages and it can become habitual, a rut. In order to climb out of it, you need to understand how you got there in the first place.

All whining isn’t the same

Whining usually means one of three things: (1) children are trying to communicate with you, (2) they are trying to manipulate you, or (3) they whine so often they’re no longer even aware of it.

A lot depends on a child’s age. For toddlers, whining usually isn’t deliberate. It’s more like an advanced form of crying. And the reason it’s so frustrating for parents is that, although we expect infants to cry, we assume that once children have learned words, they will use them. But most 2 and 3 year olds don’t have a very well-developed sense of language. When tiredness and frustration overwhelm them, all they can manage is a cry of distress, which can come out as a whine.

As kids get older, if they learn that whining achieves results, they will use it to get attention, to get what they want, and to test their power over you—or sometimes all three.

Set a good example

Sometimes we don’t realize how we sound, but we need to listen to ourselves. When we say the same things over and over again (“How many times do I have to ask you?” “Will you get moving?” “Hurry up, we’re late.”), it can sound an awful lot like we’re whining too.

To avoid this, try using brief neutral phrases to make your points, such as: “It’s time to get up. Your cereal is ready.” Single-word prompts can work well too: “Teeth.” “Shoes.” “Jacket.”

Try role playing

Carol, a mother in one of my workshops, taught her 5-year-old son Harry to identify the difference between whining and asking—to help him gain more control over the way he expressed himself.

When he started to whine, Carol would say: “I only answer when you speak in your regular Harry voice, not in a whiny voice. Can you ask me in a way that makes me want to listen?”

The approach worked. In time, Harry learned how to ask for what he wanted without whining. When he occasionally slipped, Carol learned to say calmly, “Try it again in your regular voice.”

Another way to get your point across is to change roles. You pretend to be your child, and your child pretends to be you.

Of course, if you try role playing, be careful to do it playfully, never sarcastically. Your goal is to teach, not to make fun of your child. Just be aware that when kids are truly overtired or hungry, they are not likely to appreciate humor.

Don’t give in

Experienced whiners know how to wear parents down with their unrelenting pleas. But if your response is to do anything to stop the whining, you’re letting your child know that it works. Firmly state: “This no is not going to turn into a yes.”

If your child continues to whine, say, “If you’re in a whiny mood, that’s OK, but I don’t want to hear it. Why don’t you go to your room? You can whine there until you are ready to stop.”

Of course, the “go to your room” approach will not help you in stores and other public places, where a lot of whining happens. It helps to say, before you enter the store or mall: “We’re going to buy laundry detergent today and nothing else.” Another day, you can say, “We’re going to the mall and you can pick out a book or toy today.”

Pay attention to the triggers

If children have become regular whiners, try to figure out what sets them off. Does it only happen with you, or with others as well? Is there something particular your child whines about?

By paying careful attention to the circumstances, you can interpret the reasons for a child’s distress and create alternative ways of handling different situations.

For example, if a 3 year old whines while you’re getting her dressed, maybe you need to change your method. Some kids this age need more time and freedom to dress themselves. If a 4 year old get whiny in the early evening, maybe he needs a snack or some quiet time.

Recognize genuine needs

When children start out in a normal voice and then escalate to a whine, they may feel frustrated because you are ignoring their needs. When kids feel uncomfortable, tired, or simply want something they can’t have, they can become intense and emotional.

Whining children may merely need a hug or a comforting word. If a child whines because you said no, you should try to respond. You don’t have to change your no to a yes, but you can acknowledge the child’s feelings of sadness, anger or disappointment.

You might say, for example: “I know how much you would like to stay up later, but your bedtime is 8 o’clock.” Or “sometimes it’s so hard to wait, isn’t it?”

While it’s only natural to get annoyed, sometimes the best way to respond to whining is with love and understanding.

**A quick quiz to help you play to your strengths**

By Chuck Martin

**Human beings have the built-in capacity to meet challenges and accomplish goals through the use of “Executive Skills,” a set of cognitive functions that take place in the brain’s prefrontal cortex that affect who you are and how you operate (see Research Review on page 3). These skills help you decide what activities or tasks to pay attention to and which ones you will choose to do. They allow you to organize your behavior over time and override immediate demands in favor of longer-term goals. Through the use of these skills you can plan and organize activities, sustain attention and persist to complete a task.**

Executive Skills also enable you to manage your emotions and monitor your thoughts in order to work more efficiently and effectively. They essentially help you regulate your behavior. And, for the record, this term should not be confused with the particular skills commonly associated with executives in the workplace.

**Why it’s important to know**

As a practical matter, most of us are strong in some Executive Skills and weak in others—and you may already have a good idea of where you stand. But a fresh assessment of your Executive Skills and weak in others—and why you are strong in some Executive Skills below. Ask yourself: Where do my strengths lie? And then play to those strengths.

**Response Inhibition** The ability to think before you act—to evaluate a situation and consider how your behavior might affect it.

If you often feel like kicking yourself for what you just said or did, this is generally not your strong suit.

**Working Memory** The ability to remember key information as you perform complex tasks. This involves drawing on past learning or experience to apply to the situation at hand or to project into the future. If you tend to be absent-minded—and totally forget things you were supposed to do, this is not one of your strengths.

**Emotion Control** The ability to manage your emotions in order to achieve your goals, complete tasks and control your behavior. If you are cool and unemotional under stress, if you don’t fall apart with criticism—and are resilient in the face of setbacks, this is one of your strengths.

**Sustained Attention** The capacity to stay focused on a task of situation despite feeling distracted, tired or bored. If you retreat from challenging tasks, have difficulty seeing things through to the end and are easily distracted, this is a weak area that you need to work on.

**Task Initiation** The ability to begin projects or activities without undue procrastination. If you start things when you say you will, hit the ground running, and deliver the project on time, this is one of your strengths.

**Planning/Prioritization** The capacity to get yourself to a desired destination or goal. Knowing which are the most important signposts along the way. If you’re unsure of how and where to start a big project, can’t decide what’s most important, and have trouble making doable plans, this is not your strong suit.

**Organization** The ability to arrange and keep track of your belongings. If this is one of your strengths, everything has a place and you know where that place is. You are not surrounded by messy piles. You have good working systems for organizing your files, email and in-box.

**Time Management** The capacity to estimate your time, allocate it effectively, and stay within time constraints and deadlines. If this is a strength, you have a good sense of how long it takes to do something. You can juggle tasks and get the most important ones completed.

**Goal-directed Persistence** The capacity to have a goal, follow through to its completion and not be put off by competing interests along the way. If this is a strength, you can define and see goals through to completion. If it’s not, you may get excited by new ideas but will have trouble following up on them.

**Flexibility** The ability to revise plans in the face of obstacles, setbacks and new information. You can accept and adapt to changing conditions. If you have a low level of flexibility, it’s hard to make changes, especially under pressure. If your flexibility is high, you can integrate new information, change course and take action on your own.

**Metacognition** The capacity to stand back and take a bird’s-eye view of yourself in a situation. To understand and make changes in the ways you solve problems. If you are inclined to shoot from the hip, have trouble seeing the big picture, and/or tend to repeat certain mistakes, this may be an area of weakness.

**Tolerance for Stress** The ability to thrive in stressful situations. To cope with change, uncertainty and performance demands. If you are steady in a crisis, can handle a deadline being moved up—and even welcome the challenge of working through the night to finish a project, stress tolerance is one of your strengths. It’s not your strong suit if you obsess over errors or get angry when your boss diverts you from a task.

It’s important to know your skills, because when you’re under pressure your weakest skills will be the first to fail you. For example, if you’re weak in Task Initiation, you’ll have even more trouble starting anything when you feel stressed and overworked. That’s why working in teams and complementary partnerships is a good strategy to adopt. ◆

---

*From the author’s book “Work Your Strengths.” Adapted with permission from Amacom.*

---

**When you’re with a team, you can draw on a larger skill set.**
Take a daily dose of outdoor activity

There’s a simple remedy to the “nature-deficit disorder” so many Americans are suffering. We just need to spend more time moving around in the green spaces around us—most of which are free to use and enjoy.

A consortium of physicians, health insurers, naturalists and government agencies have recently joined forces across the country to encourage people of all ages to engage in health-enhancing activity in parks and other natural environments. Their aim is not just to counter sedentary lifestyles but to reacquaint us with the parks, rivers, forests, lakes and beaches that provide us with opportunities to stay active and healthy.

“It’s a lot cheaper to go outside and move than it is to build gyms and a lot of hospitals,” says Dr. Daphne Miller, a family physician in San Francisco. She and other like-minded doctors have begun writing specific “prescriptions” for outdoor activity. Many of them also provide their patients with maps, guidelines and programs of activity based on their physical abilities.

These are helpful because so many people are unfamiliar with the outdoors, says Dr. Miller. “They’re scared to walk through a park, and they don’t know what to do when they get there.” Among the possible sources for help:

National Wildlife Federation. Its “Be Out There” campaign encourages children to get one hour a day of unstructured play and interaction with the natural world to counter the physical, emotional and educational drain of an “indoor childhood.” See www.nwf.org.

Whole grain foods may help lower cardio risks

We all know that whole grains are better than refined grains in terms of nutrition. Now we’re learning from new research that eating more whole grains may also help lower our blood pressure, which in turn improves cardiovascular health.

In a study published in the “American Journal of Clinical Nutrition,” participants who substituted three servings of whole grains for an equal amount of refined grains daily for 12 weeks lowered their blood pressure.

“T his is the first study to note a possible effect of whole grains on blood pressure,” says Erica Jones, M.D., director of the Cardiac Telemetry Unit at Weill Cornell Medical Center. “So the mechanism underlying this effect is unclear.”

Whatever the reason, Dr. Jones agrees that the study participants experienced a notable benefit. “If they are able to maintain even modest reductions in blood pressures, their cardiovascular risks would be significantly lower in future years.”

In a related report: the Framingham Heart Study has found that among 2,800 middle-aged participants, those who eat more whole grains have less belly fat—the visceral kind of fat that’s linked to a higher risk of heart disease and diabetes.

Just beware of the products that say things like “made with whole grain” or simply “whole grain” on the front. Phrases like “multi-grain” or “7-grain” don’t mean much either.

Look for the words “100% whole grain” and check the ingredients list. Ingredients are listed in order of greatest to least, and whole grain should be the first ingredient.
You don’t have to be perfect to lead a richer, happier life

Most people are interested in the subject of happiness, says Tal Ben-Shahar, Ph.D., and he should know. He’s written the books Happier and Even Happier, teaches a course in happiness at Harvard University, and lectures all over the world on this topic.

What the author has found consistently is that when people say they are unhappy, they usually mean they are not happy “all of the time.” They assume that truly happy people are somehow immune from feelings of sadness, fear and anxiety—or from experiencing failure or major setbacks in their lives.

“The pervasiveness of this assumption—across generations, continents and cultures—made me realize something astounding,” writes Dr. Ben-Shahar. “I was surrounded by perfectionists.”

His new book, Being Happy, looks at “perfectionism” and how it can become an obstacle to a happier life. He describes two ways of living that provide an important key to our understanding of success and self-fulfillment: the “Perfectionist” and “Optimist,” and there’s a bit of both in all of us.

Perfectionists suffer from a dissatisfaction with anything flawed, and they tend to be picky. Even success gets rejected (“I should have done better”), so they hold back feelings of accomplishment and gratitude.

Optimalists, on the other hand, accept the reality of flawed outcomes on life’s journey. They’re able to feel good about a job done well enough, and they tend to learn from their mistakes. They’re far from being perfect, writes Dr. Ben-Shahar, but optimalists are perfectly, happily human.

With wonderful anecdotes and examples, each chapter has questions and ideas to consider as the author helps the reader cut loose from the all-or-nothing mentality of the perfectionist and balance it with the open, fearless embrace of the optimalist.

Being Happy: You Don’t Have to Be Perfect to Lead a Richer, Happier Life (McGraw Hill, paperback, $18) is available in book stores and online. ✶