**A ‘connected childhood’ is the most reliable key to success and happiness**

By Edward M. Hallowell, M.D.

We talk about connection and connectedness a lot these days. And if you judge by the use of our many electronic devices, you would think that we’re all pretty connected. But are we becoming connected electronically—and disconnected personally?

Let’s look at the kinds of connectedness that help kids develop to their fullest potential. A large national study of adolescents identified two factors that were the most positive for children’s development and also protected them from negative outcomes. The first was connectedness at home: the feeling of being “understood, loved, wanted and paid attention to” by family members. The second was connectedness at school: feeling that they are treated fairly, feeling close to people and getting along with teachers and students.

**Your love is the starting point**

The starting point in creating a connected childhood is unconditional love from parents or another important adult who is active in a child’s life. But loving children unconditionally doesn’t mean you don’t have expectations for them. High expectations are fine—just not unrealistically high. When parents’ love always has to be earned (when they imply “I’d love you even more if you got all A’s”), children feel that they can never please their parents, no matter what.

**Have high but realistic expectations**

It’s easy to get caught up in the great riptide that sucks kids out of childhood and into an achievement fast-lane as early as nursery school. Be assured that by providing connectedness, above all, you’re giving your child the best “leg up” on the competition. The connected child will achieve at the level he or she is supposed to and will enjoy doing so.

At the opposite extreme of driving children too hard is not expecting enough from them. This is a form of disconnection called indifference. For example, if a child senses that nobody really cares enough to make sure homework gets done, this can lead to sadness, loneliness and low self-esteem, which can result in self-destructive behavior.

Continued on page 2...
As with everything else, balance is key. Being a loving, connected parent doesn’t mean giving kids too much, too soon and always coming to their rescue. We should remind ourselves that children don’t need a lot of fancy toys or clothes. What they do need is your time, interest, love, guidance and ability to say no.

We help kids most by helping them help themselves. They need our supervision—but they don’t need us to provide around-the-clock entertainment. When we do too much, we deny children both the opportunity to deal with adversity and the opportunity to create and sustain their own joy.

The most important advice in any parenting book should be: Enjoy your children. Learn from them. Listen to what they say, and play with them while you can.

The elements of connection

Other kinds of connections can also help form a firm foundation on which to build an entire life. They include family togetherness and positive connections to friends, neighborhood, school, community, sports, the arts and a sense of the past.

Here are some practical suggestions to encourage these kinds of connections.

Family togetherness

Talk about it with your kids. Say the words: “It really matters to us as a family that we create a feeling of togetherness and connection.” Ask children why they think it’s important or not to feel connected.

Make time for family dinner as often as you can. If that doesn’t work, try family breakfast, or get together in the evening. Making this time is essential. It’s hard to develop a feeling of connectedness if you are rarely together.

Read aloud to your kids for as long as they’ll let you. It promotes connectedness, literacy and the growth of imagination. Studies show that two family activities correlate with higher scores on achievement tests: eating dinner together and being read aloud to as a child.

Set limits respectfully, in the name of a principle such as fair play or respecting a person’s feelings. Apply this to the other adults around you—and be aware that children who bully others usually learn this behavior at home from their parents.

Talk. TV, video games and the use of computers have reduced the number of words exchanged in families. Find places to talk like riding in a car or sitting in the kitchen. Stick up for what you think is right as a parent, even if it takes time to talk through. Disconnected families may not care enough to argue—or family members are simply too busy to spend hours trying to supervise the behavior of others.

Friends and community

Tell kids stories about your friends—and listen to the stories they tell about theirs. Learn more about your children’s friends than just their names.

An old neighborhood with friends looking out of their windows, keeping an eye on kids has disappeared in many parts of the country. Develop strategies for kids to take up a new activity. Kids often resist because they’re afraid they’ll look stupid and mess up—which they may well do at first.

The goal for kids should be to connect with a sport or activity. Many children push themselves beyond what is reasonable to become “stars”—or they get a lot of pressure to excel in a specific sport. At all costs, avoid being a crazy, fanatical hypercompetitive parent!

Sports can build children’s confidence or make them feel like total losers. A bad sports experience can be especially harmful to a boy. Being humiliated on the playing field can do as much lasting damage as being humiliated in the classroom. If you create a negative frame of mind in sports or academics, kids will feel bad about themselves and not do well. Learning of all kinds happens best without fear.

Dr. Hallowell is a psychiatrist with offices in Boston and New York and author of “Crazy Busy.” This was adapted from his book “The Childhood Roots of Adult Happiness” (Ballantine, www.DrHallowell.com).
Mom says, ‘I give up. Show me how to text.’

Texting has become the main way my kids communicate. So I finally said, “I give up. Show me how to do it.” I’m a texter now, and I think my children use the technology responsibly. But I keep hearing about hostile, bullying, dangerous texting. Am I kidding myself that everything’s OK?

—N.B., Tampa, FL

You’ve hit on a practical reality for many parents: texting is the fastest way to reach your child. And most kids use the technology responsibly. Even so, messaging is a private, extremely powerful communication tool—and very little research has been done on the impact of immediate communication on academic and social development (see Research Review below). And there need to be some age-appropriate boundaries on texting. Here are some suggestions from CommonSenseMedia.com.

- **Make rules as to when and where.** For example: no texting during meals, during class and on family outings. Turn the phone off at night! And, of course, no texting while riding a bike, driving or doing anything potentially dangerous that requires a person’s full attention. And follow this rule yourself.

- **Establish and enforce consequences for misuse.** Cheating, inappropriate messages and sexual communication are all no-go’s. If you need to seriously make your point, take a child’s phone away for a week.

- **Watch your own behavior.** Parents are still our children’s playbooks for right and wrong. If we text kids while they’re in class and then turn around and tell them they can’t do it, we’re sending mixed messages.

- **If you suspect your kids are** not texting appropriately, you can always look at the messages they are sending and receiving. It’s our job as parents to ensure that our children use powerful technologies safely and responsibly.

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### RESEARCH REVIEW

Are kids growing up wired for distraction?

Several new studies suggest that young people are spending too much time texting, gaming and on social networking websites—to the detriment of their schoolwork. Economics professor Jacob Vigdor, Ph.D., of Duke University, who led some of the research, found that when kids “are left to their own devices, the impetus isn’t to do homework but play around.”

The trend these days is for students to juggle their homework and entertainment. A study by the Kaiser Family Foundation found that half of kids from 8 to 18 are using the Internet, watching TV or using some other form of media either “most” (31 percent) or “some” (25%) of the time that they are doing homework.

Many parents, worried about the distractions, try to limit their children’s computer time, but it’s difficult to monitor texting on cellphones. And because parents themselves also want to be able to call their child at any time, taking the phone away is not always an option.

Children’s media choices tend to reflect their personalities, according to David Reilly, principal of Woodside High School in Redwood City, California. For example, social butterflies are more likely to be heavy texters and Facebook users. Less social kids may escape into games while who are those prone to procrastination might surf the Web or watch videos.

“The technology amplifies whoever you are,” said Reilly in a *New York Times* report on schools’ efforts to keep kids focused on their studies amid the flood of technology and texting (Nov. 21, 2010).

One student told the *Times* that he sometimes wished his parents would actually force him to quit playing and study, because he finds it so hard to make that choice on his own.

A recent Case Western Reserve University survey of 4,000 high school students in Ohio found that 20% said they sent at least 120 text messages a day, 10% were on social networking sites for three hours or more a day and 4% did both. The 4% who did both were also at higher risk of other worrisome behaviors. *The Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry* has previously reported studies showing that excessive media exposure can lead to increased aggressive and high-risk behaviors. But much more research needs to be done on this emerging, complex issue.
Is this normal or could it be Alzheimer’s?

Afer many years of research, no one has found a magic bullet against Alzheimer’s disease. And there is still no solid evidence that you can prevent it or delay its progression although studies continue to pursue promising leads and strategies.

The Alzheimer’s Association encourages people to exercise, challenge themselves mentally, stay socially engaged and eat a heart-healthy diet. While it may not ward off the disease, “It can’t hurt,” they say.

We have also learned a bit more about what Alzheimer’s is not. For example, it’s not forgetting names or where you parked the car. In fact, a mild degree of memory loss is normal in older people. It’s only a sign of possible early Alzheimer’s if it happens daily and disrupts the person’s life—and even then it’s only a “maybe.”

“I can’t believe I forgot my keys again!”

“The hallmark of the disease is the loss of recent memory such as repeating statements or questions,” says Daniel Kuhn, M.S.W., author of Alzheimer’s Early Stages: First Steps for Families, Friends and Caregivers. Other early signs may include difficulty navigating directions or finding the right word in a conversation.

“It’s important to bring symptoms to the attention of a physician for formal testing,” says Kuhn. “Practical steps can begin then. Education and support of the affected individual and his or her family and friends can also begin to insure a good quality of life for all concerned.”

Here’s the current thinking on the specific symptoms of Alzheimer’s disease:

1. Memory loss
Forgetting recently learned information—forgetting more and more often and unable to recall the information later. What’s normal? Forgetting someone’s name or a phone number or where you left your keys.

2. Difficulty performing familiar tasks
Losing track of the steps involved in writing a check, preparing a meal, placing a telephone call or playing a familiar game. What’s normal? Forgetting what you were looking for, why you came into a room, or what you meant to say to someone.

3. Problems with language
Forgetting simple words or substituting unusual words. Making incomprehensible sentences. What’s normal? Sometimes having trouble finding the right word.

4. Disorientation as to time and place
Getting lost in one’s own neighborhood, forgetting where you are and how you got there, and not knowing how to get back home. What’s normal? Not being able to remember the day of the week or where you were going.

5. Poor or decreased judgment
Forgetting recently learned information more and more often. What’s normal? Making a questionable or debatable decision from time to time.

6. Problems with abstract thinking
Having great difficulty writing a check: for example, forgetting what the numbers are for and how they should be used. What’s normal? Having difficulty reconciling your monthly bank statement or making a mistake in your addition.

7. Misplacing things
Putting things in unusual or dangerously wrong places—such as a pot of butter in the toaster, an iron in the freezer or a wristwatch in the linen closet. What’s normal? Misplacing your glasses or wallet or the cable bill temporarily.

8. Changes in mood or behavior
Showing rapid mood swings (from calm to tears to anger) for no apparent reason. What’s normal? Occasionally feeling sad or moody.

9. Changes in personality
Becoming extremely confused, suspicious or fearful. What’s normal? People’s personalities change minimally with age.

10. Loss of initiative
Becoming very passive, sitting in front of the TV for hours, sleeping a lot, or not wanting to do usual activities. What’s normal? Sometimes feeling weary of work and social obligations.

If you recognize any of these warning signs in a loved one or yourself, it’s important to see a doctor. Early diagnosis of Alzheimer’s or other forms of dementia is an important step to getting appropriate treatment, care and support services.

For more information, contact the Alzheimer’s Association at (800) 272-3900 or the Alzheimer’s Foundation hotline at (866) 232-8484.


A fresh take on parenting for the Now Generation

By David Nelson

Here I am, rushing to get my daughter out of the house and to school on time. Lunch is packed, share-day item is in her backpack, a jacket in case it gets chilly. She asks me a question, a request of some sort. I say no. The wave hits like an emotional tsunami. A fit. Wait a minute—it’s a full-on tantrum.

A wise man once said, “I consider myself an amateur parent. I do it because I love it.” I couldn’t agree more. I’m one of three crabs. My wife, my daughter and I are all Cancers, astrologically speaking—not that I follow that, but we do live in Los Angeles after all. And whether it’s the placement of Saturn or some more commonplace cause, the truth is, ours is a fairly emotional household.

Living in the “now”

Since two of us crabs are adults, we can pretty much keep those emotions from stirring up to gale force. It’s the third crab I’d like to speak about. Daughter Sophie is six and a half and one of her favorite songs is “We are the Now Generation” by the Black Eyed Peas. This song speaks to her. As she explains: “Because when I want something I want it now.”

Knowing what you want is a gift. But not being able to have what you want isn’t easy and, at its core, is an exercise in grief. Hopefully, in the life of a six year old, this disappointment can be an opportunity to learn patience.

A child’s world

Know this about six year olds. They’re a duplicitous bunch. One moment they’ll have you believe they are little adults, using words like “breath-taking” and “phenomenon,” thanking you politely, then telling you some obscure fact about the life cycle of a butterfly. A heartbeat later, some displeasure brings on a fit of temper that reminds you of the tantrums you were sure were a distant memory.

Growing up takes time

Maturing is an ebb and flow process: two steps forward, one step back. We’ve seen great strides in Sophie’s development over the last year: reading, writing, math, athletics, imagination, and artistic ability—it’s all firing. So I’m not surprised to see some regression in another area.

Tantrums from a two year old are mostly tears and stomping. But a six year old has a larger vocabulary, understands concepts and can push buttons she may or may not know exist.

So there I am being yelled at by my child, who is letting me know that I am at fault for how unfair her life is. And what caused this? I don’t know. I say no to her wanting to wear dress shoes on gym day or play a game there’s no time for before school. Whatever it was, her emotion is too much to contain. She explodes, stomping, shouting and crying in despair.

What would “they” say?

And that’s when I feel my wife’s and my ancestors behind me, disapproving, rolling their eyes, in hushed judgment: “No child would ever behave that way in my day.” “If I even thought of raising my voice like that to my father.”

But they are the ghosts of generations past. They didn’t sit in on the parenting classes we took with Sophie from six months to two years. They didn’t experience the amazing things we heard and saw when parents treat their kids with respect and accept them as unique and capable individuals. They didn’t have the knowledge and science that we do—and in some ways the luxury that enables our sensitivity.

A new path for our family

I know that my wife and I are forging a new path in our family’s journey. But I’m still at a loss. What if these critical ancestral voices are right? What if I am a sucker, a chump, a softy being bossed around by his own child? Have I got it all wrong? What am I supposed to do right now? I don’t know how to do this.

Wait: “Slow down.” I remind myself of what I have learned. As a parent, I don’t have the answer now and don’t have to rush to one. I simply let Sophie know that we have to leave for school. She stomps off toward the car, tears still streaming down her face.

In the time it takes me to get into the car, she’s calmer, quiet. Duplicitous though they may be, six year olds are a resilient lot. I begin to drive and the first words spoken are from Sophie, pointing out an interesting tree she sees from the rear window.

She says it in the lightest way, asking me to share in the joy of her observation. I’m taken aback. Wasn’t she just raging mad at me? I feel like something must be said.

“Yes, I see that tree. Sophie, I want to talk to you about your behavior back at the house. It’s not OK for you to shout that way at Mommy or Daddy just because you didn’t get your way.”

She thinks for a moment and then says something that stops me in my tracks: “I was only shouting because I was upset. That’s what I do when I’m upset, Daddy.”

It hits me like a ton of bricks. What did she do? She had not used profanity. She was not physically aggressive. She was just shouting her discontent, expressing her disappointment. She was grieving.

Suddenly a shaft of light cuts through a darkened room. I realize it’s not my job to control her emotions, only to set clear, consistent boundaries that have meaning and weight. I laugh and tell her I’m proud of her for being so able to express herself—but next time to try lowering the volume.

I restate the house rules

I tell Sophie that it’s OK to be angry and to express it, but we don’t throw or slam things—that if you have to let it out, you can go to your room and hit your pillow. I tell her that sometimes Mommy and Daddy are going to place limits on her, that it’s not possible to get your way all the time. She tells me she knows it and I believe her. I watch her walk up to the school entrance alone, pulling her book bag behind her.

My eyes well up before I pull away. Maybe from the joy of realizing that my daughter can help teach me how to be a good father, maybe because I become aware of how fleeting it all is, how quickly she’s growing up—or maybe it’s just the position of the Moon.

—The author is an amateur parent who writes and lives in Los Angeles with his beautiful wife and daughter. He has no idea what his rising sign is.
Be kind to your reader...and more writing tips

By Jane Curry and Diana Young

Rule 1 for good writing is to keep your reader reading. And how do you achieve this feat in your workplace communications? For starters, make sure that every opening sentence in every email, letter or document passes the “So what?” test.

If there is even a chance your readers could respond by asking “And how is this relevant or important to me?” you need to revise your opening so they know exactly why they should keep reading.

For example, here are two openers. One fails and one passes the “So what?” test, as you can see: “My name is John Grant, and I work in the marketing department at Branding, Inc.” Or “I work with Anne Bradstreet at Branding, Inc., and am wondering if you have any data on teen-branding, Inc., and am wondering if you have any data on teen-

Make key points first

Readers tend to pay attention to the first sentence or two of every paragraph—and then they drop like flies. Put your key point first in every paragraph. Let your sentences shine. Make them clean, clear and without excessive details that bog down a reader.

For example: “I have a solution for addressing the issues raised last week about our new Training Initiative.” I’ll call you to follow up soon. In the meantime, you can reach me either by email or by cell at... Thanks.”

Write an informative subject line

Think of your subject (or Re:) line as a global heading on the map of the page. It should be informative but not too specific. For example: “Re: Vacation” tells too little but “Re: Emergency vacation starting tomorrow” is just right.

Be clear and concise

Writing clearly and concisely is easier said than done, of course. Here are six steps to help you find the balance between brevity and clarity:

Think and plan before you start writing. Know your purpose and the outcomes you want to achieve.

Express your ideas as simply as possible. Let normal speech be your guide. Don’t write gobbledegook that you would never say to a reader’s face. Delete empty words and rambling phrases.

Don’t be too informal. Write the way you talk, for the most part. But avoid slang and abbreviated words. They give the impression of laziness or excessive informality.

Use the active voice. If you let your speech guide you, you’ll stay in the active voice. You use it all the time: “We won the game.” “We worried about that issue.” Still active, just past tense.

The active voice is specific, natural and clear. Compare: “The hog-stunner was installed by Robert” or “Robert installed the hog-stunner.” The passive voice is OK sometimes: for example, when the doer of the action is relatively unimportant or you are emphasizing the outcome.

Put the action in the verb. Don’t worry if you aren’t sure what a verb is. Compare: “We are conducting an investigation of this issue” or “We’re investigating this issue.” Be on the lookout for words that end in “tion.” They often remove the action.

Don’t let your email come back to haunt you

Email is neither private nor unimportant. Here are five simple reminders to protect you and your company from messages guaranteed to haunt you professionally or legally:

2. Never send anything that would embarrass your grandmother.
3. Never send information that your firm or the recipient considers sensitive.
4. Never send instructions to delete emails that concern an investigation.
5. Never believe—even for a nanosecond—that you can send an anonymous email.

Keep sentence length between 15–28 words. Long sentences have a deadening effect on readers. For emails, letters, memos and announcements, keep your sentence-length average between 15–22 words. For longer, more complicated documents, 22–28 works well. Compensate for a complex topic by choosing a simpler word and sentence structure.

Put your creativity to use

If you think your business writing should be more “creative,” think again. As the saying goes: “Whenever you feel the compelling allure of your own cleverness, go home until the feeling passes.” Business writing is not about announcing how funny or clever you are: it’s about making your meaning clear and getting things done in less time and with less effort. Here’s how:

Think past those standard templates, decades-old form letters and blah-blah-blah verbiage.

Become your own reader. Picture yourself as the person who will be reading what you have written. In other words, send only what you would like to receive.

Channel your creativity into aspects of your job that you can reinvent and put it to work there. Imagine new and clearer ways of saying what you mean. If you do this, nothing you write will end up unread or misunderstood. ◆

—Adapted with permission from “Be a Brilliant Business Writer: Write Well, Write Fast, and Whip the Competition” by Jane Curry and Diana Young (Ten Speed Press, 2010).
Why so much food never gets eaten

A quarter to half of all the food produced in the U.S. goes uneaten. It’s left in fields, spoils in transit or gets thrown out at grocery stores. And a huge amount of waste happens in our homes. A study at the Cornell University Food and Brand Lab reported that 93% of respondents said they bought food they never used.

We need to change our wasteful ways, says Jonathan Bloom in his new book American Wasteland: How America Throws Away Nearly Half of Its Food (Da Capo Press).

To begin with, food is expensive. The University of Arizona’s Garbage Project, which tracked home food waste for three decades, has reported that a typical U.S. family of four throws out about $40 worth of food a week—$2,275 a year.

“Refrigerator clutter” is a major culprit. Leftovers and fresh foods get lost on shelves until they go bad. “People have massive refrigerators, and there’s this sense that we need to keep them well stocked,” says Bloom. “But there’s no way you can eat all that food before it goes bad.”

The Garbage Project also found that food spoilage becomes part of an unhealthy cycle—because we’re more likely to turn to processed foods or restaurant meals. There’s an environmental aspect as well: food scraps account for a fifth of U.S. landfill waste, where it rots and produces methane, a greenhouse gas.

How to effect change

Here are some suggestions from Bloom and from Mark Connelly of Consumer Reports.

If foods spoils quickly in your fridge, make sure you’re following manufacturer’s care instructions. If the coils on the back are caked with dust, dirt or pet hair, this can interfere with performance.

Pick up an inexpensive thermomenter and check temperatures. The refrigerator should be 37 degrees and the freezer 0. Most refrigerators have good controls, and models with digital settings are typically the best.

If you buy a new model, focus on sight lines, not just space and style. Bottom-freezer units can be helpful by putting fresh foods at eye level.

Keep veggies in crisper drawers. Use storage containers with top vents and bottom strainers. Whole heads of lettuce stay fresh longer than cut-up lettuce.

Don’t buy more food than you can eat. Create shopping lists based on specific planned meals. Store in the freezer fresh foods that may otherwise spoil.

Give food a second look. “The common attitude is ‘when in doubt, throw it out’,” says Bloom. “But I try to give the food the benefit of the doubt.”

Exercising with a friend or alone? Experts say ‘Do both.’

Research reported in “Psychology Today” magazine suggests that working out in the company of others has multiple benefits. And so does going it alone. Here’s why:

Strength in numbers

We tend to adapt to the workout ethic of those around us. If the person next to you kicks it up a notch, you’re more likely to do it too. People in sync bodily feel a deeper connection. A study at Troy University found that couples who exercise together resolve conflicts faster and communicate better.

Exercising with friends improves “motor function”—those learned movements that allow you to run, catch and jump. The more we engage with others, the slower our motor skills decline as we age.

The simple desire for social contact is a great motivator to hit the gym.

Working out alone

It’s more relaxing. You don’t have to navigate conversations and weigh others’ feelings. Exercising with friends can be emotionally draining, especially for introverts.

Studies at Santa Clara University have found that a solitary cardio stint can improve memory, mental clarity, focus and alertness. That makes it particularly useful on days when you have a job interview or have elaborately prepared for a task.

You’re less likely to feel self-conscious or judged for being too fat, too slow or too sweaty. And many people avoid the gym for just those reasons.
WE RECOMMEND

Guide to leadership success for women in the workplace

It’s been a slow, steady climb, and there’s general agreement that women are moving up in many organizations. Research has shown, however, that certain parts of the economy and specific companies are more hospitable to women than others.

While the proverbial glass ceiling has long since been broken, a book titled *Her Place at the Table* addresses “fuzzy” challenges. These are “second generation” gender issues such as stereotypes about the way women should and do behave in the workplace, many of which are still operative.

Authors Deborah M. Kolb, Ph.D., Judith Williams, Ph.D., and Carol Frohlinger, J.D. have identified four questions that typically surround the appointment of a woman to a leadership role. These questions are tricky, the authors say, because they are subtle and neither the employer nor the woman may be aware of them.

*Is she good for the role she would play?*
*Can she be both a woman and a leader?*
*Has she demonstrated leadership capability?*
*Will her personal life get in the way?*

*Her Place at the Table* can help women in the workplace understand and respond to these persistent but still unstated questions. The book is addressed to two specific groups: women embarking on their first leadership positions and those who are assuming assignments that involve increased responsibility.

Case studies illustrate how women leaders can successfully negotiate five key challenges critical to their success: (1) gathering the intelligence for informed decision-making, (2) mobilizing backers for critical support, (3) garnering resources for key allocations, (4) bringing people on board for buy-in, and (5) making a difference, the biggest challenge of all.

While the book is geared to women, it can also be helpful to men who are striving to become effective leaders in the competitive world of today’s complex organizations.

*Her Place at the Table: A Woman's Guide to Negotiating Five Key Challenges to Leadership Success* (Jossey-Bass, paperback, $19.95) is available in bookstores and online.◆