

FAILURE TO IDENTIFY OUR CHILDREN'S PROBLEMS - A POINT OF VIEW

Abalinx Peter Adamis 7 August 2015

Background. I have written this article because of a recent article that came across my screen while doing some research on another topic. It was titled "[Number of children seeking help for mental health problems doubles since 1998, landmark survey shows](#)". A copy of which has been added below. It brought back vivid memories of my time as a single father raising my boys and as such I felt compelled to write down my thoughts on the subject of what it was like for me during those wonderful but difficult years. Mind you when you read this, please note that I had no understanding of the meaning of stress in children and neither the capacity to identify problems with children. All that I believed in at the time is that children learned from parents who set an example of what is right from wrong and by the environment in which they lived. This is not an excuse but merely a fact.

Some 26 years ago I was confronted with the enormous task of raising four sons alone. I welcomed the responsibility as it was in my opinion the right thing to do at the time. This was a time when Australia had recently suffered a financial crisis and I was still a serving member of the Australian Defence Force. It was difficult time for all of us and we all banded together to support one another during the four boys formative years. The ages of the boys at that time were, 11, 10, 6 and 5; all of whom were of school age. During the early stages when I was posted down to Melbourne, one of my sons an away from home. He went to get away from the responsibilities imposed upon him as a youngster and the stressors of home.

I had implemented strict guidelines and had in place procedures to cover about almost any contingency including my death and what actions the boys would have to take in order to remain as a family unit. I looked forward to the day when the eldest reached 17 so that he could make the decisions on my behalf in the worst case scenario arose and take whatever action was necessary to safeguard his and those of his siblings. On reflection, it was a huge responsibility that I had placed on my eldest and now after all those years I have come to realise just how unfair I was to him and to his other younger brother. The eldest could not take such a heavy burden and the responsibilities fell upon the second eldest. He performed well supported by the elder and kept everyone safe and ensured where possible that procedures implemented were followed to safeguard the family's interest.

However as a father, I failed to see the signs of stress and anxiety building up in my two eldest and I will admit that life was very difficult for my boys. In the morning I would leave around 6.30 am after my morning routine, waking the eldest two sons prior to leaving for military service. In the afternoon and until I arrived home at 7.00 Or 8.00 pm, I would remain in contact by telephone with my boys, answering their questions and seeing if they were all right. When I did arrive at home we were all glad to see each other and each was waiting his turn to tell me his story and adventures of the day. While on the other hand my two eldest would also bring me up to date with issues that may have encountered.

After our discussion period was over, I would shed my military camouflage gear and I change into a comfortable track suit or other suitable clothing. The boys would help cut vegetables and I would prepare the meat or other meals that was edible and palatable to the palate. I made sure that the boys had plenty of food on their plate and I insisted that they ate all of it. When they protested that they were full and could eat no more, I would jokingly say "guess what" which was a euphemism for "eat it and be thankful". This "guess what" would remain a family joke for many years to come.

The little ones were more novel and showed me their tiny bellies that they were full by purposely sticking out their tummies. I countered this by asking them to open their mouths and pretending to peer into their stomachs and at the same time rubbing their bellies as I was seeking a hidden cavity. After a period of searching which lasted about a minute, I would cry out with glee that I had found a small cavity in their stomachs and that they room to finish their dinner. The two youngest would always look down disheartened that indeed their Dad had found a tiny area where they could eat more and reluctantly returned back to the table and ate the remainder of their dinner.

After dinner, the eldest would clear the table and wash the dishes whilst the little ones would help dry them. In the meantime, I would prepare their lunches for the following day and place them into the refrigerator for them to pick up prior to leaving for school which thankfully was only about two kilometres away. Once that was done, the eldest boys would have a bath or a shower followed by the youngest whom I helped wash together in the bath. Quality time was spent with the boys, watching television and/or looking at their homework or watching one of the many videos that we would hire or borrow from friends.

Once that was done, the boys went to bed and I returned back to preparing my military gear for the next day as well as laying out the clothes that the boys would wear for school. They had school uniforms of which they had two pairs, one in the wash and the other they wore. I gave up how many times the boys came home from torn trousers, wrecked runners or shoes destroyed from their antics at school. Once all the "administration and logistics" was completed I would sit down and look at the computer that we had bought and unravel its secrets. It had cost the family \$5000.00 but it was worth it as it prepared us all for what was to be the future in every home.

It was 1990 and still the early years of computers being in every home. There were times as the two eldest stayed up late in order to finish school projects that I had company, but to be honest with myself and to the boys I look back and feel that I did not have quality time that they needed at that particular time in their lives. I was too busy surviving at my military responsibilities and weighed down by my responsibilities of raising the boys.

The crunch came without me even identifying the underlying issues and stress that had been building up within the two eldest sons. Suddenly and without notice or prior warning, I came home to find that the second eldest had run away from home with a friend of his, a girl whose father was also in the military and lived across the road. The next three weeks was a frantic time for all of us in trying to locate the two runaways. My telephone bill racked up a few hundred dollars which was a small sum which I could not afford and yet the information I was seeking was vital.

I thought I had rung the father of the girl to help me find the kids only to find that I had made an error and rang a friend named Mick Strong who was a rank higher than myself and asked for his help. His immediate response was not a problem, I am coming down now. When I realised that I had made an error I apologised and said thank you. I will never forget the kindness of Mick Strong and his family and I do hope that they are all doing well. Mick Strong left the Army and retired somewhere in the Adelaide hills of South Australia.

The search for the two runaways covered, Western Australia, South Australia, New South Wales and Queensland. I personally created photos of the kids and pasted them all over Melbourne where I could. I rang as many of their school friends; spoke to the teachers, Police, SES, Fire brigade and also relatives to see if I could pick up any useful information. I ransacked and went through all of my son's belongings and any scraps of paper that I could find. I went as far as checking the rubbish bins at home in the hope of finding some clues. All of this was going on in the evenings until the early hours of the morning; I still managed to go about my military responsibilities during the day. Not knowing is a terrible experience and your mind wanders to the extreme, thinking of the worst possible scenarios of what could happen.

The day happened after some weeks had passed and I was in the middle of giving a military presentation to my colleagues that I received a telephone call from the Police saying that they had found the two runaways who had been seen loitering around a supermarket and were reported to the Police. I left work and picked up the father of the girl and we travelled to a country police station in Victoria where we were given a brief by the Police. The Police advised us that the kids were scared and were worried about the consequences.

The other father and I were still in our military uniforms and must have looked stern bastards to the kids when they first saw us and were awaiting the worst. I walked up to my son who had by now grown taller than me and looked into his eyes long enough to read him so to speak. I took him into my arms and gave him the longest hug he had ever had. At that moment his shoulders drooped and a heavy sigh was released from his body and it was his way of saying that he was glad that it was all over.

It is of interest to note that during my search for my son I had received information from his school chums that he had left in search of his mother whom we had not seen since she left the four sons under my care. I had lost three custody cases but was able to get my four sons back by default as she could no longer cope with the responsibility of caring for them. After all these years, I don't hate or have any malice towards my ex wife and wish her well after some 31 years since our breakup, but in hindsight I wished that she had made an effort to see her sons at least periodically. It would be eight years later that she would be reunited with her sons. After I had found my son who had run away, I managed to track their mother down and reunited her with the boys.

I can honestly say that I did not do it for her sake; I did it all for the psychological well-being of the four boys and hoped that the unification would have a positive effect psychologically on them. This

decision to locate their mother was not an easy one for me to make and when I overheard my number three son say to his school friends that his mother had died, that was the final straw that moved me emotionally to find their mother. The results are not what I had hoped for and all that I can say at this point in time is that it took another 15 years for the relationship between me and my boys settle. As I have no malice or ill feelings, I leave the rest to the imagination of the reader.

I learnt the hard way in raising my four sons and hence this is the reason why parents of today should not take for granted their children. Don't shout them down, don't put too many restrictions upon them and above all; encourage them to explore the world in a safe environment because all children need challenges and are naturally curious about themselves, their environment and the world as they perceive not as we the adults do. I am certainly no child psychologist but merely a normal bloke who took on the challenges that I was faced with. Parents in my opinion are the best judge of characters for their children, not psychologists or other well meaning organisations and institutions whose role is to guide not dictate how a parent should raise their children. Having said all of the above I encourage readers to look at the article below and make your own assumptions because if as parents we fail to see the signs of stress and unusual behaviour in our children, the alternatives are destructive indeed.

What are my boys doing now one may ask? They, David, Paul, Matthew and Mark are all fine and doing well in their respective fields. Every month we would have them over for dinner on a weekend and we chew the fat so to speak. "I try" to say as little as possible but it's difficult when there are five other points of view around the table including my lovely wife Yovanna and I would get howled down by a united chorus against me. Life is but full of challenges and as such how we face those challenges will go towards strengthening ones character.



Peter Adamis is a Journalist/Commentator and writer. He is a retired Australian military serviceman and an Industry organisational & Occupational (OHS) & Training Consultant whose interests are within the parameters of domestic and international political spectrum. He is an avid blogger and contributes to domestic and international community news media outlets as well as to local and Ethnic News. He holds a Bachelor of Adult Learning & Development (Monash), Grad Dip Occupational Health & Safety, (Monash), Dip. Training & Assessment, Dip Public Administration, and Dip Frontline Management. Contact via Email: abalinx@netspace.net.au or via Mobile: 0409965538

Number of children seeking help for mental health problems doubles since 1998, landmark survey shows

Medical reporter Sophie Scott 7 August 2015

Many parents do not recognise when their child is suffering from depression, with the number of children seeking help for mental health problems doubling since 1998, according to a new report. The landmark national survey — the first of its kind in Australia — which looked at 6,300 families, including 3,000 young people aged four to 17, was commissioned by the previous federal government in 2012.

It has been described as a wake-up call for parents, with depression rates nearly doubling when the children provided the information themselves, as opposed to their parents. The report also showed a third of young people with mental health disorders used support services in 1998, in comparison to two-thirds now. Chris Tanti, CEO of

youth mental health initiative Headspace, said while many of the statistics in the report were alarming, it would hopefully encourage parents to become more vigilant about noticing changes in their child's mood or behaviour.

"Parents are key in helping young people to get support, particularly mothers of young men, so knowing the signs and symptoms something might be wrong and then how to get help is vital," he said.

Other key facts:

- Males were more likely than females to have experienced a mental health issue in the lead-up to the survey (16.3 per cent and 11.5 per cent respectively)
- ADHD was the most common mental health disorder, followed by anxiety disorders and major depressive disorder
- Almost one-third of children/teenagers with a mental health disorder actually had two or more disorders
- Thirty-eight per cent of adolescents took up sport or exercise to help manage emotional or behavioural problems, 45 per cent increased their participation in activities generally and 23 per cent improved their diet vs just 7.9 per cent turning to alcohol, smoking or drugs
- Schools play an important role in intervention, with a school staff member among those to suggest that some help for emotional or behavioural problems was needed in 40 per cent of cases

"The mental health system needs to be further simplified to make it as easy and seamless as possible for young people and their parents to get the type of help they need. "One of the ways of doing this is making sure services are well advertised, accessible and delivered face-to-face, online and in schools."

The survey backs up the findings of the National Mental Health Commission's review, which makes recommendations about the need for greater early intervention and improving program outcomes and evaluation, not just investment in programs alone. The Government's expert reference group is currently developing an implementation plan for the Commission's recommendations, which is due back October 2015.

Federal Health Minister Sussan Ley said the group would engage with the mental health sector to "deliver meaningful long-term reform". "The whole of the mental health sector has a role to play as we move through this process together to ensure Australian mental health patients receive the right care, in the right place, at the right time," Ms Ley said. "One of the key reasons fragmentation occurs in the mental health system is because of the complicated interactions between all levels of government.

"In the coming months, I will be working closely with my state and territory government colleagues to develop a new National Mental Health Plan." The survey showed one in seven children had experienced a mental health disorder in the past year, the equivalent of 560,000 youth. Despite the rise of community awareness, acceptance of mental

health and willingness to both help and seek treatment, the report still had alarming statistics about depression, suicide, and self-harm behaviour amongst young people.

One in 10 teenagers aged 12 to 17 indicated they had engaged in some form of self-harming behaviour, with three-quarters of those doing so in the 12 months leading up to the survey. One in five teenaged girls aged 16 to 17 were found to meet the clinical criteria for depression based on their own report, while one-quarter of the girls reported deliberately injuring themselves at some point in their lives. One in 13 12- to 17-year-olds had seriously considered attempting suicide in the 12 months leading up to the survey.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-08-07/landmark-youth-mental-health-survey/6679320>