



## *Parenting Together Parenting Apart* —Kristen Fowler

Parenting is difficult enough when two people are sharing the job but when you are doing it alone it often seems impossible. Today's families are facing many challenges; among them is the task of trying to parent together when physically separated due to job demands.

Many employers have become more aware of the importance of family and have begun offering more flexible work schedules, which include job sharing and part-time employment. However, many employers cannot provide this type of schedule due to the nature and

demands of the job. Members of the Armed Forces, contractors and those working swing and nights shifts make up a large population



of peninsula families facing this challenge. Military families often face the additional challenge of deployments in which the "apart" parent must be out of contact for a period of time.

Many of these families are attempting

to stay connected but find it difficult due to the limited communication resulting from long absences and conflicting schedules. These families often make what seem like logical parenting decisions at the time, such as splitting the parenting duties between shifts or having one person become solely responsible for parenting while the other is away. Although these solutions may seem to work for a period of time, they often lead to a disconnect between parents. Feelings of resentment and burn-out often follow, which can lead to further marital problems. The

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## Laughter Therapy

A CHILD'S PERSPECTIVE

Enjoying some time together outside, my six year old daughter turns to me and asks: "Mom is the American flag a boy or a girl?" "I'm not sure what you mean", I answer. "I think it is a boy", she responds. "Why a boy?", I naively ask. "Because its name sounds like a boy's name.", she responds. "Name, what name?", I ask completely confused. "Salute" she answers "Salute

The funny things kids say



the Flag... sounds like a boys name to me", she says innocently. "It sure does", I responded trying to contain my laughter.



## Parenting —cont. from page 1

goal is for both parents to be involved in the parenting process so they both must share in the responsibility of finding viable alternatives to “traditional parenting”. Too often, the “apart parent” feels there is nothing they can do if they are not physically present, however this could not be further from the truth.

Often, families censor what information they give the “apart” parent in an effort to protect them. However, this is often confusing for the child. In a recent counseling session, a young boy whose father is deployed to Iraq shared his concern about his father’s safety. When I asked if he had talked with his father about his fears, he replied “no, we can’t upset him”. The implication that dad cannot handle this type of conversation had led this boy to keep many concerns to himself. As a result, the boy has experienced frequent stomach aches and nightmares. Although the “at home” parent was attempting to protect her spouse from being upset about things he cannot control, she was inadvertently implying that dad cannot be bothered while he is away. Children need the security of knowing that mom and dad care and can provide guidance and reassurance regardless of their whereabouts. This ensures that important thoughts and feelings a child may want to share with a parent do not have to be held over until they next see the “apart” parent.

When work requires that mom or dad be away or cannot be reached for a period of time, there are many ways to help the parent and child feel connected while apart. Too often, the parent who remains at home assumes they must fill every void left by the “apart” parent. This is not the case, however, and finding a

way for the child and “apart” parent to remain connected is essential in maintaining a close relationship. Both parents should work together to explore options that will work for their family.

Parents often have to get creative when looking for ways for their family to ensure communication. Depending on the ages of the children, traditional forms of communication may not be realistic. A

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five year old with limited reading and writing skills will not gain as much from letter writing. Nor will a ten year old who has trouble with verbal communication get as much from frequent phone calls. Allowing the child to participate in this process is also beneficial.

Another young boy who was struggling to cope with his father’s upcoming deployment suggested he and his father create a “masterpiece” together. After picking a theme, fishing, a common adventure they enjoyed together, they agreed to each take turns adding one item to the picture. The excitement of mailing the picture back and forth and seeing what had been added each time until their “masterpiece” was created invoked an excitement in the boy that the father had not seen on

his three previous deployments. Dad felt this would help foster a bond with his son and provide a running communication to last through the many months of separation. Mom reported feeling relieved that she would not have to fill every void that dad’s absence would leave.

Although there are many possible scenarios, the key element is the same -- communication. The communication between husband and wife during times of separation is often strained and finding simple ways for all family members to stay connected helps to alleviate some of the pressure. When parents work together and understand the importance of each of their roles in the parenting process it sends an important message to the child.

Parents still love their children from afar; they want to know how school is going, if chores are getting done, and what their fears are. This is true whether they are deployed halfway around the world or gone on an overnight business trip. Although parenting together when apart is difficult and challenging it is always worth the effort. ~





## Purpose: The Origins of a Newsletter

—Scott Fowler

As we embark on this new endeavor we welcome the journey and not the destination. We hope this newsletter will help connect those in the community with each other. This newsletter is a work in progress and we hope that it will remain that way. As life changes we all are forced to respond. This is a response to years of contemplation for avenues of change to those we serve and the broader community in which we all share. Over the years we have made many observations about what makes life easier to live, ways things work, and how

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people impact each other. You will find humor, emotions, helpful hints, and stories of and from people in the community. No doubt, just like in life we will need to adjust to the winds of change. Like our name says, we recognize and value the importance of connecting to those around us. We have found that there are many good people in this community and have a lot to learn from each other. This newsletter intends to serve as a vehicle to connect ideas, emotions, interventions, and general good information on various topics. Our goal is to compile useful information and dispense it to those who desire change in their life, some more than others.

## Motherhood

—Kristen Fowler



Being a mother is not easy, in fact some days it seems overwhelmingly impossible. At times your efforts may seem pointless when the dishes pile in the sink, you haven't showered in three days and you have no idea where your son's soccer cleats are hidden. However, overall you think you've got it together pretty good. Your kids are kind and gentle, they show honesty and respect and are kids you are proud to call your own.

Until one day... your son flushes your daughter's goldfish because “he hates her”, your neighbor knocks on the door to let you know they found your twelve year old daughter smoking, and your son's teacher calls to inform you that four letter words are not appropriate in second grade. “O.K.” you tell yourself “my kids aren't perfect, a few minor incidents are to be expected, but they are still good kids.” You remind yourself they are doing well in school, obey mom and dad...most of the time, and really do love each other...deep down

inside! “I can do this” you repeat until you are pumped up enough to face motherhood again.

Until one day...you find out your son just tried marijuana, your daughter wants to go on the pill, “just in case” and they both keep trying to convince you the D's on their report cards really do stand for “Delightful.” “O.K.” you say again, “I can handle this, it's really not that bad. At least they didn't steal a car, or rob a bank or kill someone!” And then you realize that the standards you have used to measure your kids, the standards that you believe define your effectiveness as a parent have lowered. Lowered not just a little but by depths you never thought possible.

Parenting is not easy! Even involved and patient parents face challenges in raising their children. Parents often struggle with the fact that their kids should “know better.” It is important to remember that childhood and adolescence are periods of time often void of rational thought. Kids often do know right from wrong but choose wrong because it feels better! That is why parents must be involved in their children's lives. Missing a day could mean missing a vital moment in your child's development. It becomes less important to have your kids fulfill a

certain expectation and more important that they figure out who they are and who they want to become.

Parenting often means that although you have taught them about integrity and respect and tried to instill values, they may still choose “wrong” when they know better. At these times, your job is about supporting them through the wrong decisions and often setting boundaries to protect them from themselves. As a mother you may want to keep them from making mistakes or from being hurt, but you can't always do that and many times you shouldn't. Often these mistakes provide opportunity for growth.

Your effectiveness as a parent cannot be measured by “perceived failures” because it is often these failures that give your child the chance to figure out “who am I and how will I let this affect me?” Spend time with your children, listen when they talk, get to know them and their friends, set limits, enforce these limits and most importantly live a life you would be proud to have your children lead. And remember next time...get a pet that is too big to flush! ☺



*About Us*

*We are dually licensed Marriage and Family Therapists and Professional Counselors. We received training at the University Of Louisiana at Monroe in an intensive clinical program. With various experience working in court, school and church settings we understand the many dynamics facing Peninsula families.*

*Scott M. Fowler specializes in foster care and adoptive family issues and has worked extensively with adolescents in preparation for independent living.*

*Kristen M. Fowler specializes in women's issues and has an interest in work with Military families.*

*Call today for more information or to schedule an appointment.*

*\*Most Insurances Welcome*

*\*Day and Evening*

*Appointments Available*

*Healthy Relationships: A Quick Fix*

—Scott Fowler

People love being in love. It is amazing the connection between people who love each other. That feeling cannot be artificially created. But in every relationship there comes a time of frustration. Disagreement is a common occurrence when two people come together. It is inevitable when people live and love together. Over time life happens to us, we make mistakes, our emotions get the best of us, and we simply have differences. These are not bad things. They can be. How you handle the pain of life can make the connection stronger between you. But do not forget who you are. It is important to grow stronger as an individual as well. During times of fighting with your partner there is one thing you can do that will give immediate results. Sacrifice.

I know what you are thinking; if he would just stop such and such or if she would just do this and that. How can I get my partner to read this? Stop right there, because you have already missed the point. If you are reading this then it is you who should sacrifice. I am not suggesting that he or she does not need to sacrifice as well. In fact, they may need to change a lot of things. Too much energy is wasted trying to change someone else. In relationships you can never go wrong with looking in the mirror.

What do you sacrifice? Haven't I given until I can no longer give anymore? Giving up something you have been holding onto will make you a better person. A better person is easier for your partner to love. Often times this is an idea or a memory. Maybe it is a feeling you get that has little basis for the strength and power that goes with it. Maybe it is the priority you place on things in your life. Often times there are big differences between what you say are your priorities and what you do in day to day life. Sacrifice will not solve all relationship woes, but it can act as a jumpstart toward the right direction. ~

Services Offered

- Family Therapy
- Individual Therapy
- Couples Counseling
- Group Counseling
- Substance Abuse Evaluations and Counseling
- Parenting and Mental Health Workshops
- Professional Training, Supervision and Consultation

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