**RAISING CHILDREN WHO MAKE HEALTHY CHOICES**

*by Paul Schmidt, PhD*

During the Covid pandemic, many people became overwhelmed with anxiety, depression, addictions, and traumatic abuse. Suicide and murder rates accelerated. Problems like these had been growing for decades in their own silent epidemics. Especially at times like these, we worry that our children and grandchildren walk out every day to a world with growing lies, hatred, division, and distrust.

Yet I’ve been encouraged that somehow, a few brave, resilient souls are taking better care of themselves and their neighbors than they did before. Even if their families, their bodies, or their bank accounts are getting worse, some wise people are healthier *personally,* even during distressing times. They seem to have found vaccines and ventilators for their *souls*. What is this *wellbeing* they have, and where did they get it?

Surveys of professional literature on the subject review theories and research about what wellbeing is, and where it comes from. Sadly, all the recent reviews conclude there has been no agreement in recent decades on either a model or even a definition to help us understand what wellbeing is, or how to grow personal wellness in ourselves or others. So where else could we turn?

History sheds considerable light on this subject. About a hundred years ago, trusted authorities in medicine, psychotherapy, and organized religion began selling us more profit-driven pictures of the good life. But for the preceding 1500 years in Western civilization, experts in these fields shared widespread agreement about what wellness was, and where it came from. Across all culture and religions, the doctors, counselors, and other healing professionals usually agreed on **four keys to wellness***.*

***KEYS TO WELLNESS***

*Beliefs*

• **Believe in a power higher than yourself, a creative source for life, health, and wellness.** Forces of darkness and death need not be feared, if they’re offset by trusting in a higher, stronger force for healthy life.

• **Believe that this power somehow lives in people, and inside of you.** You need not worry about whether people will give you the things you most need for the good life, because they are welling up within you fresh every day, and the more you give them away, the more you have.

*Behaviors*

• **Balance your concern for self and others.** Don’t care about yourself and your family more or less then you care about your neighbor. Don’t love people who help you and your family more than you love people who need your help.

**• Care about the fullness of time, looking at past, future, and especially the present.**  Seeing what the past shows is good for all concerned in the long run, you’ll try to leave the world a better place.

How would we know if these beliefs and caring behaviors work to increase wellbeing? The first test of this model has already been passed, *the test of time*. It has worked for 1600 years. The second test is *face validity*: common sense says it should work.

But what about *research?* Until fifty years ago, such matters were thought to be beyond the scope of science, and couldn’t be proved. But that changed in the 1970’s, and dozens of social scientists started researching the healthiness of traditional beliefs and lifestyles embodying the four keys to wellness above. The evidence is clear and getting stronger all the time: people who live by these keys have physically, mentally, and emotionally healthier lives*.*

I can add *clinical observation*. I’ve heard the life stories of 7000 people poured out in my office, and I have seen them try everything under the sun to turn anxiety and depression into love and happiness. I’ve seen nothing that works like these four keys.

The final validation came from the good souls at *Shelby Life* magazine*.* It looked right to them, so when they saw this article, they asked me to write a few more, written for readers who want their children and grandchildren to make healthier choices than the culture around them. Next time I’ll teach you how this understanding of wellness can prepare you to teach younger loved ones to feel safe in all situations, even bullying, trauma, and abuse.

**RAISING COURAGEOUS CHILDREN WITH PEACE OF MIND**

*by Paul Schmidt, PhD*

We can’t expect our children to find courage and peace of mind in fearful situations any more than we have found them ourselves. The two biggest powers we have against fear are choosing what to believe in ahead of time, and on the spot, what to pay attention to. Our beliefs serve as an *inoculation of peace* to prevent infection by those who would enslave us to fear. In the moment, our beliefs enable us to pay attention to sources of strength and hope that work like *inhalers of courage*, to give us confidence when we need it most.

We need to find healthy role models to follow, ones that grow not fear but faith. *We will know them by their fruits –* the lifestyles and attitudes of wellbeing. We lose our freedom when we trust and pay attention to anyone who puts out words and deeds that bring insecurity, worry, panic, doubt, confusion, and mistrust. By contrast, we gain freedom when we rely on people who trust in some higher power that brings peace, hope, confidence, courage, and calm.

**Share your Past Anxieties**

When news comes into your family of bullies in school and adult life, or of terrifying episodes of traumatic abuse, talk about how the victims could have inhaled courage. *Tell children about your past and present troubles* with these things. Share what happened when you relied too much on yourself, and on other self-centered people. Ask yourself where you go in a crisis to find security. (To learn more, ask your loved ones where *they* see you going for these things.) Children need to see you trusting in a higher source of protection than yourself, one that not only protects you, but indwells you, where it blesses you to bless others.

**Teach them a Fire Drill**

In elementary school, we learned to imagine and rehearse fires and practice getting to safety. Likewise you can teach children to imagine a fearful situation, take a couple of deep breaths, and access the strongest, sweetest spirit they have ever known (their grandmother, maybe you, ideally God’s indwelling spirit of love). Next they can listen to words of affirmation and comfort coming from that sweet strength. They can practice saying these words to themselves, maybe saving them into their journals or phones.

Fire drills can include scriptures like the 23rd psalm, or prayers. One formula some people use is a series of rehearsed behaviors recalled with the letters **S-A-F-E: S**upport and **S**oothe yourself, **A**ffirm your **A**ssets and **A**lliances, **F**ocus on the **F**uture, and **E**ngage your **E**ncouragers. However they do it, practicing their fire drill will help children in the situations below.

**Bullying at School**

When someone tries to bully our children or their friends, they need the inoculating belief that they aren’t alone. Their bodies may be in danger, but *their souls can travel,* to another time and place. They can learn to imagine protective authority coming to their aid. They can soon ask parents, grandparents, school officials, and other effective friends to discipline the bully. More importantly, they can teach children effective responses to make when bullied. For inhaling, pressure-relief responses they can use on the spot, I give ten practical tips on my blog: **mynewlife.com/bully-proof-your-child,** plus my podcasts on handling anxiety and anger at **brainfood.libsyn.com** .

**Traumatic Abuse**

All children need to be prepared to deal with being mistreated. For children **not to be** **victimized** by such incidents, they can learn to talk their feelings out with safe people, so they won’t take their anger at the abuser out on themselves and others. The inoculation of peace is to believe that victims of traumatic abuse can learn to *take responsibility for their own healing*. Inhalers of courage can include a fire drill, or practical instructions for healing from abuse (with and without professional help) given on my website **mynewlife.com/recovering-from-trauma-and-abuse,** andon **my podcasts** linked above.

The central lesson here is this: we can ***feel our feelings*** of fear and talk them out, so we can ***believe our beliefs*** that we are always safe and sound inside our bodies where our higher power lives.

*696 words*

**RAISING CHILDREN WHO LOVE WELL**

*by Paul Schmidt, PhD*

King Solomon said, “Guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.” When a heart loves one person or group too much, a spring for loving self and others dries up inside. Young adults with this pattern have usually learned it from their parents. It doesn’t have to be this way.

The key to a healthy wellspring of love is *balance*. • Love your neighbor as yourself, and love yourself as you love others. • Love the neighbor who is balanced that way, more than the one who isn’t. • Watch out for the ones who love themselves or someone else too much or too little, including you, as they will drain your wellspring. • Keep your wellspring connected to your Creator, and to the community that loved your heart first, as they know the well-balanced life the heart needs to stay healthy.

How can parents raise children with well-balanced hearts? Make sure that you *show love in a balanced way to everyone in the home,* including yourself. Don’t show more love to the ones who show the least love to themselves and others. Instead, do *show some love to people most in need outside the home,* such as the elderly, sick, less privileged, and those new to the community. And at each stage in your children’s development, be ready to teach them to love in balanced ways they will need at that age.

*Preschool Years*

Always indulging or picking up crying children will exhaust you both. Teach babies they may have to wait awhile for their desires to be met. Learning to tolerate a little discomfort is a way for them to gain strength. Their irrational fears will subside, if they’re given enough time to adjust, thus showing love themselves and for you. This works with fears like darkness, storms, quiet, the sight of new people, the taste of new foods, and being away from their parents. They can learn to distract and soothe themselves, thus developing a taste or tolerance for things they will be experiencing in life.

*Elementary School*

Friendships in grade school pull children’s hearts from their families. When they’ve been rejected, while you comfort them, give them more education than sympathy. The two keys are teaching them to give *attention* and *affection* wisely. “Why give your attention to them, and hope they’re nice to you? Pay them no mind, and let those snooty people have each other. Look for people who need a friend, for people that are nice to everybody. Be nice to them and see how that goes.” Tell them how these things worked well for you and others when you were young.

*Middle and High School*

Passions run higher now. Being rejected in love, left out of a clique, or worst of all, getting locked into a lopsided romance or clique are big hurts that most teens suffer. But not to worry *–* it’s better for them to learn from these experiences than to avoid them. They’ll learn when you ask (and keep asking) these questions: • “You are giving and forgiving a lot, not getting much back. Why?” • “Why do you deserve this?” • “Why not talk your feelings out with a healthy person, instead of acting them out with one who’s not?” • “Do you enjoy your life more or less than you did before you got into this?” • “How does this end?”

It doesn’t help to lecture or criticize teens, or those they love. The best principles to teach are those in the first two paragraphs of this article, and the first article in this series (the July issue). Stories will help, especially from your own life. The best you can do is to guard your own heart. Show them how much you enjoy life, thanks be to your healthy, well-balanced wellspring heart.

*639 words*