

The Magic of Silence and Stillness

Silence and stillness does have a magic to it! It doesn't matter where you find it – in your home, your workplace or your classroom, when it occurs something magical happens.

Our children are more troubled than ever before in the history of mankind – especially those in the Western world. More so than ever before we are seeing:

- ❖ More violence and assaults in our schools and communities;
- ❖ More children than ever before on Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) medication to manage hyperactivity and inability to concentrate;
- ❖ More children presenting with depression or emotional overwhelm and overload;
- ❖ More cases of sexual abuse;
- ❖ More children suffering obesity and diabetes;
- ❖ More children suffering alcohol and drug abuse;
- ❖ More children homeless;
- ❖ More children being diagnosed with mental disorders like obsessive compulsive disorder and severe anxiety disorders;
- ❖ Children as young as five who are wanting to die;
- ❖ Children as young as three on sleeping medication to help them sleep;
- ❖ An increase in childhood and juvenile crime;
- ❖ No real improvement in school retention rates for our indigenous children;
- ❖ An ever increasing teen suicide rate.

Dr Fiona Stanley, a world authority on child health, expressed her concern at a recent conference in Australia:

"Health and behaviour problems among children have reached frightening levels and a national campaign is needed to avert a looming social crisis".

West Australian, November 9th 2002

Why is this happening to our children and in such epidemic proportions?

We have sped up the pace of life and living. We live in an **instant** world where we expect everything NOW. Communication, food, pain relief, results, well behaved children....you name it, we expect things instantly. This expectation works silently and unconsciously creating stress when things do not always happen like that. Children take **all** of childhood to grow - to learn how to think, learn, process information, behave appropriately – manage their lives, dress themselves, find their way home and learn who they are! We cannot rush this.

Children, now more than ever, require input into their learning and growing. They seem to need more kindness and compassion than did previous generations. Children respond to people who allow them to explore their own choices and give them the opportunity to make more of their own decisions, while being aware they themselves will also be responsible for the consequences of their decisions. They suffer from allergies and stress related illness more than ever before and need us adults to make more conscious choices about how to raise them in safe nurturing ways! To do this we all need to slow down – simplify our lives and spend more time committed to being a positive part of our kid's lives.

Children now want to be the driving force behind their own learning. Many have no desire to be rich and materially successful; they want to live effective lives with quite different attitudes and ways to their parents. They are much more environmentally aware, socially accepting of cultural differences, anti-war, aware of their own responsibility for their health and wellbeing, or lack of responsibility as the case may be. Many young people are in a spiritual void, where emptiness, a lack of meaning in their lives and disconnection from society are part of their reality.

As an independent counsellor and educational consultant with a special interest in emotional literacy and human resilience I see the broken spirits, damaged minds from not raising children with love, awareness and correct information.. I know that our children's world can be made better. I know that because I am witnessing it in some homes and schools where the emotional wellbeing of children does come first. Research has long held the belief that happy children learn best. A safe environment where differences are accepted and welcomed allows children to learn social skills as well as academic skills. Humans are programmed to be social animals. Social behaviour is not inherent. It happens through the constant interaction of humans with other humans over a long period of time.

The magic of silence and stillness is something that helps shape the developing child in a positive way. While there are many cognitive (left brain) benefits from teaching the magic of silence, there are even more emotional and social (right brain) benefits. The inner world of children today is in turmoil and the outer turmoil of the world that we have created probably contributes. I believe that children who can build a doorway to their own sense of value and worth will be better able to manage this chaotic rapidly changing world. This doorway is found on the inside rather than the outside. As explained by John O'Donohue

"We need to return to the solitude within, to find again the dream that lies at the hearth of the soul. We need to feel the dream with the wonder of a child approaching a threshold of discovery. When we rediscover our childlike nature we enter a world of gentle possibility. Consequently, we will find ourselves more frequently at the place of ease, delight and celebration."
Anam Cara : Spiritual Wisdom from the Celtic World, 1997.

So please open yourself to the magic of silence and stillness first. Then teach it to children so that they too can take it out into the world and into adulthood as a skill that sustains them during life's challenges. Teach them so that they can hold more hope, optimism and enthusiasm, and that our world can be a better place than it is now. Please teach it now, before we lose any more of our teenagers to depression, mental disorders, drug and alcohol abuse, and suicide.

Maggie Dent 2004