

Helping Our Kids in Today's World

I am writing the final chapters of "Nurturing Kids Hearts and Souls" and wanted to share with you a few concerns I have at this time around raising our kids. The first is the notion of stranger danger education. In "Children of a Lucky Country?" co written by three well known Australian experts in child health including Professor Fiona Stanley they give the statistics of child abusers. It is frightening! 69% of child abusers involved a natural parent – 7% other relatives, 6% were step parents, 5% were de facto partners, 5% were a friend or neighbour.....do the maths! 92% of abusers were known to the child ...only 8% were strangers. We need to spend time with our children letting them know how to tell the difference between safe and unsafe people. We need to validate their intuitions about what to do if they feel "yucky" near a person or when a person asks them to do something unusual. Children are easily bullied and coerced by an older person and fear is what keeps them quiet. The most important thing is to watch when your child's happy eyes disappear or their behaviour around someone changes! Watch their eating patterns, their emotional temperament and have they reverted to any younger behaviour? Be vigilant. Prolonged abuse of any kind robs a child of so many things including emotional stability and literacy, social strengths and resilience to life's knocks. The media helps to paint our fear driven world and how bad people are out there – however it does little to protect children in their own home. Please talk to your children about safe people – who are they in your circle of family and friends? Tell what to do if you are not aroundthere are safe people and safe houses. Make sure they know the symbol on safe houses....and tell them to go there is anything frightens them.....

The second area of concern is the unhelpful labelling that happens to children and how this shapes who they are. As teachers we know that children become self fulfilling prophecies and this means that a child's attitudes to school, themselves and others will determine their reality or what happens in their life. I am hearing of more and more children at speech therapists before four, or children being diagnosed with ADHD before school. **Labels shape how people see and interpret a child and they will become what you label them.** Some children are slow to speak – that has happened forever. Some are very highly spirited with way too much energy – that has happened forever. I heard of so many stories at funerals of men who were "buggers" for their Mum's – it has been happening for a long time. In the old days these kids were not inside in front of screens, their Mums were not as busy and stressed and Kids tended to run amok with the local kids and gave everyone some time out. Communities kept an eye on their kids. These kids also expended a lot of energy. And they were not filling up on junk food and cool drink and food full of preservatives.

Genuine ADHD which requires medication to slow the brain's processing is a real medical condition and I believe it is way over-diagnosed. However, using medication to help calm a hyperactive in-your-face child is asking for problems long term. Not only does their evolving personality and sense of self be influenced in a negative way, they get confused easily about life. Work with their excessive energy and spend more time at the park, the beach, the bush and less time in front of TV, toys and confined space. Watch what goes into their mouths. The over stimulation of our technological world, that is also consumer driven fries

young brains! No wonder they have trouble sleeping and then sleep deprivation causes the cycle to continue!!!! When we support the labelled reality with our own negative thoughts about our child – they are ADHD, they are a full on, or a naughty boy, they drive me nuts.....(and I know they can and do-I had one!!) then they will continue to be that way. Focus on changing your thoughts (spend quiet times before you get out of bed is a good time) seeing your highly spirited child in a more positive way – see them when they are loving, and being a delight. Speak about them in positive ways even when they are out of earshot! We get stuck into problem focused thinking and it helps keep the problem happening. And let go a bit of trying to control your child's life. Calm their world down. Keep them outside with dirt, sand, water and trees. When we see young children as damaged and flawed before they start school we are holding them back from their own natural way of developing. No two children are alike and as parents we often judge a second child by the first childand this can cause problems. Let our kids have more opportunity to grow without as much prejudged conditioning and with as much positive parenting as possible that allows them space to learn to play without expensive toys, technology and too much talking and bossing. This is how it has been forever. They will learn to entertain themselves, be comfortable with quietness, fresh air and learn that when they make poor choices they get hurt. Raising independent uniquely different individuals who develop naturally with as few as labels as possible may give parents and teachers time to do what they are meant to do – create safe places for children to play and grow. Remember it would be a dull world if all kids were predictable and the same.