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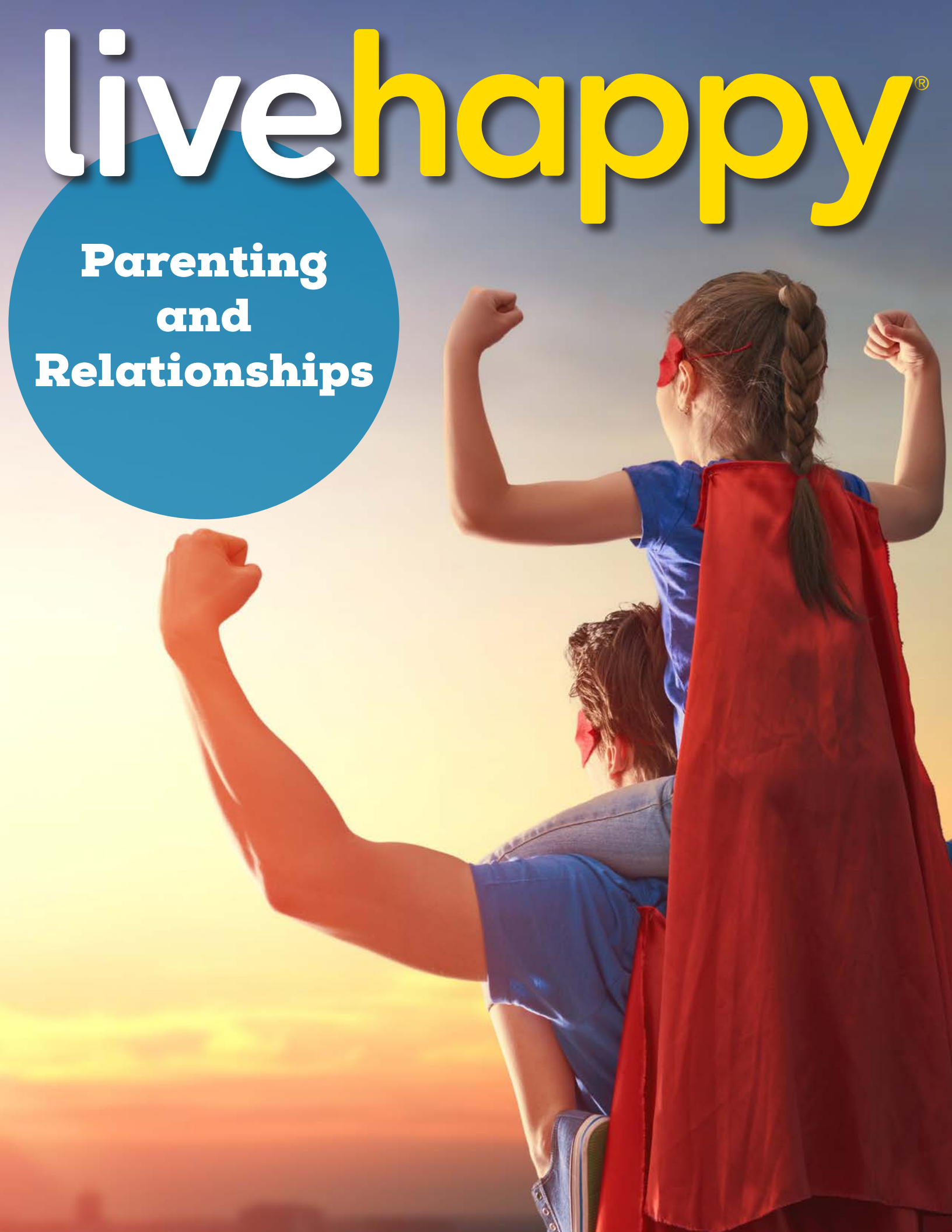
Parenting and Relationships



LET'S DROP THE CAPES

Who needs super parents when we can be good, happy ones instead?

by Stacy Kaiser

After relationship issues and personal growth, parenting ranks among the most pressing topics facing adults today. I am a parent, and also I talk to a lot of parents, both in my personal life and at work in my private practice as a therapist. Parenting is clearly an important and difficult job. We, as parents, are not only providing for the basic physical needs of our children, but we are often hyper-focused on their psychological needs as well. On top of that, we hold ourselves responsible for the implications of each of our decisions: We want to do the best job possible and not mess up our kids! This desire to be the best parent possible can translate into an unrealistic ideal of the super parent.

When my daughter was in elementary school, she participated in a children's book club in our neighborhood. Each family took a turn hosting with a theme-related activity, decorations and food. Parents went all out! When it was our turn to host, the book was about puppies. My daughter and I baked cookies in the shape of dog biscuits, we made a puppy-related art project and bought puppy plates. I really thought I had hit it out of the park when we bought little plastic bowls for the kids to drink out of instead of cups. To be honest, I felt like a very successful parent—something I struggled with because I worked outside of the home.

One mom arrived early and complimented all that we had done but then critically asked why I did not have puppy ears for the kids to wear. In hindsight I now see that she was inconsiderate and ridiculous, but at the time I was truly crushed. It took me a few minutes to regroup, because her judgmental question launched me into a state of insecurity and worry. We put so much pressure on ourselves that it's easy to feel that we have somehow failed, or at least not met expectations.

The drive to be a super parent can leave you feeling stressed out, depressed, guilt-ridden and like a complete failure. Trying to be and do everything at a level of perfection will only lead to exhaustion and unhappiness, and set a poor example for our children—the very people we are trying to nurture, teach and please.

Typically the need to be a super parent emerges from these three areas:

EXPECTATIONS

Whether set by our own standards or those we perceive from society, expectations cause us to stop focusing

PHOTOGRAPH: ©ROBERT DALY/GETTY IMAGES

on what is emotionally best for our families. This creates too much pressure, which can lead to guilt, disappointment, frustration and sadness.

COMPARISONS/ENVY

Sometimes we are so busy looking at what other people are doing that we lose focus on what is best for our family. While it is tempting to try to keep up with, or even outdo, a neighbor's over-the-top birthday party, it may not be what your child wants, or what you can afford.

INSECURITY

The need for perfection can be rooted in insecurity. We may feel overextended and worry that we are not devoting enough time and energy to parenting. That can lead to skewed perceptions of what is good, healthy and desirable.

Let's stop trying to be super parents and focus on being good parents instead. Good parents allow room for error and fatigue, accept their imperfections and model to their children that trying your best is what is important. Good parents focus on the well-being and happiness of themselves and their family.

STACY KAISER, the author of *How to Be a Grown Up: The Ten Secret Skills Everyone Needs to Know*, is a successful licensed psychotherapist, relationship expert, media personality and *Live Happy* editor at large. She has a B.A. in psychology from California State University, Northridge, and her M.A. in clinical psychology from Pepperdine University. As a former weekly advice columnist for *USA Today* and with more than 100 appearances on major networks, including CNN, FOX and NBC, Stacy has built a reputation for bringing a unique mix of thoughtful and provocative insights to a wide range of topics. For more on Stacy, go to StacyKaiser.com.

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10 WAYS TO BE A GOOD PARENT

1. STRIVE toward reasonable expectations that fit you and your family. Check in with trusted family or friends. If they tell you that your expectations are too high, listen.

2. ASK yourself if your standards are based on your own thoughts and ideals, or if you are being affected by outside influences.

3. MAKE an effort to deal with disappointment in a kind, nurturing, less critical way.

4. LEAN on friends and family to help when you are feeling overwhelmed.

5. WHEN you do mess up, lighten up. Beating yourself up only adds to the misery. Think about how you'd do it differently next time and move on.

6. PRIORITIZE—do what's necessary and leave quality and fun time for yourself, your relationship and your children.

7. KNOW when you are overloaded or overwhelmed and do something about it. Rest, recharge, focus on what you are grateful for and escape into something you enjoy.

8. PAY ATTENTION to the messages you are sending to your children—they learn what they live. If they hear and see you being too critical or unreasonable, they will do the same. If they hear you being understanding and accepting, they will learn from that as well.

9. EVALUATE and re-evaluate your behaviors, goals and expectations on a regular basis. Adjust as needed.

10. HAVE FUN. Sometimes as parents we are so focused on the "do's and don'ts" that we forget we should be enjoying our kids and our lives.

What they say is true, it all goes so fast. They grow up quickly. Lighten up and enjoy the ride!

THE MOM-AND-DAD GUIDE TO LEADERSHIP

These three skills will help you out at home and in the office.

by Margaret H. Greenberg and Senia Maymin, Ph.D.

People of all ages respond well to the right kind of feedback. As parents and executive coaches, we've noticed that certain key concepts of positive psychology are effective in both parenting and work settings.

1. SHINE A LIGHT ON WHAT'S GOING RIGHT.

As Margaret and her colleague Dana Arakawa found in their research, thanking people and recognizing their work is directly tied to better productivity. Managers who gave the most positive feedback also ran teams that were 42 percent more productive compared with the managers who gave the least positive feedback.

And of course children respond well to your gratitude when they help with chores without being asked.

We'll fill you in on a little productivity secret: It's more motivating to your team—and to your kids—to be recognized for things that they're doing well.

2. GIVE PROCESS PRAISE, NOT PERSON PRAISE.

If Margaret could change one aspect of her parenting, it would be how she praised her daughters. She praised their good deeds by saying, "You're so smart" or "You're such a good girl," thinking she was encouraging more of the same behavior.

But research by Carol Dweck, Ph.D., of Stanford University, and others, shows that such praise (called person praise) can demotivate people in the long term. Why? Because people may stop working on projects in which they can't immediately see the payoff of being smart or fast or talented.

What's the solution? Process praise. With our kids, that means giving them specific praise about what they've done—something like: "Recording your favorite TV shows the last two nights so you could make flashcards for your test showed dedication, Joey! That extra time and effort really made a difference!"

The same detailed feedback works in the office. We're setting people up for future success by emphasizing that more effort pays off.

3. CHANGE IT INTO A HABIT.

Wendy Wood, Ph.D., of the University of Southern California, is the foremost expert on habits. She finds two major benefits of habits: Emotionally, they remove stress from a task, and mentally, they free our minds to think about other things. The next time you're looking to change behavior at work or at home, think of habits.

When a client wanted to contribute more in group settings, we encouraged her to ask a question or say something within the first 15 minutes of a meeting. In each of our homes, to avoid distractions and foster deeper conversations, we created a family habit: The dinner table is a phone-free zone.

We hope you, too, can practice crossover skills that help at home and at work!

MARGARET H. GREENBERG and SENIA MAYMIN, Ph.D., are organizational consultants and executive coaches whose workshops, keynotes and coaching inspire leaders around the world. Their book *Profit From the Positive* is also available in Chinese, Japanese and Korean. They both earned master's degrees in applied positive psychology from the University of Pennsylvania and were inducted into the Happiness Hall of Fame.

DOCTOR'S ORDERS

Make time to truly connect—with no distractions.

by Dr. Rachael Ross

We've all been there at one time or another: You come home after a busy, stressful day at work and all you want to do is relax and unwind. But the minute you walk in the door, you see the bill that didn't get mailed or the trash that didn't get taken out. Your spouse or partner promised to take care of that—and once again, didn't.

Now you're ready for a fight. You know exactly how this evening is going to go, and it's not going to go well.

"Great," you think. "Just what I needed after the day I've had."

Before your mind starts running through that mental list of all the other things your partner hasn't done, take a breath. Yes, your partner's mistake was annoying, but is it worth ruining the evening for both of you?

In today's world, where both people in the relationship are often working outside the home and leading busy lives, it's important to remember that you're both on the same side and, presumably, working toward the same goals. It's so easy to bring our frustrations and conflicts with work, family members and friends into our romantic relationships. It's also easy to get so caught up in daily stresses and demands that you forget how it's affecting your significant other—or how it's making you treat your partner.

That's why I believe practicing a little mindfulness can make a huge difference in our relationships, but particularly our primary, romantic relationship.

PHOTOGRAPH: ©WAVEBREAK MEDIA/SHUTTERSTOCK

GIVE IT A MOMENT

When we come home at the end of a workday, a lot has happened since we walked out that door. We've had dozens—maybe even hundreds—of interactions with people and maybe not all of those have gone as well as we'd like. Add in commutes, computer frustrations, unscheduled interruptions and children, and now you've just multiplied your challenges. Sometimes all it takes is that one little "something" to make us blow our stacks—and often, our significant others are on the receiving end.

Research shows us that as many as 90 percent of all arguments are about something other than what we think we're fighting about. One of the best ways to lower your conflict level is for both you and your partner to give each other space at the end of the day.

Let the other person have the first 30 minutes after work as uninterrupted "me" time to unwind and refocus

thoughts and attitude for the evening. This is a great way to keep frustrations of the day from transferring into situations at home.

It also gives you time to decompress and, if you're upset, to re-evaluate the situation. OK, the trash didn't get taken out—is that really worth launching an argument about? Or do you want to give your spouse the benefit of the doubt and realize that maybe he or she was rushed and just forgot? Stay mindful that this is someone you love and then consider how you'd like to be approached if the situation were reversed.

By staying in the moment and keeping your discussion focused on what's really bothering you, together, you can resolve the issue more easily and without hurt feelings. You can also avoid creating small resentments that grow into large ones.

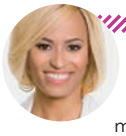
Remember, your goal here is to love and take care of each other, and that means it's important to find effective, non-confrontational ways to communicate and resolve issues. Changing the way you think about and approach small problems allows you to develop a deeper, more loving relationship—and who doesn't want that?

BETTER CONNECTIONS

Another way we unknowingly undermine our relationships is by not being fully "there" even when we're in the same room. If you want to deepen your relationship, give your full attention to your partner, not just your physical presence. Take time to truly connect, meaning put the phone down, turn off the television and really talk about what's going on in your lives.

One of the very best ways to do this is to leave the technology at home and take a daily walk together. Walking outside reminds us of the beauty of the world we live in, and studies show it will immediately make you more mindful and put you "in the moment."

And what better way is there than to connect with your loved one and discuss your day? Take the time to focus on each other. By the end of your walk, you'll be nicer to and more understanding of one another, and that's going to benefit both of you—not just at the moment but for the long haul.



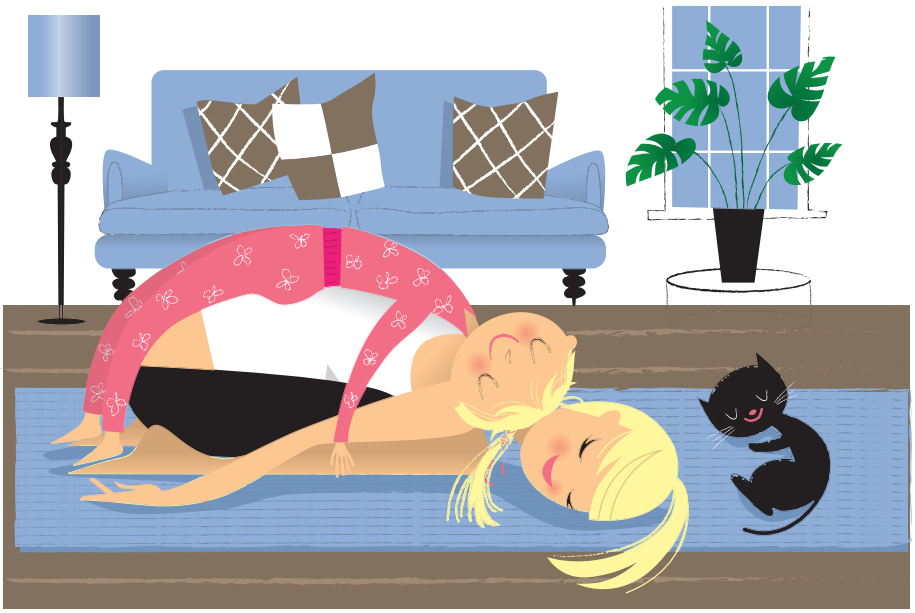
DR. RACHAEL ROSS is a practicing board-certified family medicine physician and sexologist. She is a pioneer of groundbreaking discussions about relationships, sex, abstinence, HIV/AIDS prevention, contributing to a multitude of media outlets nationwide. Dr. Ross was also a co-host on the Emmy Award-winning talk show *The Doctors* for three seasons.

PHOTOGRAPH: ©STEVE SMITH/GETTY IMAGES

Mindful Matters

Create meaningful connection with parent-child yoga.

by Sandra Bienkowski



Susan Verde was an elementary school teacher before she took some time off after her children were born. She was looking for a new way to impact children's lives in a positive way.

"I knew what yoga did for me. I felt like it would be a wonderful way to keep a connection with children, and my kids—while doing something I absolutely love."

Getting certified to teach yoga and mindfulness to children changed her life. The mother of a daughter and twin boys, she also writes children's books including her latest, *The Water Princess*.

CREATE MEANING WITH MOVEMENT

By doing yoga with your children, you can create meaningful moments of connection through movement, Susan says. "In our culture, kids are stressed about test-taking, relationships and the tech they are exposed to all the time. Parents and kids can benefit by finding their center and their calm, strengthening muscles and increasing flexibility," Susan says.

She encourages parents to be playful when doing yoga with their kids. Embrace silliness over silence. Get in Downward Dog pose and let your child crawl beneath you. Put your hands on your bellies and take a deep breath together. Or, pretend you are a forest of trees and hold on to each other for balance.

TRY LIZARD ON A ROCK

Susan's favorite pose to do with a child is Lizard on a Rock. A parent is the rock by getting into child's pose. Sit back on your heels. Toes touch. Rest your chest on your knees and put your arms by your side. Put your forehead on your yoga mat or whatever surface you are on. Line up your sacrum (lower back).

The lizard gently lies on the rock, back-to-back. Hook your arms around your child's arms to get a good stretch. The pressure on your back feels good, and there's a great stretch for both parent and child. Practice breathing together. Kids love pretending they are real lizards.

Susan believes the mindfulness of yoga between parent and child can make families more present with each other in life off the mat.

"Yoga allows us to connect to body and mind in a nonjudgmental way and helps us be kinder to ourselves," she says.

"HAPPINESS IS THE PERSON WHO CAN IMPROVE OTHERS, NOT ONLY WHEN PRESENT, BUT EVEN WHEN IN THEIR THOUGHTS."
—SENECA

NEWS

'Cause I'm Free to Do What I Want

In a series of Ohio State University studies, researchers discovered that people have less fun on planned leisure activities. Most people associate planning with work and would rather their free time be free flowing.

(Source: *Journal of Marketing Research*)

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TABLE TALK

Swapping favorite family stories is more than just holiday dinner banter. It bonds us, shapes us, shores our well-being and deeply enriches our lives.

by Stephanie Alexander
illustrations by Jon Cannell

There are a few things you can always count on during family holidays: kids showing up a foot taller since last you've seen them; Aunt Lisa nailing the perfect sweet-potato-to-marshmallow ratio in her signature dish; and roof-raising joyful chaos that leaves you flopped out on the couch once everyone hits the road.

And there's another part of families' gatherings that's taken so for granted that we don't even think about it: the tales that get retold so often that they become part of the very fabric of your family's identity. But these stories aren't just idle ways to fill the silence between forkfuls—they serve a real purpose in making our lives richer and more meaningful. Robyn Fivush, Ph.D., a psychology professor at Emory University in Atlanta, studies family narratives. These reminiscences contribute to a young person's formation of her identity and her understanding of her place in the world, Robyn says. For older people, sharing family stories allows them to satisfy what psychologist Erik Erikson termed generativity, or the desire to impart your wisdom and legacy to the next generations. "There is some anthropological and sociological research that suggests that these kinds of stories become kind of a family motif," says Robyn, "like 'We're a lucky family' or 'We're a family that struggles but overcomes.'" What that means, says William Dunlop, Ph.D., a University of California, Riverside, assistant professor who studies personal narratives, is that these stories can affect a person's entire worldview. A listener comes away with a sense of collective identity. "These stories say, 'This is my kind of family,'" Will says.

While holiday time is not the only time family lore gets shared—car trips, dinners and other less formal moments are terrific opportunities to recount and listen—the gatherings offer a unique opportunity. "The thing about a holiday is it's a chance to ask questions that a lot of different people might have answers to," says Linda Coffin, the executive director of the Association of Personal Historians, an organization that encourages the preserving and sharing of people's life stories. "If you ask your mom about crazy Uncle Harold she'll have her perspective, but with 12 people at Christmas, you'll get a lot of different perspectives." You come away with a richer, more three-dimensional picture of your family's history and the people who formed it.

There are many other life-enriching benefits to family stories, perhaps the most overt of which is imparting values to young people.

There are many other life-enriching benefits to family stories, perhaps the most overt of which is imparting values to young people. "Sometimes they're moral stories, or admonitions or warnings—what not to do," says Marshall Duke, Ph.D., Robyn's Emory colleague who also studies family narratives. Other times, they're stories of what Marshall calls heroism. "In this case, heroism is doing something the listener thinks he would never do, such as picking up and leaving Europe and going to a new country, or overcoming some political and social obstacles." The idea that you are part of a group of people who are capable of such heroism—which almost everyone in a nation of immigrants is—is a source of pride to people of any age, but especially to teens and children. In his research, says Marshall, "we've found that heroic stories give strength to kids. The fact that they are related to someone who did this, it becomes 'That's what we do in our family, our family rises above.' It teaches resiliency."

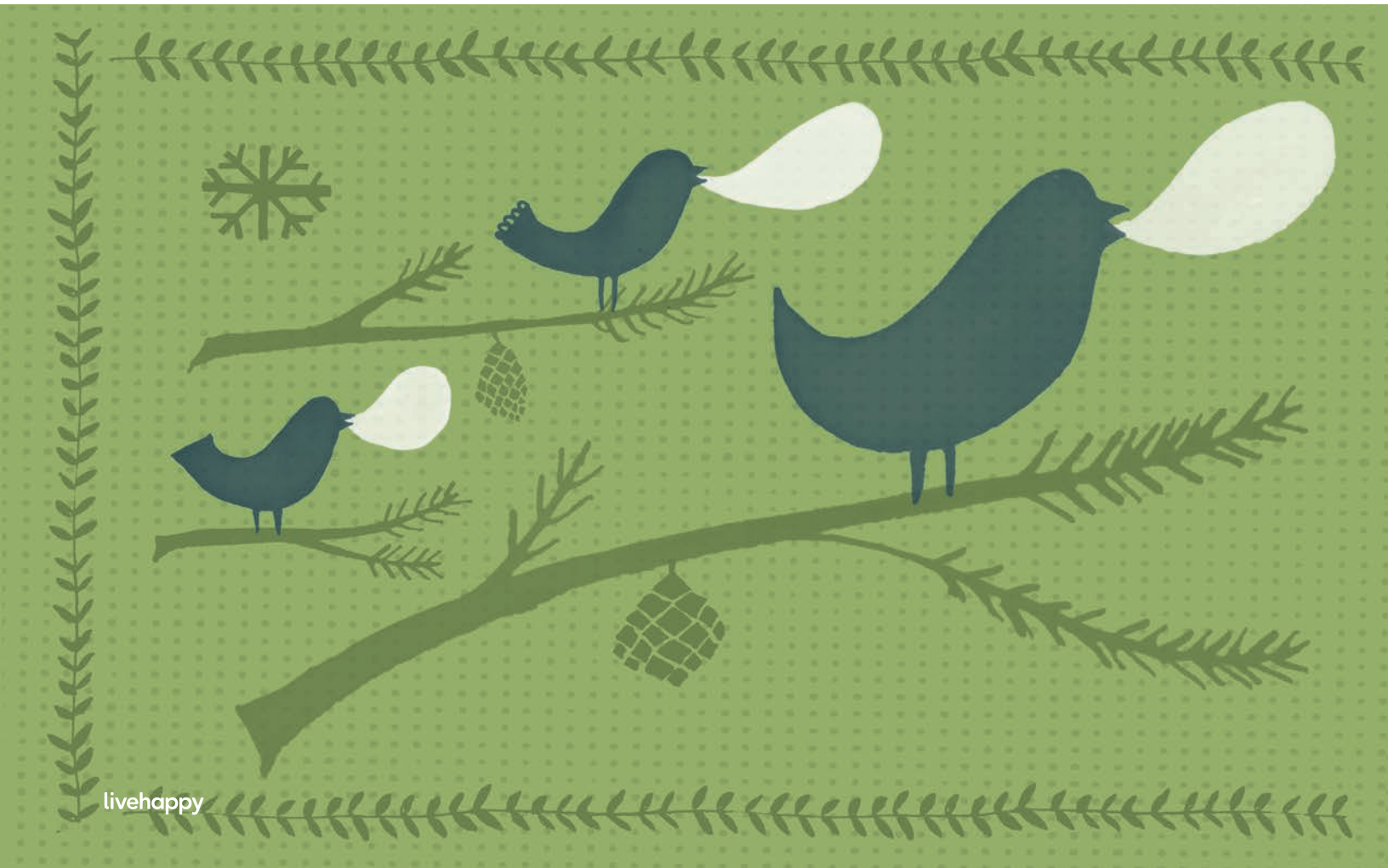
Stories of her mother's heroism had a big impact on Marisa Fox-Bevilacqua, 52. Her mother, Tamar Fromer, was a soldier in the Israeli underground. Marisa heard again and again how Tamar fled Poland alone at age 13 to Palestine, which was then under British governance before the state of Israel was established, just before World War II. "My mother told me how she and other girls smuggled [goods past the gates] in Jerusalem" to aid the Israeli statehood movement, Marisa recalls. The British guarding the city were too formal and polite to check women, Tamar recounted. "She'd just walk by with this big innocent smile on her face."

Tamar also told her daughter of the pain of leaving her mother behind in Poland, where she died in the Holocaust. "Growing up with that story—you, too, can be severed from your mother—filled me with a lot of anxiety as a kid," Marisa says. "But I think what she was trying to tell me was that you can't walk through life with fear—you get over whatever it is that you're afraid of, that you must adjust, that life is random and you have to make the best of it." And while Marisa knew her mother as a homemaker, not a soldier, "I learned from her stories that girls can do anything," she says, and that breaking the rules for a worthy cause was an admirable thing to do.

The Past Is Prologue

Tales of events that took place before we were born don't just help people understand their places in their families but also the families' places in the larger world. "Because by listening you are now included in these stories, they become part of your history," Will says. And especially when the story is being told by an older person to a younger person, the listener experiences what Marshall calls an "extension of the self." "When a 10-year-old knows about how his grandparents lived 60 years ago he feels a part of something that has been going on longer than he's been around." He is woven into an ongoing family narrative and on some level may feel a responsibility as a participant in the story, which, says Marshall, can help guide his choices in the future. The child, says Will, "is aware that his behavior affects the family in a broad sense."

CJ McKiernan, 48, of Somerville, Massachusetts, says she grew up hearing her dad tell a story about his own father that, while primarily humorous, nonetheless had a strong message about what was expected in their family. "When my dad was young, he ran out of money in California and so he called my grandfather for help. Grandpa says, 'They have buses, don't they?'" she says. "So my dad takes a nine-day bus trip back to Massachusetts from California and finally arrives all dirty and tired and calls his father from the bus station to pick him up. Grandpa says, 'They have buses, don't they?' It was rush hour and



he wasn't about to go pick him up at the station." The moral of the story, CJ says, is "You are responsible for your own mistakes—your family is not going let you get hurt but if you do something idiotic, you take responsibility for yourself."

But these family stories, experts say, do not have to be positive, funny or even have a happy ending to confer the same benefits of family identity and values on the people hearing them. In Marshall and Robyn's research, adolescents who knew many details about happy and unhappy aspects of family history tended to have higher levels of self-esteem, lower levels of anxiety, fewer behavioral problems and greater resilience. "They learn that bad things happen to good people, and we can

Get the Whole Story

If some of your family is more reserved, here's how to encourage members to share their legacy tales.

ENLIST THE GRANDKIDS. "Often an older person will say to their adult children asking to hear a specific story, 'Oh, you've heard that a million times,'" says Linda Coffin of the Association of Personal Historians. "If a grandchild asks, they can't really say that."

MAKE IT ABOUT YOU. To encourage someone to talk, say something like "I've always wondered about how you and your Uncle Jack were able to share a bed with three others and get any sleep," she advises. Or "I can't remember how the story about how daddy got stuck on the roof ends…can you tell it again?"

PRETEND YOU'RE MODERATING A ROUNDTABLE. If one relative tends to dominate the storytelling, it's fine to say, "Thanks, Uncle Jimmy, but I want to hear what Auntie Karen has to say."

STIR THE POT. "I see Cousin Rich is is shaking his head…is that not how it went down, Richie?"

In some families, stories are sheer entertainment, and the ritual and repetition of the same stories—with the same sometimes corny punch lines that families recite in unison—are what binds members together.

overcome obstacles," Marshall says. They also learn that failure is not the end of the world. "Sometimes you work as hard as you possibly can and things still don't come out well—it helps people accept that there are times like that."

The stories don't even need to be true to bring the good stuff. In fact, says Marshall, they are often hardly true at all. "They have a certain 'truthiness' about them, as [Stephen] Colbert would say. They're often embellished or the edges are softened."

The Joy of Storytelling

Marisa and CJ both took away valuable lessons from their parents' stories, but the upsides of family storytelling aren't just to the listeners—the teller, too, gains a sense of meaning, which is often tied to generativity. Northwestern University narrative researcher and psychologist Dan McAdams and his colleagues have been studying storytelling and generativity for decades. "Generativity," he writes, "is an adult's concern for, and commitment to promoting the well-being of future generations through…a wide range of endeavors aimed at leaving a positive legacy for the future."

"It's kind of like, 'I've gotten me figured out, now what am I going to give back to the world?'" Robyn explains.

Dan's research reveals that highly generative people find happiness in telling these stories. "Not everyone achieves that generativity, but those that do report higher levels of life satisfaction and a sense of meaning and purpose," Robyn says. People who are more generative, Dan's research shows, also report telling more of these family stories, particularly ones with the themes of suffering, growth and human kindness.

Linda, who helps clients put their life stories into book form to give to their loved ones, has seen what telling personal narratives can do for her clients. "In sharing these stories, people get a sense that they're passing on something that's significant in a way that's not always true of an estate that consists of things," she says. "It's a personal legacy that they're passing on." Even if an older person is not particularly concerned about the next generation or needs to be coaxed to tell their story, "I find that people who tell their own stories have a sense of looking back through their lives and feeling a sense of accomplishment," Linda says. "Like, wow, you know, I've had a life! Even if they didn't do something 'big,'" she says.

The Tales That Bond

In some families, stories are sheer entertainment, and the ritual and repetition of the same stories—with the same sometimes corny punch lines that families recite in unison—are what binds members together, even more than the specific content. One family classic

The Kids *Are* Listening

Even if they seem lost in their iPhones, adolescents benefit from hearing your stories. Families that do collaborative storytelling (where everyone chimes in) tend to have kids who have higher levels of self-esteem, social competence, better grades and less anxiety and depression, as well as less anger, according to new research out of Emory University. Likewise, kids who know their parents' stories from when they were younger show higher levels of growth, autonomy and self-esteem, particularly if these stories involve transgressions that got resolved ("I got drunk when I was 16 and did some stupid things, but I learned from it."). For more on this research, visit livehappy.com/narratives.

of CJ's is the tale of how her dad got lost driving to Logan airport. "Oftentimes the whole story won't get told, because we've already heard it. It'll be just one sentence, and it's like hearing the whole story," she says. "Whenever there's mention of someone getting lost while driving, we say, 'You gotta go into New Hampshire to turn around,'" CJ says. "It's the same joke over and over again, and the four of us think it's funny. I'm sure it's not as funny to other people, but it binds us together as a family."

Of course, not all families have delightful (or even hilarious-in-retrospect) memories to share and some family gatherings are strained, but the stories we tell in those circumstances can also serve a positive purpose. Siblings sharing gallows humor about a difficult parent, for example, is healthy and positive and bonds them together in a different way. "These stories cement the relationships," Will says. "Nothing is better than not feeling alone. It doesn't make the stories less terrible, but it does make you feel less isolated."

What's more, if a sad story is told during the holidays, around food and gifts and loved ones, the message is, "This terrible thing happened in our family history, but look how nice everything is now," Marshall says. "Things pass and people overcome."

So don't worry if it appears that the younger folks in your family aren't obviously enthralled with your anecdotes that illustrate your years of accrued wisdom.

"You just want to put the story out there," Marshall says. When your kids are adults and you hear them repeating your meaningful stories to their own children, you can sit back, enjoy Aunt Lisa's sweet potatoes, and know that what you said did, in fact, make a difference.

New Life for The Oldest Art

The Moth's true five-to-10-minute stories told live from a stage are entertaining, of course, but what draws me and millions others back to the group's award-winning radio show and podcasts—like moths to a flame—are the light and heat. The Moth storytellers dig deep for personal truths, revealing some of their most difficult or embarrassing moments. The result is often transformation—for the teller and occasionally the listener.

Take novelist Meg Wolitzer's story recorded live on a Manhattan stage in 2014. Meg tells of being a goofy, confused 15-year-old enjoying a freewheeling theater-themed summer camp four decades ago in the Berkshire Mountains. She lived in the shadow of a fellow camper named Martha, a poised, goddess-like beauty with flowing brown hair. Boys who scribbled "I never told you this, but I was in love with you" in Martha's yearbook wrote "You're so funny" in Meg's book. The leading drama teacher adored Martha but showed little patience for Meg's silliness, often admonishing her—"Meg Wolitzer, pipe down! Be still! Discipline yourself!"—and banished her from class, leaving Meg to wander outside feeling "like a freak."

Such coming-of-age stories have long been found in print, but in 1997 The Moth created a venue for people to tell their true stories live on stage. Live storytelling struck a nerve. Started in Manhattan, The Moth has since exploded in growth. Today, 24 cities, including Chicago, Los Angeles, Seattle, Milwaukee, London and, most recently, Sydney and Melbourne, Australia, host local StorySLAM competitions. *The Moth Radio Hour*, launched in 2009, is now broadcast on more than 500 radio stations. *The Moth Podcast* gets 30 million downloads per month. "At any given time, someone's telling a story," says The Moth Executive Director Sarah Haberman.

What hasn't changed is The Moth's simple mission—promoting the art and craft of storytelling. Live. "That's where the magic of live storytelling happens. You allow yourself to be vulnerable in front of a group and, as a result, audiences listen with an open mind," Sarah says. The human connection is almost palpable. "At times, the audience seems to levitate."

As stories go, Meg's summer-camp tale is mild. Edge-of-your-seat tales can range from a NASA astronaut who trained for five years for one mission to war refugees to a humanitarian aid worker forced to decide whether to break the rules to save more lives. We learn by the end of Meg's story that she and Martha became friends and remain close to this day.

But the story nearly brought this listener to tears the way it reminded me of my own daughter: a bright, funny, sometimes goofy, theater-loving 12-year-old, who, I'll admit, can at times try my patience. Meg won me over with humor and her courage to share intimate details about her feelings of pain and inferiority. And then she floored me with her epiphany: "The world is always trying to tell you what you're not," she said, nearly choking up, herself. "It's really up to you to say what you are. Every single thing [the teacher] disliked about me—my rube-ishness, my silliness, the way I put myself out there again and again—turned out to be the things that I feel most tender about in myself."

And I feel more tender about those same qualities in my daughter, thanks to Meg's story.

—by Logan Ward