

upcoming events

All events are held in our San Francisco office. Fees for presentations are \$40/person or \$60/couple. Book group fees are \$25/person. For more information visit our website: www.symbiosf.com.

Book Group: Siblings Without Rivalry

by Adele Faber & Elaine Mazlish

Wednesday 03 December @ 6:00 pm

Come and join us for a discussion of the thoughts and suggestions offered by this popular book. We'll discuss how to apply and/or modify the book's teachings to your own children. Parents who are so inclined will have the chance to share suggestions and experiences with one another.

Discipline with Toddlers and Preschoolers

Thursday 04 December @ 7:00 pm

Discipline is an omnipresent topic for parents trying to guide young minds and protect young bodies. This presentation will consider common approaches to discipline from a psychological perspective. We'll discuss how to tailor tactics and techniques to your child's particular personality and temperament; how to balance setting limits and sharing control; and how to use discipline to lay a foundation for self-esteem, emotional regulation and healthy communication.

Managing Holiday Transitions and Disruptions

Tuesday 16 December @ 7:00 pm

Along with a spirit of celebration and connection, the holiday season can bring a host of challenges to families with young children. Schedules and routines get disrupted by travel, visitors, breaks in school or daycare and the multitude of special events surrounding this time of year. We'll discuss how to plan for, and cope with, the impact of disruptions, when to push through and when to opt out, and how best to return to normal routines when the session winds down.

december @ symbio



q & a

My husband and I are totally stumped about how to handle our “screamer” who is two. We were told “not to worry, it’s just a phase” over six months ago. As first time parents, we’re not sure how long a “phase” lasts but my gut tells me this is something more. Our son has an extensive vocabulary but opts for screaming over words. When we say “no”, he screams; when he’s excited, he screams; when someone takes something from him, he screams; when we walk into his playgroup, he screams. In fact, I’m starting to hear his screams when he’s not even around! His screaming episodes are short: just one or two sharp, piercing cries but the shrill really gets under our skin. The latest advice was to ignore him but we’ve found that this makes him scream more. The other day, in a moment of exasperation, my husband screamed back at him and our son stopped dead in his tracks. Thinking we had stumbled onto our answer, we started mimicking him when he screamed, but all we’ve managed to do is drive his volume to a new decibel. What do we do?

We agree with your gut – this is more than a phase. Your son seems inclined to advance recreational screaming to a lifestyle. This makes a lot of sense from his point of view: screaming gets attention, it lets off steam, it
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Separations & Loss

Wednesday 14 January @ 7:00 pm

Whether it's a preschool drop off, goodbye to a visiting grandparent, a move to a new house, understanding death, or even just saying goodnight, separation and loss are important and sometimes difficult themes for young children. We will talk about how best to plan for and respond to these things based on your child's specific temperament.

Temperament: Understanding Your Unique Child

Tuesday 27 January @ 7:00 pm

Temperament plays a large role in determining how your child experiences, and relates to, his or her world. Every child is unique temperamentally, which is why each child responds differently to parents' strategies regarding issues such as sleep, discipline and leaning. This talk should help you form an understanding of how your child's unique temperament affects your interactions with him or her and how it influences your child's role in your family. We will provide guidelines for effective ways of working with various temperaments.

Book Group: Raising Your Spirited Child

by Mary Sheedy Kurcinka

Wednesday 07 January @ 6:00 pm

Spirited children are intense and engaging; they often have magnetic personalities. But they can be exhausting to raise, especially through the early years. We'll take a look at the wisdom this book has to offer, add some thoughts and perspectives of our own and apply it all to the stories, question and suggestions of the parents in the room.

Private Presentations

Presentations on any topic for groups of eight or more can be arranged by appointment. These presentations can be done at your home or another space of your choice, or at our San Francisco or Marin locations. For more details, contact us at: symbio@symbiosf.com.

satisfies an impulse and it's something he's clearly good at doing. Of course, you have a very different experience of it. Getting him to come around to your point of view, or at least comply with your guidelines, will take some work. Your son is screaming for a variety of reasons; what they all have in common is an experience of heightened emotion (both positive and negative). Discouraging his screams will require a variety of responses, which you will need to employ as a cohesive strategy. Start by talking with him about screaming in times when he not screaming. Tell him that screaming is loud, it hurts your ears, screaming is not for in the house or in the car. When you are out and you hear other kids screaming make a disappointed face, hold your ears, and say towards the other kids, "too loud, no screaming" (this is assuming the other children and their parents are far enough away so that they won't hear). You want your son to get that you don't feel friendly towards screaming. Given your description of him, he's likely to laugh at first. That's okay; he'll need a minute to get through the initial rush of anxiety and excitement your response will produce. If you react to his laughter by fussing then the emotional intensity of the situation will take an upward turn, which will, of course, lead to screaming from your son. Just hold your disappointed face steady and reinforce the message. Once he calms down a little, give him the chance to join in with you: show him how to cover his ears and say, "no screaming." At this moment you have become likeminded allies on the screaming topic and your son has an emotional experience that pairs distance from screaming with closeness to you. This alone won't stop him from screaming two minutes later, but it forms an important basis for the rest of your discipline strategy. The key to putting a stop to his screams (or a least reducing them to a frequency that will leave your sanity intact) is be sure he gets the message that screaming will not get him what he wants: it will lead to an undesired consequence. Ignoring him is not likely to work because, in the absence of your response, he will just use screaming to entertain and comfort himself (besides, he knows it's getting to you). Your husband yelling at him probably worked the first time because it got his attention but, because your son didn't get any information about what to do instead of screaming, your mocking screams soon became part of a game and so, reinforced the pattern. What you want to do is this: when your son screams, respond with a firm, sharp, but calm (remember you don't want to drive the intensity of the situation up) rebuke. Use a stern face and voice and direct eye contact. You may need to get down on his level and hold his shoulders to get him to focus. Hold your expression long enough to get his attention, don't lecture. Then, without breaking contact with him, soften your expression and quietly tell him, "no screaming." Cover your ears and see if you can get him to do the same so you can say "too loud" together. Reconnecting emotionally is important because, if you don't, he'll continue to feel anxious, which will make him, yep, scream. Then be sure to give him a lot of positive attention for every non-screaming utterance he makes. If he tests you by screaming again right away, you'll have to uphold a firm boundary. Tell him, firmly and calmly, "no screaming" and then end whatever activity you were engaged in before the screaming started: if he was playing with a toy, take it away; if you were in a park, gather up and leave; if you were washing the dishes and he was hanging on your leg, pick him up and move him out of the room (if you can hand him off to someone else, good, if you can gate him out of the room, good, if you have no other option, briefly deposit him in his crib). When you enforce these sorts of consequences expect some strong protest, he's not going to be happy about the limit that you're setting. Keep four things in mind:

- 1) Consistency is very important, without it you will not be able to establish a clear connection between screaming and negative outcome.
- 2) Things may get worse before they get better – he will need to test this new limit before he respects it.

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- 3) When consequences involve separation, keep the duration of the separations short, you may have to ride out a protest but go back to him as soon as he's not screaming and do a lot of reconnecting do soothe his anxiety. We want him to pair the separation specifically with screaming, not with a general sense of things feeling bad – at his age this means keeping the time-frame short.
- 4) If he's screaming to get attention you will have to provide a lot of positive attention during the times when he's not screaming, and lots of praise for his restraint when he uses it, or he'll just opt for the negative attention of screaming and getting in trouble.

I'm dreading our annual trip with my two kids to my parents' house over Christmas. My parents only get to see the kids a few times per year so they cherish every minute they spend with them. This is great, except my daughter doesn't reciprocate her grandparents' affection. She will wail if they try to touch her or do anything for her and she says nasty things like, "I don't like you! Go away!" On our last visit she even took a few swipes at my mom. When we say good-bye, she walks out the door like she could care less but then she talks about the trip for weeks on end (and asks when we're going back?!). She doesn't act like this at home but I can't convince my parents of this. They've started making comments about our parenting and think we don't discipline her enough; I've also noticed my parents beginning to have a preference for my youngest daughter who is much more enthusiastic about their presence. How do I encourage my daughter to cut her grandparents some slack—or to at least act more civil when they're around?

Holidays, and the abundant opportunities for family closeness, can be a rough time for kids who are not enthusiastic about people rushing into their space. Your daughter's behavior is more likely related to her temperament than her feelings about her grandparents. It's very common for children who dislike intrusions, or who tend to be slower to warm, to be very reticent about contact with people they are not used to being around. In addition, many kids with these temperament traits also tend to struggle with transitions in general and will rely heavily on consistent routines to move through them. They may avoid or protest hello's and goodbye's in general; and all the more so when the routine is altered by the addition of a new person (or people). The pressure your daughter feels to respond in a certain way will make matters worse on both sides, and for you in the middle as well. Your best approach to negotiating an agreement about the protocol for these moments is to help both sides understand the situation a bit better. Explain to your parents that your daughter needs to have a sense of control over when and how she makes contact (you can tell them that you have professional assurance that this is not a result of poor parenting but of your daughter's own unique and inborn preferences). If she feels that you, or they, are inclined to force her to do or say something, she is more likely to seek some control by withdrawing and protecting her space. By the way, she is doing this brilliantly; many kids simply bite. Help your daughter to prepare by recalling previous encounters with your parents to her. She's apt to take to this well with that stellar memory of hers. The better prepared she is ahead of time, the less out-of-control she will feel, and thus, the less she will need to withdraw. Be detailed with her to help her get a picture in her mind; remind her of what her grandparents usually say and do when they first see her. You can also remind her of what she usually does – tell her about how she likes to hide behind you, etc. Don't be concerned that talking about this will make her more likely to hide. She's going to do that anyway and if you can get your parents on board with giving your daughter a bit more space, it can actually end up being fun. Try introducing a routine in which you all agree ahead of time that your daughter will hide behind your leg when you enter and your parents will cover their eyes and there will be no hugging allowed until your daughter says a magic word. In addition, it's a good idea to talk openly about the differences between your daughter and her sister. Don't compare in terms of value, just let it be an easy conversation topic that one sister likes to take her time getting used to people and one sister feels like she's used to people right away. Let the discussion have the same unbiased feel as a discussion of which kinds of cereal each child likes. The more your daughter can emotionally anticipate her own experience in times when the routine changes or something new enters the environment, the more effective she will be in preparing for it. As long as she knows she'll have some control over the pace of contact, you can set limits over how she takes it. For example, you should be able to successfully set limits around the language she uses as long as she is prepped ahead of time about words that are okay to use, such as "I want to play hide instead of hugging hello" rather than, "Don't touch me, I hate you." Finally, give your parents the gentle reminder that they'll catch more flies with honey...help them figure out how to draw her in by giving her space (the added bonus is you might feel more like being around them too).

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psychological services for families with
young children

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