

## 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](http://www.symbiosf.com).

### Potty Training

Wednesday 11 March  
7:00 pm

Using the lens of temperament we will address how to approach getting your child out of diapers. We'll suggest guidelines for timing and choosing a technique, explore some of the strengths and drawbacks of common approaches, and provide tools for how to determine what strategies will work best for your particular, unique child.

### Book Group:

#### 1-2-3 Magic

by Thomas W. Phelan  
Wednesday 18 March  
7:00 pm

Join us, and other parents, in an informal discussion of this popular approach to discipline. Whether you've read the book cover-to-cover or are just interested in the ideas it presents – come and share your questions and perspective.

### Discipline w/ Toddlers & Preschoolers

Wednesday 25 March  
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.

# march @ symbio



### By Special Request:

#### Weaning: A Healthy Transition from the Breast

Tentatively scheduled for Wednesday 4 March @ 7:30 pm

We have been asked to offer a presentation on weaning for infants and toddlers. If there is enough interest in the topic, the presentation will take place on Wednesday, March 4th. We'll talk about how to decide when the time is right, how to prepare, how to set the pace, and how to help both mother and child make the transition to other forms of connection and soothing. If you are interested in attending please let us know as soon as possible. This group will only be held if there is sufficient enrollment so an RSVP is required.

## q & a

I'm the busy father of a 2-year-old and a potty-talking, name-calling 3-½ year-old. Needless to say, life is fairly chaotic but, I believe, less so because both my wife and I are believers in consistent limits and firm boundaries. However, we've been confounded by the recent suggestion that we should just "ignore" some of the undesirable verbalizations of our preschooler. This goes against what feels right, especially those times when I hear my son scream at his mom that she's a dummy, which seems to be happening with rapidly increasing frequency. My wife is a loving, compassionate mom and it infuriates me to hear my son disrespecting her (and others) - and unfortunately, now our two year-old is parroting back some of the same words. I'm just afraid that ignoring this language will essentially give him the green light to verbally lash out at people whenever he feels like it. Thoughts?

## Managing Sibling Rivalry

Wednesday 08 April  
7:00 pm

Dealing with sibling rivalry can be one of the most difficult and frustrating aspects of family life. In this presentation, we will discuss how to encourage strong, healthy sibling relationships, create clear guidelines and boundaries, model independent problem solving and maintain your own sanity. Topics will include empathy, sharing, communication, guidelines and how-to's for parental intervention, and managing aggressive behaviors.

## Parental Anger & Conflict in The Home

Wednesday 22 April  
7:00 pm

This topic has come up so often in our individual consultations. Parents regularly struggle with feelings about their kids and the experience of parenting that they would rather not have. The stress of parenting and managing the demands of life and relationship can lead to conflict and expressions of anger or frustration that parents regret and do not know how to address. This seminar will focus on taking an honest look at the harder moments of parenting, exploring the best ways of responding to them and addressing the hidden opportunities they provide for healthy child rearing.

## 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](mailto:symbio@symbiosf.com).

Ignoring kids can be a tricky business - not to mention that it often requires the mental focus of a Zen master to do it properly. As long as a behavior is not something that you find either seriously counter-productive, hurtful or particularly upsetting, there is nothing wrong with simply not responding. However, when it comes to challenges like the ones your son has thrown down, we recommend opting for other tactics for a number of reasons. We've found that most often when parents think they are ignoring behaviors they are actually responding in a mixture of ways that ranges from an tense disapproval (concealed to varying degrees) to occasional instances of confronting the behavior, often when parents are most frustrated by it. So, in fact, most parents do not truly ignore the behaviors they don't want to reinforce, rather they respond inconsistently and, because frustration often drives these responses that occur despite a parent's intent to ignore, they are often delivered in a way that leaves a child feeling anxious after the fact. It's hardly fair, but certainly true, that the one time when parents react to a behavior tends to cancel out all the "not noticing" they've done from their child's point of view. Consequently, a child's behavior will become as much a way of testing his or her parents as anything else. (Although some children will be stunned into compliance in the moment by an uncharacteristically intense response from a parent, they will almost always test for the reaction again after a period of time). The second reason we're not proponents of ignoring problematic behavior is because, when your children fail to get your attention with bad behavior, they will often simply redouble their efforts with worse behavior. Now, this isn't universally true, and it has a great deal to do with temperament. Some kids have a more compliant nature and will tend to leave off when parents simply don't respond to negative behavior so long as they are getting enough attention for positive behaviors. However, many kids have an honest need to be somewhat oppositional in order to learn and develop. Finally, ignoring kids doesn't tend to make them feel good. Although we don't want children to feel good in the moment they are engaging in negative behavior, we want to be sure that they are clear that the not-so-good (aka bad) feeling they are getting is in response to a negative behavior, not a more general disruption in their connection to parents. When you don't acknowledge a behavior, it's hard to get this point across.

All of this is not to say you have to take issue with every utterance of "poo-poo head" you hear when your son is playing alone in the next room. But when he is being insulting or provocative, you want to respond. The key is for there to be gradations to your response. A simple "I don't like that" or "I don't feel like listening to you right now because you are saying things I don't like to hear" will suffice at times, so will a direct, stern, 10-second gaze delivered in silence. If you know you are in an escalating pattern, be sure you know where the cut-off is, meaning: be consistent about what level of behavior elicits a consequence and be consistent with that consequence. Remember, your son is testing and, being a potty-talking 3-½ year-old, he will often need to test repeatedly, so you want to be sure his results are conclusive; this will minimize the amount of experimentation required.

For the past few days my 21 month-old son has been successfully using the potty during the day (well, most of the time). Half of my friends say he's too young because he's a boy and if I push him I'll screw him up; the other half are emphatic that I need to potty train him before he misses "the window." I certainly don't want to screw him up, nor do I want to miss the window - and honestly, I don't what that window is - so I'm feeling stuck. Yet, while I'm caught in all my indecision, he's proudly peeing in the potty. Who should I listen to?

When it comes to the right time (and the best way) to potty train a child, temperament is a much more important determinant than either age or gender. For example, children will tend to train earlier and more easily if their level of sensory awareness is such that they know when they need to go, but is not so high that they are deterred by the strange new sensations that come with peeing and pooping on the potty. By the same token kids who are distractible enough that a trip to the potty can puncture puzzle-time, but not so distractible that they can't focus on the task at hand once they are there, will have an easier time as well.

(continued page 3)

Speed of adaptability, preference for approach or withdrawal and frustration tolerance are other factors that play a significant role. With so many possible combinations of factors influencing toilet training (age, gender, verbal abilities, and manual dexterity among them) there really are very few broadly applicable generalizations as to when a child will be ready.

In this case, we say listen to your child. Because your son has so eagerly taken the plunge you can let him lead; and you don't need to be afraid to offer some instruction, explanation or coaxing if he stalls out. (We might offer quite different advice for another 2-year-old boy of a different temperament). There is never a need to hold children back when they are ready to try. Encouraging your son and supporting his efforts are a far cry from pushing him, which, we agree you want to avoid carefully. When children feel pressure the whole potty training affair becomes anxiety provoking; and when toddlers are anxious they will act out or shut down. Both positions can be very unpleasant for everyone involved when the issue at hand is toilet training. Let your encouragement take the form of enthusiasm and guidance rather than creating a distinction between successful and unsuccessful visits to the potty. One of the most encouraging things you can do is to talk a lot about your own bathroom experiences: how you know when you need to go, how hard it is to hold it some times, how relieving it is to get to the toilet when you have to go. Depending on how verbal your son is, you may have to use a lot of gestures and repeated phrases to convey these messages, but keep them coming. Anyone else in your household who is old enough to participate in these unique sorts of discussions should join in as well. You may want to put in regular times for potty trips during transitions between activities in your day (for example, right after every meal, before nap time and whenever you leave or come home) and have these trips happen whether or not he has to go. Have trips to the potty be a family event: everyone goes and shares results. Producing something isn't the point; it's the adventure of the trip.

## Questions

If you have a question you'd like us to answer here, email us at: [symbio@symbiosf.com](mailto:symbio@symbiosf.com).

## Group and Presentation Topics

We've had requests to form two different on-going groups:

- 1) Parents of Spirited Children
- 2) First-Time Parents

We've also had a request for an evening presentation on "The Only Child" to discuss the issues unique to children who won't have a sibling. If you are interested in any of these, please let us know: [symbio@symbiosf.com](mailto:symbio@symbiosf.com)

## symbio

psychological services for families with young children

[www.symbiosf.com](http://www.symbiosf.com)

noelle cochran, psyd  
lele diamond, mft license # 40325