

OPINION: finding meaning in the ending of relationships and moving past it in a healthy way

Maturity in a relationship has nothing to do with age. The truth is when you enter into a relationship you have to realize that in time you will have to take responsibility over your partner's heart. Love is a beautiful thing and the concept seems so easy. I love you and you love me. That's it, right?

Love sometimes is confused with a euphoric feeling of everything being alright in the world. All reasoning is put aside as we chase the high that it gives us. While seemingly oblivious to pitfalls or red flags put right in front of our faces. But what can come between lovers? What could dare rip apart the magical thing that is "love."

An important thing to remember is that we are all flawed. It is in a dishonest way if we present ourselves otherwise to someone we're trying to win over. It's foolish to look at your partner and see them as flawless. In my opinion, love is found in the flaws. It sounds wonderful to say "I love her so much, she is flawless" or "he is perfect." That person can be perfect to you, but they're human. If you can't see and accept their flaws now, then at some point you will and it can crush the relationship you've built together in the clouds of euphoric harmony.

Years means something. Or does it? Who hasn't expressed that their relationship is superior to another because of the time they've been together? We have to admit that a lengthy relationship does mean something, but should it mean that it

is greater and stronger than another that hasn't been around for as much time? Of course not.

To assume years equals a happy union would be to assume that one person's happiness is the same as another. There are relationships of convenience or those who settle into the familiar without expectations of better. Some make an effort to stay together "for the kids" or because of the fear of being single. Painful decisions that hurt their own hearts as time passes and as time is lost. Time is precious and it's important to know that time put into another individual who you love is time well spent.

If you've been together for a year and that was a year of loving moments, memories made and each of your hearts cherished by the other, you may have it over those who have had more time together with the mere label of being in a relationship.

"Love is always full time, never part time, and certainly not just on your time."

But love is found also in the dark moments that were overcome together – in how they were handled. If true forgiveness is possible. How can you know how strong your relationship is if it's never been tested? Does that mean go out and bait your companion to make them jealous? Of course not. But situations can and will happen when you've been with someone long enough that will test your faith in each other.

Two people don't always handle things the same way. One person may run away from pain and towards isolation while the other needs comforting. It's important to be there for someone who you know loves you and in the way they need you to be. Easier said than done. But if you can overcome great sorrow for the right reasons, you'll be stronger together for it.

Yet, at some point you might have to accept that you are not right for each-other. This can be incredibly hard to do and in

many cases not a shared opinion. You each have the responsibility to guard and nourish the other person's heart. So to come to realize that you're unhappy with this and that, you're not up for the task or the other person isn't doing "right" by your heart, isn't always a cut and dry decision.

Love conquers all, right? Time will make things better? Truth is, you'll get advice and it may or may not help. You know what you want out of your life and you know what makes you happy. Whether the other person was all smoke and mirrors or just grew apart from what you saw as a forever home for your heart may render you to be mature enough to walk away. Maybe it's you?

Maybe you can see that you are hurting the other person or you soon will hurt the other person in the future you'd share together. You've made that fateful decision to end your relationship. The pain of loving someone and ending it or having someone you love end it is immeasurable at the time it happens. Sometimes it will linger on...

Maturity is accepting responsibility in all matters of your life. Being accountable for your actions. I am not an expert at love. I know it and I've learned from it. From the love of the children I have and the one growing inside of me right now. To the love of another heart I claimed responsibility for. It is a self-sacrificing, yet self healing, overwhelming emotion that hopefully blesses us all. But before you can find it in a relationship, you have to find it in yourself. If you don't think you are worthy, work on yourself. Until you are happy with that one person you can never get away from.

You.

Depression. Self-hate. Anger. This is the most destructive plague on the human soul. It will destroy you and those who love you. Lead you down a path that isn't easy to return from. Self-destruction starts with negative feelings about yourself

that fester. A wound that isn't treated will not heal. Take care of yourself. Be happy with who you are.

Then find happiness you can share with someone else. It's time well spent.

OPINION: Outdoor Smarts

Some important tips for enjoying your day outdoors!

Don't fear the outdoors, respect it. If you do, your reward is unlimited fun and enjoyment in the various places this area has to offer.

I like beaches. Parks are nice. But I LOVE the woods. It engulfs every sense without attacking it. Like the loud sounds and busy atmosphere that the city does. At least for me. Living here, we have an abundance of options to enjoy the outdoors. With the weather warming up, more are willing to seek out ways to enjoy the day. The best thing we can do for ourselves and our children is to get outside and find out what makes this part of Massachusetts so incredibly awesome. First things first, protect and educate yourself before heading down the road less traveled.

Sun safety

The sun is at it's strongest between 10am-2pm, and overcast doesn't matter much as up to 80% of the sun's rays can still get through the clouds. So if you're going to be out between those hours, stay in the shade and know that you are at a much higher risk of getting sun damage. No matter the time of day, any long term time spent in the sun, you should have sunblock on. If you're working outside or going for a swim use water

resistant sunblock. Find a good broad spectrum sunblock with an SPF of 15 or higher. Don't forget that your lips and ears need protection as well. For some reason, people forget that. You should put on sunblock 15 minutes before exposure. Let's be honest, most of us apply it once we get to our location and unpack. Well, stop it. As a mother I've found it easier to put the sunblock on me and the wee ones before getting in the car to leave. Most locations aren't very far away so this works and honestly it's just one last thing to remember when you get somewhere and chaos ensues. Just remember, reapply! Sunblock doesn't last as long as we'd like it to. So follow the instructions. You've already bought it, why not use it right? If you are fair skinned or have a history of skin cancer, or for the sake of little ones, a t-shirt and brimmed hat are your best bet (along with sun block). I know, I know... those little bathing suits are cute. But not only can a sunburn be painful it can lead to a lifetime of unrecoverable damage. Oh! Sunglasses!! Look for a good pair that offers 99-100% UV protection. Wrap arounds are the best. Same goes for the kids. Forget those Disney shades, if they don't have UV protection then they are not saving their eyes from sun damage.

Biting bugs

I think most people can agree that they have a reasonable dislike and maybe fear of ticks and mosquitoes. You are very right to dislike them but fear won't help you love being outside. There are some absolutely wonderful products out there that can protect you and your family from these two blood suckers and the several others that you may not know about who bite and may also carry disease. I'm going to talk about protecting yourself against the ones outside of your house. Not things like bed bugs and fleas, which could be in your house and carry disease. Although I urge you to educate yourself on that matter. Mosquitoes are public enemy number one. Known to carry diseases such as West Nile Virus, Lyme, and Triple E, but were known best for carrying Malaria and

Yellow Fever for thousands of years. There's nothing pretty about them. I personally don't know their overall purpose but I think Noah should have swatted them on the Ark and saved us all the aggravation. Protect your home and know where they breed. If you have any size object or container of stagnate water (like a bird bath or a kids toy) keep it clean. If you live next to a pond, marsh land, etc.. then you know those are hot spots. There are plants such as Citronella Grass, Lemon Thyme, etc. that can help repel mosquitoes. If you have a property that is a hot spot and you are able to put up a Bat House, I highly recommend them. They are a mosquitoes worst enemy. They eat up to a 1,000 in an hour and despite how creepy it sounds to know a bat lives nearby. They're nocturnal (so they won't ruin your day outside in the yard) and not after your blood like those little insects are.

Lawn sprays that keep the bugs away. I'm not just talking about Grubs and Carpenter Ants. I'm talking about Ticks, Mosquitoes, Fleas, Deer Flies, Black Widows, what have you. I've found these to be very effective (I've used Bayer but have heard others were just as good). Follow the instructions and be child and pet safe. I know there will be people uncomfortable with this solution. There are natural sprays that claim to be just as effective. I'm all about natural solutions, I'd love to have chickens some day (they not only lay eggs, they EAT ticks!). But I haven't found a lawn spray as effective, but you should do whatever makes you comfortable.

Ticks. By now everyone knows the words "Lyme Disease". Our first thought is to the Deer Tick. Although he isn't the sole carrier of the disease he is the more often than not the culprit. Tiny, hard to see, it's hard to imagine the horrible disease this thing can transmit. I don't want to scare anyone. I just want you to understand the importance of taking your time outdoors seriously. If you're going for a picnic in the park, a walk in the woods or a field, pretty much anywhere

where animals have been. Like rabbits, rats, mice, deer, etc...dress smart. In the woods, hats are your best bet. Wear pants vs. shorts, socks and sneakers or boots vs. sandals. Treat your clothing, hat, sneakers and gear with a Permethrin spray (a product I've used for many years). I've also treated the inside of my car with it. This treatment will last many washes and is frequently used in a lot more bug friendly areas (like South America) successfully.

Lotions and spray bug repellent. There are so many products out there. I've had success in using OFF! Deep Woods and Avon Skin So Soft Expedition/Bug Guard Plus. Which also has a sunscreen in it but the jury is still out whether or not using a combination bug spray with a sun screen is a good idea. One should be put on more frequently than the other and if you get a combination and the bug spray has DEET than you absorb it more. Which may not be a good thing. Educate yourself and come to your own opinion. Read instructions. Re-apply and don't store it in your car rather opt for a cool place. I have a go to bag where I keep Sun Block, Bug Spray, Veggie Crackers, First Aid kit,etc.. So when I head out to enjoy the outdoors I won't forget these important things.

Planning is everything. If you are going out in the sun and/or know you'll be doing a lot of walking. Bring water. Stay hydrated. I like to put a bottle of water in the freezer the night before. The next day I get ice cold water even if I'm out for hours. Which is great. It's so much better to plan the day before because we're all human and forget things. Set up snacks, lunches, put out hats and clothing, get the sunblock and bug repellent in a bag ready. A helpful tip to remember when to re-apply lotions or sprays is to set an alarm on your phone or watch. Hours can fly by.

Respect everyone else right to enjoy the outdoors as much as your right. Clean up after yourself, leave the area like you found it. Don't take mementos that are not okay to take. Like flowers, for example. If you go to a park or trail there is no

reason for you admire the flowers you come upon but don't ruin it for everyone by taking them. Avoid bringing glass bottles with you. Why take the risk of it breaking on the beach or elsewhere? Take your butts with you... and don't smoke in the woods, for obvious reasons. Keep children safe. If your child is not a good swimmer there is no reason they should be next to a body of water without you right by them. If you have a pool or pond, a good investment is an alarm to signal you if something falls in the water. One product is a bracelet for a child to wear with a wireless receiver that goes off if the bracelet gets wet. But again, your eyes should always be on your child.

When it comes to enjoying the outdoors you should always hope for the best, but proper readiness can help ensure you and your families health and safety. We live in a beautiful area and if you can't enjoy it, then you can't love it. You should want to love where you live.

OPINION: Winter Reflection



"If you can't find a good role model, be one"
Gale Anne Hurd.

I'm sorry Ned Stark, winter isn't coming. In fact, Spring is almost here.

The birds are chirping, the snow is melting and dripping, and going out isn't as taxing as it has been. Honestly, every winter I get annoyed with the complaints about the cold and of course the snow. I've been thankful to live in an area that truly experiences each season at its greatest. Though this Winter, put me in my place.

I can drive in the snow. I don't mind shoveling and

stockpiling the fridge and pantry "just in case." It isn't an unusual task for me...but the snow kept coming. My body was screaming from the work it caused. Going anywhere became such an aggravation. Being a good driver didn't mean that other people would have the same skills on the icy/snow covered streets. This was the worst case scenario for many people and even their cars!

Now let's face it, everyone got a touch of depression and annoyance at the weather. So when the snow blindness sub-sided and the sun started shining a little brighter many of us started to feel better. I know I did. But with my mind a little clearer and the bouts of cabin fever behind me I started to reflect on things.

Say what you want about our winter apocalypse, good stuff did happen because of it. Faith in humanity was restored for many people who found themselves in need and people came to help. Others found work in snow removal. People took initiative. Maybe not everyone, but many people did. That in itself is a great thing! Even people who just made it to work everyday is a huge deal. There are visiting nurses and hospice workers who care for those that do not get better because the roads are not plowed well. So they went to work. There are teachers who have dozens of students who know them, are comfortable with them and need them there. So they went to work. There are daycare workers who watch the children of parents that need to work to feed them. Those children know these workers and rely on the constancy of their presence. So they went to work. There are grocery store workers who unlock the doors, stock the food, collect the carts and check us out. Who if did not show up, we would be at a loss. So they went to work. There are animal rescuers and officers who can't wait for the weather to subside to get an animal out of the conditions to save it's life or go to shelter so they can feed them. So they went to work. There are also those who run homeless shelters where the need in harsh, unforgiving weather is a matter of

life or death. So they went to work.

There is no insignificant job, only insignificant people unwilling to work them at their fullest capability.

Thank you to the doctors, nurses, teachers, plow drivers, store workers, coffee makers (dear God thank you so much!), utility companies, postal workers, shelters owners and volunteers, and just thank you everyone! You kept the wheels turning when the snow tried to stop us all dead in our tracks.

You all made a difference and I hope you at the very least feel some pride in yourself. Thank you.

OPINION: Options for runaways



It's important to know who else is in your child's life.

There is a lack of urgency and fear given to the word

'runaway' that is always given to the word "abduction." Perhaps it's the misconception that a minor is in complete control of their situation. Maybe in some cases they are, but typically only for a short while. Minors leave their home for various reasons. Some would seem justifiable as a percentage of runaways report fleeing abusive situations. Taking their lives into their own hands and running, for them, is just what they feel is the only option they have.

This isn't true.

It is important that if you know of a teenager or child in an abusive household that *you* get them help. They may not know how to do it themselves. If you turn your back on abuse, then you are taking sides with an abuser and they are now your victim as well. If you know of a child being abused or neglected you can report it by going to your local police station, Department of Child & Family or by calling the Child-At-Risk Hotline at 1-800-792-5200.



There are currently 60 records listed from Massachusetts of missing children.

Being silent about abuse is not a burden you want to carry.

There is also a great number of minors who run away that are actually lured away. With technology we have allowed a playground for predators to enter into our child's lives without our knowledge.

It's important for children to be taught stranger safety and for teens who are going online to understand how someone they meet on there can very much be a fictional character with a live action dialogue. They study today's kids/teenagers as if they are studying for a test. They will know their music, movies, video games and how they talk. They have nothing but compliments to give and agree with everything your child says. When you haven't experienced the world as they haven't, you are naive to it.

We forget how impulsive and foolish we all once were. The generation that are parents to teens now, did not have the access to the world like their children do. We are learning but they are succeeding past our knowledge. A targeted teen may even be taught by the predator how to erase their tracks. Clear the history on their computers and phones. If there is something for your child to act guilty about there is something for you to be worried about. There should be no secrets that leave room for danger to sneak in between you and your teenager. It's important to know who else is in your child's life. It's important for them to know that if a person wants to be kept a secret than they have ulterior motives. It's not because they agree with your child and mom and dad "are nosy jerks," it's because mom and dad have been around long enough to see the devil behind a smiling Facebook picture.



*Sometimes despite
our best effort
they are not
feeling that at
home.*

The enemy we know. It's hard to pick your child's friends and you can't shadow them at school or maybe other activities they're involved in. They WILL know people you do not. Those people will know them. Details about your family that you may have not wanted to share. Details about your teenager that they shouldn't have shared. They could be the type of person, maybe even teenager, that you would not want around your own. There can be something alluring about the bad element. Something that children who have everything going for them will throw it away, unwittingly for.

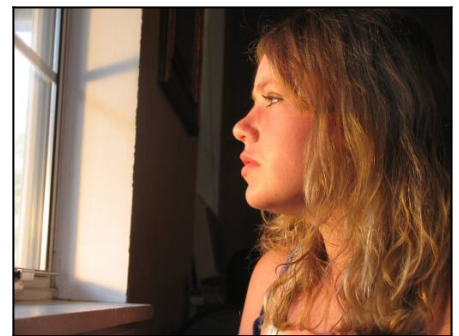
We can blame movies and television for baiting our children into thinking this is how the world works. We can blame negativity influences but we have to understand that it's on the parents just as much. We have to know our children, be their parent not their friend and realize that they are more important than ourselves.

If a situation has gotten out of our control we have to ask for help. Turn to the school, to their doctors, to trained professionals with resources. They have to know they matter that much to us. It's an incredible and important lesson to teach your child that it's okay to go for help when you need

it.

Teenagers want to feel love and acceptance. Sometimes despite our best effort they are not feeling that at home. They deal with the pressures we have forgotten and the needs we grew out of. They are not mature enough to control or understand them. It took us years and it's the same for them. We didn't believe it when our parents told us and they won't believe it when their parents tell them. But while they are going through this pivotal moment of their lives they can fall victim to others who are waiting in what was once the shadows but now the bright screens of computers, tablets and cellphones.

There are currently 60 records listed from Massachusetts of missing children. Some would now be older than you who is reading this now. They disappeared as a child and were never found. One has the name John Doe, a recovered body of a child that couldn't even be buried with his name. Nobody knows who is or rather who he was.



Being silent about abuse is not a burden you want to carry.

We know that a child that has been abducted is in danger. What we forget is that a minor on their own is also in danger. Children and teenagers need the guidance of an intelligent and responsible much less loving adult (a legal guardian) until they become an adult themselves. If you disagree with that than you must be a teenager who knows everything. Who also believed in Santa Claus and the tooth fairy not too long ago.

Who thought their first crush was the best until they met their second. Who doesn't have the understanding of expenses much less money management. But does know that you'd prefer a five dollar bill over four quarters. You've grown up and learned a great deal of things but you have a great deal more to learn.

Every emotion, everything you feel is magnified because you are so young. Anger can become rage so easily and like really feels as if it's love. But I promise you that in a few months, a year or a few years things change so tremendously for you. Stay in school and focus on who you want to be. You will never get these years back so don't let you or someone else take them away.

When we say children are our future it's because we know how important children are. We not only want you to succeed in life but need you to.

You are all that important.

Opinion – Taking Things For Granted

We have supermarkets that have prepared food that we need only heat up. It wasn't till I had an experience with someone from another country at a grocery store that I realized how easy everything became for us.

Charity isn't a seasonal thing. Although it may seem like it is. During the winter months we hear more about the importance of giving. Living in the northeast we sympathize with the fear

of being too cold and not being able to find shelter. Or have a warm coat & warm clothing to get us through the winter. With the holidays we're reminded by bell ringers that when we're out shopping that others are out there hoping and praying for help.

It's a humbling experience to face the bleak realities of others who struggle day to day. Some of us have grown bitter from past experiences of helping someone who returned that kindness into a joke. So to those of us who have experienced that type of betrayal in trust and faith, we see everyone else who is asking for help as that one person who burned you. That is just not the case.

Sympathy is becoming a rare quality in society. Instead of helping the poor we rationalize the reasons we feel they put themselves in that situation. Most of the time they are faceless to us. We dehumanize them. Charities around the world spend millions to give them faces. To make us empathize. Money that is better spent on their causes are spent to make us aware, to feel something. Because they know that funds dry up quickly if they can't get a knitch into society, a place in our consciences, without it they will cease to exist.

Most of us live in excess and some of us know that we do. We take these daily conveniences as not a luxury but as necessity. Such as a washer & dryer, microwave. Even A/C in the summer.

A cellphone to many is not something they need but rather want. Much less the type of cellphone.

We have supermarkets that have prepared food that we need only heat up. It wasn't till I had an experience with someone from another country at a grocery store that I realized how easy everything became for us. She just wanted oats to make breakfast in the morning. I showed her the Quaker oatmeal packets and she was just astonished! Then she wanted bread and

meats. I showed her sliced loafs and packaged chicken. This was all new to her. A luxury.

Where she is from they have a corner market and you buy meat to prepare within the next day or two and nothing comes prepacked. She pretty much "lost it" when I showed her the freezer section!

I remember going home and looking through my cabinets and fridge. Despite being a mother who knows how to cook well, I've certainly made it easier on myself and how I fed my family with the products I buy. Most people do. So I started to be more conscious of my shopping and that lead to me being more conscious of how I take things for granted.

We live in an area, a country, that sells food items that last a very long time. Despite your feelings towards that we know that there are people who have nothing. If we choose to eat fresh that shouldn't stop us from picking up a non-perishable item each trip (especially if it's on sale) and putting it aside for a shelter. Year round. Being cocky about how we've lived our lives whether its been an easy journey or a difficult one, should not impact our ability to help others.

For every blessing I have, I try to give. For every luxury I've taken for granted. We can not find an inner peace unless we become humble. As we live day to day, season to season so does everyone else the world. A very many people are just getting by and instead of judging them by forcing them to live in their own harsh existence why not find peace in yourself and give something? Starting now we can make things a little better in the world we're giving to our next generation. Every season, everyday. Live for someone other than yourselves.

Opinion: Single parenting – its pitfalls and rewards

Marriage is not a “’till death do us part” contract as half end in divorce.

We live in an area where the traditional household is composed of single parents or mixed families. This shouldn't come as a shock for you to hear that the odds are against two people who only have shared children together to live happily ever after.

It's a sad reality that many relationships do not last and even if children are involved they do not act as a staple to keep two people together. Marriage is not a “’till death do us part” contract as half end in divorce. Around 70% end in divorce when it's the third or fourth marriage.

When we take those numbers and weigh them against a long term committed relationship that mimics marriage we know that it's a pretty comparable failure rate. Regardless as to how the break-up happened, children in most cases become a casualty of a broken home.

A single parent has an uphill climb in the world. Whether they share in the responsibility of custodianship or have full custody. Children add to household expenses, take away from free time and make it more difficult to move on into a new relationship. The dynamics of being a single parent is much more complicated than being a single adult – even if your child does not live with you.



We all should have love in our lives and it would be a beautiful thing if it was so simple.

There is heartache in being a loving parent who is treated as a visitor in their child's life. This is to those who can only see their child every so often and in many cases it's the father. Although there are cases where a mother does not have full custody, I'm speaking of the real fathers who are attentive and loving. Those who are providers and truly desire to be a part of their child's world and influence onto how they are brought up.

We know there is an opposite male out there as there is an opposite female who are merely DNA contributors that brought their children into existence and who could never move beyond a selfish nature to devote themselves into parenthood. We could all give many cases of those people who single-handedly devastate those who love them.

To the real parents who are unable to be a constant in their child's world, there is not only heartache but anger. To distance yourself from an anger where as someone personally hurt you. They broke your heart and now uses something that is just as much yours as it is theirs, against you. But this isn't something, it's a child.

If you are in this situation my heart breaks for you. We all should have love in our lives and it would be a beautiful

thing if it was so simple. When a relationship ends we'd rather not witness our former love moving on. When you share a child with someone you will see this. You have to teach yourself to separate your feelings towards your child's other parent and the feelings you have for your child. They don't want a complicated life.

Your goal is to make it as less complicated as you can. Single parents tend to move on. Everyone wants love and the burden is too difficult for many in living alone for the rest of their lives. Both emotionally and financially.



*Teach your children
to be happy, show
them how.*

There is a balance that can be found and has been found over and over again for single parents. Ideally children should have the love and support of their parents. Do not visit your own pain or anger onto them. As simple as it is to agree that you shouldn't do that, every time you use that child as a tie that binds you to their other parent or a pawn in game of hate and anger... You chip away at their chance for happiness and at their essence of childhood. They shouldn't have to grow up too soon and know that the world isn't such a happy place. History is doomed to repeat itself. Teach your children to be happy, show them how. They are not your allies in war, your friend whose shoulder you cry on or who to share your negative thoughts with. Protect them from the drama, that if you think clearly enough about, you wouldn't want them to deal with.

Eighteen years our children are dependent upon us. This is a blink of time in their overall life. Maybe for ten of those years you will be their world, but they'll start spreading their wings and wanting to be more away from you than near you as they grow up. Time is precious. We have an obligation to society to bring up a caring and responsible adult. But we have the honor of parents to be a part of something absolutely wonderful, raising a child.

Our children don't have to live with us, they don't even have to be part of genetic material. If we're a mom or dad, then we are accountable for who they are and what they feel as they grow up. Give your child the gift of feeling secure in your love. It is more important to be surrounded by people who love you growing up than you can ever imagine. It's hard to give them this security if it's clouded with so much animosity with THEIR mom or dad.

No matter how you feel, you can't make the other loving and stable parent just disappear from their lives.

**Going back to school mania!
Some helpful tips...**



Need some helpful tips on prepping the kids for school?

The fliers are out, the store isles are full of school supplies, and the commercials are in full swing. No matter what your age is you've become acutely aware that summer is ending. As with any parent at this time of year the task of preparing your child for school is upon you. But while you're buying folders, pencils and backpacks you may be missing one back to school necessity...your child's personal readiness.

School can be a source of stress and mentally exhausting. The beginning of the school year can be a shock factor after a lazy summer to your child's physical and emotional state. It's our obligation to them to not just let them adapt when school starts to a new morning routine but to start beforehand. After all, it's not just making sure your child is up in time for school but to make sure they are up and ready to learn. If you haven't started already, get your child into the school routine. Set a bedtime and stick with it no matter their age and objections.

"Early to bed, early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise." -Benjamin Franklin

From preschool age to tweens, children require 10-12hrs of

sleep. Teenagers need around 9hrs, although some impersonate hibernating bears pretty darn well. Establishing a healthy nighttime routine and morning routine is beneficial towards your child's academic success. It's better that your child starts each morning with a healthy breakfast (not much of a morning appetite? Nutritional drink mixes, cereal bars, even a good trail mix). Get them up in time to eat, brush their teeth, wash their face (or as we call it "wake up your face") and get dressed. Express the importance of self-confidence. "Did you brush your hair? Check yourself in the mirror? You look like a million bucks"! In a perfect world, if you had the time and ability to go for a morning walk with your child that would be great. Healthy body, healthy mind. Even morning stretches would be beneficial. Set some more personal routines such as making their bed, putting dishes in the sink. For younger children setting out a morning checklist is great to establish good habits.



*Your kids will
be chasing the
school bus
before you know
it!*

Nighttime habits that make school a little easier are not only getting to bed early but incorporating taking a shower and bath (great for younger children as it tends to help them sleep). Start putting your next day outfit together and out on the dresser ready for the morning. During school, help your

child have their backpack all set the night before each school day and put it at a set place maybe by the door.

“Did you wash up and brush your teeth? Is your outfit all set for tomorrow and everything fits okay? Backpack all set?”

A checklist can be really helpful. You have your own set routines, it's time to make things easier on everyone by establishing some for your school age child.

To help make sure your child is mentally ready for school brush up on what they did last year, play to their strengths. If they've had a pretty lax summer and haven't pulled out this seemingly foreign instrument otherwise known as a pencil, you might want to reintroduce it. From writing their name, the alphabet, writing about their summer or letters to their friends, to doing math.. All these things help get them ready for school. If last year they were working on multiplication and division brush up on addition and subtraction right now. It's mastering the foundation that enables them to really conquer work as it progresses in difficulty.

“My grade school/middle school child can do basic math!” That's great! Can they answer long 'simple math' questions quickly?

$8+6+8+2+12-4=?????$

Make it fun! Brush up those skills and their self esteem while you're at it. Positive reinforcement WORKS! While you are back to school shopping have your child at any age help you. If they are young but learning numbers give them a calculator “press number 5” and have them find isle numbers. If they are older and think they know it all, have them prove it and tell them how much you are spending, what the taxes are and tell them how many things you plan on getting. “We're picking out three outfits and spending X amount, no asking” Can I get this?”, YOU tell me if we can afford on our budget.”

If your child is entering a new school it's a good idea to visit it beforehand. Walk around the exterior, play on the playground or check out the track. If you're lucky maybe they'll be someone in the office and you can ask to tour it with your child. Help them feel familiar to take away the shock of a new setting. Talk about how a school day goes and if they're older and have a locker, explain how to be ready to exchange items in-between classes and how to set aside books etc. they want to take home at the end of the day. Should your child be in High School have an open dialogue on what they want to accomplish and transition into after High School.



Make it fun! Brush up those skills and their self esteem while you're at it

When school starts I encourage you to be as involved as you can be. Talk with your child's new teacher to give them some insight on your child. If they are shy, anxious, easily distracted, let them know what works best at home to overcome these challenges. If you found the last school year to be very difficult for your child address these concerns as early as possible, so you and your child's teacher and/or guidance counselor can make their school year more productive. This could mean setting up an Individual Education Plan or IEP. There is no shame in getting help and every child should not have to worry they are not good enough to do well in school and to feel like a failure. School shouldn't be a place of solid stress.

A student should feel a rewarding triumph in their accomplishments and have the resources to make them happen. This starts at home...but it doesn't end there.

Pet ownership – a far greater responsibility than many realize!



Being a responsible owner starts even before you decide to bring a pet into your home.

I love animals. I don't know if we're raised to be an animal lover or if it's something developed in our own personality. Being someone with such high regard for her pets, the law frustrates me when it comes to protecting them. They are considered property – much like a piece of furniture. Even

though animal cruelty laws have come leaps and bounds the legal understanding of a pet still leaves a lot to be desired when it comes to the punishment of those who abuse our furry family members. With that in mind...

It is our obligation to them that we be responsible pet owners.

Being a responsible owner starts even before you decide to bring a pet into your home. You have to possess the understanding that this is a long term commitment. It will affect your finances, living situation and your time for the next 10+yrs! Especially if you desire a puppy or a kitten who has their whole life in front of them. That life becomes your responsibility.

Should you decide on a dog, you have to understand the needs of the breed you want. Either mixed or full bred, different breeds can have very opposite needs from medical to what ideal household suites them. For instance, some dogs need daily vigorous exercise and without it will become destruction or in worse cases aggressive.



Some dogs who are bred for their popular pint size appeal...

If you are unable to walk a dog daily or don't have a large enclosed yard where you can play daily with your dog in, you may want to avoid these types of dogs. For their own good and for yours. Remember dogs live on average about 13 years.

Some dogs who are bred for the popular pint size appeal have

suffered genetic or hereditary medical issues. This can become a costly issue to the dog owner which can seem to be shocking that what was once an adorable little puppy has some very big issues down the line. Not that larger dogs miss this bullet as well. One of the big things to take into account before bringing a pet home is the unforeseen expense of them being sick or simply growing old. Common conditions such as arthritis and hip dysplasia, congestive heart failure, diabetes. When your pet needs you the most, will you be there for it?

Shifting focus to the most popular pet: the cat – the adorable creature who doesn't require you to bring them for walks or possibly never have to be groomed (dare you to give a cat a bath). Then can seem like an ideal choice to someone who works often or doesn't have a yard. But is it the right choice for you?

A cat can live on average about 14 years (take that dog) and for the span of their life you need to provide food and clean water daily. Every other day you need to clean their litter box and should you like many other American households choose to have multiple cats than you need at least one litter box per cat. They need their nails trimmed monthly and require scratching post or else will find a piece of your furniture to take out their natural urge to claw at on. Some cats can take on behavior issues and require being played with to curve their needs to act out. Just like dogs, cats can have medical issues that can arise out of nowhere. Costly issues. Keep in mind that the odds are against you having Pet Medical Insurance but the cost of their medications and doctor visits are no different than with ours.

Of course there are other pets out there...some with feathers others with scales and of course the ones with more than four legs (shivers). To keep things simpler I focus on the leading two pets owned by people in this country and in this area.



One happy family!

After you've done your research on the pet you desire and have a full understanding of what needs can be met in your household.. Taking into account how stable your household is (are you a renter? do you have a job that requires you to move? do you plan on having children?).

Now it's time for you to pick-up your pet. Will it be adoption?

Animals shelters care for an estimated 6-8 million dogs and cats each year! Of which 3-4 million are euthanized. Simply no room for them, no funds to care for them and no homes to place them in. If you choose to adopt an animal, you ARE saving a life. Whether it be a kitten or puppy or a senior dog or cat. By taking them into your home you are opening a slot in which another homeless animal can fill.

To divert a bit off subject, adopting a senior animal is a wonderful thing. Not only are the adoption fees considerably less but you have a grateful pet who's full personality has already been revealed which means no surprises or sudden bad behavior. Also a great idea if you can only look ahead a few years and then maybe after that plan on having children or moving. A short term commitment that can be very rewarding.

Back to finding an animal. The other option is of course purchasing an animal. The benefit of going to a breeder is knowing the bloodline of your pet and if it's a reputable breeder than the odds will be in your favor that there are no hereditary issues. I implore you that if you decide to

purchase a dog or cat that you do your homework on the breeder. Being a good breeder comes at a high expense to them for a little profit. A backyard breeder doesn't invest well enough into their animals or their offspring and you the consumer will suffer the fallout of that. Taking home a pet that could very well have a much shorter life ahead of it with countless medical issues. Being cute never means being healthy.



A cat can live on average about 14 years.

No matter how you decide to obtain your pet I hope you do the responsible thing as their human parent and have them spay or neutered. Like I said earlier, almost 8 million dogs and cats end up in shelters and overpopulation can be controlled by us. They are animals. The basic instinct to breed is there and it's our obligation to this world to be responsible pet owners. If you've taken in a stray contact your local Animal Control about low cost programs to have it fixed. If you've decided that you want to breed your pet for profit. Have the knowledge to know that profiting from backyard breeding mostly doesn't exist. After cost, you most likely will be taking a loss. We can't end abuse on animals (I wish I could say or think otherwise) but we can stop helping the overpopulation of them which in many cases leads to horrific mistreatment of them. This starts with each of us at home.

Being a pet owner is being a parent. If you understand that, than you are already doing something right.

“Until one has owned an animal, a part of one’s soul remains un-awakened” – Anatole France

OPINION: Raising our children to accept failure and the real world

By Jordis Brown

“You can be anything you want to be!” “There is no person better than anyone else!” “We are all equals!”

The truth is if you heard any of this growing up someone did you a great disservice. They are all lies.

At some point we thought we’d make the next generation great by filling their little heads with pretty words: “If you can dream it, you can achieve it!” We made it seem like anything was possible, if you wanted it bad enough. Then that child grows up to find being a rock-star astronaut is out of their reach, no matter how much they wanted it. Then depression kicks in.

The drive to find any success dwindles down to a hopeless routine to get by. How is it that such encouragement can be a bad thing? We all want the best for our children and the next generation, so shouldn’t we be reinforcing it? Of course! But telling someone that “it’s in the bag,” is a whole lot different than preparing them to be strong enough to accept failure. Our differences define us and what one person is able to accomplish, another may not be able to.

That is reality. Harsh, but nevertheless.

It's the end of the season and out comes a cart full of trophies. Everyone is a winner! It's a great thing to get a trophy and be told you are a winner. But that person who worked really hard and just did better is being told that that other one who slept half the time and didn't pay attention at all is just as good.

So how is that motivating them? How is that preparing the slacker for the day someone says "You are not good enough"? How is that reinforcing the hard work by the achiever?

It isn't.

The truth is there is always someone better than someone else. Sounds horrible right? Shouldn't we raise children to believe that "No-one" is better than anyone else? I mean, that sounds darn right saintly to say that! But it is a lie.

I am better than a person who kills another person. A pedophile. A rapist. I am better than a parent who neglects or abuses their child. Now you're thinking "of course," but wait? I thought that no one is better than anyone else? Let's expand...

My child is a better artist than yours, but your child is better at math. I am more charitable than you because I write a check for a charity as opposed to just re-posting about it on Facebook. Did that sting? You do re-post more than me though. There are better parents than others, better athletes and just better people!

Our goal is to achieve personal greatness and what we can accomplish can only be found through what we've failed at. Inflating a child's head to believe that no matter what, they can have their dream. It's really nice and sweet, but one should also make it clear that sometimes things don't work out and honestly you are just not cut out for it. Crashing and

burning when reality isn't as sweet can have a hard consequence to their emotional state.

Maybe we can end the widespread depression of tomorrow, if we started preparing our children a little better for reality, today.

Baby advice for new moms

Jordis Brown

Babies, especially newborns can be a joy to hear, hold and sometimes even smell. They are pure before the world consumes them and they become us. Having a baby is a full time job and despite that being constantly said it doesn't carry the importance of that description. There are no sick days, no going in late and leaving early. It is the 24/7 reality that you accepted when you left that hospital.

If you're fortunate then you have the other parent at home, living with you and sharing in the responsibility of ensuring not only the survival but the intellectual, emotional and physical growth of the little one you both created.

A newborn baby NEEDS to feed every few hours. Even if they are asleep, they must be woken up so that they can eat. This is the case no matter if you choose formula or breastfeeding. They will lose weight in the first few days and must gain in back. If they are not producing at least 6 wet diapers and/or lethargic (overly sleepy) jaundice (yellow in the eyes and skin) than they are not getting enough nutrition to grow and survive. You will have doctor appointment after doctor

appointment with your child's pediatrician. They are there to help. If you don't feel they are helping than find another but do not miss an appointment. The beginning stages of your infants life is very important and needs to be monitored by a healthcare professional.

Your infant will encounter at least two or in worse cases, all of these issues.

Colic: Gas pains. More often seen in formula fed infants. Always "get that burp" after feeding a baby from a bottle. That little bit of air hurts and can lead to a very uncomfortable, fussy baby. Fussy is that cute word that means crying, while your heart races as you try to help them be quiet and content.

Growing Pains: That baby is growing and it is a good thing. But growing pains actually do hurt. Massage is the best option. If they seem really uncomfortable than discuss alternative options with their doctor.

Teething: Pain that we all had and none of us remember. Avoid pain relievers and look for alternative cures that don't have side effects. Cold helps. Teething toys help. More importantly, Patience helps.

Crying just because: Your baby cannot talk at at a point in their development they are going to enjoy hearing crying just because they can. Short spurts of crying isn't always a bad thing and you cant' respond with anxiety as it's always a problem that needs to be fixed. Their lungs are being strengthen. They are expressing and learning something they can control. A noise. As they get older they will learn they can control you by that noise. That's a fun age.

A baby is incredibly intuitive. If you are upset and anxious they will perceive that something is wrong and may freak out. You are their safety and through calm, loving attention they can find peace. If you become overwhelmed, securely put the

baby in their crib and go and take a breath. A good way to respond to a crying baby is to first trick yourself into thinking that you have control over the situation. Before entering a nursery get into the routine of leaving all your anxiety, tiredness, fear and frustration at the door.

Sometimes you might need a type visualization to do this. Touching an object and telling yourself that it will hold that anxiety for you (hang a charm by the door). After you've assessed if your child is hungry, wet, gassy, cold, hot or unable to calm themselves...help them. Forget yourself and what ails you and help them. They need you and they can't understand or think of your needs and it's not their obligation to.

There are many 'trials' that a parent must go through with their baby as they grow. Keeping in mind that a mother must also go through the extreme physical and emotional toll having a baby leaves on the body and mind. Not to say that a father does not have his own burdens but the mother's body and chemistry changed to support that of a growing life and there is a possibility that it can take a turn for worse after giving birth.

If you do not have the support system that you know that you need and feel hopelessness in taking care of this little life you've brought into this world... You are NOT a failure. You should NOT feel shame. You have to get help for you and that baby. Decisions must be made for the both of you and they are not easy ones to make.

Adoption is an option if being a parent at this stage isn't right for the both of you. Maybe the three of you. There is such thing as Open Adoptions. You not only have a say in the parents that you bless with a child but can work out an arrangement to either have a relationship with them as they grow or to keep correspondence with the adopted couple. To bring you peace that you made the right decision. If that is

overwhelming and you need to separate yourself from this baby as soon as possible you can bring that baby to a hospital, church, police station, any emergency station (fire & EMS). You don't have to stay and answer questions. They understand. You are protected by law and you know if this is what is right for you and that baby.

We see pictures of smiling baby faces. Happy families. The truth is a picture is shared because it shows the best parts and not the worst. Babies a year of hard work, toddlers are YEARS of hard work, adolescence is a little easier but then you get a teenager. People will smile and laugh about the tough, sleepless nights. The bouts of diarrhea, rashes, the unexpected cost and loss of personal time and peace in your own home. People will smile but every single mother and father cried, felt stress, fear and hopelessness at some point. The reality is you cannot prepare and deal with everything and you must know your limits and what is best for that baby.

They are pure innocence.

Doing what is right by them may not be what you want or what you thought was going to happen. You can only find peace in making the right choices by them.
