

Kids and Energy

by Kim Olver

I'm not sure why, maybe because it's summer, I'm getting a lot of questions and stories about kids and energy. I'll put them all under that broad category but there have been several different subcategories discussed: kids and ADHD, kids and anger management, and kids and computers.

Kids and ADHD

Let's start with kids and ADHD. There seems to be a big trend here in the US of drugging our children so they can "control" their behavior in school. I am NOT in favor of this practice.

Why is there such an epidemic of ADHD diagnoses in our children? I don't want to oversimplify but I believe one reason is that our children don't have the opportunities they had in previous generations to run around and expend their energy.

In years past, kids got to play in the parks, in the streets and in their own yards. Today, that happens less and less. Parents are too afraid to allow their children to be outside unsupervised, and rightly so! There are predators out there who would do your children harm. However, kids still need to expend their energy, somehow.

So, many times the activities available to them at home are sedentary, such as playing video games, watching television, talking on their cell phones or using the home computer. None of this provides opportunity to release energy, unless your children are like my niece who paces vigorously while talking on the phone.

Then we send them to school and expect them to sit down and be quiet. In addition, many schools are reducing the amount of physical education time for our kids and I've even seen recently that some schools forbid children to run at recess or use certain playground equipment because they fear of physical injury lawsuit. Is it any wonder our children are having difficulty?

Now I know there are parents and teachers out there who have stories of children who have been helped immensely by the addition of Ritalin, Adderall, Concerta or Dexedrine to their daily diet. If you know a child who is being helped by his or her medication, I'm not saying to discontinue it but for every child who is being helped, I believe there are at least three others who are still exhibiting all the ADHD behavior the medication was designed to reduce.

There have been studies done on placebo medications that show that in double blind studies, when neither the patient nor the doctor knew whether the patient was getting the actual drug or the placebo, the ones getting the placebo actually did better. Is it possible there is a placebo effect with some children?

If your child displays what you or the teachers believe is an excessive amount of energy, do your best to create situations where that child can expend energy. I have two boys who could both have been diagnosed with ADHD as children. They were very physical. Luckily, I lived in the country during a time when parents sent their kids out the door to simply “play.” I also spent a lot of my spare time running them around to different athletic events—YMCA soccer, wrestling, flag football, T-ball, basketball, you get the idea. This definitely helps.

Kids and Anger Management

I spoke with a woman over the weekend whose son is 10 years-old and she says has anger management issues. We didn’t really get into his specific behaviors but it caused me to reflect on some inherent differences between males and females.

I think that from very early on, boys and girls deal with their anger differently. As a general rule, girls need to talk about it to feel better, while boys need to work it out physically.

So if you have daughters, you want to teach them verbal skills to be able to work out their frustrations but with boys, you will need to provide opportunities for them to work out their anger physically—maybe with a punching bag, racquetball, running, or martial arts. The list of possibilities is truly endless but don’t expect your boys to “talk about it,” at least not until they’ve had the opportunity to release the anger in a safe physical manner.

Kids and Computers

This week, a mother contacted me about her child disobeying her limits with the home computer and sneaking time beyond her allowed limit.

In this situation, the mother had a need to protect and nurture her child. She wants to be able to loosely supervise her daughter’s time on the computer to possibly prevent her from falling prey to adults who victimize children by finding their victims on the Internet. She also wants to support her child’s need for physical activity so she restricts her computer usage and encourage outside physical activities instead. Is this mother wrong? Absolutely not.

Her daughter, on the other hand, has a desire to be on the computer. All her friends are on there and want to know why she isn’t. They don’t have limits while this girl does. This girl is quite accomplished on the computer and can build website pages for her friends. She also has a high need for freedom and doesn’t like being restricted and the computer is plain fun to her. She gets her love & belonging, power, freedom and fun needs met with the computer. Is she wrong? Absolutely not.

How does it get resolved? I think the way to resolve this issue is for the mother and daughter to sit down and talk about what each other needs and wants in the situation. If the child can convince her mother that she has the skills and knowledge necessary to

protect herself from predators and she agrees to engage in other healthy activities each day, then her mother could relax her restriction on the amount of time she has on the computer.

In this case, and many others like it, the daughter wouldn't be able to meet her freedom need with the computer if there wasn't a rule to break. Sometimes we create the very behavior we are trying to stop with the rules we make. When a person has a high need for freedom, they will inevitably break the rules, particularly the ones they don't like or that don't make sense.

Parenting is one of the hardest jobs you'll ever do and the stakes are incredibly high. We all do the best we can and hope for good results. Fortunately, when we have good intentions are kids generally survive in even thrive.