

symptom often associated with stress, such as headaches, stomachaches or trouble falling or staying asleep. In addition, parents don't realize their own stress is affecting their kids. While 69 percent of parents say their stress has only a slight or no impact on their children, just 14 percent of youth say their parents' stress doesn't bother them. When kids are under stress, she explains, they may eat too much, sleep too much or favor sedentary coping activities like watching television; the resulting weight gain and the teasing and bullying that often accompany it can lead in turn to more stress, creating a cycle that can be difficult to escape from.⁶

According to Norman B. Anderson of the APA, 75 percent of all health-care costs are associated with chronic illnesses, and a key driver of chronic illnesses is stress.⁷ In fact, the Centers for Disease Control report that more than half of all deaths between the ages of 1 to 65 result from stress.⁸ Another study estimates that 110 million people worldwide lose their lives annually to disease caused by unmanaged stress.⁹ Although the United States accounts for only 5 percent of the world's population, we consume 33 percent of all anti-anxiety pills.¹⁰ Stress can be directly linked to all six leading causes of death: heart disease, cancer, lung disease, accidents, cirrhosis of the liver, and suicide.¹¹

A good shrink can help you shrink your problems. But why not teach your children how to shrink their own problems while they're young enough and the problems are small enough to be self-shrunk? (Hey, I'm cheap, but wouldn't it save a whole lot of time, grief, pills and money?)

Some say light is the best disinfectant. I'd argue that sound is a pretty great disinfectant as well. Giving your child the gift of your time, complete attention and care—along with the practice of sharing their hurts, fears and concerns out loud each night—is a beautiful and powerful step on the road to mental and emotional health.

Order *Holding Your Family Together* by Dr. Rich Melheim at Amazon, Barnes & Noble, or a bookstore near you.

The Voldemort Effect

(From “Holding Your Family Together” by Dr. Rich Melheim Regal Books, April 2013)

There is great power in being able to speak the name of your problems out loud. I call this the “Voldemort Effect,” after the evil being in the *Harry Potter* series by J. K. Rowling. No one dared speak his name aloud except Harry.

“He who shall not be named” holds a mysterious and sinister grip on everyone—a hidden power—until the Harry Potters of the world decide, “We are not going to remain silent. We will not cower as captives to fear. We are going to name that sucker out loud. We are going to call him what he is and who he is so that we can deal with the real problem, not the myth. We are going to draw him out into the open, and then kill him together or together die trying!”

A strange and wonderful thing happens the moment you dare speak the name of “he who shall not be named” aloud. A subtle but significant power transfer begins. The moment the silence is broken, the power starts to drain away from its sinister source and move in the direction of those who dare deal with it.

In that moment, if spoken aloud and shared within the confidence of a loving family or a trusted family of friends, the newly transferred power begins to grow, strengthen and multiply. There, in the hands and hearts of the people who love you and want the best for you, a treasure trove of solutions, allies, creativity and untapped resources suddenly spring to the surface. The Rebel Alliance, the Elves, the Hobbits, the students of Hogwarts and the Narnians are emboldened as they suddenly see that they have a chance.

Okay, too many mixed “narraphors.” You get the point. As for Lord Voldemort, let's just say, “Leave him unnamed and he grows each day; name him aloud and he shrinks away.”

Light, Sound, Sight and Things that Go Bump in the Night

Another strange and wonderful thing happens the moment the hidden is revealed aloud. When the unspoken problem is finally brought to light, sound and sight—when the tip of the sliver or the

source of the scare is finally exposed—the problem will often appear much less formidable than you originally thought. The shadow on the wall may be no monster at all. The things that go bump in the night might be no more of a fright than a cat, a furnace or a tree branch tapping against the window.

It may be that the boogiemán *is* hiding under your bed, but it may be that he’s hiding there because he, too, is afraid. The great and powerful Oz may be nothing more than a frightened little man behind a curtain, who is in need of compassion, care and a balloon ride to Kansas. Or the sinister force may actually be Lord Voldemort, and at this very moment he quite possibly may be rallying his forces to kill you. Either way, wouldn’t you want to know? Better still, wouldn’t you want the people who love you to know?



Life is pain . . . anyone who tells you differently is selling something.

WESLEY, IN *THE PRINCESS BRIDE*

Blisters and Slivers

Some pain is like a blister—leave it alone and it will eventually dry up and fade away. But most pain is like a sliver. It hurts to dig a sliver out, but if you don’t get it, then it’s going to get you. If you don’t get out the sliver—the *whole* sliver—then it will eventually infect you and affect everyone who loves you.

If you are so unaware that you don’t even know there is a sliver, then it’s even worse. You may live life shaming, naming and blaming everyone else for your own problems, and you’ll probably live most of that life alone.

I Feel Your Pain

Have you ever tried to love someone who wouldn’t let you into his or her pain? Chances are you found it to be a frustrating experience. It’s difficult, if not impossible, to love others in the ways they need to be loved if they can’t be honest enough to tell you where and why it hurts.

Maybe they don’t trust you. Maybe they don’t trust themselves. Maybe they know the source of their pain and won’t say. Maybe they’ve been burned before by naming the problem and are afraid you will judge them. You won’t love them. You will leave. Or maybe they don’t even know the source of the problem themselves. Either way, a relationship gets stuck in cold, empty silence when slivers remain embedded and problems go unnamed.

Do you know someone who seems to be “fine” on the surface but often explodes? They can be going along at a steady emotional pace for a long while, and then suddenly, and seemingly out of nowhere, bang! They lose it. That’s the sign of someone with a deeply embedded sliver; someone who never learned how to dig it out.

To Shrink the Shrink

Society is filled with people who haven’t had the forum, format or modeling about how to deal with their problems. We have to pay people to listen to us in this culture. How sad and tragic is that? I am glad there are caring, trained counselors who can help us dig deep, but wouldn’t it be cheaper, better and more proactive to raise a generation of children who didn’t need to bury their problems in the first place?



Patient: What can I do to cure my problems?
Psychiatrist: Nothing, dear, you’re not qualified.

When it comes to stress-related problems, children are at the most risk. The habits and stress-coping mechanisms that parents and caregivers set in place for them early on will follow them the rest of their lives and either bless or curse their world. According to the American Psychological Association’s (APA) survey, stress is taking its toll on the young:

Children are hurting. Almost a third of children reported that in the last month they had experienced a physical health