When a group of parents was asked recently, “How would like your kids to feel about each other?” their answers were “loving,” “protective,” “understanding,” “sharing,” “caring” and “supportive.”

But when they were asked how they themselves had felt as children toward their siblings, their responses were negative as well as positive: “jealous,” “competitive” and “resentful” but at the same time “loving” and “admiring.”

Unfulfilled expectations

Why is it so important for us to have our kids get along? As children, many of us longed for a close sibling relationship. Or if we were an only child, we fantasized about having a brother or sister to play with.

Those of us with siblings were told by our parents to love each other and not fight. And most of us remember, from our own childhood, how hurtful a sibling’s anger or negative remark could be—and how it stayed with us for years. The reality, of course, is that feelings of love/hate, cooperation/competition, protectiveness/rejection are part of the normal interactions between siblings.

As a parent, you should not feel like you’re doing a bad job because you can’t trust your three year old alone in a room with your new baby or your older kids seem to be endlessly squabbling. But it’s helpful to understand that sibling rivalry is not all negative and to learn some ways to handle it.

What it’s all about

Young children tend to think about love as a limited commodity. That is, parents have only so much of it—and if you have to share it with more people, you’ll get less. Older kids are often competing for their parents’ time and attention when they fight. The fairness issue looms large and stays with us even as grown-ups.

But it’s not all bad. There can also be an upside to sibling rivalry. Psychologists Julius and Zelda Segal sum it up neatly in their book Growing Up Smart and Happy. “Through their adversarial roles, kids learn a great deal about handling human relationships—how to stand up for their own rights, how to compete without acting hostile and aggressive, how to resolve conflicts through
Sibling relationships…
Continued from page 1...

negotiation and compromise and how to lose gracefully.”

Siblings learn valuable lessons about resilience in human relationships, too, says Cathy Rindner Tempelsman, author of Child-Wise. “We can feel terribly angry at people—and then feel loving toward them again with no loss of intimacy.”

Tips for older siblings

When a new baby comes home, parents are often asked how an older child is reacting. A typical response is, “Oh, he loves his baby sister.” But it’s not so simple. A sibling may feel loving and protective, and then will tell you to “take the baby back.”

Don’t deny or dismiss this child’s feelings or signs that he or she is upset. As Tempelsman says, “The more attuned you are to your older child’s ambivalence, the easier it will be for that child to accept the new baby.” Here are some other ideas for ways to help.

■ Encourage older siblings to put their feelings into words. Books on sibling rivalry, available for children of all ages, are good conversation starters.

■ Talk about the advantages of being the older child and how much more she or he can do—like playing games, sleeping over at Grandma’s house and so forth.

■ Ask your older child first before giving any outgrown blankets or toys to the baby. They may mean more to the child than you might imagine.

■ Keep in mind that it takes time for a young child to grasp the meaning of having a sibling.

Author Anna Quindlen eloquently describes her older son’s slow realization: “I think it began one day when the younger one needed me more, and I turned to him and said, ’You know, Quin, I’m Christopher’s Mommy, too.’

“The look that passed over his face was the one I imagine usually accompanies the discovery of a dead body in the den: shock, denial, horror. ‘And Daddy is Christopher’s Daddy?’ he gasped. When I confirmed this he began to cry—wet, sad, sobbing.”

Keeping it within bounds

The fact is, sibling rivalry can’t be wished or talked or reasoned away. But here are things parents can do to manage it.

■ The younger children are, the more you will find yourself soothing or separating them. As they get older, try to stay out of their squabbles. Encourage kids to come up with their own solutions.

■ If you intervene, do so calmly and neutrally without assuming that one child is the “bully” and the other the “victim.” It’s futile to try to get to the bottom of every fight. Watch for patterns of fighting so you can avoid them.

■ Cut down on tattling by being casual when a child reports a small injustice. If you say “Oh, is that so?” you show your child that this kind of behavior is not rewarded.

■ Set some basic rules and stick with them. Hurting each other is never okay. As Vicki Lansky suggests in Practical Parenting Tips For the First Five Years, no put-downs should be allowed. “You make me mad” is acceptable, but “you’re a stupid baby” is not.

■ Fair doesn’t mean the same, and each child has different needs. Nancy Samalin, author of Loving Each One Best, says, “Cries of ‘it’s not fair’ are not about portions or turns but about resenting having to share your attention and affection. Treat each child as being unique rather than equal.”

Try this, too

■ Make sure that each sibling has a private place for toys, books and other belongings. Acknowledge also that there are certain possession siblings do not need to share.

■ Try not to compare kids to each other. Value and encourage each child’s personality and talents.

■ Avoid stereotyping children, such as “You’re the athlete in the family.” Try not to play favorites or to identify with one child over another. This can easily happen when a child reminds you of yourself when you were growing up.

■ Encourage kindness. Notice when your kids are getting along. Praise them for being helpful, kind and supportive to each other.

■ Spend time with each child on a regular basis. Make it a time when he or she does not have to share you with a sibling or with anyone else.

Technology, a challenge

Create some iRules (a behavioral contract) for the use of technology that applies to your whole family. For example: tech-free dining, no phones in the bedroom and limits on screen time. Just be sure to personalize the iRules contract for each child based on his or her age, interests and strengths.

Watch out for sibling abuse

Parents naturally would like to discourage tattling, but it’s important to be aware that sometimes sibling rivalry can slide into sibling abuse—and this can cause serious, even lifelong, trauma and suffering, according to psychologist Linda Mills, PhD, who blogs at psychologytoday.com.

“There’s a fine line between an accident and intentional abuse,” Dr. Mills suggests. She cites a report in The Journal of Counseling and Development that the percent of children using physical aggression against their siblings ranges from a low of 35 to a high of 80 percent. Instances of sibling abuse include hitting with rocks or bats and shoving hard enough to cause injury.

This led Murray Straus and Richard Gelles, authors of the research-based Behind Closed Doors: Violence in the American Family, to conclude that children very often are the most violent people in the family.

“You may not agree with this,” says Dr. Mills, “but, hopefully, all parents will pay close attention to what’s going on.”

Psychologist Susan Newman, PhD, adds, “Parents tend to think that overtly aggressive behavior is a stage that kids will outgrow. But we need to listen carefully to children’s repeated complaints and take them seriously.”

…”
Right (and wrong) ways to say ‘I’m sorry’

Q: I was not told about a meeting I should have attended. When I pointed this out to our team leader, he said, “Oh, I’m sorry, but...” then went on to make me feel like I was being overly sensitive. There’s gotta be a better way to apologize.

—E.D., Los Angeles

A: So glad you asked. We learned a lot about how to say I’m sorry from the new book Why Won’t You Apologize? Healing Big Betrayals and Everyday Hurts (Touchstone) by Harriet Lerner, PhD. Here are a few of her suggestions:

- **Don’t add the word “but”** to an apology. Making excuses or trying to shift the blame undermines the sincerity of an apology.
- **Don’t ask to be forgiven.** The hurt party may not be ready for that, and it’s not our place to tell anyone to forgive or not forgive.
- **Focus your apology** on what you said or did, not on how someone reacted to it. If you say, “I’m sorry you feel that way” it suggests “I’m not really sorry at all.”
- **Nondefensive listening** to an injured party is central to offering a sincere apology. Don’t argue, interrupt, refute or correct facts or bring up your own criticism and complaints. Even if the offended person was partly or largely at fault, you can still apologize for your role in the incident.
- **Your apology may be sincere,** but the injured party still has a right to either accept or reject it. Be aware, too, that righting a wrong can be especially difficult when it involves family members.
- **Apology is important** to one’s physical and emotional health. As Dr. Lerner suggests, “The two most healing words in the English language are ‘I’m sorry.’ The courage to apologize well is not just a gift to the injured person, who can feel soothed, it’s also a gift to one’s own health.”

Running changes the brain in surprising ways

W: We don’t think of running as a cerebral act. After all, we learned to run as kids, at first falteringly, with some occasional spills. And, since then, we’ve probably not given much (or any) conscious thought to how to run.

A recent study published in Frontiers in Human Neuroscience suggests that running requires higher level thinking than you might imagine. University of Arizona neurologists found that the brains of competitive distance runners had stronger connections in areas known to aid in “sophisticated cognition” than the brains of healthy but sedentary people.

In particular, they found more connectivity between parts of distance runners’ brains that support working memory, multitasking, attention, decision-making and the processing of visual and other sensory information. In other words, there’s more to running than mindlessly placing one foot in front of another.

This builds on previous research findings that mastering a complex activity can improve the workings of the brain. For example, playing an instrument requires refining fine motor skills while also engaging one’s memory, attention, forward planning and other executive functions of the brain. So it’s not surprising that expert musicians have been found to have a greater capacity for high-level thinking than do people, say, who’ve never picked up an instrument.

The Arizona study was surprising in that running turns out to not be a simple activity. In fact, it’s more like a kind of “mobile math puzzle,” according to Gene E. Alexander, PhD, a professor of psychology, neurology and physical sciences.

“It requires complex navigational skills plus an ability to plan, monitor and respond to the environment, juggle memories of past runs and current conditions and continue with all of the sequential motor activities of running which are, themselves, very complicated,” says Dr. Alexander.

Granted, this doesn’t prove that running alone caused the differences in thinking skills. It only shows that the distance runners in the study had certain patterns of thought. And it’s unclear whether other endurance sports such as cycling and swimming would produce similar brain connections.

But it’s worth more research, suggests Well columnist Gretchen Reynolds in The New York Times: “We might be able literally to run way from mental decline.”

Gender gap in life expectancy has narrowed

In 1990, life expectancy at birth for American women was 7 years longer than for American men. But this gap has narrowed to 4.8 years, according to the Centers for Disease Control. Currently, the U.S. life expectancy is 81.2 years for women and 76.4 years for men.

The reason? It’s largely because men in the U.S. have enjoyed larger gains than women in recent decades.

The main explanation is that the gap in smoking rates between the sexes has narrowed. Women have also lost ground because they have experienced a larger increase in cardiovascular risk factors such as obesity and diabetes.

—Adapted from the UC, Berkeley Wellness Letter
Is it hoarding or clutter? How to launch a clean-up.

By Anne Perryman

Many older people live amid clutter that can start to look like hoarding. But there is a difference.

Clutter is characterized by piles of papers, clothing and collectibles that take up most or all of the surface space in a person’s home. Hoarding is typically a floor-to-ceiling accumulation—with living space significantly reduced.

Understanding why

Clutter and hoarding are, to some extent, the result of a consumer society that encourages us to buy things we don’t need—and older people are not the only ones with a problem. When the possessions in anyone’s home don’t get sorted and dealt with, they pile up.

Compulsive hoarding, on the other hand, is a disorder that can be found across cultures and often runs in families. When compulsive hoarders get “cleared out,” they tend to refill spaces very quickly.

Most people are not compulsive in that sense. They just have way too much stuff. Whatever the situation is with your older relative, it’s important to understand why people hang on to the things they no longer use or need.

Experts cite the main reasons:

**Fear of losing something of value.** There’s often treasure in that clutter, and people who have lived through hard times also feel strongly about not being wasteful.

**An emotional attachment to possessions such as wedding gifts or even old magazines.** Many older people are unhappy because “my children don’t want these things.”

**Physical frailty.** Older people may have trouble accessing storage areas and removing heavy items.

**Spiraling effect.** When things pile up, people often feel ashamed and don’t want to be found out, which makes matters worse.

Warning signs of a problem

The New York City Task Force on Hoarding cites these as signs that someone has a problem:

- **Impulsively buying** items that are unneeded, have little value and for which there is no room.
- **Losing important papers** such as bills, causing missed deadlines and late payment charges.
- **Wearing the same clothes** for days at a time.
- **Living with blocked pathways.** Having to move things around in order to sit down or go to bed.

Getting started

Older people have mixed emotions about their possessions. They feel anxious about losing control over their living space but are deeply attached to their belongings.

Try to get a sense of how your relative sees the situation and the kind of help she or he may be willing to accept.

Be flexible and patient. If you come across as judgmental, you won’t get very far. And don’t be surprised if your offer to help with a clean-up is refused at first.

More hints for living lighter

Barry Dennis, author of The Clutter Challenge, urges all of us to think twice before buying anything: “Everything we bring into our lives, we will eventually have to get rid of. And that is much, much harder to do than bringing it in.” He suggests:

- **Don’t let your clothes closet exceed 80 percent capacity.** If you haven’t worn something for a long time, give it away.
- **Make a rule:** for every new garment you buy, an old one must go.
- **To people who give you gifts,** explain your desire to declutter and suggest alternatives like a movie pass, dinner out or a yoga class.
- **Look through the pantry, freezer and cupboards.** Discard food that is likely to make you feel “clogged up, toxic, sluggish and fat.”
- **Redefine clutter.** Include those piles of CDs and DVDs that you don’t watch or listen to and the electronic equipment that keeps you from living in the moment.

Before making any demands, ask yourself: **Is this normal clutter or a serious situation? Are there safety or health hazards? Do my parents or friends see it that way, too? Can they make informed decisions? Are they aware of the consequences of inaction, such as not being able to continue living at home?**

Launching a clean-up

If your older relative or friend agrees to a clean-up, here are some ideas for moving forward.

- **Engage your older relative** as much as possible. Make the project an on-site collaboration. Even major clutterers deserve some control over the fate of their possessions. Be aware, too, that sometimes it’s easier to work with an objective professional organizer.

- **Sort and organize** beforehand as much as possible. This will save time in the long run—and money too, if someone is being hired to work on the clean-up. Find something your relative would enjoy sorting, such as old family photos.

- **If pets are involved,** make sure they have access to a litter box, resting places and a clean feeding area.

- **Be kind.** For many people, parting with possessions can feel like giving away a piece of themselves.

- **Recycle.** People and charitable organizations can use many of the things you once needed to discard. It’s more work sorting and bagging, but it feels better than throwing perfectly good items into a dumpster. Start with churches, homeless shelters and thrift stores in your relative’s community.

- **Resources.** Check out the book The Hoarder in You by Dr. Robin Zasio and the websites hoardingCleanup.com and hoarding org. Be aware also that some thrift shops have become rather picky, so it’s a good idea to visit their websites for donation rules.
Building rapport with new teenage stepchildren

Today, more than four in 10 Americans have at least one step relative in their family—either a stepparent, a step or half sibling or a stepchild, according to a nationwide Pew Research Center survey. About half of U.S. teens are part of a stepfamily.

Because teenagers are at a stage when they’re trying to assert independence, it’s not easy for them to integrate into a stepfamily.

“From the adolescent’s perspective, it’s like discovering that another layer of management (the stepparent) is being thrust between you and the boss (parent) you’ve reported to for 12, 14, or even 16 years,” says author and psychologist Laurence Steinberg, PhD. “Or worse, that the business (the home) has been bought out from under you. From the teenager’s perspective, remarriage can feel like a hostile takeover.”

The key is to go slow and to be aware that teen stepkids can be moody and feign indifference, but down deep they need to feel they belong to their new family.

Good communication helps

Stepfamilies grow and develop through shared experiences and good verbal communication, and this also takes time. But how stepparents communicate is as important as what they communicate.

Teens want to be taken seriously. Show respect for their ideas, temperament, desire for privacy and the physical changes they’re experiencing. The bonus for showing respect is winning respect.

Decide on the rules

When a stepfamily with teenagers is formed, the new partners need to agree on basic rules that cover areas such as chores, homework, participation in family activities, food and mealtime behaviors, pet care responsibilities, religious practices, money, privacy, dating, the car and any limits on the use of a TV, phone, computer, gaming devices and social media.

“Don’t waste your breath,” says psychologist Maris Hetherington, PhD. “Family rules should apply to visiting stepchildren as well, but be willing to do some negotiating. Just make sure all kids are following the same family rules.

Here are some other ideas for ways to create smooth relationships with teenage stepchildren.

Learn more about teen development. When teenagers push you away, they are probably not really trying to hurt your feelings. Be aware that most teens will not ask you personal questions directly, but they are listening and watching everything you do.

Be a nice person. Don’t waste time lecturing, scolding and voicing disapproval. You’ll most likely be “tuned out” anyway. Try to become a trusted adviser and ally.

Communicate with humor and affection. Pass along information in many forms: handwritten notes tacked on the fridge, email, text or Facebook messages. Make your reminders about chores brief, such as: “Troy. Tuesday. Trash.”

Balance family activities with a teen’s need to be with friends. Encourage teenagers to bring their friends home, so you can get to know them. You can learn a lot when you see kids interacting with their peers.

Watch out for flirtty behavior. Sexual energy between teens and stepparents is common but dangerous. If your child or stepchild starts parading around scantily clothed, for example, discuss this with your partner. Keep the lines of communications open.

Don’t try to buy a teenager’s love and acceptance. It won’t work in the long run. Resist the temptation to overindulge and overschedule, especially with visiting stepchildren.

What to expect from younger children in a blended family

Kids react differently to becoming part of a new stepfamily.

Toddlers and preschoolers may regress to babyish ways, and it’s okay to give in. This will soon pass. Just make explanations simple—young kids can’t take in too much information at one time. Keep your family routines as stable as possible during the transition time.

Children from 4 to 7 worry about physical disruption. Try to keep living arrangements as consistent as possible. Kids this age need to feel some control over what’s happening to them. Give them choices that are real and acceptable to you.

For kids from 8 to 10, “fairness” becomes a major issue. Children this age may try to force choices between themselves and their parent’s new mate. And because they find it hard to divide their loyalties, it’s important for their biological parents to give them “permission” to relate to a new stepfamily.

Gender differences count too. Psychologist Maris Hetherington, PhD has found that boys often become angry with their mothers when they divorce, but they also tend to be more receptive to a new stepfather. On the other hand, girls who were supportive of their mother during a divorce tend to view a stepfather as intrusive. A new stepmother needs to move slowly in establishing a relationship—and a new stepdad should talk more and hug less.
ON THE JOB

Need-to-know information about taxes and the IRS

You receive an email from the Internal Revenue Service that says: “We need you to clarify information that was filed as part of your tax return.”

You worry that you might have done something incorrectly when you filed your taxes, and you want to correct the problem as soon as possible to avoid an audit.

But don’t click anything.

According to USA.gov, “The IRS does not initiate contact with an individual taxpayer by sending an email, text or social message requesting personal or financial information.”

As with any request for your personal information, double and triple check its legitimacy before taking any steps forward.

This also applies to phone calls supposedly from the IRS that are actually scam efforts. The official IRS website has a place where you can report any such activity.

If a tax return is audited

A small minority of tax returns are subject to questions or, in some cases, an IRS audit. And, if this happens, the Consumer Reports Money Adviser offers these tips.

Don’t keep people waiting.

If you get a letter from the IRS, open it immediately. The agency may have flagged a deduction from an expensive business trip that you will need to defend. Or it could have made a mistake with a Social Security number that can be easily spotted and fixed.

If an answer is requested, meet the deadline. A delay can be costly. For example, if a specific deduction or credit is questioned and you do not respond in time (typically 10–30 days), the IRS will close the case and send you a notice such as Form 4549, “Income Tax Examination Changes.”

This disallows the tax break in question, and it usually gets a taxpayer’s attention. These cases can be reopened, but it’s not a good way to start the audit process.

Deal with even routine letters right away. It could be a Notice CP2000, indicating that information from an employer, bank or investment company doesn’t match what you reported. A phone call could clear that up.

If you don’t understand what the IRS wants, talk to your preparer or go online to irs.gov/individuals/understanding-your-irs-notice-or-letter for a list of notices and what they mean.

Be prepared.

Your best defense in an IRS query is documentation. Let’s say the agency wants you to prove that a money-losing home business is not just an expensive hobby. With good records and correspondence, you should be able to satisfy that request. And when you do, the IRS will end the audit with a “thank you.” If you use a tax professional, ask her or him to review your documents first.

Stay on the subject.

If you’re on the phone or meeting with an IRS agent face to face, answer the questions you are asked and don’t raise new subjects. If the agent is interested in medical expenses, don’t start talking about your charitable deductions. And if you feel like you need some professional help, it’s okay to tell the IRS that you want to discuss the matter with your accountant or attorney, because you’re not sure.

Be honest.

If you argue too much over a questionable point, the IRS agent may sense something fishy. Say, for instance, you use your car only for business, but have no way to prove it. You might be better off dropping the deduction.

Or consider the taxpayer who claimed her dog-maintenance costs were a security expense related to her home business. When her tax return was audited, she chose not to press the case, since the dog in question was a Chihuahua.

Do it yourself?

How do you know if you can handle an audit on your own or if you need to call in a professional?

“If the IRS says you owe less than $1,000 and you don’t have a tax professional, try to deal with it on your own,” says tax expert and CPA Aaron Christopher. “A tax professional may be costly, and there’s a chance that you will still owe the tax.”

But if the disputed amount is greater, he suggests getting some help: “Professionals understand the process and the IRS better.” It’s also possible that an auditor’s interpretation of the rules was incorrect.

People who are easily intimidated, who fly off the handle or tend to get belligerent should definitely consider having a tax professional speak on their behalf.

To find a tax pro, a good place to start is with a recommendation from someone you know and trust who is knowledgeable in this area. To find a CPA with tax expertise, check out the website aicpa.org and click on “For the Public.”

You can also go to ntea.org to find “enrolled agents”—tax pros who can represent you before the IRS. Click on “Find an EA.” For a tax attorney, check your state’s bar association.
A check-up on home remedies for a cold

If you are dealing with a cold, you'll probably try some home remedies to relieve symptoms as you wait out the virus.

Here's a brief update on recent research on home remedies—which ones to rely on and which ones are ineffective.

**Chicken soup.** Yes, try it. Studies at the Vanderbilt University School of Medicine and by Nebraska pulmonologist Stephen Rennard have found that soup can help to loosen mucus. So if one of your symptoms is a stuffy nose, a chicken-vegetable soup is a good idea.

**Drink hot beverages.** That can help, too. A study at the University of Cardiff’s Common Cold Centre in Wales found that cold sufferers who sipped hot or tepid beverages reported relief from a runny nose, coughing, chills and sneezing.

The study authors suggest that while there’s likely a placebo effect, hot drinks do seem to have benefits for a sore throat. And hot tea with a spoonful of honey can be especially soothing.

**Honey for a cough.** A review by The Cochrane Collaboration looked at studies that compared honey with (a) over-the-counter cough drugs, (b) no treatment and (c) a placebo. They found that honey was more effective at relieving a cough than either no treatment or a placebo, and it was slightly better than the drug with diphenhydramine.

But while honey is worth a try, experts say that coughing helps get rid of excess mucus, so you don’t want to stop it completely. Also, the American Academy of Pediatrics suggests that cough drugs are ineffective for kids and may pose a risk as well.

**Salt water nasal rinses.** Cochrane researchers looked at five studies on the value of cleaning nasal passages with salt water and found just one that worked to reduce stuffiness. And Consumer Reports medical director Orly Avitzur, MD, says to steer clear of “hypertonic” products because the more-concentrated solutions can be irritating. (The FDA reports also that zinc-based nasal sprays may harm your sense of smell.)

**Dietary supplements.** Many products such as echinacea, zinc, ginseng and vitamin C are touted in supplements, and some might don’t always know exactly what’s in supplements, and some might interact with other medication you’re taking.

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White is the new color in food’s rainbow

We got the message to “eat a rainbow of foods” and fill our plates with color.” But we may need to dial that back a notch. The advice to limit white foods in our diet is mainly directed at refined foods that have had their nutrients removed during processing: white sugar, white rice, refined flour and white breads and rolls.

Many foods that lack color are rich in nutrients such as potatoes, white beans, turnips, cauliflower, onions, garlic, fish and bananas.

Georgia Giannopoulous, a dietitian at the Weill Cornell Medical Center, encourages us to look for foods that are naturally white, and here are some of the benefits.

**Potatoes, cauliflower and turnips** are rich in vitamin C, which helps the body to absorb iron. Try mixing these foods with iron-rich foods like navy beans or black-eyes peas. Vitamin C also helps maintain healthy skin. It supports wound healing and the formation of collagen.

**Chicken soup.** A study from the University of Texas Medical Branch in Galveston, published in the journal Pediatrics, has found that babies in the U.S. are experiencing fewer ear infections.

Researchers followed babies during their first year and found that 46 percent had at least one ear infection (otitis media). Studies from the 1980s and 1990s found the rate to be 60 percent.

The improvement is attributed to increased breastfeeding, infant vaccinations and reduced exposure to secondhand smoke. By reducing the risk of respiratory illnesses in children, these factors help reduce bacterial complications, which include ear infections.

Another factor may be that more parents have gotten the message about infant pacifiers—and how important it is “use them, then lose them.”

The American Academy of Pediatrics suggests weaning children from pacifiers a few months before their first birthday. Continuous sucking on a pacifier may cause the auditory tubes to become abnormally open, which allows bacterial secretions from the throat to seep into the middle ear.

The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association says the overuse of a pacifier can interfere with speech development.

The American Dental Association has found that using pacifiers after age 2 increases the risk of developing protruding front teeth and improper bite, which affects speech production.

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A HEALTHY YOU

WFL March 2017  www.workandfamilylife.com
Making the most of your child’s first three years

Women are told that we can do it all—at the same time—and this has become the standard to which we hold ourselves, even after all these years.

And to which Erica Komisar, the author of this interesting new book, Being There, says “Baloney. Superwoman is a comic book character and as far as I know she didn’t have children when she was saving the world.”

But Komisar, a clinical social worker, also makes the case that both working and non-working mothers should strive to be present as much as possible in the first three years of their child’s life.

Her definition of being “present” is important and eye-opening. She describes it as “the ability to be in the moment and to feel that there is no place you would rather be, no one else you would rather be with, and nothing else you would rather be doing.”

Presence, in other words, means removing distraction. So, when you are together you need to be plugged into your baby, not your iPhone. If you are constantly picking up your phone, texting or checking your email to see if there’s something interesting to follow up on, says Komisar, your child will feel that he or she is less interesting and less important to you.

Presence also means talking to your child. While babies and toddlers may not have a lot of spoken language, they do understand body language, facial expressions and what your tone of voice conveys.

Presence means playing with your child as well. After all, play is how kids safely explore their feelings, develop their self-esteem, work on their physical and social skills and learn to cope with frustration.

Based on the author’s clinical work as well as the latest research on attachment, caregiving and brain development, this book is full of valuable advice to parents on establishing an emotional connection with a newborn or young child.

Being There: Why Prioritizing Motherhood in the First Three Years Matters (Tarcher Perigree) will be available in April in bookstores and online in hard cover, Kindle and Audio CD editions.