



From the desk of Sandi Schwartz, CEO Leading Edge Parenting

The Power of Fear

When my children were younger I thought that a good mother was supposed to worry. After all, there were so many things 'out there' to worry about. I kept current on all the latest issues related to the health and well being of my little ones. I listened to the news, read articles in magazines and shared the latest concerns with my friends. There were times when my head would swirl with conflicting facts and opinions.

I can remember a time when I 'accused' my husband of not loving the children as much as I loved them because he didn't seem to worry the way I did. How could you love them and not worry about them? It didn't make sense to me. My mother worried about me all the time. I grew up equating love with worry.

I have a vivid memory of a time when there was a chicken pox epidemic and the fear I felt after reading a magazine story where a child died from complications of the disease. I could feel dread overtake my body a few weeks later as the pediatrician diagnosed my 3 year old son with chicken pox. My mind whirled into a downward spiral that took control of my being and I'm almost embarrassed to admit that I got close to imagining what his funeral would look like. Whew! Fear can be an incredibly powerful and destructive emotion!

My son is now 32 years old. If you think you naturally stop worrying when they grow up, just speak to a parent of adult children. Life will always offer challenges and situations that have the potential for worry. While that is true, I have learned the secret of how to love with much less worry. It has given me the freedom to love unconditionally and to not need my children to be or do or act in a way that makes me feel safe. I can give them their wings to make choices and take 'risks' and still keep my heart wide open, full of acceptance and free of fear. Instead of rushing in with advice and warnings (that actually push the children away and build walls of non communication) I get myself aligned with my own sense of well being, using the techniques I have learned to become trusting and comfortable with the journeys that we are all here to experience. I remind myself I am not the only vortex of insight and well being for my children. I soothe myself by trusting that their challenging experiences, their disappointments and hurt feelings are the contrasts that lead them to their growth and provide the wisdom they will eventually call their own. Teaching them to

live in *my* fears or ignore their own feelings so that I can feel better is an unhealthy way to teach them to navigate the challenges of life.

This was not an easy lesson to learn. It takes being tuned into my feelings and a conscious willingness to move past the fear when it comes. Whether it is worrying about our children's health, safety, school work, friends, career choice or any of the myriad issues that life brings, I know for sure that when we succumb to negative emotions we hurt ourselves and create anxiety for our children. I've also learned that no matter how much I worry about them, it does not protect my children. Worry and thinking 'what ifs' cannot keep challenges away. In fact, focusing on fearful thoughts can actually bring to manifestation the very things we do not want. The saddest part of this is that when our fears manifest into reality we see this as proof of our need to continue worrying because of the 'bad' things that are 'out there.' Instead of embracing life with positive thoughts and eager anticipation we keep reminding ourselves and our children about the potential threats and hazards that can harm us and in so doing, we take the joy out of the moment, creating fearful children, piling on the anxiety that leads to stomach aches, headaches and scary dreams. Parents find themselves going to doctors, therapists and specialists, trying to figure out how to help themselves and their children through the physical and emotional anxieties and situations that are plaguing them. We, the adults can actually unconsciously create the very conditions that we then want to fix. This is all done in the name of love....ouch!

This lesson was reinforced for me very powerfully on 9/11:

While in her third year at college our daughter informed us that she wanted to do her last semester in India, Nepal and Tibet. My heart skipped a beat as I could feel a surge of fear permeate my entire body. I imagined her in unsafe, remote areas and prey to faceless villains. I tried to talk her into going to more 'civilized' places and both my husband and I initially gave in to our fears and declared that she could not go. It was a combination of her ability to articulate the passion of her vision and our willingness to look for ways of soothing our legitimate concerns that led us to eventually move through the fears, ask questions of the college, imagine her safe and having the best experience of her life and eventually feeling comfortable saying, "Yes."

On the morning of 9/11 I got dressed and left the house to go to work. I had no idea that my world was about to explode. I was the executive director of a corporate day care center a few blocks from the World Trade Center. While I was evacuating our building my daughter was safe in Northern India. The 'tables' quickly turned as she heard about the chaos in New York and tried in vain to reach me to make sure that I was OK.

The lesson that I hold in my heart from that experience is that all the worry in the world cannot keep anyone safe. Our true power lies in learning how to shift our scary emotions into more positive ones. As we look for a better feeling way to approach whatever life offers and as we give our attention to thoughts that soothe and ease us, we begin to feel better and we regain our sense of well-being. That is the shift that changes everything. It comes from within us and it influences everything and everyone around us.

How do you begin to make this shift? Begin by watching the thoughts that trigger your own fear. Instead of going into the fear, go back to the thought. Ask yourself if you could gently 'tweak' the thought to one that would feel slightly better. Remind yourself that being RIGHT can lead you to pain and suffering. Some people are so RIGHT that they are miserable in their need to have others agree with them. Move past being RIGHT into a place where, while still honoring your truths, you are willing to soften your perspective and begin to think differently. We all have 'habits of thinking.' The way we habitually think and therefore react to situations feel so RIGHT that *unless we are willing to make a conscious shift* we will insist that we can't change. "That is just the way I am!" we declare as we and our children become prisoners of our minds. There is a way out. There is a way to reform our habits of thought. It begins with a willingness to expand the way we look at life.

Let's look at a typical example of something that creates fear for parents:

Our young children speaking to strangers

Here are some ideas to think about so you can soften anxiety and still communicate concern: Many parents begin to **WARN** their young children about the evils 'out there' by telling their children **NEVER** to talk to strangers. I've heard from parents that they really rev it up by letting the little ones know that a stranger could take them away from home and they would never see mommy or daddy again. These very same parents ask me how to help their children with scary dreams or how to get them to sleep in their own beds. It is the 'charge' of our own fears that leads us to unconsciously pass on **TOO MUCH INFORMATION**, hoping that it will keep the children in line. I've also watched these same parents meet acquaintances in the market place and say to their child, "Say hello to Mrs. Smith." In the parents' desire to promote good manners they encourage the little one to say hello to someone who, to the child, is a stranger. This child is not even sure who is and who is not a stranger! In a well-meaning desire to keep the child safe as well as polite parents unconsciously create confusion.

OK, then; How **DO** you handle strangers in an empowered way?

Here are some suggestions: Remember when your baby began to have '**stranger anxiety?**' The child had a 'built in' sense of not being comfortable when a new face appeared or new arms wanted to hold her. Instead of parents trusting this **brilliant intuition** many of us got embarrassed or saw it as a 'difficult' period and tried to 'make' the baby go to grandma, friend or baby sitter. I would suggest we **allow our children's inner voice to be encouraged** from the time they are infants. Give the infants (and continue as they grow) the message that their inner knowing is a guide and that you respect it. Even though they are not yet able to intellectually understand your words, they are feeling your energy. Soothe them by not going **AGAINST** their knowing. Soothe them by acknowledging their discomfort. During that time use the caregiver the child is most comfortable with. Help grandma understand that stranger anxiety is not a rejection but a natural stage of development. As they become toddlers continue to acknowledge them as they react differently to family, friends and caregivers. If a child runs into the arms of an aunt but stays away from a cousin do not **FORCE** her into being **NICE**. Acknowledge her discomfort. Gently tell your **EGO** to go away. Stop **WORRYING** what others think about you and your parenting strategies. Whisper in your child's ear that you understand. Suggest you hold her hand as she says, 'Hello.' Tell her she doesn't have to do something that doesn't feel good. Gently guide her into politeness while acknowledging her feelings. There is a big difference between raising a 'spoiled' child

who has no sense of empathy, respect or manners and a child who can let you know when something doesn't feel good or needs some time to warm up to people or situations. Not speaking to strangers can also be part of your repertoire of 'rules' or 'ways of being'. Pre-schoolers can be taught that only grown ups open doors and answer phones. Young children can know that when they go shopping, to the park, etc. mommy must always be able to see them and they must always be able to see mommy. They do not have to be terrorized as a means of getting them to listen to you. Having well established routines and 'rules' in all areas of the day will naturally blend with rules and expectations about strangers. If you hear a story on the news that fills you with fear remind yourself you do not have to succumb to the panic. You can gently change the focus of your thoughts until you start to feel a little better. In fact, your greatest power to influence your child toward well-being is to get yourself into a good feeling state before you offer any advice.

Try this type of process to move yourself from fearful thinking into a better feeling state. You may be thinking:

"The world is a scary place. I have to be vigilant in keeping my children safe."

"I have to stay on top of things by listening to stories on television and reading the newspaper so I know about all the terrible things that are happening to children."

"If I scare them enough they will know this is serious and they will listen to me."

"They don't always listen to me. What if they don't listen to me about talking to strangers? I would die if anything happened to them."

...Now let's start to make that shift in thinking...

"The news media stays in business by presenting sensational stories."

"The percentage of children that are hurt by strangers is actually very small."

"My children are always with people who love them and know how to keep them safe."

...As you think this way the fear begins to subside a bit and you will be able to think more thoughts that are soothing:

"I have really smart kids."

"They usually use good judgment; especially when I'm not around."

"I am making this bigger than it actually is."

"I like the idea of influencing my children to trust their inner guide."

"It feels so good to choose the direction of my thoughts."

If any of these statements relieve the fear, use them. If you do not feel relief from them, make up your own thoughts that help you feel better. Once you have 'centered' yourself by taking the '*charge*' out of the subject you are then ready to help your child. If you are filled with negative, stress- filled feelings you are fooling yourself if you think you are teaching your child something of lasting value.

WHEW!!! This concept of fear and worry is a mighty big and important subject. As I continue to write my parenting book (it's halfway done) I will be conscious of offering more strategies that help soften this dilemma. In the meantime, let's remember that the same way our children were born with inner guidance, so were we. Sometimes that guidance is clouded by the messages we received as children, by the media and by the pressures of daily life. Give yourself the gift of sitting quietly for a few moments each day. Breathe deeply. Focus on something that feels soothing. Ask for guidance. See what miracle happens.

This fall I will begin hosting my nation-wide phone conference seminars. If you, your parenting partner or a friend would like to join me for the free class please e-mail me and I will put you on our list. It promises to be an amazing way of reaching out and sharing the key principles for creating a family life with empowered parents and happy, successful children.

I would love hearing from you with feedback on this article as well as suggestions for future topics. If you are interested in private consultation or ordering a Relaxation CD for parents, (they make a great gift!) please call me at 1-800-658-1454
Check out my radio show and website here: www.leadingedgeparenting.com

Hugs to you and to your children. Sandi

Biography

Sandi Schwartz, MA, is an internationally acclaimed radio show host, award winning educator, consultant, inspirational speaker and spiritual leader with 40 years experience working with children, training professionals, supporting families, and encouraging parents with inspired wisdom. She has received state and national recognition, including a Certificate of Merit from the Governor of New York for her work with families during and in the aftermath of 9/11. As founder and CEO of Leading Edge Parenting, LLC, Sandi is passionate about assisting parents in creating experiences of physical and spiritual abundance as they release worry and stress, rediscovering the joy of living life with their children.

Learn more about Sandi's work and radio show at:
www.leadingedgeparenting.com