

# Health lessons may be answer Mom's behavior is embarrassing



ALL ABOUT FAMILIES  
ALICE MCCARTHY

Thoughtful people attest to the fact that giving often yields more than a 100 percent return.

Return was not in my thoughts as I devoted four days to working with a panel of experts convened by the American Cancer Society. Health educators, psychologists and writers like myself were cloistered for many hours to sort out the most important messages to send to multiple organizations and citizens about the importance of teaching health in grades K-12.

Among the experts was Kevin P. Dwyer, associate executive director of the National Association of School Psychologists. Dwyer left the meeting to attend the National Safe and Drug Free Schools Conference. The National Association of School Psychologists and other experts are working with U.S. Secretary of Education Richard Riley to develop a framework to help teachers and principals understand early on when a child is truly troubled, and steps they can take.

When Dwyer returned to our meetings, he provided us with Riley's thoughtful and proactive message of hope for all of us worried about the recent killings in schools. This is what I mean about donating time and being rewarded.

As Riley says, "I know that America's schools are among the safest places to be on a day-to-day basis. Ninety percent of our schools are free of serious violent crime. We have millions of young people who are healthy and happy and want to learn. But as long as this society continues to glorify violence, continues to make it easy for young people to get guns, and as long as we continue to hide our heads in the sand or fail to reach out when a young person is truly troubled, we will have to confront tragedies."

Do you wonder just what is going on with our adolescents? Riley says that in our haste to keep up with the velocity of

change, we are forgetting those things most essential to children: giving them that deep, abiding sense of trust, guidance and security that tells them that they are truly loved, cared about and respected. Riley proposes that every school in the nation must actively engage and encourage parents and do everything possible to mitigate the time crunch of daily life — to slow down so they can stay connected to their children. He says that every child in America in a school must have a positive caring relationship with at least one adult.

What can you do to make a difference? Ask your child's teacher about health lessons that practice problem solving, coping and social skills, and making friends. Find out if gun safety is taught. The link between guns in the house and children being injured, or committing suicide, is well established and alarming. Guns at home must have child-safety locks. Ask the members of your Board of Education about such issues as class size (reduced size gives teachers more chance to give attention), the ratio of counselors and social workers to

children, and psychological services for all children K-12.

Talk with your child's principal about after-school programs, mentoring programs and alternative programs. Volunteer to help wherever you have skills.

Use this summer to double your personal efforts to connect firmly with your children and connect with your children's school. Children's lives depend on your actions.

All About Families runs every other week in The Eccentric! Newspapers. Birmingham resident Alice McCarthy, Ph.D., is a nationally known parent educator, writer and editor. She is the mother of five children and grandmother to eight young children. To leave a message for McCarthy, from a touch-tone phone, call (313) 953-2047, mailbox 1894, or write her at The Eccentric!, 805 E. Maple, Birmingham 48009.

To access McCarthy's columns on the Internet via O&E Online, her address is:

<http://observer-eccentric.com/main/mcc/mccindec.html>



ON AGING  
RENEE MAHLER

Q. My mother has dementia. It is not Alzheimer's disease but she is very confused and sometimes does not behave rationally. She still enjoys going shopping or out for dinner but many times I am very embarrassed by her actions. Sometimes she gets very loud too. I don't want to make her stay in the house all the time but I think she annoys other people. I also do not want to criticize her in front of others because I know it embarrasses her. What do you suggest?

A. Your concern for your mother-in-law and others is commendable. I am glad you know that even though your mother-in-law is confused she still should not be embarrassed in front of others. Often times people with dementia do not realize what they are doing or how boisterous they have become. If they did they would probably be appalled by their behavior. They just can't help themselves though.

The Alzheimer's Association, which is concerned not only with people with Alzheimer's Disease but with all who have some form of dementia, has business-sized cards that read "Please be patient. My companion has Alzheimer's disease." You would be surprised how understanding most people are, and using this card would save you from making long and involved explanations. To reach the Alzheimer's Association, call (248) 657-8277.

Q. My aunt is 73 and on Medicare. She belongs to an HMO. All of a sudden they will no longer pay for her dental bills. She counted on having certain benefits and now we find that they are no longer available. What is going on? Is there anything we can do about it?

A. Many benefits, such as free drugs, dental care and eyeglasses, are being eliminated from the benefits offered by Medicare HMO's. This is due to rising drug costs and the cap Congress set on this year's payments to Medicare HMO's. The government thought that managed care would cut down or at least slow down the amount of money the federal government spends on Medicare. What may happen, however, is that many people may possibly drop out of their HMOs and return to traditional Medicare. Some Medicare HMOs also have raised their prices or are charging a monthly premium. Your aunt may want to consider this plan of action.

Q. My husband has Alzheimer's disease. There is a new drug that is supposed to be very helpful. What do you know about it?

A. I believe you are referring to the drug called Aricept. Aricept is being used to treat people with mild to moderate Alzheimer's Disease. It can help treat some symptoms such as memory loss but it does not work for everyone. Some people may show some improvement or exhibit no further decline in their mental status for a period of time. However, there may be some side effects such as fatigue, nausea and diarrhea. It must be remembered though that Aricept is not a cure for Alzheimer's disease and each person may respond differently to the drug. You should consult with your physician. He or she can best decide if Aricept will help.

On Aging columnist Renee Mahler is a gerontologist and a former member of the Michigan State Commission on Services to the Aging. To leave a message for Mahler, from a touch-tone phone, call (313) 953-2047, mailbox 1894. Send questions to The Eccentric! Newspapers, 805 E. Maple, Birmingham 48009.

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