**Intergenerational Social Connectedness and Health**

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Children are the bearers and promoters of our more noble human qualities.

When we are with them we fluctuate between their unbridled optimism and our experiential skepticism; between boundless energy and growing fatigue; curiosity and experience; and innocence and wisdom. While the experience of being with children is not always predictable, it is healthy and stress reducing. When we are with children (aside from the responsibilities of parenting), we are less likely to be anywhere else – we are more likely to be in the moment and free self-induced stressors.

Sadly, there is a widespread belief that children don’t want to spend time with older adults. Yet, everything in our DNA tells us otherwise.

**Intergenerational Social Connectedness and Health**

In modern times, with the disappearance of the village society, there is a diminished responsibility to care for other’s children. Consequently, we have scores of older adults who have no access to children, and are therefore disconnected from the enriching and health promoting relationship with the young.

For eons, we gathered together in small generationally diverse groups in order to survive in harsh environments. Children were an integral part of the human efforts to survive, as the flourishing of children ensured the survival of us as a race, and it provided the workers, soldiers, craftsman, mothers, cooks, scholars and all sorts of human resources needed. Children were not only recipients of parental and village nurturing and instruction, but also had crucial roles in the operation of the family and the society. Therefore, a life devoid of children is an anomaly.

**Children Are Vital to Successful Aging**

According to Dr. William Thomas, founder of The Eden Alternative, \* older adults thrive when in close and continuous contact with plants, animals and children to build resilience and avoid depression. In retirement communities where the Eden Alternative has been adopted, they report the reduction in medication use and lower mortality rates. Health insurer Humana also believes in the value of intergenerational connections. They sponsored the building of multigenerational playgrounds with equipment suitable for all ages, designed in such a way that motivates older adults to move and interact with children. And, *Project Shine* is an intergenerational initiative that seeks to bring together local immigrants, struggling with integrating into the community, with students through educational programs, volunteerism and mentoring.

**How Children Benefit From Older Adults**

Children also benefit from associating with other adults. Big Brothers Big Sisters of America report that after only 18 months in their program, children are …

• 46% less likely to begin using illegal drugs

• 27% less likely to begin using alcohol

• 52% less likely to skip school

• 37% less likely to skip a class

• 33% less likely to hit someone

Clearly this young people-older people association can be characterized as “win-win.”

**5 Ways to Have Children in Your Life (Even if You Don’t Have Grandchildren):**

1. **Contact the local Big Brothers Big Sisters** and ask about the requirements to enter their program.
2. **Visit the local elementary school and see if it’s possible to become a mentor, storyteller or aide.** Many school’s history classes will welcome an eyewitness account of twentieth-century events you have lived through.
3. **Ask the local library if they have a need for a children’s storyteller or reader.**
4. **Visit the local hospital’s children’s ward to see if they have a need for volunteers.** Many welcome baby rockers.
5. **Teach a special skill that could benefit children.** Perhaps you’re good at woodworking, knitting, playing a musical instrument or are fluent in a foreign language. Local organizations such as the Boys & Girls Clubs, community centers, the YMCA and TWCA, church groups, summer camps and other community-based organizations are hungry for volunteers and instructors.

**For more information about Dr. Roger Landry, Masterpiece Living, and the successful aging movement, visit** [**www.LiveLongDieShort.com**](http://www.LiveLongDieShort.com) **and** [**www.mymasterpieceliving.com**](http://www.mymasterpieceliving.com)**.**