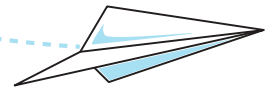


# Elisa E. Nebolsine, LCSW

**cognitive therapy for kids**



**W**elcome to the second newsletter for **Cognitive Therapy for Kids**. In this issue, I take a look at a book by psychologist Madeline Levine called *The Price of Privilege*. This thoughtful book is quite relevant for the relatively affluent DC area, offering many positive suggestions for helping the children in your life become entitled and more empathic. In the research corner section I look at an article on CBT and anxiety in the schools. And in the article section I write about social skills and CBT. This is emerging as a strong interest for me as I think CBT offers some great ways to address social skill deficits in children and teens. Please feel free to contact me with any comments or questions.

*Elisa*



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## Online

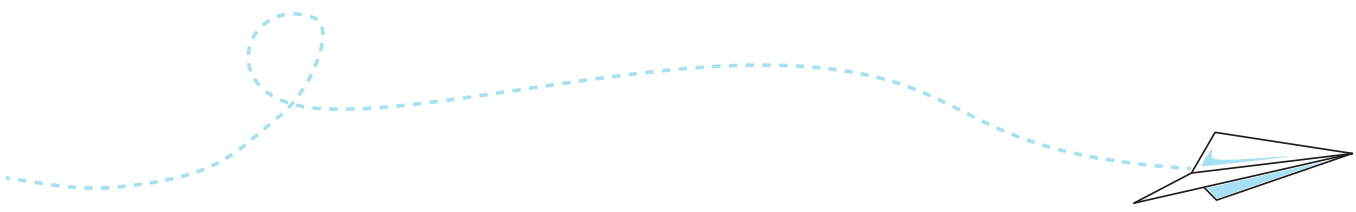
Check out my recently updated blog. Researchers are publishing fascinating work on kids and ADHD, social skills, sleep, stress, snoring, anxiety...

<http://www.cognitivetherapyforkids.com/Blog/>

6830 Elm Street, St. 302, McLean, VA 22101  
(703) 790-0035

[www.CognitiveTherapyforKids.com](http://www.CognitiveTherapyforKids.com)

[Elisa@CognitiveTherapyforKids.com](mailto:Elisa@CognitiveTherapyforKids.com)



## CBT & Social Skills: What is the relationship?

Every action produces a reaction. In physics, as Sir Isaac Newton stated, the reaction is equal and opposite. In social situations, well, it's not always so clear. Physically, if you put on rollerblades and push against a wall you will move backwards. In a social relationship, if you push someone verbally, you will get a different reaction than if you push them physically. Your actions toward others influences their response. Simple, right? Not for everyone.

Imagine breaking apart a social interaction into each of the steps that comprised the exchange. For example, a girl was at her soccer practice and she ran over to another girl and said, "Hi." The first girl, Emily, knew the girl she was running to, Sophie, and she knew she was friendly. When Emily ran over she was smiling and waving; her face indicated excitement at seeing her friend, and a sense of anticipation. All of this led up to the response she received: Sophie ran towards Emily and hugged her. They laughed and talked excitedly. It's an interaction that takes place all of the time.

Now imagine it differently: Emily sees Sophie and starts to run over to her. Sophie has been picking on Emily all week, and yesterday Emily was in tears at recess because Sophie was calling her names in front of other children. Emily's thoughts are, "If I can just get Sophie to like me she'll stop being so mean. I just need to be nicer." Sophie turns away as Emily runs toward her. Emily stops when she gets to Sophie and says, "Hi, Sophie, how are you?" Sophie looks at her and turns away. Emily's thoughts, "She is never going to like me. I'm an idiot for trying. There must be something wrong with me."

When many of us consider this information, we can see why the reactions occurred the way they did. While reading, you may even have thought, "Don't do it Emily, she won't be nice!" You would have been correct, and you would have read Sophie's cues differently than Emily did. In the first example, running towards Sophie made sense; she was a kid who had shown herself to be friend and to enjoy interacting. In the second



example running towards her did not make sense; she had demonstrated an unwillingness to be friends, and had repeatedly been mean.

Our reactions to others generate responses. There are many reasons that kids repeatedly engage in seemingly illogical social behaviors, and to help them we have to both understand their motivation and teach them new, more realistic ways to evaluate situations. For most people, social interactions are effortless and happen without thought. For children who struggle socially, social interactions are anything but effortless and require huge thought. They often feel powerless and hopeless in social exchanges because all of their attempts fail. If a child has trouble understanding why the first interaction described above was successful and the second was a failure, she may engage in a negative pattern of interaction. She may act in a way that generates a poor response, feels hurt, and thinks to herself, "No one ever likes me," or "That kid is so mean to me, it's all their fault," with little insight into their own role and the steps they could take to make things better.

CBT is a logical and effective means of intervention. Through the basic processes of evaluating the evidence of a situation, exploring the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, a child can become empowered to understand the situation more clearly and to make changes in how they act. This isn't easy and takes a great deal of effort and practice, but it is possible.

## Book Review

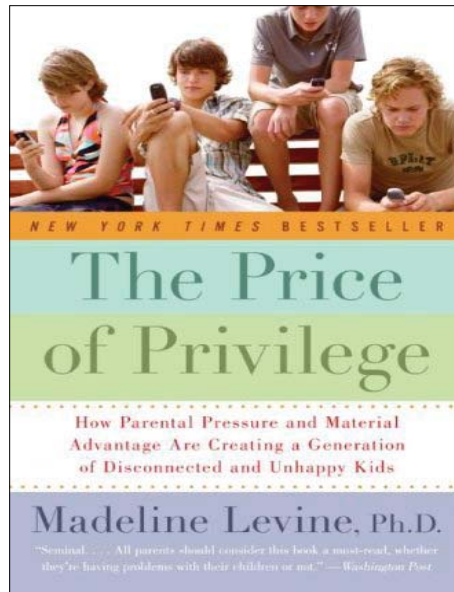
# ***The Price of Privilege: How Parental Pressure and Material Advantage are Creating a Generation of Disconnected and Unhappy Kids*** by Madeline Levine

Kids that have the most are not always the happiest. In fact, research is showing that affluent children have higher risks of depression, anxiety, and self-destructive behaviors. *The Price of Privilege* explores the research and offers techniques for changing intervention.

It is the paradox of wealth. In affluent communities, some parents work so hard to provide the best for their children they end up unintentionally harming them. Madeline Levine explores this idea in her thoughtful book, *The Price of Privilege: How Parental Pressure and Material Wealth are Creating a Generation of Disconnected and Unhappy Kids*. Levine looks at a familiar struggle, in which parents work to succeed and bring their children material wealth, and children end up feeling isolated and disconnected.

The teen years serve as an important developmental stage for building character and developing autonomy. This a period of time where an individual's sense of self is explored and tested through success, failure, discipline, lack of discipline, and hard work. One of the main developmental tasks of adolescence is to build skills that facilitate independence. We have all heard the stories of parents staying up all night to write their children's book reports, Levine points out that this culture has less dramatic but still harmful tendencies to do more for their kids than is necessary.

When a child is having a hard time, the first thing any parent wants to do (usually) is help. Levine questions this, and explores the difference between helpful and intrusive. Too much help can skew our value systems



with a focus on performance above all else. Referring to current research studies, Levine looks at the combination of achievement pressure and social isolation from parents. The results are worrisome. When there is greater focus on the product of the grades than the process of achieving them, there seems to be a higher rate of depression in teens. Additionally, when parents focus solely on grades and performance, the relationship with their child suffers; there is a lack of ability to connect and a high tendency to engage in conflict. Overall, the research cited by Levine indicates a high risk for emotional difficulties in this population; a surprising and counter intuitive finding.

One of the best aspects of this book is the common sense advice Levine offers. To become more independent, a sense of self efficacy is necessary. Levine defines self efficacy as “the belief that we can successfully impact our world” (p. 71). She differentiates self esteem from self efficacy, and points out that self efficacy has strong correlations to positive outcomes for children and adolescents. Rather than adopting the attitude that there is nothing left to do for these kids and they are doomed to a negative outcome, she offers practical strategies for encouraging and promoting self-efficacy and relationships.



## Research Corner

### Exercise boosts academic achievement

Yet another study has shown the positive results of regular exercise. Researchers at the University of Illinois found a positive correlation between children who had regular physical activity and higher attention and academic achievement. The children were more able to attend and score higher on tests after exercise. Despite this, most schools are limiting recess and physical education time. Current recommendations are for 150 minutes of exercise per week for elementary school and 225 minutes for middle and high school. More at <http://news.illinois.edu/news/09/0331activity.html>.



### Lack Of Sleep and Behavior Problems

Once again, a study has shown the significance of sleep in the lives of kids. There is no question that we all need more time in the day, and in a perfect world would have our children sound asleep right on time, but the reality is that it often is a struggle to pull that off. One more study shows why it's worth the struggle.

In the past several decades sleep duration has decreased in the US and other countries. It is estimated that one third of US children do not get adequate sleep. A new Finnish study explores the hypothesis that tired children frequently show their fatigue through behavioral outbursts rather than the typical adult tiredness.

The study, conducted by the University of Helsinki and National Institute of Health and Welfare, Finland, found that kids who slept fewer than 7.7 hours had behavioral ratings that scored them in the ADHD, hyperactive type, range. The children, when given more sleep, showed far fewer behavioral difficulties. More studies will be

needed to look at the causality between ADHD and sleep, but the clear message is that adequate sleep is essential for young children (and their parents). More at [www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2009/04/090427131313.htm](http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2009/04/090427131313.htm).

### CBT & Zoloft Combination Shown Most Effective Treatment for Childhood Anxiety

A new study in the *New England Journal of Medicine* led by anxiety pioneer Ann Marie Albano has shown that the most effective means of treating severe anxiety in kids is through a combination of cognitive behavioral therapy and the antidepressant Zoloft. CBT alone had a 59.7 percent rate of efficacy, Zoloft alone had a 54.9 percent success rate but the combination had a synergistic success rate of 80.7 percent.

### Timers, Homework, & the Industrial Revolution



As I read through an article from the July 08 issue of *The Atlantic*, I was struck by a discussion of Frederick Winslow Taylor, a man who changed how people worked through a series of timed experiments. Taylor went into the factories in Philadelphia, broke down the tasks people were doing into steps, timed each step, and then set up expectations for the steps based on the data. While the employees weren't thrilled, the production dramatically increased. This same idea makes sense for homework! While not exactly fun, I've worked with several kids this way: We first outlined the homework, then broke down the steps and figured out an approximate time for each step. The kids significantly reduced the amount of time they spent on their homework.