



The Perfect Mother: she home-schools, cooks organic, & runs a tight ship

Burned-out supermom bounces back, loosens up

by AMY ROTHENBERG, ND, DHANP

THE TWO LITTLE GIRLS THAT KITTY BROUGHT TO SEE ME WERE ADORABLE: A four-year-old and eight-year-old, dressed impeccably and wearing matching handmade capes. I was struck by how obedient the children were, sitting quietly during exams and listening well to their mother. The younger daughter suffered with chronic earaches and allergies, the older girl with skin problems and anxiety.



Over the next year, as I worked with the girls to get them back on track, I also had the opportunity to observe their mom. Kitty was a wonderful mother who was committed to home-schooling the girls, feeding her family an organic foods diet, and keeping a tidy home. She excelled in all of it, and the choices she made about how she raised her family were in line with her values and beliefs. She loved what she did and felt strongly it was best for her girls. But she was also clearly struggling with the enormous load of motherhood. The wear on her showed in anxiety, worry, fatigue, and a general air of being overwhelmed. When I eventually suggested to Kitty that maybe it was time to make an appointment for herself, she broke down in tears. I think she felt both embarrassed that I could tell she was losing her grip and relieved that someone had expressed concern.

High standards

This 38-year-old former laboratory technician had known a full, busy, and satisfying life before children. She had never imagined herself as an at-home mother, until after the birth of her daughter when she became disconcerted at the idea of someone else caring for her perfect child. Kitty nursed on demand and enjoyed a family bed. By the time she became pregnant again three years later, she was committed to doing everything in her power to feed, care for, and educate her own children. Her efforts had been noble but alas, she was now falling apart, an unfortunate victim of her own high standards.

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It takes a village

Increasingly I see families where this is the case. The lofty ideals of raising a family without television, without prepared food, and without outside help, for example, can leave the stay-at-home mother (or father) overwhelmed, exhausted, and disappointed with themselves. Of course, the job of raising children was never meant to be done in isolation or without the support of family, friends, and community nearby. Some individuals who do attempt to go it alone—perhaps because of geography, religious beliefs, or personal temperament—ultimately find that their ideals are not sustainable.

For Kitty, her own tendencies toward obsessive-compulsive behavior were heightened after the birth of her children. She was unable to let go of the cleaning routine and lower her standards about orderliness and excellence. She could spend hours cleaning and organizing after the children were in bed. She judged herself harshly if she felt she was not “doing it all” and doing it well. Her husband was supportive and helped out where he could, but he worked long hours to support their decision that Kitty would be home with the children.

Home sweet home

Theoretically, Kitty wanted to involve her children in all kinds of enrichment activities and have them spend time with other home-schooling families, but alas, keeping up with such activities and engagements was too overwhelming for her. Never one to be comfortable in social settings, Kitty found these group efforts exhausting and anxiety-producing. As she put it, her lack of confidence and general insecurity made just being with others stressful. She would rather be home with her two children, learning together, baking, sewing, doing art projects, or playing in the yard. This approach worked for Kitty because she could control all aspects of the environment for herself as well as for her children.

The only problem was that she was exhausted. In addition to doing everything to run the household and educate her children, Kitty had a life-long issue

with fatigue, needing daily afternoon naps of one or two hours. Although she would wake refreshed, she would soon be tired again.

Kitty also reported a life-long relationship with depression though as she sat before me, she seemed eager, almost anxious, with eyes wide-open and an easy ability to connect with me one-to-one. She described herself as more of an anxious person than laid-back. Social settings were the worst; she would replay interactions and wonder constantly if she had said or done the right thing. She was extremely averse to discord and could not bear the idea of someone being upset with her. At home, she felt her obsessive-compulsive behaviors the most. She might check or recheck things in the house such as light switches and the toaster, to make sure they were off or unplugged. She had very little in the way of a support system with family far away both geographically and emotionally.

Angry skin troubles

Since adolescence, Kitty had struggled with severe cystic acne; in the past few years her skin was “falling apart,” with outbreaks all across her forehead, nose, and chin as well as her back and chest. The blemishes were red, raised, and coalesced into large patches. There was an angry look to the skin that Kitty was aware of, especially as children would often ask her what was wrong with her face. Although she was not especially vain and did not try to cover up the areas, she had tried any number of over-the-counter medicines to no avail. The only treatment that had ever had an impact was antibiotic therapy many years earlier, but Kitty’s digestive system could not tolerate it, so she had discontinued treatment after several months.



Kitty tended to be constipated but controlled the problem with diet and keeping well hydrated. She had no other remarkable physical symptoms.

Analyzing the clues

In deciding on a remedy for Kitty, I had the benefit of knowing her for more than a year, having watched her with her children when she brought them in for their visits. She was always attentive, loving, and firm with her kids, and they all seemed to love each other very much. The younger daughter had done very well with the remedy *Silica*, which had helped both her earaches and allergies, and her sister had done well with the remedy *Sulphur*. I took this into account because sometimes we do see that family members need the same remedy; but, of course, each person’s case must be taken in full and analyzed as its own story.

Kitty’s shy and insecure temperament, her obsessive-compulsive-like behaviors and social anxiety coupled with the nature of her physical complaints (in particular, the cystic acne and lifelong leaning toward constipation), led me to the remedy *Silica*.

That her daughter had done very well on that remedy was a good confirmation, but I would have given Kitty *Silica* regardless. When I repertorized Kitty's case, the other remedies that came through strongly and that I seriously considered were: *Arsenicum album*, *Carsinosin*, and *Causticum*. She had the anxieties and physical general symptoms of *Arsenicum album*, such as chilliness and a burning sensation in the acne, so that remedy was a close contender; but in the end I felt the root of her issues was her weakness, which drove her to create many structures and rules to compensate for being fatigued and overwhelmed, as opposed to trying to control her environment out of fear and anxiety, which would have pointed more to *Arsenicum album*.

She judged herself harshly if she felt she was not "doing it all" and doing it well.

I gave Kitty *Silica* 200c. Because her skin had cleared up with antibiotics in the past, I also decided to give her a natural anti-bacterial supplement called Optibiotic made by Eclectic Institute (also sold in health food stores under the name VitaBiotic), which contains Vitamins A, C, and B-6, along with Magnesium, Zinc, Bioflavonoids, Echinacea, Myrrh, Ginger, and Capsicum. I have had success with this vitamin-mineral-herb supplement for a number of complaints, including cystic acne. I also recommended that Kitty take a probiotic. Because of her ongoing and extreme fatigue, I ordered blood tests to rule out anemia and thyroid disease, but all results came back in the normal range.

A clear complexion

When Kitty returned about six weeks later, the first thing I noticed when I saw her in the waiting room was her clear skin. She was thrilled to have a clear complexion, for the first time in her memory! Although she still had outbreaks on her chest and back, her face was quite lovely. Kitty reported feeling more energized and motivated, with more mental clarity—she said she hadn't realized what a fog she'd been in. She had taken on one home-school group event and was feeling good

about being involved with several other mothers to organize, promote, and run it. Since Kitty seemed to be responding so well to the treatment, I did not repeat the remedy at that point, but did have her stay on the other supplements.

Loosening the reins

When I saw Kitty three months after she'd taken the *Silica*, she spoke about how she was feeling more comfortable in social settings. In the past, she would always dread the annual holiday party from her husband's work, but this year, she had made herself a new skirt, had actually looked forward to attending, and indeed had enjoyed herself there. For the first time since her children were born, she had hired a babysitter so she and her husband

could go out. In short, she seemed to be loosening the reins a bit at home and was better able to enjoy herself, her husband, and her children. The skin on her back and chest had improved as well. After the first six months of treatment, Kitty discontinued taking the natural anti-bacterial supplements, and her skin has remained clear.

Over the past four years, I have continued to see Kitty. Every so often she comes in feeling a bit low or a bit blue, and I give her a dose of *Silica* 1M, which seems to shore her up, put a little pep back in her step, and allow her to relax a bit. We know that those who need homeopathic *Silica* tend to be a bit weak and therefore develop elements of rigidity to balance out that weakness. When we give the remedy, the weakness is ameliorated and the rigidity is lessened; in Kitty's case, the rules and obsessive-compulsive tendencies decrease and her energy and conviction increase.

Kitty's daughter, now a teenager is thinking about attending the local high school, and Kitty is entertaining all options, no longer feeling as single-minded about homeschooling her kids all the way through. Overall, there is more give and take in the family than before, which is appropriate as children get older.

A family affair

When treating children, we can sometimes see that a parent might benefit from a homeopathic remedy, too, or from advice, and almost always from additional support. Sometimes it takes a year or two to build the confidence and trust with the parent before offering such suggestions.

Treating families is my favorite part of practice. The insights I glean during case-taking for one family member influence my understanding and ability to help other family members; I can see how various individuals relate or don't relate, how they communicate or do not communicate, how their behaviors and temperaments may influence siblings or partners—all of which gives me more insight into choosing a beneficial constitutional remedy for the patient in question. I tend to think in a systems dynamic kind of way in all the work that I do, so it makes sense that in the system of a family, as one person gets healthier, it impacts the whole family. As families get better together, each person also improves.

I try to treat whole families as often as I can. After many years in practice, I am now having the opportunity to treat across additional generations, a blessing for me, and also, I hope, for the families involved!



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Amy Rothenberg, ND, DHANP, practices in Enfield, Connecticut. She teaches and writes widely on topics in natural medicine. For further information on the New England School of Homeopathy's next

Two Year Course beginning in January 2010 in Seattle, see www.nesh.com. You can also find information there on subscribing to the *Herscu Letter* as well as free articles and other writings by Rothenberg and husband Paul Herscu, ND.

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