



Raising Little Ones

Healthy kids,
happy families—
with homeopathy and
natural medicine

By Amy Rothenberg, ND, DHANP

I have never regretted spending the early years of my children's lives with them. Luckily, I had good friends on the same journey and kids that were happy to go along with the many everyday adventures we dreamed up—hanging large sheets over tables, creating new colors of homemade playdough, setting up the camping tent on the playroom floor, using a refrigerator box for a spaceship, planning treasure hunts, and baking all kinds of healthy treats (some tasty, some questionable). I'm not sure where I got the creative energy for this but having three kids in four years stimulated all sorts of inner resources!

We didn't have a television, and there were no computers or cell phones. We had the yard, the neighborhood, a whole lot of books, some musical instruments, and time on the road. And sometimes, we even had boredom, which, in hindsight, was the

greatest gift of all: time for the mind to wander, the hands to find something to do, the sibling relationships to deepen, and the silliness and fun to bubble up.

We were also privileged to have terrific help in those early years. Colleen lived with us and became the support system we all relied upon. Young and energetic, she picked up where I left off, widening the circle of adults who loved and cherished our kids. I was blessed, too, with a husband who supported me in staying home and who chipped in as time allowed.

I am not saying it was all fairy dust and rainbows. We had weeks in quarantine with consecutive cases of chicken pox and dark winter afternoons where my energy flagged. But on the whole, it was a precious time.



Of course, our world is much busier and more complicated now. Many parents juggle hard-to-fathom schedules and struggle to meet all kinds of demands placed upon them. I admire young families doing their best in today's world.

Finding your way

What is the best way to raise a family? I believe deeply that the best way to raise your family is just that—YOUR best way. There are no prescribed approaches that will work in every scenario. There are no parenting techniques that will be successful for every child. Couples or individuals have to brave the path that works for them.

Hard economic realities force many parents back into the workforce before they want to go. Conversely, some parents,

for religious or cultural reasons, feel they must stay home, even though their self-definition and self-esteem are bound up in their outside-the-home work. It's a shame that for many of us, our fertile years for child-rearing coincide with our fertile years of work, often leading to difficult decisions and sacrifices.

Leaps of faith

I counsel families to periodically review their situation and ask questions: Is this working for us? Is there any wiggle room? Can we take a leap of faith and try something different? When our children were young, for example, I worked at our naturopathic medicine clinic one day a week—which I truly considered my day off. Just getting out of jeans and messy T-shirts and combing my hair felt like a call to civilization. But there came a time when even working at the clinic one day was too much. I needed

to not feel split on my commitments, physically, emotionally, cognitively, and energetically. We reviewed our situation and cut back on our spending, and I took a number of years to work strictly at home as a mother and homemaker.

When I eventually started back to the office, I relished seeing patients. My husband stayed home those days, and this gave him a tremendous gift, to be solely responsible for the household and children without my input or opinion. That doesn't mean I didn't want to refold the laundry or cook the chicken differently, but I tried hard to keep my mouth shut and appreciate that I could go out to work one or two days a week and know my children would be safe, loved, and cared for by their father.

I recall one particular day when my two sons, ages one and two at the time, were both still in diapers. I came home from work and saw the little one, who was just starting to walk, waddling down the hall, bow-legged from the weighty diaper hanging by his knees. Right away, I could see that he did not get the dry diaper he needed when he needed it. Oh well! He still went on to complete a graduate degree and own a lovely home!

Essential for the toolkit

As a doctor and a parent, I am so happy to have homeopathy in my toolkit! It has come to the rescue on many occasions—both for families in my care as well for my own family. Here's a case from my practice that shows just how essential homeopathy is when raising kids.

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Leslie: flushed and feverish

Sarah called me one morning because her adorable 18-month-old daughter, Leslie, seemed to be getting sick. Sarah was pregnant again and feeling very tired and under the weather herself, so she hoped that whatever Leslie was brewing would not also affect her.

I had seen Leslie for colic and sleep problems during her first year. The homeopathic remedy *Calcarea carbonica* helped her and was a good fit for her constitutional type; a robust and hearty child, Leslie was curious, strong-willed, and full of smiles. She had her mother's beautiful red hair and light green eyes with a pale complexion.

Now, Leslie had a low-grade fever with a flushed face and was crying off and on; she seemed mad and irritable and was difficult to please. I suspected Leslie had either an earache or some other inflammatory process brewing—hence the fever alongside the irritability. Leslie had not had a bowel movement that day or the day before, which was uncommon for her.

Illness in context

I always like to understand the context in which someone has gotten sick, so I asked Sarah what had been going on the last few days. Had Leslie been around other sick children? Had she had any stressful or unusual experiences? Had anything else happened that I should know about?

Sarah recalled that her husband had taken Leslie on a long bike ride the day before. Leslie was secured in the baby seat and wearing her helmet, but the day grew colder and breezier, and they were out for several hours.

People often report getting sick after they've been exposed to the cold or to wind. Even on a relatively calm day, the wind generated by a moving bicycle could create a certain stress on a passenger riding in the back, especially if the individual is susceptible. And that stress can lead to illness.



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There are many remedies to consider when a patient is worse from exposure to wind, including *Aconite*, *Belladonna*, *Bryonia*, *Hepar sulphuricum*, and *Silica*. Still, other remedies are indicated when a patient gets ill after exposure to cold, and *Calcarea carbonica* is one of them.

Baby on a bike

This tough little girl, in typical *Calcarea carbonica* constitutional style, had worked up quite a sweat, especially on her head, during the first part of the ride in the warmer part of the day. But then the temperatures dropped, and the sun hid behind clouds. The wind blowing on her damp head for over an hour, coupled with the general coldness of the afternoon, simply stressed Leslie's system too much, and she slipped into an acute illness.

As Sarah and I were speaking on the phone, I could hear Leslie howling in the background. I gathered more information about Leslie's current symptoms: her skin was dry, even though she was feverish; her head was hot, and her extremities were cold; she was flushed, with large wide-open pupils; the illness had come on suddenly.

A remedy to remember

Each of these observances pointed to the homeopathic remedy *Belladonna*, which is a wonderful tool for treating all sorts of inflammatory processes, especially in the early stages where the inflammation has not yet settled into one organ or organ system. Parents know it as a remedy that is often indicated in childhood illnesses. Homeopaths also know from experience that there are relationships between remedies, and that when someone with a *Calcarea carbonica* constitution develops an acute illness, their symptoms often call for *Belladonna*. I asked Sarah to give Leslie one dose of *Belladonna* 30c and to get back to me if she was not better that afternoon.

Quick turnaround

Sarah called a few hours later to say that Leslie had fallen asleep moments after taking *Belladonna*. When she woke up, she was back to being her perky self, no longer irritable or flushed.

Sarah marveled at how quickly her daughter responded to the remedy. Homeopathy likely averted a full-blown illness in the child, thereby helping her pregnant mom to stay free of acute illness, too—which benefited the whole family!

Sarah assured me that the next time Leslie went for a long ride on a bike or in a stroller, the little girl's head and ears would be covered well, so the weather would not be too much of a stress on her!



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Family vacation saved

The tried-and-true homeopathic remedy *Belladonna* helped little Leslie and her family. But once in a while, a less common remedy comes to the rescue of a sick child and saves the whole family from a serious ordeal, as in this next example from my own family.

We were camping on the sands of a beautiful little jewel in the British Virgin Islands when our kids were three, four, and six years old. On the first day, our eldest and her little brothers were happily running after hermit crabs and swinging with their papa on hammocks that dotted the camping area. That evening, we had a sparkling campfire and lay five in a row on the warm sand, looking up at the pristine star-studded sky. As we carried the kids to bed, we felt we'd found our little piece of paradise.

A deep sleep

Our usually hale and hearty daughter was very excited to be sleeping in a little screened-in hut right on the water. But a few days into the trip, she did not wake at the crack of dawn with the others. In fact, by mid-morning, she was still asleep. I went to get her and found her burning hot and feverish, with extremely cracked lips. When roused, her eyes were glassy, and in an almost imperceptible voice she said, "My head hurts. My neck is stiff. I hurt all over." And then just like that, she fell back into a deep sleep.

She had not had too much sun the day before and had gone to bed feeling fine. So, we kept an eye on her all day, thinking perhaps she had just overdone it or had a little virus. When we finally got her up and carried her to the shady part of the beach, the light really bothered her eyes, and she did not want to go near the water. All she wanted to do was sleep.

Welcoming a New **BABY?**

A survival guide for parents



A much anticipated new addition to the family can be exciting—as well as overwhelming! To smooth the way for the new baby, parents, and siblings, I offer these suggestions to patients in my practice:

• TEND TO BABY AND MOM

For the first eight to 10 days after a baby is born, the mother should be in bed most of the day, tending to the baby—with the partner, friend, helper, or parent tending to them. Let others do the housework, the yard work, the caring for siblings, the cooking, the errands, and so on. This allows the mother to recover from childbirth and bond with the baby. It also reduces the chance of post-partum infection and mastitis.

• GET HELP

Forget trying to do it all yourself! The concept of a parent at home alone raising the kids and keeping the household running was never a good idea. It leads to burnout—to feeling overwhelmed, anxious, and inadequate. I tell new parents, “Show me a parent who hasn’t thought once or twice about getting in the car and just driving away, and I’ll show you a parent who doesn’t know how to drive!” If resources are available, hire someone to cook, shop, and do domestic chores. If parents need an hour at the gym or prefer to cook or shop themselves, let the helper take the baby for a walk in the stroller or baby carrier. If money is scarce, look to friends or family to do laundry, prepare meals (in volume and frozen for later use), or give focused attention to older siblings.

Meningitis

When she was no better the next day, a fellow camper walked three miles over a small mountain to the only pay phone on the island and called our daughter’s school to see if there were any illnesses going around. The school nurse reported a number of cases of viral meningitis, with two kids in the hospital. Our daughter’s high fever, extreme sleepiness, and stiff neck signaled that she probably had it, too.

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Viral meningitis is an inflammation of the membranes (“meninges”) that enclose the brain and spinal cord. There is no conventional treatment for viral meningitis, just rest, hydration, and waiting. Most people recover from viral meningitis in a week to 10 days—versus the more serious bacterial meningitis that can cause deafness, brain injury, or death—but it’s tough to tell the difference without doing a spinal tap.

We were an hour boat ride from an airstrip that could fly us to a hospital. This was one time that my husband and I questioned our choice of family outings! Our daughter seemed to be slipping away, so we began to make plans to get off the island. At the same time, we considered how we might help her with homeopathy.

Temperament shift

Our daughter is one of the most outgoing people you could ever meet, but during this illness, she had pulled inward to the point of being almost unreachable—as close to melancholy as she could be. When a patient has such an extreme shift in temperament as this, they do not need their usual constitutional homeopathic remedy. They need a remedy to address their very different acute symptoms and situation. We had to find a remedy that fit our daughter’s extreme fatigue, aversion to light and company, overall soreness, and very dry mucous membranes. She was barely urinating and had not had a bowel movement that day.

We considered *Gelsemium* and *Phosphoric acid*, because these remedies may be indicated when someone is feverish and debilitated. But it was the extreme degree of collapse that seemed most striking about our daughter’s condition, and that is what led us to choose the remedy *Muriatic acid*. Clarke describes the *Muriatic acid* state of collapse in his *Materia Medica*: “... an extremely low vital condition ... unconsciousness ... the patient often slips down toward the foot of the bed and must be lifted up every little while.” This description fit her. *Muriatic acid* also fit her very dry mouth, cracked lips, fever, soreness, headache, and taciturnity. *Muriatic acid* is not your everyday remedy, but by good fortune, it happened to be in our travel kit.



Turning the corner

We gave our daughter a dose of *Muriatic acid* 200c. Within a few minutes, she opened her eyes fully for the first time in two days, and with a bit of brightness returning, said, “I’m thirsty.” A good sign. Within an hour, she ate for the first time, and by the evening, she wanted to be out playing with the other kids. We forced her to lay low to avoid a relapse. Over the next several days, she was weaker than her usual robust self but climbed her way back to health to enjoy the rest of the trip—running up and down the beach chasing and being chased and riding the little wavelets that came scurrying across the fine white sand.

Back from the brink

Homeopathy pulled our daughter back from the brink of serious illness—and saved us the trauma of evacuating to a local hospital. So that’s just one more example of how essential homeopathy is in raising little ones. 🌍

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Amy Rothenberg, ND, DHANP, has been in practice since 1986 in Northampton, MA, www.nhcmcd.com. Her new book, *You Finished Treatment, Now What? A Field Guide for Cancer Survivors* (Koehler Books, 2022) can be ordered anywhere books are sold. See www.DrAmyRothenberg.com. With her partner Paul Herscu, ND, MPH, DHANP, she founded and teaches through the New England School of Homeopathy, www.nesh.com. Her writing can be found at *Medium*, *Thrive Global*, *The Huff Po*, and more. When not working, Dr. Rothenberg enjoys spending time with her family, in the garden, and on the ballroom dance floor.

Hear Dr. Rothenberg speak at JAHC 2023 in March!

A survival guide for parents

• CARE FOR YOURSELF

Drink plenty of water and eat well. Many new parents find it difficult to take care of themselves while caring for a new baby, but I remind them that they will be more loving and effective parents if they are well-fed, rested, hydrated, and exercised!

• GET OUT OF THE HOUSE

After the first few weeks, try to get out of the home every day—with or without the baby—even if just to do errands or meet a friend for tea. This will help parents preserve their mental health. I also encourage new parents to make and keep a date with their partner—bring the baby along if you must, but get out of the house for some adult time away from the endless work of keeping house and tending to little ones!

• FIND SUPPORTIVE ROLE MODELS

Spend time with other parents you admire, and seek their advice. Avoid people who are critical of you or not supportive. This is your baby to raise as you see appropriate.

• LET THE EMOTIONS RUN

Sudden weeping or uncontrollable laughter is not uncommon. Emotional swings are part and parcel of the hormonal ride of having a new baby. This applies to partners and new parents of adopted children as well. On the other hand, true postpartum depression must be addressed under the care of a qualified health provider, for the safety of mother and baby alike, so seek help if you have any concerns.

• NURSE OR PUMP, IF POSSIBLE

I encourage breastfeeding or pumping milk for at least three to six months, and, if possible, for a year. This is healthy for the baby and the mother/baby relationship, and it is even more important if older children in the family have had allergies, asthma, chronic infections, or autoimmune illness. If nursing or pumping milk is not possible, don’t worry—many of us were never nursed, and we seem to be doing well enough.

• LOWER EXPECTATIONS

I always encourage new parents to aim low. Set very small daily goals that will be possible to reach. Children grow up fast, and savoring even the mundane is itself a goal.

• USE HOMEOPATHY AND NATURAL MEDICINE

Homeopathy and natural medicine can address many of the everyday health complaints of babies, young children, and new parents, elegantly and with minimal side effects. This is why I encourage parents to have a relationship with a qualified practitioner of homeopathy and/or a doctor of naturopathic medicine to call upon in times of need. Having a homeopathic home care kit and learning to use it for first-aid and acute illness is another great idea. But the objectivity and expertise of a trained practitioner can save the day when you are at your wit’s end over a child’s illness, or when you are the patient yourself!

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