

Dr. Larry S. Fong

Eileen Ailon

Hanita Dagan

Terra Taylor

Dr. Susan Clark

Jack Dobbs

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DRIVEN TO DISTRACTION

For Many Commuters, the Trip to Work is a Job in Itself



REELING FROM IT

The Second Shift Effect

The weariest commuters tend to be women with children at home. In a survey of rail passengers, working moms had higher stress than working dads. The culprit is women's added child care responsibilities. Even in households where men share child rearing duties, it's the beleaguered moms who have deadlines at both ends of the commute. Whether coming or going "They have a job waiting for them."

Bypass Ahead

Commuters who endure heavy traffic nearly triple their odds of suffering a heart attack the next hour. Among women, the risk is even higher—almost five times the norm.

Day Shifts

The typical car commuter is most stressed out on Thursdays. Researchers have attributed this to a "weekend effect," in which stress builds during the week and peaks just before Friday.

DEALING WITH IT

Don't Beam Me Up, Scotty

When asked if they would teleport *Star Trek*-style to and from work if given the chance, 67% of commuters said no. For some people, traveling is an opportunity to return phone calls, listen to iPods, or simply chill out and watch the scenery. Commuting may also provide a buffer between work and family by serving as "the transition from one domain to the other".

Rage of Innocence

Older drivers handle traffic jams better than younger ones—possibly because younger workers take more job stress home every evening.

The Tortoise and the Harried

When it comes to commuter happiness, predictability trumps brevity. In a survey of drivers, those who merely hit congestion or needed to arrive by a certain time experienced less stress than did those affected by unknowns.

Joshua Tompkins. Driven to Distraction. *Psychology Today*, October 2009. p. 47

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FONG AILON
115 1st St. SW

www.worldpsych.ca
Phone: (403) 266-2017



BATTLES WORTH PICKING

When to Fight With Your Kids and When to Switch

You don't want to take on every little issue with your kids because a fight—even if a child complies—is hard on the relationship you're building together. Saving your energy has its benefits. It gives you more leverage for the battles that *are* worth it. Your child is more likely to cooperate on issues that are important. It doesn't mean she won't oppose you, but it will be less intense and there will be less conflict.

Here are some common battlegrounds—and a take on which are worth tackling:

THE BATTLE: Food fight. Your preschooler nibbles a birdlike portion. You want her to finish what's on her plate.



THE VERDICT: Not worth it. You can't win a battle like that. It's important that kids learn to recognize when they're full. And we want to teach kids that food is to be enjoyed—it's more than just a necessity of life.

TRUCE: Offer healthy choices and let your child decide what to eat..

THE BATTLE: Consumer conflict. Your eight year old wants an over-the-top expensive toy. He's prepared to fight for it.

THE VERDICT: Worth it. Time to start humming that Rolling Stones; tune "You Can't Always Get What You want." Giving kids everything supports the notion that they're entitled. It's not an attitude we want them to take into adulthood. They grow up not understanding that we earn things. They don't learn to put off gratification.

TRUCE: Offer alternatives—can your kid earn a little money around the house doing a chore you might pay someone else to do (like washing the car) or save up his allowance to contribute?

THE BATTLE: The war room. Your preteen's bedroom looks like the scene of a horrific house-flipping show—pre-flip. You want it cleaned up.

THE VERDICT: Not worth it. It can be a relentless "*Clean up your room, clean up your room...*"

TRUCE: Remind yourself that it's your child's space. Close the door (if it will close) and walk by. It's reasonable though, to have a bottom line. Something like—"*My only rule about your room is that we can't have dirty dishes lying around.*"

THE BATTLE: Mess melee. Dishes on the counter, spaghetti on the floor. *Somebody* ought to pick it up.

THE VERDICT: Worth it. Kids should clean up after themselves; it's part of learning about responsibility and respect. The child's bedroom is private space, but in the communal areas he shares with other family members, he has to pick up his own mess so he learns how to live in a community.

TRUCE: Let your child know (without nagging or anger) that he needs to put away his dishes *before* he races off to his buddy's house. Don't forget to give him a sincere thanks after.

THE BATTLE: Crazy clothes clash. Your kid is in clothes from.....Grandma's attic? With pink hair to match.

THE VERDICT: Not worth it. They're not harming themselves or anyone else. They get to express themselves, rebel and form an identity that speaks to the world about who they are.

TRUCE: Set a reasonable standard. Try something like, "Sure, dress how you want to as long as your hair and clothes are clean and you're covered where you're supposed to be." If your child's style is veering toward the inappropriate, talk with her about the role models she sees in magazines and on TV. Ask what she thinks of characters in movies who dress in particular ways, so she can process and explore her own choices. Let your child know what your family values and boundaries are.

THE BATTLE: Cold war. The wind is howling. Your kid is on his way to the bus stop—coatless.

THE VERDICT: Not worth it. Never battle about the coat! Kids don't get sick from not wearing a coat. The natural consequence will take care of it—they'll feel cold and eventually put on the coat.

TRUCE: If you can stow a jacket in your son's cubby or locker, he can slip it on and be comfortable—without the discomfort or admitting that you were right. You want to think, 'How can I recoup this situation without my child having to lose face?' - especially when it's just before the teen years.

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THE BATTLE: Homework hullabaloo. It's turning your kitchen table into a nightly battleground.

THE VERDICT: Not worth it. Precious hours with your child can slip away wrangling over math sheets. In the early grades, when she's learning homework routines, be there for encouragement. As she gets older, step back and support her as she learns to manage the work herself (before the tough years of high school). Otherwise she could miss the lessons that come from not getting assignments done: disappointing marks, a grumpy teacher, missed chances for more interesting work.



TRUCE: Get on your child's side and problem solve together. Tell her, "You're in school and the deal is you have to do the homework—how are you going to do it?" If she suggests she play before homework, try her solution. If it doesn't work out, talk about other ways to get it done. Keep up your support role—provide a snack, supplies and a spot to work that suits her needs. And be sure to connect with your child—even for just a few minutes—before she hits the books. Children need to know their parents are there for them after being out in the world all day.

THE BATTLE: X-rated resistance. Your son insists you rent him an adult movie or let him play a mature-rated game (and he adds that everyone else's parents do).

THE VERDICT: Worth it. You know what's right for your child—listen to your instincts.

TRUCE: Explain, with confidence, that the rating means the movie is for adults and you won't support this demand. Don't be manipulated into agreeing just to avoid an argument. Our kids need us to set firm boundaries.

THE BATTLE: War of the words. You ask your child to turn off the computer and she tells you to shut up.

THE VERDICT: Worth it. Acknowledge that your child is annoyed, but be clear that respect matters—toward you and others.

TRUCE: If you need time to compose yourself, leave the room. In the moment, stay calm and speak for yourself—use an I-statement: "I'm not okay with that tone of voice." Explain that when she speaks to you, you expect her to do it respectfully. Be careful to consider the background of an outburst—check that you always speak respectfully to your child.

THE BATTLE: Bedtime brouhaha. Your kid goes to bed and reads late into the night. He's grumpy the next day.

THE VERDICT: Not worth it. Likely he's not that tired, and if he reads for two hours instead of half an hour, what the worst thing that can happen? Around age 12, kids' brains begin to change and they become nighttime thinkers.

TRUCE: Establish a time when your child has to be in his room having quiet personal time—no music, no electronics. If he stays up too late, help him sort out the effects of his decision. The next night, have a conversation about it, saying something like, "I noticed you were snappy today. Why do you think that happened?"

THE BATTLE: Friends feud. You're uncomfortable with your kid's friends.

THE VERDICT: Kind of worth it. It's normal for kids to explore and experiment in their friendships. But you have a role to play; you can help your children sort through important characteristics in peer relationships that are so critical.

TRUCE: Check in with your child. Ask how it's going with his friends and what qualities he likes—somebody funny, smart, cool in some way? If he's hanging around with a kid who's bossing him around or getting him into trouble, you might ask, "What do you think about that? How does that fit with the kind of friendships you like?" Be sure to express confidence in your child—that you know he'll choose friends who are respectful of him and that he will stand up for himself when he needs to.

THE BATTLE: Soccer standoff. Your daughter has danced or played soccer for years, but now that she's in late elementary school, she wants to give it up. You're inclined to insist she keep on.

THE VERDICT: Not worth it. If it's a passion or a talent, she'll get back into it. It's common for kids to lose interest around age 13—a lot is happening in their lives at that age.

TRUCE: Encourage your child to try something new—anything to keep her active—but don't insist. If you insist, you're bound to get resistance and that will defeat the purpose of keeping your child active. We can't look at habits teens have and assume things will be like this forever.

Cathie Kryczka. Battles Worth Picking. *Today's Parent*. November 2009. pp 79–84.

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AFTER THE NOISE

How Your Personality Affects The Way You Respond to Unwanted Sound

THE LOUD

Bring in 'da Noise

Extroverted people perform well in the presence of some background noise, and have no problem learning prose passages or solving arithmetic problems with a TV on, studies show. Since extroverts operate in a state of constant under-arousal, they require more stimulation and are better equipped to tolerate noise-induced stress. Not only do they have no trouble getting work done in a loud office, but the noise actually helps relieve their boredom.

Lighten Up

Extroverts may be drawn to a loud bar, but they're in trouble if it's dimly lit. They're most irritated by noise when lighting is low, according to one study. As illumination levels increase, noise annoyance decreases. Higher intelligence correlates with greater noise annoyance at all levels of brightness.

The Last Straw

Noise increases violence in angry people. In a study, subjects viewing a violent film behaved aggressively if there was also noise present. And angry people give more severe shocks to fellow subjects when exposed to uncontrollable noise.

THE QUIET

Space Invaders

Introverts require plenty of personal space, but when noise levels go up, people get closer, making introverts even more uneasy. They're better off scheduling dates and meeting somewhere quiet and private.

The Flipping Point

Introverted people with neurotic tendencies suffer when forced to work in noisy environments. Given their high baseline arousal, low awareness of what's going on around them, and low tolerance for external stimulation, they don't cope well with noise stressors. For them, quiet places like libraries are most conducive to peak work performance.

Personal Bubble

Noise arouses fear and uncertainty, and empathetic people—acutely aware of others and thus better at reading social cues—deal with it by reducing interpersonal distance to comfort themselves and assess proper social responses. In high-traffic public spaces, being less empathetic is a plus because you won't crowd others.

Sophie Chen. After the Noise. *Psychology Today*. December 2009. p.48.

Parenting Coordination in Divorce/Separation—Module III

Eileen Ailon, Hanita Dagan and Terra Taylor attended the Parenting Coordination in Divorce/Separation Course taught by Judge Michael Porter in October 2009. They are among the first group to be Accredited Parenting Coordinator/Arbitrators according to the criteria established by Alberta Family Mediation Society.

*Happy Holidays from
Everyone at Fong Ailon*



SUGGESTIONS/COMMENTS?

Do you have any suggestions for future articles, or just a comment regarding this newsletter? We welcome your feedback. Please contact Wanda Mueller at 403-266-2017 or wmueller@worldpsych.ca.