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## MEDIA RELEASE

# *Raising an Optimistic Child*

By Bob Murray and Alicia Fortinberry

A Proven Plan for Depression-Proofing Young Children—For Life

*'During the past few decades academics have heatedly debated whether the prime determinant of optimism, pessimism and depression is nature or nurture, or more recently a combination. The elements that enable us to be optimistic and experience authentic life-long happiness, true friendships and fulfillment are largely set in place by age six. Yet there is little information for parents of very young kids on how to create the conditions that will foster ongoing optimism and prevent depression.'*

— *Raising an Optimistic Child* by Bob Murray and Alicia Fortinberry

*Raising an Optimistic Child* provides methods to treat or prevent depression, anxiety and sadness in even the youngest children. Professionals and the public are becoming increasingly aware of the problem of childhood depression—*Newsweek* recently reported on research that showed depression in babies as young as two months old. The frightening news about antidepressants and suicide in adolescents has further increased awareness, but has also raised serious doubts about treating depression with medication.

Based on the authors' successful university-sponsored *Uplift Program*, this book gives parents who are concerned about depression, either because they have observed symptoms in their children or have their own experiences with the condition, proven tools to raise a happier child. Other books focus on teaching kids cognitive-behavioral techniques, but these are almost impossible to use with very young children. This book shows how to create a family environment that successfully treats and prevents depression in children of all ages.

Bob Murray and Alicia Fortinberry have taught at major universities and medical centres including Duke University, Tufts University, John F. Kennedy University, the University of South Florida, California Institute of Integral Studies, Royal North Shore Hospital and the Australian College of Applied Psychology in Sydney. They are regular consultants for Fortune 500 companies.

Their acclaimed *Uplift Program* has been teaching thousands of people what they know and live by and is the inspiration for their work. Bob and Alicia divide their time between San Francisco, Tampa and Sydney.

## About the Authors:



**Bob Murray, Ph.D.** is a clinical psychologist. He holds degrees in psychology from New York University and the University of Sydney. His innovative and proven theories and techniques that focus on relationships, depression and evolutionary psychology show up frequently in the media and in professional journals. He consults with multinational companies and government organisations on team building and relationships. He is a member of the International P.E.N., the American Psychological Association and the Association for Humanistic Psychology.



**Alicia Fortinberry, W.S.** is a psychotherapist, corporate trainer and coach. She received an MS degree from the Columbia University School of Journalism and a BA from Sarah Lawrence College. She has written extensively on health and psychology for major national magazines and newspapers. She is also a leading Feldenkrais practitioner and has developed cutting-edge techniques for using movement to enhance well being. She has lectured widely on her own healing from 'treatment resistant' depression, which she attributes in large part to her loving marriage to Bob.

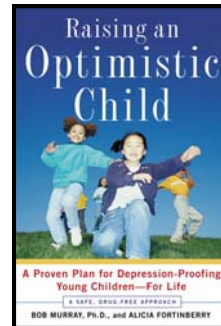
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To request a review copy and/or interview with Bob Murray and Alicia Fortinberry,  
or if you would like more information about *Raising an Optimistic Child*,  
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# Tips for Raising an Optimistic Child

## Seven Steps to Depression-Proof Your Child--For Life

**Step 1.** Don't let your inner saboteur affect your family--identify and change negative parenting patterns.

**Tip:** When you get into an argument with your partner or start yelling at your child, stop and ask yourself: "How am I recreating aspects of my own family of origin? Who from the past am I really fighting with?"

**Step 2.** Determine a healthy balance between work and family--establish a Priority Parenting Plan, and stick to it.

**Tip:** You can't give your kids or colleagues your best if you neglect your own well-being. Take time to be with your partner and friends and for exercise and relaxation, and schedule these activities into your calendars both at work and at home.

**Step 3.** Build a nexus of supportive relationships around yourself and your child--using our Needs-Based Dialogue techniques.

**Tip:** As soon as your child begins to speak, it's very important to encourage her to ask clearly for what she needs. Listening to her needs is part of demonstrating empathy and making her feel she's a valued member of the family.

**Step 4.** Set up a clear process for family decision-making--even young children can learn these skills at the Family Powwow.

**Tip:** To give your child practice in daily decision-making and keep it simple, offer him a choice between specific alternatives such as a fruit juice or yogurt when you're at the store. Don't ask him to figure out a generality, such as "something that is not too expensive."

**Step 5.** Establish rules, roles, and rituals--the essential ingredients of a harmonious family.

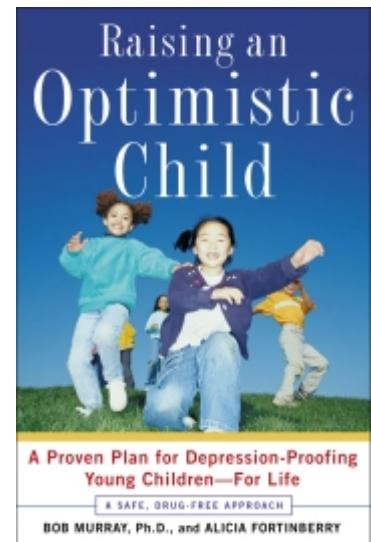
**Tip:** Kids need rules to feel safe, but this doesn't mean they always stick to them. The usual reason rules aren't followed is that parents don't enforce them consistently. First agree on the basic rules with each other, then discuss them with the kids.

**Step 6.** Create a family culture of appropriate praise--how to nurture healthy self-esteem and competence.

**Tip:** In order for children to feel really good about themselves they need praise not only for what they achieve, but also for how they do things and for just who they are. Praise your children at least once a day, and use all three kinds of praise.

**Step 7.** Develop and nurture shared values and beliefs--for family bonding, resilience, and empowerment.

**Tip:** Take the opportunity to discuss values after watching a TV show or reading a book. For example, ask your children what makes a character a good guy or a bad guy.



## Childhood Depression Statistics

The rate of childhood depression is increasing by 23% a year according to a Harvard Medical Center study.

The rate of depression is doubling every 20 years.

1 in 3 American children suffers from depression, 4% of children under 6, according to 2001 National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) statistics. Depression figures are on average similar in Australia.

Preschoolers are the fastest growing market for antidepressants.

There is absolutely no evidence that antidepressants work for young children. (2004 clinical review in British medical Journal found no scientific evidence whatsoever that SSRIs work for preschoolers, or indeed for anyone under eighteen.)

Antidepressants have been shown to lead to suicide in children under 18, warned the US Food and Drug Association (FDA) in 2004.

In Australia suicide is now the most frequent cause of teenage death according to the NSW and QLD Police Commissioner.

Child abuse (a leading factor in depression) is increasing in Australia by 5% per yr over the last 5 years. 33,000 cases nationwide p/yr are reported. The NSW Police Commissioner calls child abuse an epidemic. Every 35 mins a child is being abused somewhere in Australia. 96% of abuse takes place at home, school or in recreational areas.

25% of Australian teenagers will suffer from a mental illness, particularly depression, in any year, according to the Australian Governor General.

Until recently, there were no studies on depression in young children--as recently as early 1990s, the majority of health professionals assumed toddlers didn't suffer from depression, because their symptoms weren't as obvious as older kids and adults.

Many more children who may not display depression symptoms are experiencing events, including childhood trauma, in their crucial first six years that will lead to emotional problems in later life.

FDA (US govt) warns of possible dangers of antidepressants and serious side effects (could lead to child suicide, linked to brain tumors, abnormal bleeding).

Most antidepressants are banned for children in Great Britain.

369% increase in ADD/ADHD drug prescriptions (eg. Ritalin) for young children in the last 5 yrs.

ADD drug side effects include loss of appetite, sleeplessness, psychosis (when taken in large doses), and depression, which can show up years later.

# With Best Intentions

Seemingly innocuous parenting habits may sow the seeds of lifelong depression, say two psychologists

By DANIEL WILLIAMS



PARENTS SHOULD BRACE THEMSELVES before reading this latest book on bringing up children. Sensitive types won't be far into *Raising an Optimistic Child* (McGraw-Hill; 239 pages) before the fear hits that they've

messed up their kids. Husband-and-wife authors Bob Murray and Alicia Fortinberry don't dismiss the role genes play in shaping us. But they focus on the ways parenting can set up a child for a lifetime of joy or misery. "Bad parenting" is a phrase they're not afraid to use, and to their minds it encompasses much more than blatant offenses like physical and sexual abuse. Did you place your child in care before he was ready? Do you praise her more often for what she *does* than who she is? Do you tend to tell him how he *should* feel rather than acknowledge the way he *does* feel? Do you see setbacks as problems rather than challenges? If you answered yes to any of these questions, then—uh-oh . . . this book may have you suspecting that you've condemned your child to mental illness.

It'll be no comfort that, according to the authors, parents don't have long to get it right. By the time a child is six, they argue, experiences have programmed his brain for happiness or depression (though they do go on to suggest that it's possible to tinker with this programming later on). But while it may make some parents feel guilty, *Raising an Optimistic Child* is not, ultimately, a gloomy book. Its message that the power to lay the foundations for fulfillment rests with parents rather than genes or circumstance will be embraced by many as not only uplifting but life changing.

It's unlikely that the authors wanted to upset anyone. Murray, a clinical psychologist, is jovial and courteous in a professorial way; Fortinberry, a therapist, exudes warmth but also a fragility that betrays her

long struggle with depression, won't but not forgotten. Though they're blunt about the consequences of poor parenting, they don't criticize parents. "We live in a society in which damage is rampant," says Fortinberry, "in which it's impossible to bring up kids the way we're meant to bring up kids."

Drawing on their own and others' research, the pair argue that the speed of



**BONDS OF JOY** The secret is "not to be a rock or an island but interdependent," says Fortinberry

societal change has far outstripped that of our evolution as a species. In hunter-gatherer times, parents raised children close to nature and with the support of their tribe. Children's need for constant and unconditional love is unchanged. But few parents can meet it while juggling work and family in a world of hard edges and twisted values.

The result, say the authors, who split

their time between Australia and the U.S., is an epidemic of depression. They accept the more dire estimates about the illness's prevalence—1 in 4 people in those countries. Such numbers bemuse the skeptics, who suspect medicos who quote them of links to the drug industry. But Murray and Fortinberry generally disparage antidepressants. They do believe that a depressed brain is different—physically—to a healthy one, but not as a result of some spontaneous chemical abnormality. Rather, they back the theory that emotional stress in the early years inhibits proper development of certain areas of the brain—specifically, it causes malfunctions within the amygdala and the hippocampus that make the child less able to cope with stress. Eventually (perhaps in childhood, perhaps not till adulthood) anxiety and hopelessness overwhelm him.

*Raising an Optimistic Child* guides parents on how to depression-proof their child's brain. It's not enough to avoid stuffing up in obvious ways—they have to do a lot of things right. The child who forms a close relationship with his parents will grow up to form close relationships with others, and that, the authors contend, is the secret to happiness. "It's kind of dead simple," says Murray. "Human beings are relationship-forming animals. That's what we are. All our genetics gear us toward solid, supportive relationships. It is through these that we survive." Just as strong bonds are the path to avoiding depression, so they're the only escape route from its grip. Fortinberry says her depression was cured by her relationship with Murray. Antidepressants can only mask pain, she adds, while cognitive behavioral therapy is inherently flawed because it assumes that healing occurs from the inside out when really it happens from the outside in.

It will trouble some readers that the authors of a book on the damage that can be done by "bad parenting" are not parents themselves. "In a perfect world we would be," says Fortinberry, "but we felt we had to make a choice between having kids and helping others." Of course it's easier to be a good parent in theory than in practice. But the authors' childlessness doesn't invalidate their points. Theirs seems a fine blueprint for a noble aim: to send out into the world more children equipped to find the beauty all around them. ■