

## If you're stressed so is your kid

**Canadian doctor says many developmental problems in kids tied to parents' stress**

By CATHLEEN F. CROWLEY Staff writer

Updated 8:45 am, Wednesday, September 28, 2011

Science cannot explain the rise of autism, obesity or attention deficit disorders, but one doctor has a theory: parental stress.

"The more stressed parents are, the more developmental problems you will find in kids," said Dr. Gabor Mate, a Canadian physician.

He can't prove it, but nothing else makes sense, Mate said.

Mate will speak on Oct. 14 at a forum that targets improving the health of girls and women who have suffered early childhood trauma. The event, called "Connecting the Dots: The Effects of Adverse Childhood Experiences" is sponsored by Community Cradle, an Albany nonprofit that serves women and babies.

"He is one of the most compelling speakers I've ever heard," said Lucy Pulitzer, executive director of Community Cradle. "Whether you are a health professional or just a human being, you can learn a lot of insights about yourself."

Mate has written four books that explore the connection of mind, body and stress including "In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts: Close Encounters with Addictions" and "Hold on To Your Kids: Why Parents Need to Matter More than Peers."

There is growing research that indicates childhood trauma influences a child's personality and brain development, affecting their mental and physical wellbeing into adulthood.

"The electrical circuitry of a child's brain is programmed by the mother's emotional state," Mate said.

Mate treated drug addicts in downtown Vancouver and found that almost every addict was abused as a child. The physician also cited research where doctors could determine which mothers had postpartum depression by examining the electrical activity of infants' brains. Another study found that low-income children were protected from the negative health effects of poverty if they had attentive and nurturing mothers.

Mate said the key to raising healthy children is a nurturing home and community, but those environments are extinct.

"We are not talking about individual parental failure. We are talking about a broad social phenomenon," Mate said. "We live in a society... that completely destroys the parenting environment and then we have all these kids in trouble and we medicate them."

The parents come home stressed from work, spend little time with their children and are isolated from friends and family.

"The kids have become strangers to them," he said.

Heather Larkin, a professor of social work at the University at Albany, said Mate raises interesting questions that researchers can explore.

Larkin is working with community groups to raise awareness of the effects of early childhood trauma.

"We want to help community members, parents and policy makers understand that adversity can have these costly life consequences and there are things we can do to help," Larkin said.

One parenting technique that Mate wants to end is the "time-out."

"Anytime you undermine a child's safety and emotional security, you are undermining his development," he said. "So why are we teaching parents that they should threaten their kids with the worst threat that you can hold over a child's head, which is 'If you don't please me, I'm going to withdraw my love for you'?"

Reach Cathleen F. Crowley at 454-5348 or [ccrowley@timesunion.com](mailto:ccrowley@timesunion.com).

Parenting advice from Dr. Gabor Mate:

Don't try to parent when you are feeling hostile. Wait for your heart to open up.

Understand the effect of your own childhood experiences.

Do not use any parenting technique that makes a child feel insecure, like time-outs.

Catch your children "being good" and give them positive attention.

Connect with other adults who believe in nurturing parenting.

If you go:

What: Dr. Gabor Mate speaks at a Community Cradle forum

When: 8 a.m.-4 p.m., Oct. 14

Where: Wolfert's Roost, 120 Van Rensselaer Blvd., Albany

Cost: \$35

RSVP: Register before Oct. 6 at 426-1153 or <http://www.communitycradle.org/rsvp.html>