



Research Corner

David A. Crenshaw

I am going to devote this space to a review of an outstanding book I just read that I highly recommend to all my colleagues who haven't read it. The book is called *The Boy Who was Raised as a Dog and other stories from a Child Psychiatrist's Notebook* By Bruce D. Perry and Maia Szalavitz. The book was published in 2006 by Basic Books in New York. The book is highly readable consisting of some of the more interesting and challenging cases that Bruce Perry has encountered. Perry is a remarkable child psychiatrist. I wish there was some way to clone him and make him available in every community around this country. The next best thing is that we can all learn from him, not only from this truly remarkable book but from his Child Trauma Academy website: www.ChildTrauma.org which includes many of his papers and offers on-line courses for the serious student of his work. He has established himself as one of the leading authorities on the neurobiology of child trauma, especially known for his study of children who have been abused and neglected. But even these impressive credentials do not do him justice. You can't help but be deeply moved when reading his book written with an award winning journalist (Szalavitz). His compassion, empathy, and dedication to his child and family patients reminds me of some of the wonderful psychiatrists I have met along the way in the days when insurance companies were still willing to pay psychiatrists for time to listen to and talk to their young patients and not just the minimum possible time it takes to decide on a prescription. In fact, the need to listen to children and their families is a reoccurring theme throughout this book and the harm that can result when the time is not taken to carefully, listen, and appreciate the whole picture is also noted. I nearly was moved to tears of joy when I came to this paragraph: "Of course, medications can help relieve symptoms and talking to a therapist can be incredibly useful. But healing and recovery are impossible—even with the best medications and therapy in the world—without lasting, caring connections to others. Indeed, at heart it is the relationship with the therapist, not primarily his or her methods or words of wisdom that allows therapy to work" (p.232). Perry also observes, "The most traumatic aspects of all disasters involve the shattering of human connections. And this is especially true of children" (231). I found Perry's message to resonate with my own clinical experiences and convictions again and again and can't remember anything I read that ran counter to my clinical experience or philosophy. I was especially thrilled to see him take up the baton regarding an issue that is dear to my heart because the late Walter Bonime, M.D., a psychoanalyst that I studied with for over a decade in New York City, wrote about extensively. Perry, like Bonime, before him sees one extremely unhealthy feature of contemporary Western culture to be the hyper-competitiveness that drives parents to load kids up with such extensive academic, sports, and activity schedules that parents have little time to talk to their children, hug their children, and the children have little time to engage in free play with children in the neighborhood. As a result children are often deficient in essential social skills because they get few opportunities to enjoy playing with other children, resolving conflicts or negotiating compromises. I could go on for pages about the things I loved about the book but some things are better left for you to read. I am sure you will not be disappointed.