Living With Children

By John Rosemond

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The Wall Street Journal recently (3/16/2019) printed a letter-to-the-editor in which Upland, California psychiatrist/psychoanalyst Charlene Moskovitz promotes the alleged benefits of medication and psychotherapy for children diagnosed with depression, anxiety, and ADHD (and, presumably, other emotional and behavioral issues). According to Moskovitz, children who exhibit the behaviors in question may be dealing with "biochemical abnormalities."

She asks, rhetorically, "Would such a child not benefit from having his or her biochemical issues helped with medication and thus build further strengths and coping mechanisms to deal with the other difficult aspects of his life? Does such a child not benefit more fully from the psychotherapy a skilled therapist provides?"

In all fairness to her, Moskovitz is only acting as a spokesperson for the mental health and pharmaceutical industries that have built up around the practice of diagnosing children as young as two with various mental disorders. Said practitioners routinely explain the behaviors in question – depression, anxiety, inattention, impulsivity, defiance, frequent and extreme tantrums, sudden mood swings – in terms of "biochemical imbalances" and prescribe medication as well as various forms of therapy.

In 2009, I published a book on this subject: The Diseasing of America's Children. My co-author – pediatrician Bose Ravenel of Greensboro, North Carolina – and I put forth evidence that these brain-based explanations and therapies have no scientific validity.

Concerning the oft-referenced "biochemical imbalance," for example, since no one has ever quantified biochemical "balance" in the human central nervous system, it is nothing short of disingenuous for medical scientists to lead the public to believe they know what they're talking about when they refer to a CNS imbalance. A leading psychiatrist, well-known in his professional community, has said that the term biochemical imbalance is "nothing but a useful metaphor."

"How is it useful?" one may ask. To sell the public on the unproved notion that psychiatric drugs are the answer to problems of emotion and cognition, that's how. After all, it makes sense to assume that a biologically-based condition requires an intervention that targets the biological fault or dysfunction. The problem is, no one has ever established beyond reasonable doubt that psychiatric disorders are biologically-based. And yes, that includes schizophrenia and manic-depression. The current state of evidence strongly suggests that the term "mental illness" is a misnomer. Moskovitz's fundamental premise – that many of the kids in question have "biochemical abnormalities" – is one that neither she nor anyone else can prove concerning any given child.

Furthermore, the medications in question, although approved by the FDA, have not reliably outperformed placebos in double-blind clinical trials. Unlike placebos, however, they have often-dangerous and even life-threatening side effects. In other words, the question of whether these drugs truly "work" is not fully resolved.

As for psychotherapy with children, and with all due respect to folks like Moskovitz, no study done by an objective third party has conclusively verified the reliable efficacy of any form of child therapy. Over the course of my 40-plus year career, hundreds of parents have told me that putting their kids in talking or play therapy made matters considerably worse.

Several psychiatrists have confirmed to me that what I've written in this column concerning medication and child therapy is known by many of their colleagues… yet the band plays on.

That just might qualify as a mental illness.

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1 Watery: prefix
5 Kind of roll or beat
9 Maxim
12 Monopoly set stack
17 Pt. of EMS
18 Mock gently
19 Sick-bed beverage
20 Take the kinks out
22 Unfair paradigm
25 Mislead
26 French connectives
27 Discord personified
28 Hautboy
29 Be an accessory
30 Sailors' jackets
32 Galena and bauxite
34 Sell to the consumer
38 Dejected
39 Recorder
41 Consummate
44 Soweto's nation: abbr.
46 Stocking mishap
47 Rag
50 Go twelve rounds
51 Produced
54 Has vision problems
57 Celebrity
58 Rowdy card game
59 Scrutinize carefully
60 Author Adams
61 Rowing device
62 Bearded antelope
63 Jealous wife of mythology
64 Pallet
65 Open a present
68 Historian Edward
70 Posed for a picture
72 "__ Sematary" (Stephen King)
74 Feet between first and second base
75 Shouted
76 Hauls
78 "__ the Night" (1985 film)
80 Captain Kirk's diary
81 Spain's cont.
82 Illustration software name
84 Harness section
85 Graceful tree
86 Joke
88 Romantic appointment for four
91 Lackadaisically
92 Plato's lost island: abbr.
93 Eau-de-vie
95 '60s adjective
96 Morse symbol
98 Take another turn
100 Writes bad checks
102 Pretense
104 Uncouth Swift characters
106 Like Galahad's heart
107 "Here goes __!"
111 Wanes
113 Have to have
115 Marceau, e.g.
116 100 cents: abbr.
117 Put a sari on
120 Words starting a schoolyard incident
124 Computer "eraser" key
125 Badge metal
126 Ligeia or Parthenope
127 Stratagem
128 Tree type
129 Wallowing area
130 In excess
131 Emulated

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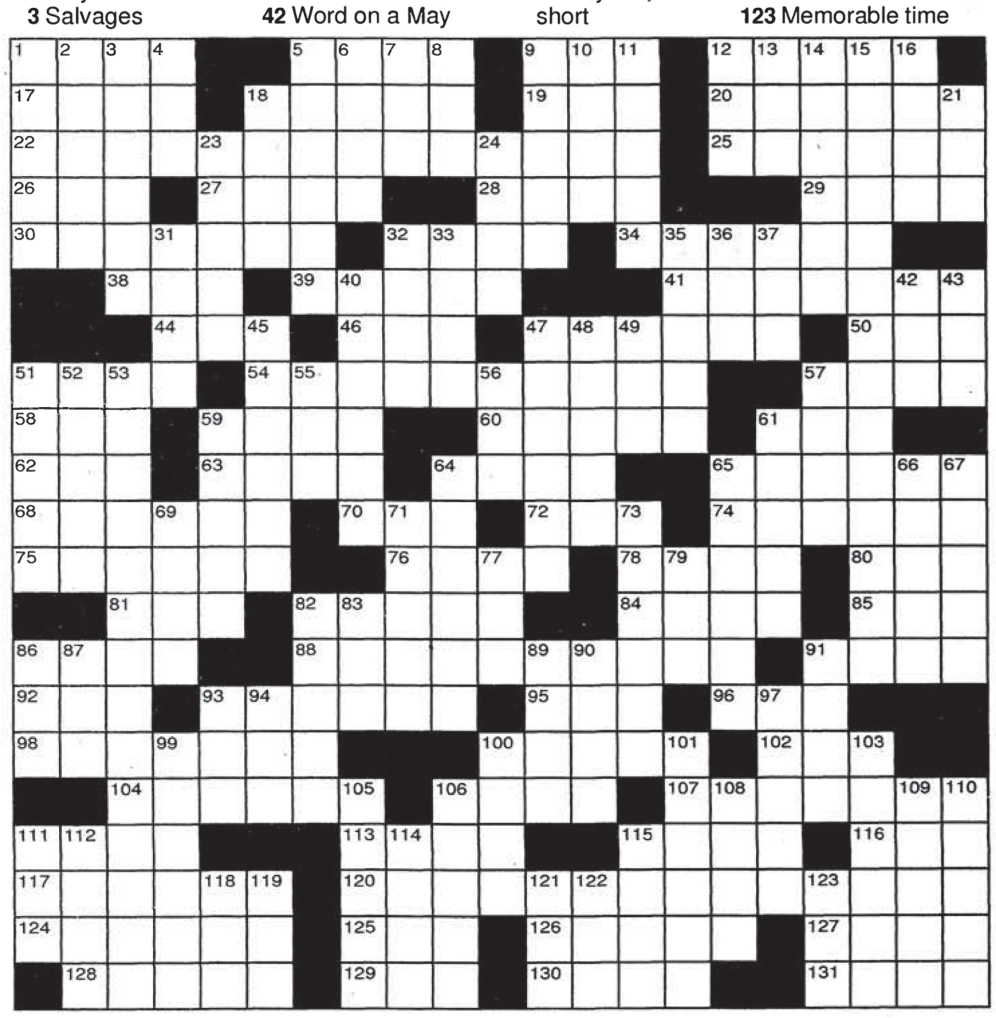
1 Pesach feast
2 Play the ham
3 Salvages
4 Sphere, poetically
5 Halt
6 Sid and Whitey of "Flushed Away"
7 Neighbor of Mex.
8 Fellows
9 Wounds with a dirk
10 Flight: prefix
11 Fisherman's boot
12 Defective firecracker
13 Mariner's dir.
14 Filled pastry
15 Like some shotguns
16 Flank
18 Area: abbr.
21 Gave permission
23 English industrial city
24 Up-and-at-'em type
31 Bus token
32 "Bloom County" penguin
33 Rive
35 Cosmetician Lauder
36 Between Mon. and Wed.
37 Credit card interest abbr.
40 Stadia
42 Word on a May greeting card
43 English Channel feeder
45 Rise
47 Pennsylvania Dutch motifs
48 Put up (with)
49 Nurturance: abbr.
51 Humid
52 "Tomorrow" musical
53 Rally killer, often
55 Jug handle
56 Poison __
57 Forest baby
59 Horse artisan
61 Edible pearl
64 Kaye of "Guys and Dolls"
65 Loosened
66 Coral reef
67 Tribesman of equatorial Africa
69 Color of an editor's pencil
71 Oral
73 Diatribe
77 Solidify
79 Tightrope walker's protection
82 Hersey's bell town
83 "__ Carlos" (Schiller)
86 Luxury car, for short
87 From __ Z
89 Descendant of Mohammed
90 Love too much
91 Cast-wearer's torture
93 Scrooge's sound of disgust
94 Astaire-Rogers destination
97 Western film
99 Huffed and puffed
100 African antelope
101 Twisted Sister frontman Dee
103 Prepare for company
105 Agitated states
106 Showy June bloom
108 Arabian gulf
109 Rope loop
110 Stuck together
111 Announcer Hall
112 La __ Tar Pits
114 Revise copy
115 Kind of pittance
118 Summer in the City of Light
119 Ulm article
121 Beantown musical gp.
122 Tyler of "The Incredible Hulk"
123 Memorable time