



Chiropractic Newsletter

Well-Being

The Stories We Tell Ourselves

When your child is doing something that makes no sense to you, you make up a narrative to help make sense of it. Sometimes this story is helpful. Sometimes it's not. We all do this. It happened to us when we were growing up, too—our parents made up stories about our behaviors.

Maybe you've had the experience of dreaming when you're hearing a noise in real life and it becomes a part of your dream. Earlier this week, I dreamed I was on a cruise and I had a feast set before me. Right before I could take the first bite, I woke up and realized my night-owl 19-year-old chef son was cooking in the middle of the night (again) and it smelled heavenly. (I didn't get to eat what he was cooking, by the way.) We also make up stories about our kids when we only have some of the information. It's normal. We all do it.

The stories we make up, to fill in the details that we don't have, can have a profound impact on our relationships.

Months of Crying

Some time ago, a mother came to see me. She had a baby who had been screaming for three months. The story she had made up was that she wasn't a good mother. That idea became part of every interaction she had with her baby, and became a negative feedback loop between them. Her baby cried, and she couldn't soothe her, so she felt overwhelmed, and the baby cried more...

When the mother finally understood that her daughter was showing mom the story of her experience, the mom was able to connect with her daughter. It shifted



their whole interaction.

If that story had continued on, they would have really struggled in their relationship. We were able to change the story and the path of their relationship. I followed up when her daughter was 1, and they were thriving.

Absentee Issues

Recently, I spoke to Grace, the mother of a teen who hasn't been going to school every day. She told me that her daughter was experiencing a lot of anxiety. Grace, like most mothers in this situation, had made up a story that her daughter didn't care about school or her future. Grace had given up a lot for her daughter to go to the school she was attending, and then her daughter didn't care enough to even get out of bed to go. It's certainly understandable that she would come to that conclusion!

Grace and I spent a little while talking about what it was like to have a daughter who was really struggling. And then we talked about her daughter's experience, and what it's like to have anxiety. We explored how her daughter was finding ways of dealing with the anxiety with the tools she has available—staying in

bed, being on screens— the very things that were driving Grace crazy. We talked about how to add in some more support for her anxiety, and for naming that her daughter actually cared a lot and was using tools from her own tool kit to try to help herself. That changed how Grace was feeling, and the story she had about her daughter changed almost instantly, so that they were back on the same team.

Shifting the Story

When the story you're telling yourself about your child and yourself is helpful, things have more space to grow. When the story you're telling yourself keeps you stuck, there's room for the story to shift.

There is no one right way to parent. There is no one perfect solution to any problem we face, in life or as parents. But you can learn the tools to connect more deeply with yourself and your family, so you can find your way in connection and with respect.

—Rebecca Thompson Hitt

*Appearing in Pathways to
Family Wellness Magazine Issue 66*

