Our pets on Capitol Hill are some of the best cared for animals in all of DC. Our pets are in our holiday photos and even mentioned in our wills. We buy them clothing, high quality foods, and accessories including doggles (Doggles = Goggles for dogs. Yeah, that’s right). So, why is it that when it comes to dealing with their most common health problems we are reluctant to take action? What is the most ignored disease that affects all of our pets? Dental disease.

George Washington had some crummy teeth and, while his false teeth were not actually made of wood (they were carved from ivory), it is certain that his dog’s teeth were not much better. Our cat’s and dog’s teeth are not that different than our own and they can develop tartar and gingivitis just like we do. Bacteria in the mouth form a film of dental plaque around the teeth. This eventually hardens into mineralized tartar. Then, the bacteria associated with the tartar moves below the gum line and can result in gingivitis and/or cause the bone root to become weak leading to eventual tooth loss. Name: Periodontal disease. Cure: Prevention!

Daily brushing is the best way to prevent the build up of plaque and tartar, but who wants to come home after a long day of work to wrestle with your cat as you try to clean its teeth. However, the process may not be as daunting as you think. We have clients that brush their pet’s teeth every day and the positive results are obvious. Commercial toothpastes are available at your vet’s office or from local Capitol Hill stores. The toothpaste is flavored, typically beef, tuna, or chicken (human toothpaste can upset dog’s or cat’s stomachs). Start simply: Feed your pet a small amount of the toothpaste before dinner to get them accustomed to the taste. Also, while relaxing with your pet, gently pull back their lips and look at their teeth both to get familiar with the layout of the teeth and to get them used to this type of activity. After a week or two, you can start brushing their teeth for one to two minutes at a time before you encounter any protesting. Should you do this every day? Yes. Will you? No. The compromise: Do it as often as you can and know that every session helps.

Let’s face it, not all pets will be good candidates for teeth brushing. Luckily there are other ways to prevent periodontal disease. Feeding foods that encourage the mechanical cleaning action of the teeth are helpful. Studies have shown that certain dry dog foods/prescription dry foods can assist in prevent tartar buildup (Hill’s t/d, Royal Canin Dental Hygiene). Also, bones or chew toys can help keep dogs teeth clean, but pets should be closely monitored when...
Mindful Parenting
Becoming More Attuned to Your Child

BY DEBBY RAGER AND RONDA BRESNICK HAUSS

Young children have a natural ability to be “in the moment.” They are able to focus on a toy, their food, a song, a book and relish what they are doing with full attention. Children also come into the world without judgment of themselves or of others. This is not to say that they don’t have preferences, or that they don’t experience frustration and worry, but they start off life open to others and to their own capabilities without prejudice.

Applying the world with full attention and lack of judgment, while innate in human beings, often shifts as we age. As adults, we are engaged in busy lives and it is often hard to take the time to slow down and bring patience and attention to any given moment. We are also full of judgment, of ourselves and of each other. How well we are parenting or how well others are parenting often drive us to be judgmental. Constantly judging our parenting choices and our children, we seek to compare with others for reinforcement and validation.

What Is Mindfulness?
The concept of mindfulness has become more popular in the western world as the practice of yoga and meditation has increased. In the book, Everyday Blessings: The Inner Work of Mindful Parenting, Jon and Myla Kabat-Zinn define mindfulness as “moment-to-moment non-judgmental awareness. It is cultivated by refining our capacity to pay attention, intentionally, in the present moment, and then sustaining that attention over time as best we can. In the process, we become more in touch with our life as it is unfolding.”

Mindful Parenting
Mindful parenting is about being aware and present with all that the parenting role brings, accepting it and finding time to be attentive and attuned to your child. Being mindful means practicing being present in each moment and with each task of the day. If we think of all the tasks that parenting brings, some are wonderful and some are not so glorious. We have those great moments -- a breathtaking smile, a nuzzle on the shoulder, the “firsts” of so many milestones; but we also have the diaper changing, the endlessly crying when it’s time to sleep.

Being mindful is not an attempt to create one more thing to do. Instead it’s an opportunity to take a deep breath, slow down and be there for all the moments that are happening. Mindfulness is a practice in which we connect to our child and bring our full awareness to their presence.

With our demanding lives, we can’t always spend as much time with our children as we wish. Parenting mindfully can take place both when you are physically present with your child, but also when you are away from them. For example, by giving yourself a moment at work to stop, breathe and to enjoy the photo of your child on your desk is an act of being mindful. It allows you to slow down and to feel a sense of connection to your child. Instead of having feelings of guilt at being away, you can shift those moments to feeling joy and pride. Reducing guilt and stress will also make the moments you have with your child easier and more precious.

Research in child development highlights the need for children to form strong attachments - children need at least one caretaker who is responsive to their needs in order to gain a sense of trust and security in the world. In the first year of life, it is ideal to have a caregiver who is there in the moment and responsive to all a child’s needs so that the child internalizes that the world is a safe and secure place. However, the need for a trusted and responsive adult is always a necessity for children even if the quantity and quality of their needs shift. Mindful parenting is not just about being the only one who is there for your child, but can also be cultivated for the person who is there when you need to be away. Whoever the caretaker is to your child in addi-

“Mindful parenting calls us to wake up to the possibilities, the benefits, and the challenges of parenting with a new awareness and intentionality, not only as if what we did mattered, but as if our conscious engagement in parenting were virtually the most important thing we could be doing, both for our children and for ourselves.”

- Everyday Blessings: The Inner Work of Mindful Parenting

- The authors are owners of the Atlas Veterinary Hospital at 1326 H St. N.E. (www.facebook.com/atlasvetdc). ★

- Debby Rager is a licensed clinical social worker in private practice on Capitol Hill. She offers assessment and therapeutic services to children, teens and families. Using a cognitive behavioral approach, she incorporates her experience in play therapy, sand tray and yoga to provide an integrated modality to meet the needs of each individual. Debby specializes in work with grief, trauma, and attachment. She can be reached at 202-505-4325.

- Ronda Bresnick Hauss is a licensed clinical social worker and the founder of the Quiet Waters Center for Trauma, Stress and Resilience on Capitol Hill. She uses an integrative & holistic approach to psychotherapy – addressing the connection between the mind, body and spirit through the use of traditional talk therapy, hypnosis, meditation, visualization, and creative, non-verbal techniques. She can be reached at 202-544-5050. ★

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