

Why Does Having Children Often Destroy Marriages?

© 2017 BY John W. Travis, MD, MPH, Wellness Associates

For details, see ConnectedAndThriving.org for the Connected Couples—Thriving Families Project’s interactive version of this paper, along with live links and further resources.

Executive Summary: The Crisis At-a-Glance

The first steps in resolving a crisis are to:

- See it
- Name it
- Understand it

Then we are better able to do something about it.

One crisis is an **epidemic of failed relationships** shortly after a child is born. A major cause is **Male Postpartum Abandonment Syndrome or MPAS**. Naming and analyzing the crisis can lead to preventive and remedial steps that a family can take.

The challenges partners face during pregnancy and after a child is born are intense. When a couple isn’t fully supported or resourced within an extended family or community, it is difficult (maybe even impossible) to meet everyone’s needs. The recently instituted and now failed **nuclear family disaster** (only 1 or 2 parents with no adult relatives nearby) has proven to be far from optimal for raising children.

Having a baby results in parents moving through many phases of growth: preparation, transition to parenthood, healing re-stimulated old wounding, tending the couple’s relationship, and finding balance in a new life.

Families experience massive disconnection due to unmet needs from too little support. All too often the father leaves emotionally or physically (MPAS). The more we can understand and address this challenge and nurture new families through the early years, the more we can expect to give families, and ultimately our communities, a better chance to thrive. Parents need a community or a tribe to support a healthy family.

Struggling families, and those professionals supporting them, can hold onto hope with the knowledge that the MPAS epidemic can be healed through creating or restoring secure connections with significant family members. For families to thrive, we need many people involved with each child, and more support surrounding families.

With proper support, a couple can stay connected, while individuals tend to their personal growth work and heal any childhood trauma that surfaces with parenthood. It is vital that parents and children be strongly attached.

For this transformation to community/tribal support to occur requires **all of us**. Helping professionals working with new parents are the ideal guides to help families open up to support and direct them to appropriate [resources](#) (see listings on website).

The MPAS Crisis



A Destructive Epidemic

The first steps in resolving a crisis are to:

- See it
- Name it
- Understand it

Then we are better able to do something about it.

Why do so many couples separate—physically or emotionally—soon after the birth of their first child? This silent epidemic of failing partnerships is reaching epic proportions.

Approximately 30% of couples split up within a few years after the birth of their first child. And upwards of 90% separate emotionally, along with a plummeting sexual connection. Having children seems to destroy marriages—especially in nuclear families.

The introduction of a baby taxes a nuclear family system (only 1 or 2 parents with no adult relatives nearby) beyond capacity. It's impossible to meet everyone's needs with so few people in a household.

The extreme stress leads to further disconnection, and often to separation, divorce, and broken families. Usually it is the dad who seems to disappear, because the mother stays with the child, usually in the family home. But it's really the partnership that has disappeared.

The Gottman Institute reports up to 2/3 of couples are unhappy after baby comes home. This statistic was translated by the media (Huffington Post) as tongue-in-cheek advice to “divorce while baby is young”—an all too common trend.

If you split right after a baby's born, not only will your baby be too young to hold that against you, or even have memories of it later on, but you were going to be sexually frustrated and emotionally distant in your marriage anyway. Honestly, I just can't think of a better time—can you? —Huffington Post

Why? Why grow a family just to separate and end up alone with child, or just alone? What if there is another way? What if you *can* stay connected and enjoy the early years of parenting, even *thrive*?! You *can*!

How MPAS Develops

Because of cumulative unmet needs (see *Roots of Disconnection*, below), many boys grow up looking for a mother-connection they never had. If lucky, the man finds and mates with “Her,” thinking he is now complete and fully connected.

Once the honeymoon has passed, distance grows. Our disconnected culture has few resources to teach maintenance of bonds or communication skills—particularly for men. The resulting lack of connection, security, or communication skills, leaves men with inadequate resilience—especially when massive changes occur in their primary relationship, caused by the arrival of an infant.

When a man's first child is born into a nuclear family, he often feels like he must go out and earn more money to support his wife and her new "lover." He can't consciously admit this, even to himself, but this is how his own little boy may feel inside.

He craves the attachment he is witnessing between his baby and partner, which he likely didn't even experience himself, as an infant. And now he's saddled with even more responsibility, as well as a loss of the attention he's used to getting from his partner. This can be a devastating experience for a man at a time when he is expected to be joyful at the arrival of his child.

These losses, stacked upon the wildly unreasonable demands on parents attempting to raise children in a nuclear family, creates a stress that so often leads to disappearing dads. This is made even worse if one or both parents are working outside the home.

Breakdown is imminent.

Roots of Disconnection

Our culture is in breakdown. Really the whole Western industrialized culture is impacted by the separation of our family and disappearance of community structures. We are suffering from an epic state of disconnection, violence, addiction, depression, emotional pain, crises, and chaos. A lot of hurting is going on in our culture. People who are hurting, hurt other people.

To understand this phenomenon more fully, check out the book, *Why Dads Leave*. It describes many of the types of the disconnection that can be activated within a couple, especially when roots are newly forming for an addition to the family—the sweet and innocent infant. That little one can stir things up!

When a family adds a new member, the dynamics shift dramatically and can trigger old wounds, old traumas (including hidden or misunderstood generational trauma), and unhealthy dynamics like co-dependency and individual dysfunction.

In our "advanced," industrialized culture, the mother/baby unit has become far removed from the center of the community. In fact, mother/baby units are often expected to be quiet and relatively unseen, with nursing corners hidden away and play areas, if available, off to a side or in a corner. While birth can be a celebration, caring for mother/baby and caring for growing families is neither celebrated nor prioritized. With unawareness of the mother/baby unit as the center of a society, the needs of the mother and baby can't be met, and the needs of the father fall even farther behind.

The societal impact on mothers without adequate resources is huge. As a result, far too many new parents slide down the pain side of the Connection Continuum.

A dad leaves a family emotionally or physically for a vast range of reasons—at the core because his needs are not met. Let's look further into how this happens.

To understand the whole picture, we'll start with an historical perspective.

Our Mammalian History

Mammals arose 60 million years ago, after the extinction of the dinosaurs. Mammals were unique in that they nursed and nurtured their young, slept together, and mostly lived in bands.

Humanoids arose in the last million years. They cared for their young in the same ways.

Humanoids had a new, developing *mammalian brain*, formed atop the old reptilian brain, and began to experience emotions, and intuition, as well as a drive to connect with others.

It's the unique ability of this *feeling-brain* (the *limbic brain*) that creates resonance between individuals and

ultimately fosters bonding. The limbic brain is what draws us to one another and regulates much of our behavior, especially our social behaviors.

As a result, the most successful emerging humans lived in tribes and villages, and maintained extended families. ***Collective social structures are actually requirements for optimal human development and secure connection.*** Because humans lived closely together, the benefits of community were available for most of our time on earth—the past 200 millennia—and we were able to thrive.

One or two parents do not a village make. —Scott Noelle, EnjoyParenting.com

Wrong Turns



The Nuclear Family Experiment Disaster

Unfortunately the industrial revolution eroded much of the village way of life, forcing families and villages to break down into smaller living units, housed in squalid urban tenements, working long hours away from family members.

More recently, the mobility of jobs further tore apart what may have remained of extended families, with close relatives often living hundreds of miles apart. This aberration—which John Travis, MD, MPH, originally called the nuclear family experiment—is only a little over 100 years old, yet is now seen as normal. At this point he calls it the nuclear family *disaster*.

It is not healthy. Far from it.

From decades of wellness research, and especially infant wellness, Dr. Travis asserts it takes a minimum of 3.87 adults per infant to adequately meet a family’s needs. Doing this math for a nuclear family is very simple—and sad.

Even the most basic care, like holding an infant, requires actual human arms. And constant motion/rocking of being held, like that experienced in the womb, is needed for an infant to feel worthy, welcome, safe, connected, and loved. It’s also required for optimal nervous system (brain) development.

This devastating shortage of arms in the nuclear family disaster has seriously impacted the “in arms” period of development (also referred to as the “fourth trimester” or the primal period). Our feeble efforts to make up for this arms shortage has led to a variety of damaging substitutes such as cradles, cribs, prams, strollers, high chairs, and walkers. These lifeless containers are a far cry from human arms, and ultimately anchor us in a permanent sense of separation/separateness—a conjoint anxiety as we grow up.

Additionally, the cultural discouragement of breastfeeding has led to further disconnection, with the substitution of blankets or stuffed animals to replace the comfort of a warm breast and healthy, tasty mother’s milk.

Breastfeeding comforts as much as it nourishes. Historically, the normal weaning age for humans was between 4 and 7 years. Today most babies, if they are breastfed at all, are weaned at 6 weeks to 6 months, despite the World Health Organization recommendation of 2+ years. Many mothers must return to jobs outside the home and so are unable to see or hold their infants for long periods of time, and nursing becomes impossible.

Another destructive factor is sleeping alone, something that massively disconnects an infant. A baby will eventually give up crying (“crying ‘it’ out”) for connection and slip into despair and resignation. This is mistakenly mislabeled “self-soothing.” An infant cannot self-soothe. Infants *are* dependent and become dis-regulated when left alone. A part of their nervous system will shut down. Sleeping alone is neither normal nor

healthy for an infant.

Making Matters Worse

Another misstep in our history is routine medicalized birth. Within just the past 80 years, we have created a birthing system that intervenes unnecessarily about 90% of the time. Home births are well documented to be safer and far better for the baby's first experiences, but so much fear of birth has been created that few women realize this. While crucial for the high-risk, 5-10% of births, these same interventions disrupt the normal bonding process of birth for mom and baby and lead to birth trauma during most medicalized births.

Today's family life with a newborn is more than strained, considering the mostly hidden trauma that modern birth brings to the whole family, including restimulated memories by the parents and the lack of community support.

The lack of constant movement, touch, and the familiar scent of mother disrupts an infant's experience of safety, trust, and love. This disruption leads to a disconnected child with a fundamental breakdown of normal, healthy brain development.

The demands of an infant wear out the mother and father physically and emotionally, further eroding the couple's connection—it takes a village.

We ignore our mammalian heritage at our own peril.

While we don't consciously remember our earlier devastating losses, or intellectually "notice" our deep longing for connection, our bodies never forget them.

This great, deep "missing" (a painful longing for unmet needs to be met) directly results in the depression, violence, addiction, chronic illness, fundamentalism, materialism/greed, MPAS and ecocide we see all around us today.

Having many people involved in the life of a new baby is absolutely essential. It is how we are built to live. We must remember and honor our mammalian roots to return to a state of individual and collective health.

Recreating villages is crucial to solving this systemic cultural breakdown.

<p><i>"The currency of wellness is connection" —John W. Travis</i></p>

Hope for a Solution



Living into a New Possibility

A family challenged by **disconnection** suffers. When a family has only one or two adults, or some other configuration of a nuclear family, there is a high likelihood that its members' basic needs will not be met.

Nearly all parents will strive to meet the basic needs of food, clothing, and shelter. However, other needs, like affection and appreciation, require vulnerability and an extension of one person toward another person – partner or child. Weary parents are less likely to be able to foster close contact, so connection-based needs can go unmet.

When a family's needs for connection go unmet, stress can cause disease and other symptoms of compromised health in the physical, emotional, mental and social realms. Nuclear family life can be unhealthy and not very sustainable.

Relief lies in forming deeper connections:

- Connection with your self (which can get lost as you become a parent).
- Connection with your partner.
- Connection with your child(ren).
- Connection with your family and close friends.
- Connection with your extended family and friends.
- Connection with your social circle, a larger community—ideally one with a fulfilling purpose and joy.

Parents need a tribe to create a healthy family.

To be able to tend to their connection needs of all kinds, parents need support from outside the nuclear family.

Because the majority of us don't live in larger families, we need to create a new reality. The MPAS epidemic is at a point where we're not likely going to fix it. We can't go backward and do it differently—we need to move forward, living into something that represents a shift in our fundamental ways of life, especially for families who are just having their first baby.

So we inquire, “What's missing that could generate more love and connection within the family, especially between parents, and then more connection and support with a greater community?”

As helping professionals who are supporting parents during this critical time, you can help parents understand what is happening, and often avoid upcoming pitfalls—or point them toward opportunities and solutions that heal.

Let's explore a different kind of family living. Let's look beyond the nuclear family structure, where a single parent or couple is trying to figure it all out on their own. And let's work together to help parents find their way to thriving.

The Many Layers of Thriving

A thriving, growing family has successful layers. For starters, it makes a big difference when a child is wanted, and a couple is prepared for the arrival. The family starts with a firm foundation.

If a community is strong and is prepared to welcome the child and help support the family, it has another healthy layer.

Once the baby arrives, the parents go through phases of growth—each of which must be tended. Here are a few of the main layers:

- **Preparing** the relationship, preparing the home, preparing a community.
- **Transitioning to becoming a parent**—physically, emotionally, mentally, spiritually, socially. This is an intense effort for both parents.
- Doing **personal healing and growth** work, as each parent grows into being a mother or father.
- **Tending** to the growing and changing **relationship**.
- **Discovering** what a new **balance** might be between self, partner, child, work, family, friends, and other interests.

Each layer requires time and attention. All layers can benefit from a supportive community.

There's no such thing as other people's children. —Hillary Clinton

A New Kind of Tribe



Historically, humans have always lived in clusters—extended families, tribes, and close-knit small villages and towns. Since the industrial revolution, our tribes have been splintered across the country or even across the globe.

Today's healthy tribe may look different from the way it did when families lived together more effectively. It's time we consider some new possibilities for what a tribe can be:

- Some families have an active **neighborhood community** where families get together for meals, play and other activities.
- Some find community within a **church**.
- Some have a **group of close friends** who stay connected as one or more partnerships in the group of friends shifts into parenthood.
- Some families find allies within a favorite **recreation or activity**.

If none of these apply, many parents find themselves feeling disoriented, alone, isolated and painfully without community support at this most critical juncture. This is where the breakdown between a couple can happen and when support is needed most.

As a family expands to include children, it's critical to include more people in the family. To define their tribe, a family needs to a) know what support they would like, b) to be open to support and c) to find or create the support with loving, willing people around them. The community, in turn, needs to be ready to answer the call and nurture the growing families. This transformation needs all of us. As a helping professional, you can act as a guide to help families who are open up to support and then also direct families to available [resources](#).

Which will it be?



Since we're presently far from a tribal structure, a good place for couples to start is to be willing to notice where support could be helpful, and find guidance toward getting it. Given the epidemic of MPAS, it is essential to keep in mind that dads' needs are critical, too. Connecting with dad, and supporting dad, can be another way to nurture the family: mom/babe/dad. Any supportive community to the parents makes a difference.

If members of a community are aware of a new expanding family, ideally they will ask regularly what they can

do to support them. People may have to ask more than once before the family will accept their support. They may also need to be reassured that the family won't be judged for a messy house, messy hair, or for being not such great hosts or company. A growing family needs to be taken care of, not to be hosting guests. This can take longer than the entire first year.

The second simultaneous step is for a couple to stay closely connected. In order to tend their relationship, a couple needs to have support with their child(ren) so they can have time together. To get healthy support, additional caregivers need to be close to the children. The solutions are also layered.

Parents need to spend time:

- taking care of themselves,
- tending one another and their relationship,
- being with their child(ren) independently to establish and maintain close bonds.
- living together as a family, [start each bullet with an ing]
- building community ties they can trust.

For most families, this is a shifting time where the social web needs to be actively grown, nurtured, and sometimes even reconfigured. Going from life as a couple into life as a family means new rhythms, new constraints on time, and a lot of uncertainty.

The first few years can be full of constant change. As soon as the couple establishes a rhythm and routine, the baby grows and changes—along with everything else about life. The couple may not even know what they need—they may not know what kind of help to request.

Societies that are most successful generally revolve around the mother/baby unit, or the growing family if there is more than one child. The whole tribe or clan considers themselves a growing family when a new baby is born into the community.

In a thriving society, all families take care of the kids, even if they aren't born into one particular pair of arms.

There's no such thing as "other people's children."—Hillary Clinton

All kids belong to all of us. If this is the case, how does a community successfully support a growing family? How can it form a tribe around a growing family, or how can a growing family generate a community around themselves?

Sometimes families are so private that it takes quite an effort to build trust with another family in order to watch the child when parents are tired or need a break, or to even know what support could help.

It's important for growing families to know that ***it's ok to ask for help***. Families can begin by making a list of needs that would make life easier and more enjoyable, and a list of people they know. This is the start of asking for assistance. Then, either on their own or with support, they can begin making connections with people who can meet some of their identified needs.

But How?

How do we build community?

This is a huge question in our culture today. How do we create relationships that feel safe when we are vulnerable and need support?

Members of a tribe all need to:

- spend time together,
- ask for help and say "Yes" to helping/supporting each other,
- share authentic selves—responsibly and with ownership of the "good" and the "bad," the easy and the tough, the light and the dark sides of self.
- do their personal growth work,
- mature together.

When we take these steps to build connections with ourselves and one another, each member of the "tribe" is

more resourced and able to offer their unique contributions. Without enough support, suffering is inevitable. Here are *some* of the many **Benefits of Community** for each of the various layers of community surrounding a family.

For Individuals (Everyone):

- **Learning.** Being connected means a greater opportunity to learn from each other, tap each other's wisdom and help each other thrive.
- **Connections.** By being more closely interconnected, each member of the community is able to enjoy a wider, richer network of resources, wisdom, friendship, and support.
- **Creativity and inspiration.** Connections with different people of varying ages, backgrounds, careers, etc., expose individuals to new ideas and new ways of looking at things. This cross-pollination of ideas can be a great source for ongoing creativity and inspiration.

For Parents

- **Practical help.** An extended community surrounding parents can help with daily tasks like running errands, cooking, shopping, homework, transport to sports, etc. Two or four hands are not enough to meet the needs of an entire family. When many hands work together, the load becomes easier to manage and the days become more joyful.
- **Wisdom.** When many people work together to parent (including older siblings), each “parent” will offer their own way of doing things—often introducing new ways to the primary parents. New perspectives, passed-down learning and shared folkwisdom are some of the ways community can make life easier for parents. For brand-new parents, this can be a wonderful way to avoid painful mistakes, though sometimes the only way to learn is by doing. The wisdom of others becomes a gift of choice for new parents—take the best and leave the rest.
- **Social Connection and Love.** Many parents run from home to school to work to school to home to bed to school again—and again. Having a community of people to see and connect with in the mix of otherwise routine days can make life feel more fulfilling and meaningful. We are social creatures who need love and connection.

For the Parent Couple

- **Time together.** When a community surrounds parents, the couple has more time together alone. For a couple to have regular date nights and also rest in the knowledge that community members are growing sustainable bonds with the child(ren), this support nourishes them and allows them to deepen their connection.
- **Reflection.** Community members can remind members of a couple-ship who they are. These reflections can be a source for ongoing nurturing of them, and a valuable contribution during times of conflict if/when a couple is struggling to remember the good.
- **Support.** Similar to reflections, others in a community can offer much-needed support and guidance as a couple grows. The joys and challenges of life often require support to move gracefully through life. Support can make all the difference.

For Kids

- **Witnessing.** As children grow, they crave to be seen for who they are, what they are learning, what they do well, and what's unique about them. When more people know a child, the child gets greater affirmation and reflection of themselves, which can result in increased self-esteem, more confidence and greater mental health. What a wonderful foundation and benefit arising out of community.
- **Discovering gifts.** Within community, there are many (and deep) needs and opportunities of expression and contribution. Children can explore meeting various needs of others in the community, and as they do, they can explore their own natural gifts.

- **Establishing values.** Being raised in a community exposes children repeatedly in different ways to certain values. A community can actively cultivate a set of desired values as they nurture one another, create the community experience, and support each other in daily life.

For Community Members

- **Belonging.** We all crave belonging. When we have others around us who relate to us as important, a vital basic need is met, allowing us to function at a higher level. Plus it's just one of the best feelings to know we're a part of something. To be-long is to live-long and happily.
- **Authenticity/Acceptance.** Within an environment of belonging, community members can experience a sense of safety, which can allow a more real version of themselves to show up for interactions. Within a safe community, members have the space to truly be themselves and establish more intimate relationships with friends and loved ones because more of the real person is accessible.
- **Growth.** When many come together, it's inevitable that conflict will arise. Healthy conflict is the life-blood of community and provides valuable opportunities to learn better forms of communication, conflict resolution, , boundary setting, forgiveness, acceptance, unconditional love for self and others, and ultimately, personal growth.

For the Extended Community:

- **Strength/Sustainability.** Healthy and growing communities represent the very essence of sustainability. When community members can rely on each other and are working together with common goals, individuals become healthier and stronger—and more able to give their best. When many are working together to give their best and take care of each other, what comes out of the community as a whole is more stable and productive. If we work toward having many sustainable, strong communities, we will see a sustainable and stronger global community.
- **Health.** As described above, people caring for each other results in better cared-for or healthier people. Healthy people make a healthy community; healthy communities make a healthy planet. Health can be physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, and even social, within a tiny circle (like a family) or a larger one like a school, a church or even a town.
- **Resources.** Many people working together represent a wide network of resources. For example, one person may know about home repairs, while another may know about healthy nutrition or websites.

One of the resources offered through the Connected Couples—Thriving Families network is the community-building work of Bill Kauth and Zoe Alowan. These two, in conjunction with their community, have created brilliant tools for groups, families and individuals wanting to create deeper ties. Beyond their book, *We Need Each Other*, they offer consulting and trainings to individuals and groups.

Other community-building ideas are: shared meals with multiple families, finding local families or individuals to share housework or building projects together, each family receiving assistance one day of the month (or quarter) from the whole group. Collaborating this way among three other families takes four days a month or quarter. While that may seem like a lot, dedicated time and attention is one of the essentials to deepening connection.

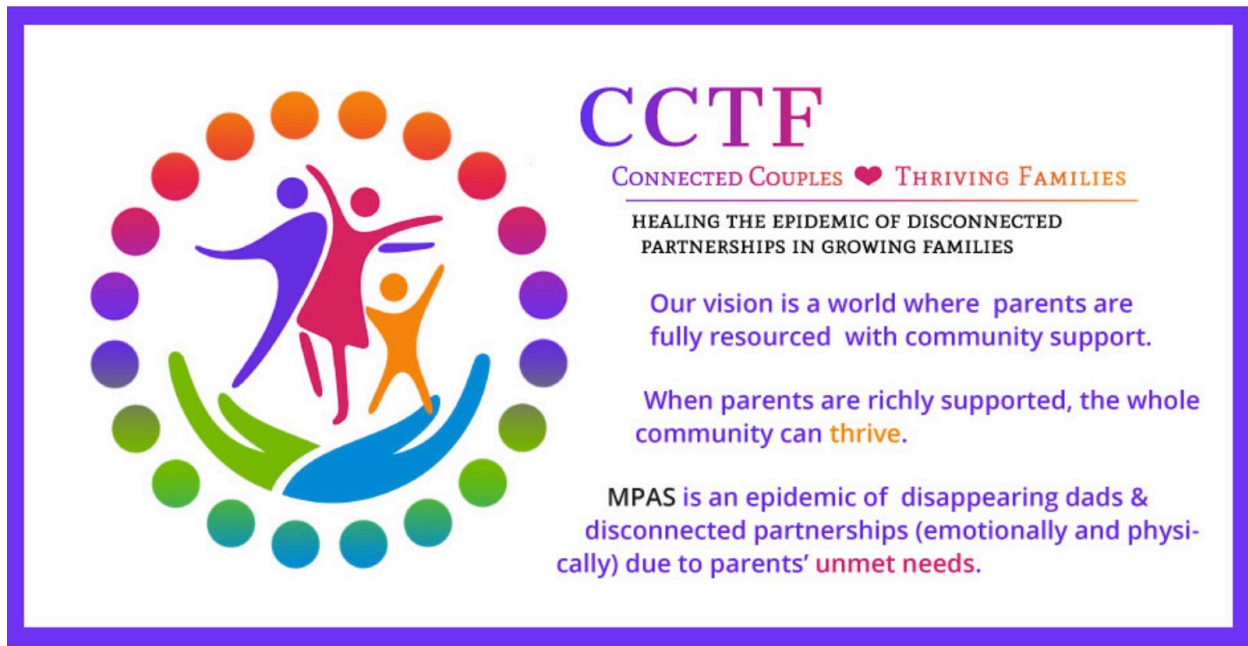
How it happens is up to you. Many hands make light work.

One important step is to recognize that our society and our communities have a collective challenge. We call it disconnection, entwined with MPAS.

We need to revitalize our partnership/parent-couple relationships—and build community around them.

Let's together take the first step and turn this epidemic of disappearing dads on its head—let's grow together toward a *thriving future for families*.

Addenda—Connected Couples—Thriving Families Project



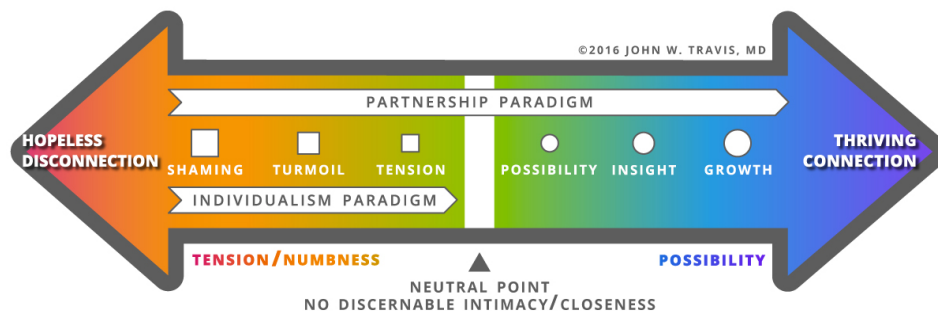
The mission of this project is to educate and inspire 10,000 family-support professionals around the world to heal the epidemic of disconnected partnerships in growing families.

The Pain-to-Joy Connection Continuum:

A Pathway from Hopeless Disconnection to Thriving Connection

Wherever a couple is, there is always room for greater thriving. Over time, both partners grow and change, often in different ways and at different rates. To stay close, couples need to also grow together, which requires tending.

When a baby arrives, ample support is required for such tending. Without it, a partnership can slip closer to the pain side of the Continuum, running the risk of irreparable disconnection.



Our work is designed to educate family-support professionals in recognizing the symptoms of Male Postpartum Abandonment Syndrome (MPAS) and to provide awareness of, access to, effective solutions and resources for families to thrive.

Theoretically it only takes one insightful, responsive parent to give a child the bond it needs to successfully attach and live a healthy productive life. But actually, in order to thrive, it takes approximately 3.87 engaged

and responsive adults per infant to support all members of the family. All family members must thrive, not just the child.

Parents in a nuclear family environment, who don't have extended family nearby, have little chance of everyone thriving. The pressure on nuclear families is extensive and turns quickly into stress and struggle when a baby is born. Survival is the norm; thriving is not.

When a couple-ship struggles (and often deteriorates) due to a lack of support—so does the family. This leaves parents strained and under-resourced, unable to offer their best for the child and each other. When parents separate or divorce, this disruption adds layers of challenge to the potential security of the children in the family, which has multi-faceted, long-lasting societal impacts.

Our vision is a world where parents are fully resourced with community support and are able to offer at least one primary caregiver who can establish that secure attachment foundation. If the parent isn't fully resourced, it's more difficult to be present and responsive to the child.

When parents are richly supported, the whole community can fully thrive and be healthy—starting early in life, and continuing for generations.

Male Postpartum Abandonment Syndrome (MPAS) Self-Assessment

Ending the Epidemic of Disappearing Dads

© 2014, John W. Travis, MD, MPH

For new parents—or answer while remembering how you felt when you were a new parent.

Depending on how true each statement is, score yourself with 0, 1 or 2, where 2=most true, and add the total

Men:

- ☐ feeling excluded, disconnected, or out of sorts
- ☐ decreased intimacy—physical, emotional, etc.
- ☐ frustration with differing sexual responsiveness of partner since the birth
- ☐ bothered by unpleasant childhood memories
- ☐ increased sexual interest in others
- ☐ increased use of addictive substances: alcohol, drugs (prescription or otherwise), gaming, TV, etc
- ☐ increased irritability
- ☐ increased levels of depression, anxiety or agitation
- ☐ feeling inadequate
- ☐ increased number of disagreements with partner
- ☐ increased amount of time away from home/family (work, sports, bar, or pub, etc.)
- ☐ Total

Women:

- ☐ decreased intimacy—physical, emotional, etc.
- ☐ feeling overwhelmed by needs of baby, household, and partner
- ☐ frustration from sexual pressure from partner since the birth
- ☐ decreased interest in sex/intimacy
- ☐ increased number of disagreements with partner
- ☐ feeling disconnected, out of sorts
- ☐ feelings of inadequacy
- ☐ feeling less attractive, sexy
- ☐ bothered by unpleasant childhood memories
- ☐ increased irritability
- ☐ increased levels of depression, anxiety or agitation
- ☐ Total

Male Postpartum Abandonment Syndrome (MPAS) in a Nutshell¹

Since the 1940s, modern childbirth/childrearing practices may have created the most disconnected generations of human beings ever seen on the planet. As a result, America has been called the world's largest experiment in loneliness.

High-tech prenatal care and birth interventions; artificial baby milk instead of 2+ years at the breast; sleeping alone, being carried in plastic containers (rather than held in arms); and for many boys, circumcision, are the major factors in this alienation/abandonment. *Named normative abuse/neglect,*² *these conventional parenting practices prevent secure bonding and attachment*, later leading to Male Postpartum Abandonment Syndrome (MPAS)—the cause of the **hidden epidemic of disappearing dads/marriages**—wherein the man feels abandoned by his partner.

Industrialized cultures, having destroyed the village, have wreaked havoc on the primal period of human development. Approximately 3.87 adults are required to meet the needs of each infant. Simple math indicates that the nuclear family, where the baby takes center stage, is untenable as a social structure. A baby needs far more time and energy than a couple can provide, needing to be *in* the center of a village's attention rather than *be* the center of attention of a nuclear family.

The resulting generations of disconnected boys grow up looking for the mommy they never really had. If they're fortunate, they "find" her, marry her, and think everything's OK—until the first baby comes along—requiring mother's full attention.

The resulting emotional absence of their overwhelmed partner plunges many men into a restimulation of their own early, unresolved birth and childhood trauma—usually unconscious. It can be especially triggered when they see their child suckling at a breast they never knew (their mothers').

Feeling the pain of abandonment once again, they often self-medicate with drugs, alcohol, work, gaming, porn, affairs, etc, until the pain becomes too great and about 30% physically leave within the first years. Upwards of 90% leave their partner emotionally.³

Recognizing and healing MPAS is critically important to prevent the perpetuation of normative abuse/neglect and end the epidemic of disappearing dads.

For more information see: *Why Dads Leave: Insights and Resources for When Partners Become Parents*, Meryn Callander, Akasha Publications, 2012. See resource links from book at:

WhyDadsLeave.com.

aTLC has launched a major project to address solutions to MPAS through a worldwide network of resources: Connected Couples—Thriving Families <ConnectedAndThriving.org>

¹ Term coined by John W. Travis, MD, in 2006, described in *Why Dads Leave* (2012) by Meryn G. Callander.

² Normative abuse, named by Karen Walant in *Creating the Capacity for Attachment* (1999) is generally not recognized as abusive because most everyone experienced it—just as slavery wasn't seen as abuse until modern times. In most cases, *normative neglect* is actually a more accurate description of what occurs.

³ Often it's the mother who experiences the disconnection more acutely, and after trying to reconnect (or not), she often withdraws herself, compounding the situation. Since the mother usually stays with the child, it appears that the father is the one who leaves, but it's usually a mutual disconnection/separation, whether physical or emotional—there are myriad forms that MPAS can take).