

Motherhood Matters

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By Eric Metaxas

MANHATTAN, N.Y.—What would you do to enhance your baby’s mental and emotional well-being?

Erica Komisar, a New York psychoanalyst, says she is in the business of making people uncomfortable. She succeeded brilliantly with the publication of her new book—which has made a lot of people not just uncomfortable but downright angry.

The book is titled *Being There: Why Prioritizing Motherhood in the First Three Years Matters*.

Ms. Komisar wrote it after noticing a disturbing trend: A huge increase in the number of kids being diagnosed at an earlier age with mental disorders and emotional problems.

■ Ms. Komisar writes that, in just one year—from 2011 to 2012—the number of children “diagnosed with psychiatric disorders rose to a staggering 19 percent”—nearly a fifth of all children.

■ And the number of kids hospitalized for eating disorders “has increased 119 percent in the last decade,” she notes.

■ Ms. Komisar points to the shocking prediction of the U.S. Census from 2015: Approximately one fourth of all American kids “will be diagnosed with a mental disorder before the age of 18.”

Her 27 years of practice and research led her to an inescapable conclusion: Children are at a higher risk for these problems when, she says, “the essential presence of a mother is missing.”

Ms. Komisar massively documents her assertions. Decades of research “confirms the more time a woman can devote to the joy and job of mothering a child in the first three years,” she says, “the better the chance her child will be emotionally secure and healthy throughout his life.”

And now you know why the heads of feminists and liberals are exploding. They think Ms. Komisar (who, by the way, is a feminist and a liberal herself) is attempting to take women at warp speed back to the 1950s.

It’s not surprising that today’s mothers think their babies won’t miss them if they grab their briefcases and go back to a full-time job six weeks after giving birth.

They believe what our culture taught them—that they can easily juggle career and motherhood; that babies thrive just as well in daycare as at home with their moms; that mothers and fathers are fungible; that when it comes to motherhood it's all about "quality time"—even if it comes at the end of a long workday when mothers are exhausted.

Stay-at-home moms can also fail to be "present" for their babies if they ignore them while talking on the phone, checking E-mails or volunteering for too many church events.

In short, women all too often careen into motherhood with absolutely no idea of how much their babies need them.

This is why young people should consider the research about the needs of babies if they expect to have children one day, and begin planning for parenthood even before they've met a future spouse.

- For instance, are wives prepared to make career sacrifices, if necessary, to care for the kids for a few years?
- Are couples willing to settle for a smaller home, fewer vacations and less income during the years Mom is nurturing the babies?

Thinking about those awful mental-health statistics, I hope and pray they will be.

As Erica Komisar points out: "Your baby does not care if she has a bigger room or a Florida vacation. What she wants is you and the safety and security of being in your presence."

Of course, many moms must work for economic reasons, and we should support them all we can. If you read *Being There*, you'll find advice on how working moms can maximize their time with their kids.

So I suggest we ignore the angry catcalls from the left (which I always do anyway) and embrace Ms. Komisar's arguments. If enough people do, America will end up with happier, healthier children.