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ReachMD

www.reachmd.com

info@reachmd.com

(866) 423-7849

Your Patient's Mother: Is She in the Exam Room?

MOTHER'S EMOTIONAL LEGACY IMPACTS YOUR LIFE

Your patient's mothers continue to play a constant role in their lives, no matter how old they are, what are the types of mothering styles and how does it influence our psychology.

Welcome to The Clinician's Roundtable. I am Dr. Leslie Lundt, your host and with me today is Dr. Stephan Poulter. Dr. Poulter is a licensed clinical psychologist with a private practice in West Los Angeles. He has worked in various settings with thousands of families, parents, and children for over 30 years.

His latest book *The Mother Factor* follows as companion piece to his acclaimed book *The Father Factor*, how your father's legacy impacts your career.

DR. LESLIE LUNDT:

Welcome to ReachMD.

DR. STEPHAN POULTER:

Thank you Dr. Lundt, it's great to be here. Thank you.

DR. LESLIE LUNDT:

What do you mean by "mothering style?"

DR. STEPHAN POULTER:

I did answer that question probably more than any other question. Mothering style is the way that you and your mother interacted verbally, nonverbally, emotionally, how you handled anger, expressions of love, compassion, empathy, depression. It's the fabric of the

mother-child relationship. There is a particular style in which a mom is connected to you, but it's more than bonding, it's beyond bonding; bonding is a part of it, but it's wider than that, and that's why I refer to them as mothering style.

DR. LESLIE LUNDT:

How many different styles do you see in your practice with patients?

DR. STEPHAN POULTER:

I kind of summarize them into five, in mothering styles. We have always had a piece of all five, and primarily one of the five, and we give you the five names, and just off-the-top, people have pretty good idea, which one they come from. There is a perfectionistic mother, the unpredictable mother, the me-first mother, best friend mother, and the complete mother. Each one of those five mothers has tremendous strength, with the exception of the complete mother, also some liabilities.

DR. LESLIE LUNDT:

Okay, but let's start out with #1 the perfectionist, tell us about that.

DR. STEPHAN POULTER:

That is a mother who is all about parents and achievement, which is outstanding for the son and daughter because they learned an excellent work ethic, but there is not much of an emotional development between the mother and the daughter or the mother and the son, it's all about having accomplishment. You will see many times you will take clients or the kids complain, you know, in high school they take 16 AP classes (advanced placement classes) and they didn't get into their first choice for university, you would think they failed out of high school and they are 4.4.

DR. LESLIE LUNDT:

And how many of the primary care docs see this in their practice?

DR. STEPHAN POULTER:

I think we would all see this many times, development of stress related illnesses and panic attacks and you know these strong psychosomatic stomach problems or breathing because there is so much pressure to perform, because performance is the supreme value in the family and the mother-daughter and the mother-son relationship, and in order to be lovable you have to be accomplished.

DR. LESLIE LUNDT:

I would think two things like eating disorders like anorexia in this group.

DR. STEPHAN POULTER:

Absolutely. It's very much on the parents how you look and you'll see daughters they want their mother's approval <____> size 2 or sons will drive themselves to the bone to get the mothers approval by being the perfect son. It's very problematic, but on the other side, is also excellent, these are people who will always finish a task, complete something, show up for work, never be late. They have never <____> a day in your life.

DR. LESLIE LUNDT:

So these are the people you should hire.

DR. STEPHAN POULTER:

You know something, they are outstanding employees. They will work 60 hours a week and think they are just doing a part-time job, but there is an end to their, you know, how far they can go.

DR. LESLIE LUNDT:

Now, how about the second one you mentioned, the unpredictable.

DR. STEPHAN POULTER:

The unpredictable. This is where the mother is very moody, growing up there might have been an alcohol problem or drug problem, may be an undiagnosed personality disorder, but there is a lot of emotionality in the house and there is a lot of mood swings and what that does is it produces and you'll see this in your practice, many times adults are just paralyzed with anxiety, paralyzed with fear or just convinced they have a brain tumor. Many times their background, everything the life in the child, who is growing up is unpredictable, nothing felt safe or steady or stable or consistent.

DR. LESLIE LUNDT:

Okay, so tend to become somatizing.

DR. STEPHAN POULTER:

Yeah, a lot of somatizing.

DR. LESLIE LUNDT:

I would think too, may be sounds like a set up for obsessive-compulsive kinds of thing.

DR. STEPHAN POULTER:

Absolutely, in a way compensating with the unpredictability.

DR. LESLIE LUNDT:

To control in an uncontrollable environment.

DR. STEPHAN POULTER:

Yeah, and I think this would be like 8-year-olds, by age 8 you'll see this in your patients that these kids are, you know, miniature adults, they worry about everything like, which way we are driving home, that person across the street, make sure put <_____>; they are very hypervigilant children and they go into adult life the same way.

DR. LESLIE LUNDT:

Now are these kids too, you know every once a while I'll have pediatric patients that are worried about more global kinds of issues.

DR. STEPHAN POULTER:

Oh, absolutely. They should not watch CNN at night. It's not good for them or the news before they go to bed. I've clients like that, they cannot watch the news because they are going to worry about that meteor flying into their house or that there is a drought in the Northwest and they live in the southward range, you know, 45 inches here.

DR. LESLIE LUNDT:

Now, if you've just joined us, you're listening to ReachMD XM 157, The Channel for Medical Professionals. I am Dr. Leslie Lundt, your host, and with me today is Dr. Stephan Poulter. We are discussing his book *The Mother Factor*, how your mother's emotional legacy impacts your life.

We are currently reviewing the five different styles of mothering that we see, we've talked about the perfectionist, the unpredictable mother, and #3, is the me-first mother.

DR. STEPHAN POULTER:

This is the mother that probably the child will never have a close relationship with in a <_____> patients, the narcissistic mother, it's all about her, all roads lead back to mom. You know, you may have a patient come in, they are 28 years old and have got this job promotion, they call their mother to tell her about that and the conversation turns around to be about mom's lunch date. (Laughs) You know, it's like everything revolves around the mother. These adults tend not to have a close relationship with their mothers because

there is no room for them emotionally or mentally. They are very sensitive people, who don't pay attention to them; they know that, they grew up with it.

DR. LESLIE LUNDT:

And how do we see these in our practice?

DR. STEPHAN POULTER:

You know, I think many times they probably don't somatize as much, but when you ask them like did you notify your mother that you are going through a round of chemotherapy or serious operation; you know like I told my mom but she was busy and she couldn't come into the hospital or the daughters having their first baby, was your mom going to help you with this, no she is on a cruise. There is a real absence of nurturing or affection from the mother toward the daughter or son.

DR. LESLIE LUNDT:

Anyway that as their physician we can help that or replace that?

DR. STEPHAN POULTER:

I think help him understand that you know that people have limitations and that you draw on other people in your life who can give you that kind of support.

DR. LESLIE LUNDT:

So find an alternate mother.

DR. STEPHAN POULTER:

Exactly.

DR. LESLIE LUNDT:

Makes sense. Okay, #4 the best friend.

DR. STEPHAN POULTER:

This is the most popular style of mothering right now because this is the mother who really becomes her son's or daughter's best friend.

They have more of a friendship relationship than a parent-child and there is an absence of boundaries and what happens is that daughter or son ends up taking, emotionally they take care of their mother. You know, it's very hard for them to leave home emotionally or physically or to move into other relationships or to move out of town because they always felt this guilt or burden to take care of their mother emotionally and mentally, sometimes even physically. I am not talking about older parents who need help; I am talking about viable high functioning adults.

DR. LESLIE LUNDT:

So these are the people, they may even as adults, talk to their mother 5-6 times a day on the phone?

DR. STEPHAN POULTER:

Yeah, and I think it's hard for them to move forward in life because ultimately they will stay in a teenage life with their mom. It's like you see in the media some of these celebrity daughters with their mothers and it's very interesting because the mom looks like an older sister.

DR. LESLIE LUNDT:

Right, they dress the same, they look the same.

DR. STEPHAN POULTER:

Act the same. Having a daughter that has to take care of her mom or she acts out worse than their mother does.

DR. LESLIE LUNDT:

And how might we see this in our practice?

DR. STEPHAN POULTER:

I think extreme behavior, drug abuse, anorexia, many times the daughter will want to change herself cosmetically not to look like her mother, you know, as a way of trying to separate from her. A mother-daughter may both want to get a nose job or they wear similar clothes. I think you will see it in your practice where there might be a lot of extreme behavior.

DR. LESLIE LUNDT:

Now, is this something if we think about treating the mothers or we think they would be a set up for empty nest kind of syndrome when the kids do leave the house that they be may be more vulnerable to mood problems.

DR. STEPHAN POULTER:

Yeah, mood disorders, and also the message is don't leave me and it's very hard the daughter may go away or the son in the college for you and then move back only to get down to college and immediately move back as a way of taking care of their mother.

DR. LESLIE LUNDT:

Okay, now the example we all should strive for, #5.

DR. STEPHAN POULTER:

The compassionate mentor, the complete mother. This is a mother who does it all. She is not perfect, but she helps her son and daughter find their own way and she doesn't use her kids as an emotional support system in that her primary friends are not her children and the complete mom helps her son and daughter to separate, form their own identity, their own individuality through helping them find what their interests are, what they want to do, help them take risk, to move out into the world and do a lot. That's where we all want to move towards, doctors with our patients, empower our patients to go out in the world and do what they really want to do.

DR. LESLIE LUNDT:

Any suggestions on how those patients that are still early in the mothering process can achieve this ideal?

DR. STEPHAN POULTER:

I think probably one of thing is to mind that mothering our sons and daughters our job is to become separate and independent of our parents and as parents to help our kids to become separate, independent, and high functioning, not that we will always have this close emotional bond like they are 5 years old, but we are doing our job, they want to go away, they want to explore the world and we want to foster that kind of relationship with our children and end up having a better relationship with them because of that.

DR. LESLIE LUNDT:

Yeah, you know one of the best pieces of advice I ever got when I started having kids was from the day they are born, your job is to get your kid out of the house.

DR. STEPHAN POULTER:

<____> I could not have said it better. If your kids don't want to leave home, something needs to be adjusted and I have clients in their late 20s, mid 30s still are in home and has nothing to do with ethnicity.

DR. LESLIE LUNDT:

Well, now a days it's so easy to blame finances...

DR. STEPHAN POULTER:

Or the economics...

DR. LESLIE LUNDT:

Yeah, but that clearly isn't the real issue in many of these cases.

DR. STEPHAN POULTER:

Right.

DR. LESLIE LUNDT:

Great. Well, thank you so much for being on our show today.

DR. STEPHAN POULTER:

It's a pleasure and thank you for having me.

DR. LESLIE LUNDT:

We've been discussing the different types of mothering styles with psychologist and author, Dr. Stephan Poulter.

I am Dr. Leslie Lundt. You've been listening to the Clinician's Roundtable on ReachMD XM 157, The Channel for Medical Professionals. To listen to our on-demand library, visit us at www.reachmd.com. If you register with the promo code radio, you'll receive six months free streaming for your home or office. If you have comments or questions or suggestions, please call us at triple-8 MD XM 157 (888-MD-XM-157) and thank you for listening.

You're listening to ReachMD XM 157, The Channel for Medical Professionals. Here is a sample of the great shows airing this week.

I am Dr. Larry Kaskel. On the next Lipid Luminations, I will be talking about sleep apnea and the heart, the most underrated risk factor for heart disease with Dr. James Ehrlich of Atherotech Inc. Please tune in.

I am Dr. <____> Johnson inviting you to join me this week with Dr. Renda Weiner from Dartmouth Medical School and we will be discussing glucose management in the critically ill.

This is Dr. Bruce Bloom. Join me and my guest Dr. Denise Felsman from Harvard Medical School and the director of the Aveeno Biology Lab at Massachusetts General Hospital as we talk about a potential cure for type 1 diabetes.

Thank you for listening to ReachMD XM 157 where we change topics every 15 minutes. For our complete weekly guests and program guide, visit us at www.reachmd.com.

This is Dr. Denise Felsman, Associate Professor of Medicine, Harvard Medical School, and Director of the Massachusetts General Hospital Immunobiology Laboratory and you are listening to the first national radio channel created specifically for medical professionals, ReachMD XM 157.