

# JOURNAL OF DENTAL HUMANITIES



VOLUME 5: ISSUES 1/2 WINTER/SPRING 2021

# JOURNAL OF DENTAL HUMANITIES

The Journal of Dental Humanities is dedicated to presenting thought provoking material connecting dentistry to the humanities, and the social sciences. The journal places a priority on publishing quality material that supports the objective of dental professionals who seek to provide a patient-centered approach to health care. The mission purpose of the Journal of Dental Humanities aligns with the position that a functional democracy requires ethical, highly skilled professionals who are engaged, active members within their community and the larger society.

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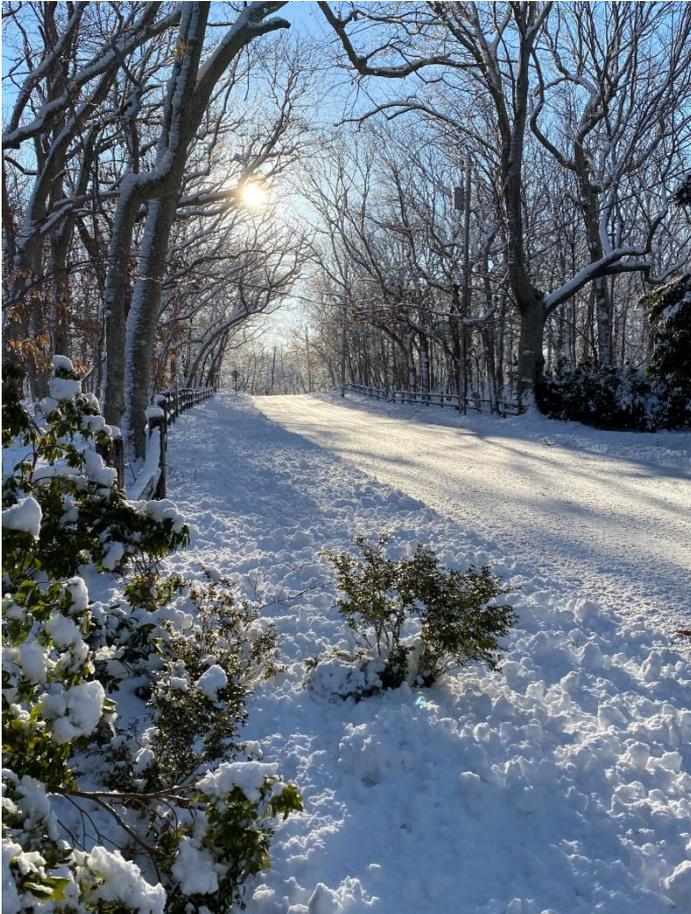
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ISSN 2573-8844

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# FAMILY DYNAMICS: PROVIDING ORAL HEALTH CARE FOR A CHILD WITH A DISABILITY

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“Parents, (grandparents and caregivers) are human. This means that not only will they NOT be able to admit that they favor one child over another, but also that they WILL favor one child over another. What is important to understand about this ‘favoring’ has nothing to do with love... It is quite simply the raw truth that there will always be people in this world, whether related or otherwise, that you mesh with more easily. However, surprisingly favoring children also hurts the children that are favored...**favoritism is evident in 2/3rds of all families.** [emphasis added]”<sup>3</sup>

“When your (first) grandchild was just an infant I understood when you never had any one-on-one time together (infants can be scary), but now your grandchild is a toddler and more capable of doing things. I clearly see the relationship you have with your first grandchild and can't help but wonder why no effort is made for your other grandchild...

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<sup>3</sup> Daniel, Stef. "Favoring One Child Over the Other – Is it Wrong?" Professor's House. Accessed 23 August 2020. <<https://www.professorshouse.com/favoring-one-child-over-the-other/>>

**Children do recognize favoritism. [emphasis added]”<sup>4</sup>  
But why involve grandparents?**

- That’s because grandparents are not the wizened cranky images presented in older movies. **43%** became grandparents in their fifties, **37%** in their forties with the average age of grandparents in this country at **48 years**. Grandparents lead **37%** of all U.S. households in this country; that’s **50 million** households nationwide. Grandparents represent one-third of the population with **1.7 million** new grandparents added to the ranks every year.<sup>5</sup>
- 2.5 million grandparents every day are taking on the responsibilities required to raise these children **Across the United States, more than 13 million children are living in homes with their grandparents.**<sup>6</sup>

Families with a newborn will obvious “favor” the newborn at the outset. Parents of children with disabilities children normally show more signs of favoritism towards them. This same type of “necessary favoritism” can and does occur when someone is sick. The difference is that in these situations, parents can easily explain factors at the onset of these realities to their other children, based on a “*needs perspective*.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> "An open letter to the grandparent favoring one grandchild over another." Opnltrr. 26 July 2018. Accessed 23 August 2020. <<https://opnltrr.com/letter/open-letter-grandparent-favoring-one-grandchild-over-another>>

<sup>5</sup> "The surprising facts about grandparents." Considerable. 23 June 2020. Accessed 25 August 2020. <<https://www.considerable.com/health/aging/grandparents-babysitting/>>

<sup>6</sup> Gaille, Brandon. "23 Statistics on Grandparents Raising Grandchildren." 22 May 2017. Accessed 25 August 2020. <<https://brandongaille.com/21-statistics-on-grandparents-raising-grandchildren/>>

<sup>7</sup> "An open letter to the grandparent favoring one grandchild over another." Opnltrr. 26 July 2018. Accessed 23 August 2020. <<https://opnltrr.com/letter/open-letter-grandparent-favoring-one-grandchild-over-another>>



**“If you've got more than one kid, you're showing favoritism, whether you know it or not.”<sup>8</sup>**

The repercussions of favoritism can be fierce. Not only can the outward favoring of one child set up a battle ground for **sibling rivalry**,<sup>9</sup> but it can also cause a great deal of marital conflict, especially if the parents often fight about the situation. Not only can the less favored child become rebellious, emotionally distraught, angry, and resentful but also is also more prone to depression, mental illness, and drug use as the years pass. The favored child may feel an increasing amount of guilt and becomes unable to forge strong relationships with his or her siblings. Unfortunately, these problems can extend for a lifetime.<sup>10</sup>

Additionally, it is often common for parents to favor their same gender children. *Stereotypical examples* - Perhaps father and son like to fish, while mother and daughter prefer to shop. Perhaps mom feels dad is being too harsh on the daughter, and mom steps in to lessen the impact because as a female, she can relate to how her daughter is feeling. The same is true if a mom tried to discipline her son and dad steps in saying, ‘Let boys be boys!’<sup>11</sup>

“The unfavored child can feel defeated, and unmotivated, as a result of working hard to get parental affirmation and support, with no success ... He or she may also suffer from depression and become angry, bitter, resentful, or jealous ... Children feeling this way may act out, in an effort to get their parent’s

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<sup>8</sup> Whelan, Corey. "Consequences of favoring one child over another." Reader's Digest. 26 February 2018. Accessed 24 August 2020.

[<https://www.rd.com/list/consequences-of-favoritism/>](https://www.rd.com/list/consequences-of-favoritism/)

<sup>9</sup> Daniel, Stef. "Sibling Rivalry – Siblings are Supposed to Argue, Fight and Bicker." Professor's House. Accessed 23 August 2020.

[<https://www.professorshouse.com/sibling-rivalry/>](https://www.professorshouse.com/sibling-rivalry/)

<sup>10</sup> "An open letter to the grandparent favoring one grandchild over another." Opnltrr. 26 July 2018. Accessed 23 August 2020. [.<https://opnltrr.com/letter/open-letter-grandparent-favoring-one-grandchild-over-another>](https://opnltrr.com/letter/open-letter-grandparent-favoring-one-grandchild-over-another)

<sup>11</sup> Daniel, Stef. "Favoring One Child Over the Other – Is it Wrong?" Professor's House. Accessed 23 August 2020. [.<https://www.professorshouse.com/favoring-one-child-over-the-other/>](https://www.professorshouse.com/favoring-one-child-over-the-other/)

attention, making matters worse. They may also indulge in inappropriate behaviors, becoming the black sheep, they believe their parents already see.”<sup>12</sup>

Favoritism is not exactly a cinch for the favored child. Kids who perceive that they are their parent’s favorite sometimes translate that into a free pass for their behavior in future relationships. Favored children may feel a sense of entitlement, and that rules do not apply to them.<sup>13</sup>

### **Realities of a child with a disability in the family –**

The daily ongoing demanding requirements for a child with a disability adds complex dimensions to the interactions between parents (and grandparents) and the needs other children in the family. Studies reveal that:

- Grandparents' initial reactions are similar to parents' reactions of shock, anger, and grief when they learn a grandchild has a disability. Over time, grandparents become involved in their grandchild's family system, providing practical and emotional support.
- Families with children with special needs require a more positive perspective. They need to acknowledge the strengths children may gain from having a sibling with a disability; including enhanced adaptability, understanding and tolerance.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Whelan, Corey. "Consequences of favoring one child over another." Reader's Digest. 26 February 2018. Accessed 24 August 2020.

<<https://www.rd.com/list/consequences-of-favoritism/>>

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Macks, Ryan J. and Ronald E. Reeve. "The Adjustment of Non-Disabled Siblings of Children with Autism." *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders* 37, 1060-1067 (2007). 27 October 2006. <<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10803-006-0249-0>>



- Low income families are especially vulnerable<sup>15</sup> because they have less access to resources.<sup>16</sup>
- Ideally, children with disabilities grow up in family environments that help make them feel worthwhile and valuable. They learn that their feelings and needs are important and can be expressed. However, some families may fail to provide for many of their children's emotional and physical needs. Children growing up in such families are more likely to develop low self-esteem and feel that their needs are not important or perhaps should not be taken seriously by others.<sup>17</sup>
- Abuse and neglect may inhibit the development of children with disabilities, their trust in the world, in others and in themselves.

### Providing oral health services in a complex family environment

When we speak of the humanities, we refer to the general sense of humane qualities, such as kindness and benevolence among individuals. How is that related to providing care for a family rendered dysfunctional that includes children with disabilities? No doubt the first reaction is, **"I'm not a psychologist or psychiatrist; I'm a dentist."** But dentists are more than "just medical technicians". We have learned that providing care for patients of all ages and wide ranges of physical, emotional, social, economic and family situations

<sup>15</sup> Emerson, Eric. "Poverty and people with intellectual disabilities." PubMed.gov. Ment Retard Dev Disabil Res Rev. 2007;13(2):107-13.

<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/17563898/>>

<sup>16</sup> Landman, Keren. "Growing up alongside a sibling with a disability." *New York Times*. 11 May 2020. Accessed 24 August 2020.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/11/parenting/children-sibling-disability.html>>;

Lee, Misuk and J. Emmett Gardner . "Grandparents' Involvement and Support in Families with Children with Disabilities." *Educational Gerontology*, 36:6, 467-499 (2010). <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/03601270903212419>>

<sup>17</sup>Counseling Center at University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. "Dysfunctional Family Relationships." Accessed 28 August 2020. <https://www.brown.edu/campus-life/support/counseling-and-psychological-services/dysfunctional-family-relationships>>

entails an appreciation of the “patient’s world” and their perceived needs and wants - not just standard techniques which were taught in schools and experienced in private practice.

Both of us are trained pediatric dentists and learned that providing care for youngsters is not just pediatric dentistry; it is “**family dentistry.**” Moms and dads, grandparents, siblings, aunts, uncles and friends are among those who accompany youngsters for dental appointments. In many cases, we have learned critical information about family relationships and the impact on the children (with and without disabilities) from our interactions with the child’s care givers.

### **In the past**

There was a time when virtually all applicants to dental and medical school programs were “real science” college students; (e.g. biology, chemistry and physics major student. Increasing research has indicated that “soft science” college major students (e.g. sociology, psychology and communication majors) performed as well (or better) than their “real science” major fellow students in dental and medical schools. Nevertheless, admission committees were reluctant to accept these “differently trained” applicants. One of us (HBW) chaired dental school admission committees for many years and was repeatedly informed that such evidence could not be discussed and was just a waste of time.<sup>18</sup> *Incidentally, in later years when our school was reviewed for accrediting purposes, the Commission On Dental Accreditation (CODA) was not interested in speaking to the department chair or reviewing the public health and behavioral science department.*

Today, dental and medical school classes are filled with college graduates having an extremely wide range of college major students. In addition, there are increasing numbers of students and reports in the literature regarding the need for and impact of psychology in the

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<sup>18</sup> Waldman, H.B. "Attracting a “new” applicant to schools of dentistry." *Journal of Dental Education*, 1972, 36(4):31-34.



delivery of oral health services.<sup>19</sup> Few, if any, refer to the complex psychological environment for the delivery of dental care to families with children with disabilities. Surely, it is time for dental schools and the general profession to emphasize family dynamics when provided oral health care for children and grandchildren with a disability.

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<sup>19</sup> King's College London, Research & Innovation. "Psychology in Dentistry." Accessed 28 August 2020. <<https://www.kcl.ac.uk/research/psychology-in-dentistry>>



# THE COSMIC YOU

IMBESAT MAHEEN SYED, D.H.A.<sup>1</sup>

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Be as free as the floating clouds;  
Be as bright as bright as the sun.

Be as obvious as the sky.  
Be as mysterious as the moon.

Why prefer to crawl,  
When you were born with wings to fly,  
Said Rumi.  
True are these words as ever can be.

Do you know who you're?  
You're the divine light,  
that you seek outside.

Look no further,  
but look inside,

Inside you'll find answers to all the questions you seek.  
For inside is the beauty and wisdom.

Inside is the voice of divine,  
The Cosmos that you seek,  
Is the Cosmic You.

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<sup>1</sup> Resident of surgery, innovator, writer, poet, and artist. D.H.A., College of Physicians and Surgeons, Pakistan.





The Journal of Dental Humanities is published quarterly. All correspondence may be addressed to:

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Southampton, New York 11968

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Original material may be submitted for review and possible publication. Please send submissions via email to [robert.iovino@stonybrookmedicine.edu](mailto:robert.iovino@stonybrookmedicine.edu) . Materials submitted for review must not have been previously published or currently under review for publication elsewhere.

Submissions of interest will undergo a blind review process.

**Journal of Dental Humanities**  
**351 Meetinghouse Lane**  
**Southampton, N.Y. 11968**