NT Behind the Scenes: Erica Komisar, Raising Resilient Adolescents, Beyond the Q&A, Part II

Kimberly Hillyer, DNP, NNP-BC

The following is an reloaded transcript for Neonatology Today of Dr. Kimberly Hillyer and author *Erica Komisar*. The following interview focused on her new book; ***Chicken Little the Sky isn't Falling: Raising Resilient Adolescents in the New Age of Anxiety***. This is the second part of the interview.

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Introduction

Thank you for joining us on today's segment of Neonatology Today Media. I am your host Dr. Kimberly Hillyer and today with have with us *Erica Komisar*. She is a clinical social worker, psychoanalysis, and parent guidance expert who has been in private practice in New York City for over 30 years. Her new book Chicken Little the Sky Isn't falling: Raising Resilient Adolescents in the New Age of Anxiety has come out.

Dr. Hillyer: Your book is entitled Chicken Little the Sky Isn't Falling: Raising Resilient Adolescents in the New Age of Anxiety. What was your inspiration?

Erica Komisar: So, the title was based on that childhood book 'Chicken Little the Sky is Falling,' and you know that cute little chicken that's running around saying the sky is falling, the sky is falling, and it was a book to say actually this is the sky isn't falling it feels like it's falling when your children are not doing well. We say, "we're only as happy as our least happy child." So, it certainly feels like the sky is falling, but again it was meant to be a somewhat hopeful title.

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I wrote this book because I was really responding to this mental health crisis and this epidemic of mental illness in children and adolescents. It really was my way of writing a book that kind of cut through a lot of misinformation and misunderstanding about raising adolescents and educating parents about things like brain science, meaning understanding what's actually going on in terms of your child's neurological development. That helps you to understand their behavior and also helps you to be more empathic.

But I think one big reason I wrote this book is that I had a very hard adolescence and was bullied and teased. My parents loved me a lot but did not know how to help me with that situation at school, so it was very personal for me. It's probably one of the reasons I did become a therapist because I did have some adversity in childhood that I had to overcome. I wanted to give parents the tools that I wish my parents had had.

Dr. Hillyer: So. Your first book was 'Being There, Why Prioritizing Motherhood in the First Three Years Matter.' Was there a connection between the two books?

Erica Komisar: Absolutely, so the first book was about the first three years of a child's life and really the brain development, the neurological development that is connected to secure attachment. Meaning mothers or primary attachment figures, sometimes today their fathers, are critical for the healthy emotional development of children in the first three years. By a thousand days or three years, 85% of a child's right brain or social-emotional brain is developed. We call it a critical window because a child is incredibly sensitive in that critical window to the environment and to stress in the environment.

The second critical window is where parents are a part of the environment. Being a big part of the environment has a great impact on children's brain development and emotional development. The second critical window is adolescence from nine to twenty-five. Which we know now that adolescence starts earlier as early as nine and ends later than we understood many generations ago; it ends at twenty-five. We know that because we have the technol-

ogy to know that.

Dr. Hillyer: So, in your first book, you described how parental attachment creates resiliency later on in life. How does this book address that issue?

Erica Komisar: So, you could think of the first critical window as laying down the foundation of emotional security that helps that child through life but certainly carries them into adolescence. They have the foundation of that security to cope with adversity in the future.

Children aren't born resilient that is a misunderstanding, and I think it's a misunderstanding. Again, we project onto very young children adult-like characteristics because we don't want to see them as vulnerable. If they're as vulnerable as they actually are, then it means that we have to give up more. I think that we project onto them that they're not vulnerable and that they are strong and resilient. You'll often hear parents say, "oh, you know my child can take it," and "children are, you know they bounce back," and "they'll be fine," and actually, children are not fine. That's what we're finding.

Basically, the first critical window of that emotional security gives that child who heads into adolescence an advantage, which is that they are ready to deal more with the storms of adolescence when they come. What we're finding today is that more children are heading into adolescence more fragile. Many of them with attachment disorders, many of them with untreated depression and anxiety. So, when you head into adolescence which is itself a trauma and a storm, you're more likely, you're more susceptible to breakdown.

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Dr. Hillyer: Wow! As I think about myself growing up, I remember being taught, especially as a Black woman, that you need to be independent. You really need to be self-sufficient. So, with all these cultural concepts and factors, societal factors. How does your book address this?

Erica Komisar: I want to pick up on the word strong because I think there's a lot of emphasis in our society and maybe in particular in the Black community on creating, and I understand some of the history behind it, but by creating strength with self-sufficiency. I think it exists everywhere in America, in particular, that we're a very self-sufficient, independent, self-determination-driven culture. I think what it's doing is creating very rigid, fragile, defensively independent young people.

I think of interdependence as a way forward, which is that strength comes from the ability; well, we say in my field, in psychoanalysis, we say a strong ego. The strongest ego is an ego when someone that you love or cares for you is around that you can lean on them when you are in distress. In other words, giving our children strength means to make it possible for them to lean on us and be dependent on us when they can. Then to be flexible enough, to switch tacks when no one's around and to be able to lean on themselves. Then when someone's around, to create strength in relationships. So, it's more like flexibility. I think the best metaphor would be an oak tree, which is probably more likely to lose its branches in a hurricane because it's a hardwood, a rigid wood, and stands alone. Whereas a group of willows or softwood trees that bend in the wind don't lose their branches and stand together.

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I think of human beings like that in a way; this kind of hyper-focus on self-sufficiency and independence as a sign of strength is actually weakening our children. There's a wonderful article that was written in the Philadelphia inquirer by a colleague the other day about how dependency and neediness, and I write about this all the time too, but how dependency and neediness are seen as a curse word in our culture, is seen as a bad thing. It's stigmatized as opposed to saying if we don't need each other, where does our strength come from, right?

I think it's also the devaluing of nurturing and caretaking that is making our young people; the emphasis is in the wrong place. We want them to be interdependent, to be able to be independent when no one's around if someone's around. Or, if they need help that they can reach out, or they can say, "I need therapy," or "I want to go talk to my friend," or "I'm going to go talk to my mom and dad." You know, but it's this idea that they feel they have to be; it's shameful in our culture to need anyone or to be dependent.

So, I think that's an interesting concept, what is strength, what is emotional strength, and mental health? Margaret Moller, a very famous psychoanalyst, said that strength is built from being able to emotionally refuel whenever you need to with the relationships that are securing and mooring for you. That might be your mother, that might be your father, that might be your friends, that might be your therapist, but strength comes from emotionally refueling.

Dr. Hillyer: Wow, that is very powerful, and as you are talking about the interdependency, it reminds me of the article you wrote in the Wall Street Journal about Simone Biles and how she had to take a step back mentally during those last Olympics. Yet, her team rallied around her, but at the same time, society was, we were putting some really negative stuff out there on social media. How can we do better?

Erica Komisar: So, interesting is if you looked at social media, I mean, that's why I wrote that piece. If you looked at social media during that time, people were just horrible. Saying, "she knew what she was getting herself into." I mean, I don't even want to repeat it because they were awful comments. What I can say is it is part of our culture really to be not compassionate. We are not a compassionate culture; I mean, we're becoming a more compassionate culture. I think there are movements to become a more compassionate culture, but we have trouble being compassionate; it's a very harsh culture. we have to evolve as a culture, so we are more sensitive and empathic. Embrace and value caretaking and nurturing again

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You could say our culture has a lot of good things to it. We were based on freedom and independence. All that comes from our culture, but we were also a very puritanical culture. It was based on puritanical, very rigid values. I think we have to evolve as a culture, so we are more sensitive and empathic. Embrace and value caretaking and nurturing again; we've really lost our way. I think because we've lost our way as a modern culture, our children, we always say in my field that children are the barometers of how a family is doing. I will say that children in our society are a barometer of how society is doing, and society is not doing okay because our children are not doing okay. If our children are not doing okay, society is not doing okay. A lot of people don't like the things I say because they're harsh truths. As my rabbi says, keep speaking the truth even if it's painful to people and even if you get lash back from it. But a lot of people don't like to hear the painful truth that we have to value nurturing and caretaking over everything again; otherwise, our children are lost.

Dr. Hillyer: I can see that, and I definitely understand it. Thankfully your book brings together information that parents can implement, especially with a child. How can parents advocate and collaborate with the schools?

"Some of them have to do with, and I would say, the easiest advocacy for most parents is to go to your school. Start with your school. Meaning whatever school your kids go to, advocate for things like more mental health workers in the school."

Erica Komisar: I talk about policy recommendations, particularly with adolescents. Some of them have to do with, and I would say, the easiest advocacy for most parents is to go to your school. Start with your school. Meaning whatever school your kids go to, advocate for things like more mental health workers in the school. If you wait for children to show signs of difficulty, you kind of miss the boat. Even if you have to do fundraisers in your community, raise the money for another social worker so kids can have one-on-one sessions with someone in school where they don't have to pay for it. Parents don't have to pay for it directly because a lot of parents can't afford it directly, and there aren't enough mental health services outside of schools, but more mental health services in schools that catch things early that are preventative, that are not just what we call medically-oriented or symptom-oriented.

If you wait for children to show signs of difficulty, you kind of miss the boat. There are signs that are preventative signs that they show very early. Even if you see a child is struggling socially, that might be one of the first signs where a child is missing too much school because they're sick because they're developing a school phobia. If a child's grades have dropped from A-'s and B+'s to C's and D's. If a child seems to be more aggressive, and aggression is a sign of stress, it's part of the fight-or-flight part of our HPA access. Meaning it's part of how we, in an evolutionary way, respond to stress is to become aggressive, right. If we see a predator, we fight. If a child becomes distractible, you know, all these kids are being diagnosed with ADHD; I think it's like a quarter of American kids are diagnosed with ADHD. I'm like, it's not a condition, it is a symptom of anxiety. What we call a hyper-vigilance of the right part of the brain, the limbic system, and the threat sensing part of the brain is on high alert.

No one is asking why are these kids on high alert. What is the stress, and what are the psychosocial stressors for that particular child? Is it that their family has marital conflict; is it that there's alcoholism in the family; is it that their mother is depressed or distracted or absent, or their father is abusive? I could go on and on. Is it even that they've moved house, and no one took into consideration that the transitions are hard for kids? There are all kinds of psychosocial stressors that create stress for children, both external ones and internal ones. We're not asking those questions. We're just diagnosed, slapping diagnoses, and medicating kids because we just want to silence their pain and move on. So, that is another thing schools can look for is not just to say your kid has ADHD but to say your child is showing signs of being distracted. Is there something going on at home that might be causing the

stress that would make them be more distracted? Instead, they say your child has ADHD, so we want to slap labels on things, but we don't want to actually understand what they mean, right. We want to just get rid of the symptom that's part of our culture too.

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Schools can be more vigilant about referring children for psychotherapy. Talk-psychotherapy, feelings-based talk psychotherapy, not just CBT therapy which just gets rid of symptoms but really gets to the root of what's causing the symptoms. Also, schools can start later because adolescents have something called sleep-wake phase delay, which is that they produce melatonin later in the evening, at least two hours after an adult, and they feel sleep pressure two hours later than you do. When you force them to go to sleep too early, they get something called sleep anxiety, which is then they get anxious that they can't fall asleep. Parents think it's a discipline issue that kids don't go to sleep early when they're adolescents, but they actually don't feel sleep pressure until at least midnight or one in the morning. So, schools need to start later because a child who's not well-rested is more susceptible to depression and anxiety. I mean, I have so many recommendations for schools, but those are just a couple of them.

Dr. Hillyer: Those are great recommendations, and I really hadn't thought about it. How I could participate, being a part of the PTA in the school, and how to utilize some of those tools.

Erica Komisar: I mean the other thing is that more trained teachers can do the training too. Teachers can train in mindfulness training, and they can be facilitators even if they're not mental health workers. They can facilitate expression, social, and emotional groups in the morning, meaning when you come to school. There are some schools in New York who are doing the processing of emotions before the day begins. So, they go around in a circle and homeroom, and they have everybody say how they feel that day. If there's something going on that's making them feel rotten, or are they happy or are they sad. So, they can really discuss what's going on inside and outside of their lives.

Mindfulness training, meaning teaching them to do even ten-minute meditations before school starts and visualization and breathing exercises, and emote ways to regulate their emotions. But the most important thing is to give them adults that they can turn to who really care and want to understand and want to listen. Sometimes with parents, if there's not a culture of openness in a family, it takes time to create a culture of openness, but I encourage parents to try to express their feelings first so kids feel comfortable expressing their own because a lot of the kids that are going into the school system do not come from homes where their parents are not that emotionally intelligent. That's the truth. A lot of emotional repressions. A lot of situations where for one reason or another, they don't feel comfortable. There's not an open enough experience of communication, so they have to have adults that they can turn to process their emotions and their feelings. I try to get parents to be that, but teachers can also be that.

Dr. Hillyer: One section that really stood out for me in your book was the section where you were asking us as parents to look into the mirror and how we need to be truthful with our feelings. I know a lot of times, I will say to someone who's asking me how am I doing, "I am fine," and if I can't be truthful with my own feelings. How am I supposed to teach that to my kids?

Erica Komisar: So, one thing is maybe don't ask the question, how are you doing? Ask the question, how are you feeling today because how we're doing is different than how we're feeling. I mean, that's the first thing, but I think adults have to model it. I always think that when teachers are leading these groups in the morning, they have to start with themselves. Somebody has to open up, and it's a little bit of, I'll show you mine if you show me yours, it's that game. So, if the teacher says I'll start, "so I'm feeling kind of anxious this morning because I had a hard time commuting. There was a driver that got close to my car, and it scared me, and I'm feeling a little shaken up this morning." Then you go around, and then the next kid says, and "I'm feeling angry because my dad yelled at me this morning, and I didn't deserve it." You know, and you go around the circle, and you'd be surprised, once you kind of crack the door open little kids want to express themselves, they do want to express themselves. It's very little nudging to get them to open up. Sometimes with parents, if there's not a culture of openness in a family, it takes time to create a culture of openness, but I encourage parents to try to express their feelings first so kids feel comfortable expressing their own.

Dr. Hillyer: So, what I'm hearing is how important it is to really be able to express your feelings. You want to be able to see that true self. What kind of culture are we creating if we're not able to get to that? You have the CDC in 2019 saying that the second leading cause of death in Blacks ages fifteen to twenty-four is suicide. Then you have a strong Black woman, Miss USA Cheslie Kryst being a prime example of that.

Erica Komisar: Yeah, again, it gets back to what kind of culture are we creating for our children when we don't model for them, kind of vulnerability. That vulnerability is strength vulnerability is the willow in the storm. So, we're strong only if we're comfortable with our vulnerability and we trust people enough to be interdependent. That creates strength, but we are not strong if we stand alone. We're never strong if we stand alone.

I mean, teasing and bullying are a major problem in schools today. It was in my day. As I said, I was teased and bullied by this group of girls, but in my day, there wasn't social media; there wasn't technology, and so it remained contained in a way. It was not that it was good, but it remained contained. Today it's really terrible because it doesn't remain contained. It can actually become a very big and traumatic issue. The idea is that we have to think about what do we teach our kids when they are teased and bullied. Do we teach them to stand alone? Do we teach them to stand together with their peers? The answer is, and the best answer is when parents have a child who's being teased and bullied, it's helpful to reinforce that child's own community. Because when children stand alone, when in the face of others' aggression, they are more vulnerable than it's better if they have groups. It's better

even if that group is two other kids who are nerdy like you are. Whatever it is, we are stronger when we stand together with other people than when we stand alone. When you ask someone how are they doing, and they don't feel comfortable telling you, that person believes that they are stronger if they stand alone.

Dr. Hillyer: And we're teaching generation after generation how important it is to stand alone. Then with you tying in how social media is factoring in with the standing alone, individuals are just posting what's picture-perfect and not really displaying the whole truth. How do we as a society be able to show our children that it's okay to not just be that picture-perfect smile that they see on social media?

"Well, I think social media does promote idealization. So, one of the tasks of adolescence, well, the biggest task is to find your place in the adult world. But one of the other big tasks I think is when we're talking about idealizing is the de-idealizing of your parents, to not see them as perfect, and to let go of perfection in yourself. It's how we treat our own imperfections that helps our children to know that they can have imperfections."

Erica Komisar: Well, I think social media does promote idealization. So, one of the tasks of adolescence, well, the biggest task is to find your place in the adult world. But one of the other big tasks I think is when we're talking about idealizing is the de-idealizing of your parents, to not see them as perfect, and to let go of perfection in yourself. It's how we treat our own imperfections that helps our children to know that they can have imperfections.

When you're in middle adolescence, which is about 14 to 18. When you're in middle adolescence, you're very self-conscious. There's a lot of self-consciousness, the pimple on your nose, you think everybody just sees that pimple on your nose, and you are a big pimple, that's all you are. There's a lot of, and it has to do with brain development; the amygdala is very the threat sensing part of the brain is very active. The PFC, or the emotional regulation part of the brain, lags behind in development, so there's a lot of hyper-criticism, self-criticism, self-consciousness, and sensitivity to others' criticism. It's the worst time for social media because social media presents images that aren't even real. We know now that they are manipulated photos. Photos can be manipulated to look better than they are.

The idea is that adolescents, who struggle with their bodies, their skin, and their hair, and they're sort of, I would say, they're not fully formed adolescence. I know; I went through a terrible period of just feeling awkward with my looks, my teeth, my nose, and my hair. Everybody you know has that period, and to then see these images of these perfect models. Look, in our day, in my day, it was the fashion magazines that made you feel that way, but the difference is you had to go out of your way to pick up a fashion magazine, and then you could put it down and walk away. The problem is your phone is always with you, and that means it's like having an open fashion magazine all the time with skinny perfect and perfect this. First of all, it's not real, so first, you have to teach your kids that those are not real images. Those are touched-up images, meant to manipulate you into buying things and joining things. That's the first thing, but also for you to not need to be perfect. You know it's is as women, if we don't wear our makeup every day, if we kind of dress sloppy sometimes, if we have a pimple and we just go, "oh well" I have a pimple, "oh well" I'm having a bad hair day. That's okay. Everybody has. It's how we treat our own imperfections that helps our children to know that they can have imperfections, and it's okay. That's it, it's really modeling.

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Dr. Hillyer: Thank you for saying that. I think it's very important that us, as parents be able to understand that it's okay to make mistakes and that what we're modeling isn't perfection. Another part that I wanted to touch bases on is what we were discussing as far as bullying is concerned. How do we deal with that in social media? Especially in a time where the new term of "Cancel Culture" has such a negative connotation to it. How do we teach our teams that it's not about canceling them but being held accountable?

Erica Komisar: Again, I take a lot from my faith, and we talk a lot in Judaism about the idea that we're not meant to be punitive; we are meant to be forgiving. I think in Christianity, that's talked about too, the idea of forgiveness. We as a culture have gotten so far away from forgiveness.

I don't know if you heard about this whole Whoopi Goldberg thing that's going on. It's interesting because as a Jew, I would say Whoopi Goldberg has been kind of barbecued publicly when she should have actually been a partner in this idea. I don't know if you know what's happening with her, but it's just an example of how she was suspended because she made some Anti-Semitic quote-unquote Anti-Semitic comment. I think that it's really important that we allow people, as long as they aren't heinous things that we allow people to make mistakes and that we partner with them. We allow people to make mistakes and take responsibility and move on from them; that we don't say one strike, you're out. Because what that does is it creates that perfectionistic example for our children. That if you make a mistake, you could be canceled. If you say the wrong thing or do the wrong thing, you could be totally thrown out socially, and that's a terrifying idea. That you can't stumble, that you can't fall, that you can't learn from your mistakes is a terrifying idea that is actually contributing to a lot of their anxiety. It's real, unfortunately, because the culture has become so intensely hypervigilant that it's a scary culture.

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Dr. Hillyer: You were talking about your faith, and I know for me, one of the key things that I try and teach my kids is that out of all things that, God is Love. I did notice that there was a little section in your book in which you leaned on your faith. I remember seeing a phrase that really stuck with me that said "if you don't believe in God, it's okay. Lie to your kids about that." Why is that important?

Erica Komisar: Well, there's a Harvard study that came out that says that belief in some religion, it doesn't matter which really religion, some faith-based raising of children creates more resilience to stress in those children. So, I think there were a thousand families that were part of the study. I think it's a thousand or more, and of those thousand families, the children who came out the most resilient are the ones who were attending at least one service a week or at least were given some sense of faith.

Being raised in a faith-based environment, the reason for that being that faith is obviously about the idea of some guiding supportive figure in your life other than your parents, but it's more than that it's the community, it is. Community is a big part of it, and its community service because most faiths have some idea of giving to others, sort of communal support. So, there's a lot more to faith than just empathy and compassion. Those are all principles of most religions. There's a lot of advantages that are not just believing in God; it has a lot to do with community. Those kids do better than the kids who are told that when you die, ashes to ashes, dust to dust, and you're nothing. I say in an article I wrote for the Wall Street Journal that Nihilism is fertilizer for anxiety and depression.

Dr. Hillyer: Wow, Erica, you've really dropped some great gyms on us today. I know one of the things that you talked about was that a chapter you would have put in your book would have been about COVID. So, can you tell me some of the tools that you would suggest to us parents post-COVID to give to our adolescents?

Erica Komisar: Well, again, I'm not sure that COVID is all bad. In some ways, it has been devastating to our youth, and in some ways, it's been perspective-giving. In terms of people spending more time with their families, spending more time working from home. Not dropping their kids off in institutional daycare for 12 hours a day like they used to. Really kind of reflecting on relationships being the most important thing. A lot of people quit their jobs. So, I think there might actually be positives that comes out of COVID. That's the optimist in me. I don't think it's all negative. I think that there's going to be a lot of changes in society and family structures because of COVID. That will be an interesting kind of chapter, as you say what happens a decade after COVID. I mean, obviously, there's going to be some negative. It's left a lot of kids in a fearful state, we're going to have to deal with that for many years, but there's also been a lot of good that's come out of it too.

Dr. Hillyer: Yeah, I know; I feel the effects on my life as well. Out of the negatives, I recognize the very real positive aspect that my husband gets from being able to work from home and pick up our son every day from school from kindergarten.

Erica Komisar: I think children are very sensitive to not being the center of their parent's universe. I think what's happened in the past 50 years is that a lot of good has come out of the women's movement. It's a lot of good when I'm a benefactor of a lot of that good. But I think a lot of what's happened is that children used to be the center of parents' universe, and I think careers now, and other personal endeavors have become the center of our universe as adults. I think we can try to lie to ourselves and say that our children are still the center of our universe, but I think how we base what is the center of our universe is how much time we spend on that endeavor or with that relationship.

I think children are very sensitive to the discrepancy between what parents say and what they actually do. So, if the parent says, "I love you more than anything," but I only spend 90 minutes a day with you, "but I love you," children are very sensitive. They know when they're not the center of their parents' universe, and they need to be. Children need to be the center of their parents' universe, it doesn't mean we all have to work and we have to make money, and I get it, I mean, my husband and I both have to work and make money. I have always been quote-unquote a working mom, but in the early years when my kids were little, we sacrificed a lot financially to allow me to be able to be there as much as possible.

So, nothing's perfect, no one's perfect, but I think the idea is that children are very sensitive to when their parents are distracted. I'll just give you one more example, I sing, and when my kids were little, I sang in the temple. Now when I was younger, I used to sing like an amateur; I was an amateur opera singer. But whenever I would sing to my kids, they would like it for a minute. Then they would say stop it, mommy, stop it because they don't want you then your narcissism which is expressed through singing. Anything that expresses your own narcissism, they're very sensitive to. They want the attention back on them, and that's a real key to health with children is that they are the center of your interest and the center of your universe. A lot of that has to be met with the amount of time that we spend with them, and how much attention we give them and whether we turn off our devices. Whether we're really interested in them because you can't fake interest, that's the problem. You can't fake it.

Dr. Hillyer: So, I understand what you're saying about children really being intuitive and really wanting you to be that center of attention around their world. But, jumping to my profession, for example, what happens when you have a family who's in the neonatal intensive care unit? They could be there for days, weeks, or months and maybe that child at home just isn't really understanding what's going on. How do we, as healthcare providers, give these families the tools to help navigate and help that child at home who no longer is the center of the world.

Erica Komisar: So again, loss is something that happens. Adver-

sity is something that happens. It is an adversity to have a child who's in a neonatal unit, and it's an adversity to the child you already have, right? So, the child who's at home, who's now lost time with you and that you've disappeared and gone. You are spending days and hours at the hospital, and it's a tremendous loss for that child. So again, children are not born resilient, they're born vulnerable. That means that they rely on you to help them to process the loss and their emotions.

Life isn't perfect, and sometimes we're dealt cards, and our kids are dealt cards that are not fair. It's addressing the unfairness with your child. It's letting them express their sadness. It's encouraging them to express their anger that this baby has come into the world; and "can't the baby go back mommy," "I don't want that baby," "I hate that baby," "I wish that baby would die," "I wish you'd come home again." Not to say to your child, "don't say that." We don't want to stop your child from expressing emotion because they just introvert that emotion. They'll become depressed because when we invert our anger and our sadness, that leads to depression. We want to encourage our children to express how they feel, whatever it is rage or sadness, and help them to process it and say that it's natural that you feel that way, and anytime you feel that way come to mommy. Check-in every day and talk about how we're feeling, so it's processing.

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So, think of yourself as a parent, as a neonatal nurse. It's teaching parents that it's okay that the children that they have are angry and sad and that they have to give them opportunities to express. Even what is in the parent's mind, the worst possible thing, which is that that older child or the toddler wishes that baby would die. That if they say that it's not the end of the world. That if they've got to get it out and they've got to hear compassion from you. I understand it's hard; it's such a hard thing that we that this beautiful baby that is your sibling is not isn't is not able to come home and play. That mommy needs to be you need to be able to process how hard it is. So that's how you help children with adversity. You don't make it go away because you can't. You can't always be in two places at once, but you have to process their feelings.

Dr. Hillyer: Thank you so much, Erica, for your time today. I really enjoyed this conversation that we've had, and I think that your book is extremely important and I think that it gives parents the tools that they need to help their adolescents as they navigate through this complex world that we're living in now. I'm going to reread your book and tell everyone to read it as well. So, I want to once again thank you again for joining us on Neonatology Today Media platform, and we appreciate it.

Disclosure: Erica Komisar is the author of Chicken Little, the Sky Isn't Falling: Raising Resilient Adolescents in the New Age of Anxiety

About the Author: Kimberly Hillyer, DNP, NNP-BC:

Title: NT News Anchor and Editor

Title: Neonatal Nurse Practitioner & News Anchor, Editor for Neonatology Today

Organization: Loma Linda University Health Children's Hospital

Neonatology Today in partnership with Loma Linda University Publishing Company.

Bio: Kimberly Hillyer, RN LNC, NNP-BC DNP, completed her Master's degree specializing as a Neonatal Nurse Practitioner in 2006 and completed her Doctorate of Nursing Practice (DNP) at Loma Linda University in 2017. She became an Assistant Clinical Professor and the Neonatal Nurse Practitioner Coordinator at Loma Linda University. Her interest in the law led her to attain certification as a Legal Nurse Consultant at Kaplan University.

As a Neonatal Nurse Practitioner, she has worked for Loma Linda University Health Children's Hospital (LLUH CH) for twenty years. During that time, she has mentored and precepted other Neonatal Nurse Practitioners while actively engaging in multiple hospital committees. She was also the Neonatal Nurse Practitioners Student Coordinator for LLU CH. A secret passion for informatics has led her to become an EPIC Department Deputy for the Neonatal Intensive Care at LLUH CH.

She is a reviewer for Neonatology Today and has recently joined the Editorial Board as the News Anchor.

About the Author: Erica Komisar

Erica Komisar is a clinical social worker, psychoanalyst, parent coach and author. With 30 years of experience in private practice, she works to alleviate pain from individuals who suffer from depression, anxiety, eating, and other compulsive disorders. By helping them live better lives and have richer, more satisfying relationships, she assists them in achieving their personal and professional goals and living up to their potential.

A graduate of Georgetown and Columbia Universities and The New York Freudian Society, Erica is a psychological consultant bringing parenting and work/life workshops to clinics, schools, corporations, and childcare settings including The Garden House School, Goldman Sachs, Shearman, and Sterling and SWFS Early Childhood Center.

Erica is also the author of the book Being There: Why Prioritizing Motherhood in the First Three Years Matters and has appeared on major media networks such as CBS, ABC, FOX, and NPR. She is a regular contributor to the Wall Street Journal, Washington Post, New York Daily News, and FOX 5 NY. She is a Contributing Editor to the Institute for Family Studies. Her upcoming book, Chicken Little The Sky Isn't Falling: Raising Resilient Adolescents in the New Age of Anxiety will be released in Fall 2021.

She lives in New York City with her husband, optometrist, and social entrepreneur Dr. Jordan Kassalow with whom she has three teenage and young adult children.

Visit her website at: www.komisar.com.

Chicken Little, the Sky Isn't Falling: Raising Resilient Adolescents in the New Age of Anxiety

Publisher: HCI Books

Release Date: November 2, 2021

ISBN-10: 0757324002

ISBN-13: 9780757324000

Trade Paperback, 288 pages

Available from Amazon.com