

Celebrating Human Differences

by Mark Katz, PhD

COMPASSION FATIGUE is the price we may sometimes pay for the compassion we feel for others who are struggling, and for working tirelessly to help them improve their lives. Among its tell-tale signs is emotional exhaustion. We feel worn out, our spark is gone, and that light at the end of the tunnel is fading fast. While its effects have been studied mostly by experts in the field of traumatic stress, some experts now believe it actually casts a wider net than originally thought. Teachers can suffer from compassion fatigue. So can therapists. So can spouses. And so can parents of children with learning and behavioral challenges. The good news is that it's reversible. And the Movement of Imperfection can help.

The Movement of Imperfection is the brainchild of Gina Terrasi Gallagher and Patty Terrasi Konjoian, two sisters who were frightened and confused after learning that each of their daughters' struggles had a name—Asperger syndrome and bipolar disorder, respectively. Professionals would use terms they couldn't understand. They felt like outsiders during meetings at school. Books about their children's disabilities left them feeling even more frightened and confused. The last straw? Listening to friends gloat about their high-achieving "perfect" children while never asking about their kids.

Fed up, Gina and Patty began imploring those in similar circumstances not to be afraid and not to feel alone. Instead, the sis-

ters encouraged such parents to be strong and to brag about the accomplishments of their special children. A book, *Shut Up About Your Perfect Kid*, soon followed, then a business, Shut Up Industries, Inc.—and then the Movement of Imperfection.

The Movement of Imperfection encourages every parent or caregiver of all children to recognize the strengths and abilities of their kids. Patty and Gina realized the power of their movement when a mother at one of their speaking events proudly announced that her child with autism had told his first lie. In the world of autism, this was a huge developmental milestone and one to be celebrated.

In a broader sense, the Movement of Imperfection helps in more ways than we



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The Movement of Imperfection

Gina and Patty invite you to join with the Movement of Imperfection so it can continue to grow... and so you can benefit from the humor of the imperfect side. You can do this in several ways.

- Submit a story about your amazing “imperfect” child; simply visit shutupabout.com to find out how to submit a story.
- Become a Facebook fan.
- Follow Gina and Patty on Twitter.
- Read and follow their blog on psychologytoday.com.
- Read their book.
- Watch their video productions on youtube.com.
- “Think about hiring us to speak at your school or at your conference,” say Gina and Patty. “Please, help us get out of the house!” Email info@shutupabout.com to inquire about hiring the “Shut Up” Sisters for your event.

may realize. It helps us to see differences in a hopeful new light. It focuses us on life’s possibilities rather than its probabilities. We learn that we are not alone. To the contrary, we see that more people than we ever imagined have been going through very similar experiences. The movement provides a sense of legitimacy and validation to those struggling with learning, behavioral, or other differences. They can also become part of a larger, collective effort to help educate others in similar circumstances so they too do not feel confused, isolated, and alone.

These are all among the things experts in the field find to be helpful for alleviating compassion fatigue. For those suffering its effects, the Movement of Imperfection may be the cure. Even better, the active ingredient is laughter. “We’ve always seen ourselves as having two choices,” say Gina and Patty. “We could laugh or we could cry. We chose laughter. It doesn’t create puffy eyes, and offers some serious health benefits.”

Shut Up About Your Perfect Kid!

The Movement of Imperfection has grown exponentially since it was first highlighted in *Attention* magazine several years ago. Gina and Patty now speak nationally at conferences throughout the United States. They also have begun to speak in school systems and colleges, informing teachers and future teachers on the potential challenges, and gifts of special children. Their book, *Shut Up About Your Perfect Kid*, received excellent reviews and is helping thousands of parents, spouses, and professionals learn to see learning, behavioral, and social challenges in a new light.

The Shut Up About Your Perfect Kid! Facebook page—home to more than 12,000 fans—provides an inclusive, fun, and refreshingly frank support system for parents, caregivers, providers, and teachers looking for information and resources. Gina’s daughter, Katie, now seventeen years old, even launched a community page on Facebook, Shut Up About Your Perfect Kid Tween/Teen, to provide a similar resource for special kids.

The sisters utilize their website, shutupabout.com, to share success stories and provide a venue for others to share their learning experiences with others. They say, “We know how important it is to hear from the experts, but we believe the ‘street perspective’ from other caregivers living in the trenches is so valuable.” 🗣️

A clinical and consulting psychologist, Mark Katz is the director of Learning Development Services, an educational, psychological, and neuropsychological center located in San Diego. He is a contributing editor to Attention magazine and a member of its editorial advisory board, a former member of CHADD’s professional advisory board, and a recipient of the CHADD Hall of Fame Award.