

*Words, words, words...*

# NUTRITION for the MIND!

Feed your children with healthy words – the effects will last a lifetime.

By **Deborah Marshall-Warren.**

**M**ary Poppins! Recall to your mind the movie *Mary Poppins*, where the eponymous nanny sings: "super-califragilistic-expialidocious, even though the sound of it is something quite atrocious"? Mary Poppins rather enjoyed and knew the power of nutritional words and phrases for her young charges and dished them out with spoonfuls of glee and joy! When you speak to your child, you are offering to them suggestions and ideas and labels, which can be either helpful or limiting. Telling a child "You're useless!" may sink in as a 'life sentence' that your child could retain for the greater part of her life – until she finds the key to releasing it in therapy or personal growth. You can avoid that long recovery by freeing yourself from the unconscious tyranny of words, and in so doing freeing your child by choosing words and phrases that garland and celebrate that young life!

The burgeoning need for psycho-therapeutic interventions is evidence enough of how words and phrases in various forms – oft repeated, by loved ones, professionals with influence and increasingly today by peers – go directly to the subconscious mind, influencing our behaviours, attitudes and thoughts about ourselves and our day-to-day interactions with others.

I work daily, as a hypnotherapist in Malta, as a facilitator to help unravel initial programming still installed in the

subconscious minds of "inner children" of otherwise healthy Maltese adults, and am provided with evidence daily of how children in their formative years are under pressure to accept what they are given, be it anger and sometimes violence between parents they hear and occasionally witness. Children 'eat' whatever is verbally served up for their ears to hear. These experiences create the conditions for later anxiety, panic attacks and patterns of depression and low self-esteem.

**Grown-up opinions and their legacy.** As youngsters, we are much more vulnerable to grown-ups' opinions and actions. From those opinions and actions, we derive both pleasure and pain. A young child is especially vulnerable to the effects of labels that others dish out. "You're thick. You're stupid. You're no child of mine." Often repeated, these labels embed themselves in the subconscious mind. You are what you devour! This is true of your personality as well as your body. Incoming words become absorbed either for the benefit of your child's developing personality or in denial of the bright spirit within your child that longs to shine.

**Your child devours the words you serve up.** In their formative years, children are under pressure to accept what they are given. Children are told to eat up all the food on their plates – to

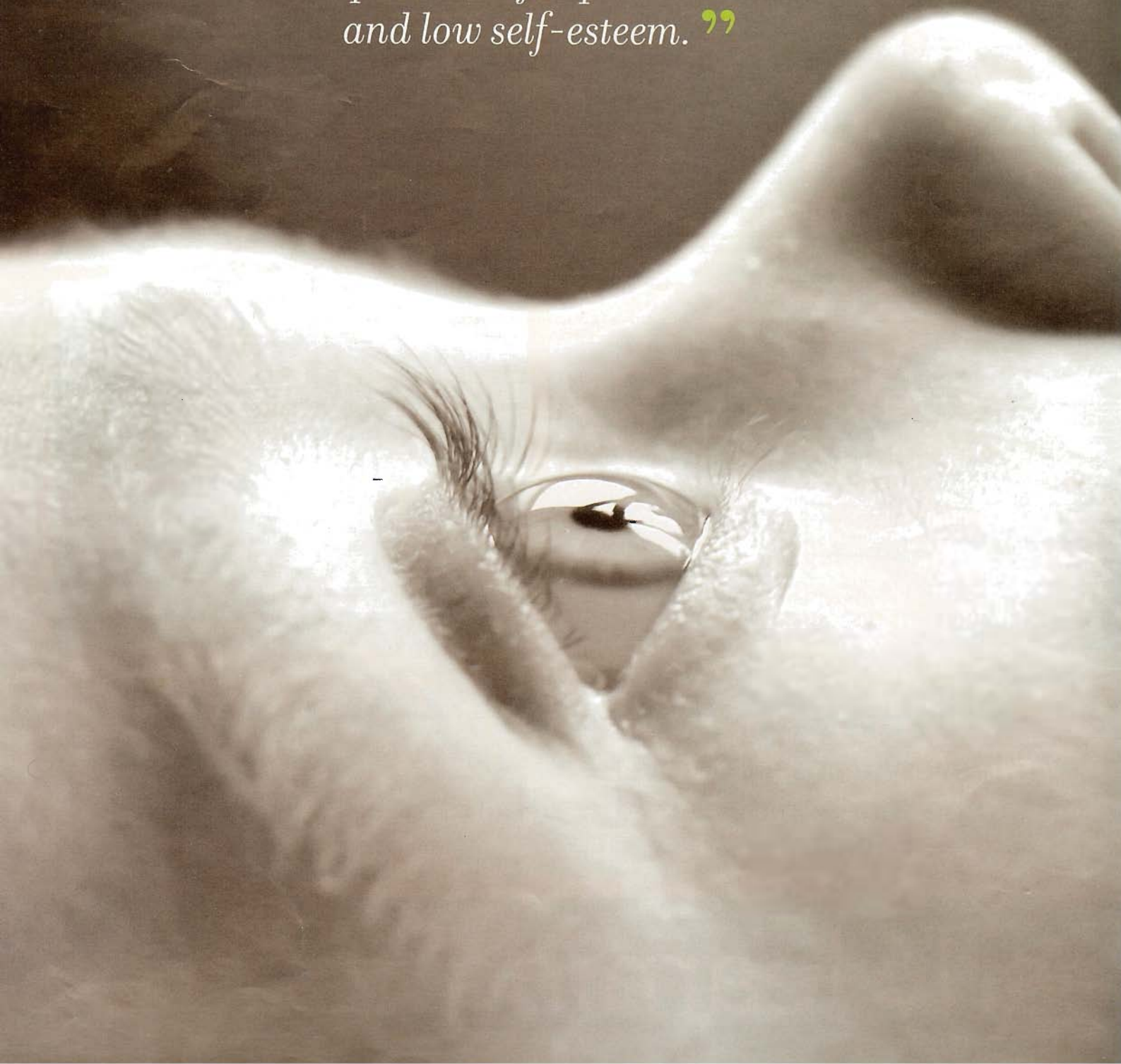
"eat their greens". Children can devour and absorb words even more voraciously than dinner. Children eat whatever is given to them – whether it is a good apple or a poisoned apple – especially when served up by loved ones or protectors. Likewise, they accept trustingly the verbal expressions that are given to them to digest and absorb.

**When words are good they are very good, and when they are bad they are horrid.** Children do not have the faculty for discerning which words to absorb and which to reject. They lack the life-experience to know what is an appropriate diet for their minds. Their ability in this respect is limited both by a lack of understanding and by an unconditional love that leads them to trust whatever grown-ups tell them. When diseased fruits land on her plate the child may blame herself for the bad taste and sickness rather than the person who gave her those fruits. Unable to separate the pea from the pod in her mind, she may not be able to formulate a clear idea of the external source of her unhappiness.

**Repeat and repeat nutritious words and phrases to your child.**

A frequently repeated ill-intentioned word can become a label that we wear as a hand-me-down wound. When words are good, their effect can be very beneficial, and when they are bad they can be very, very bad. We ingest and ▶

*“Children ‘eat’ whatever is verbally served up for their ears to hear. These experiences create the conditions for later anxiety, panic attacks and patterns of depression and low self-esteem.”*



digest them – as told to do so by parents and siblings at home, teachers and others at school – but discover later that some of them worked to hold back our growing minds and to deny the potential to be who we truly are.

### Support your child's verbal heaven.

The brightest spark in the heavens would need phenomenal strength, self-belief and determination in order to transcend continual put-downs and critical hand-me-down labels. In fact, your child may generally muddle through, and other children too, to a lesser or greater degree. Your child may have the strength, may have the seeds of self-belief and the determination. But there are many bright sparks out there who continually strive to transcend their received labels as children and who endeavour to correct their initial social programming each day – to work towards recognising the truth about themselves. For example, my client Maria as a young girl grew up believing she was a bad person because she had internalised adverse suggestions about being left-handed. On an emotional level, a young child's faculty for discerning what is an appropriate "nutritional" diet of vocabulary for her mind is limited by a lack of understanding.

### Always indulge your child with positive suggestions.

Most often, children are subjected to quite arbitrary patterns of suggestion which arise out of the past history of the suggesters, be they parents or other family members, or teachers. Sometimes the patterns are purely verbal, sometimes they are backed up with coercion. My client Steven grew up believing himself to be "crap" because of a father whose temper was on a hair-trigger and who beat him up for the least infringement of his rules.

### Celebrate the magical child.

Bearing in mind how potent your words can be in your child's ear, dream up gorgeous and growth-allowing suggestions for your child that honour the best and the brightest of them. It helps your child whenever you encourage her to choose words that express opinions of herself that are kind, loving, and honouring – and likewise encourage her to let go of labels and opinions of herself that do not serve her.

## THE POEM, TRUTH,

*Sticks and stones may break my bones,  
but words can also hurt me.*

*Stones and sticks break only skin,  
while words are ghosts that haunt me.*

*Slant and curved the word-swords fall,  
To pierce and stick inside me.*

*Bats and bricks may ache through bones,  
but words can mortify me.*

*Pain from words has left its scar  
on minds and heart that's tender.*

*Cuts and bruises now have healed;  
it's words that I remember.*

Barrie Wade



- Be aware of how your words can be misunderstood.
- Be aware that your words may live on for years.
- Give your child phrases that build her self-esteem.
- Guard your child's exposure to potentially toxic language.
- Teach your child which words to devour and which to leave aside.

### Be selective about what your child watches on television and other media.

The most common reason for viewers to watch any given television show or advert is that it follows whatever was on previously. Traumatic scenes in television and film enter through the indiscriminating eye of your child. Scenes and images go directly to your young child's subconscious mind. There they lodge, and not necessarily for her advantageous benefit. This diet for

the mind can be thought of as being "toxic" and can ultimately be more devastating than bad junk food. The latter can be rejected by the body, but television's diet for the mind can lie in the pit of the mind – festering and waiting to be regurgitated in an inappropriate emotional or physical way.

### Be on your guard with respect to the influences in society.

Be aware of enticing influences in supermarkets and fast food restaurants! Suggestions within supermarkets, fast food restaurants, bus shelter advertisements and society at large, are able to influence your child beyond your control. Guard their senses and maintain attention to what is coming in – be it from corporations, television, the Internet or a computer screen.

### Do your best to ensure your child's vocabulary is packed full of verbal vitamins!

Be watchful and ensure the verbal diet your child receives from you and other sources, is in all ways nutritious, and strengthening of the values and the qualities that empower their humanity and positive healthy growth. Be an appropriate cheerleader for your child, and champion your child to be a cheerleader for both themselves, for their siblings and for other children. I worked with an 11-year-old who was incapable of saying anything good about himself. Eventually by the third session, and with a little coaching, he arrived at some championing "I can do..." words and phrases and in relaxation I got him to say these statements over and over and over, and to really champion himself and the real possibility of his truth – to affirm his gifts. I was his chorus girl! I received a text from his mother some weeks later reporting that: "Sam is saying his 'lines' and his sister is joining in to say them as well!"

Helping your child validate himself, can be a great team-building activity for your family. You may discover how much fun it is for you, for your child, and for your inner child! ●

**Deborah Marshall-Warren** is a hypno-therapist and trainer. She has been in private practice working with children and the 'inner children' of adults for almost 20 years.