What Humans Can Learn From The Mating Habits Of Armadillos

By Jamie Wells, M.D. — August 17, 2018

I had the distinct pleasure of being a guest on CUNY-TV’s Smith Sabatino Show yesterday. When corresponding with multiple Emmy-winning, legendary co-host Rolland Smith prior to the appearance, I inquired as to the topics to be discussed (see below Notes section). In response, given the more conversational tone and vast scope of subject matter covered in the program, he replied with the general medically eclectic range along with the mating habits of armadillos. Though it was funny mixed in with the expected theme and clear that he was joking, he dangled the bait that I just can’t resist. If I don’t know about something, then my curious nature gets the better of me. So, what I came to learn about armadillo reproduction is a rather wise guiding principle that humans could find beneficial.

Apparently, armadillos, in addition to them generally being solitary creatures with the female ones typically refusing male interaction outside of the couple month window of their mating season and playing a variation of hard-to-get to outright dismissal, have a capacity to delay pregnancy, more specifically implantation. Why would they do this or have a need? Because the ability is actually protective to their offspring. If they can protract implantation of the fertilized egg (which splits into four total) in some cases for up to four months, then they can guarantee they will be born in a time of plenty. A period where food is abundant and the conditions are favorable to their progeny’s survival.

In so doing, they parent before they are even technically pregnant.

Humans do attempt to mimic this concept, but in our current instant gratification, consumer-driven culture genuine preparation for parenting often gets supplanted by extraneous purchases and
fixation on acquiring stuff and things. The minutia seems to trump the fundamentals. And, for those marketing such products, playing on the fears of first-time parents is a winning combination. Spending a fortune before (and after) the baby is born on items (or classes and the like) you more often than not don’t need enables faulty expectations that when unmet foster greater harm than good.

Stuff and things should place a distant last on the ever important list of what is required to raise a thriving, independent and well-adjusted child. The overall health of a baby is most nurtured by a host of factors at play in their biopsychosocial development. Now, waiting for the “perfect” time to have a baby, just like the “perfect” spouse or the “perfect” whatever can sometimes become the enemy of the good. So, finding the right balance between living, not postponing life and fulfilling your dreams of parenthood is really the sweet spot.

Seeking help or identifying marital woes and depressive symptoms, for example, when a pregnancy is on the horizon is the greatest gift you can give your child and family - more than any trend or accomplishment could deliver. Parenting well is about the long game and being able to step back and see the big picture in those unexpected, challenging moments. Today, with the rapid pace of the world and the pervasive influence of technology and shortening attention spans, the basics that create the most solid of foundations to support a child’s establishment of resilience and the incredibly important survival characteristic of adaptability often get put on the back burner.

Creating favorable environments help children and families flourish. The parent child dyad is a symbiotic one. For a child to learn accountability and responsibility from a parent, he will mimic what he sees. Leading by example and being consistent in demonstrating that actions have consequences will yield greater dividends than any course on the subject or electronic device. These types of gifts to a child withstand a lifetime. Yes, stuff and things are fun and have their place, but don’t underestimate how much is gained for a child when he knows he is loved, is empowered to solve his own problems and view the world through a lens of opportunities not obstacles.

Though many poor decisions we make are often short-sighted in trying quickly to avoid the current pain, in so doing we often create even more collateral damage and larger struggles. There is a lesson to be learned in how the armadillo navigates the world by selective delayed gratification.

Note(s):

Here I am in the studio with co-hosts broadcasting veteran Carl Sabatino and Rolland Smith (in orange shirt) recording for the TV and radio program that will air in a couple weeks (will update with link then, here is the link [3] to my previous appearance on the state of healthcare today):