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### The Core

Dominique Gummelt

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## Dear Fellow Mama,

If you walked by me today and said, “Hi, how are you?” I would probably smile, “Well, and you?” to which we might nod and wish each other a wonderful day.



▲ Ingrid Weiss Slikkers

I might watch you walk away and marvel at how nice you looked. I may recall your Facebook post a few weeks back of a lovely vacation with smiling children. I might sigh as I think, “She sure is lucky, seems to have the perfect life.” However, I wonder what would happen if I had responded to you, “I’m exhausted. Today I’m feeling a bit defeated and could use some encouragement,” and then proceeded to break down in tears? What would happen if I was vulnerable?

Some have called it “parental burnout;” others call it an epidemic because of media and comparisons which other generations didn’t experience. Doing a web search will lead one to research studies, personal stories, and never-ending ideas and discussions of ideal parenting from experts.

Then, my dear friend, there’s the guilt. Guilt about not spending enough time with my spouse, or because we ate drive-through food yesterday, or because we hurried, and instead of having worship before bed, simply said a quick prayer in order to “check it off the list.” Oh, and the lists . . . lists on the fridge, in my purse, by the bedside table, on my desk in the office — and the list I drafted while stopped at the red light! Oh, no! I’d better not forget what’s on that one!

The secular world has many articles on the “mommy wars” created by comparisons. My dear sister, are we more loving of each other than the secular world? Do we love as Christ loved us? Or are we harsher with others and on ourselves because our lists of perfect parenting are longer from biblical examples and guidance from Ellen White? Are we even more frightened to be transparent because it may not appear as if we are “faithful” enough?

You may find it ironic that I am writing about these things; after all, I teach the Advanced Family Therapy class at Andrews University. But here I am — vulnerably writing this to you as a fellow warrior in the trenches. I tell my graduate students there are no perfect families. One look at families in the Bible shows us that. So, why do we judge? Or compare?

I recognize that the battle for the lives our children will never end until heaven. We shall not rest as we pour out our hearts for them (see Lamentations 2:19).

So, fellow mommy, in this battle that is not against each other, but against the world, can we be like Aaron and Hur in service to Moses as described in Exodus 17? Can we lift each other’s hands up when one is tired? The battle will continue to rage but, like the promise in Psalm 46:5, we need to remind each other that we will not fail, for God is within us and He will help us at the break of day! Like a strong city fortress, we will stand. I will commit to look to my sisters and lift their hands. Let me text one right now and remind her of this promise. And then, maybe, you can text me?

Sincerely,

Your Fellow Warrior Mama ■

*Ingrid Weiss Slikkers is assistant professor of Social Work at Andrews University, a Child and Family therapist, and constantly learning more about God because of her sons.*

## The Core

I want to invite you to a different reading experience today. Are you ready? Great! Please follow the steps outlined below right now and give this a try (but do try this at your own risk!).

- Wherever you are currently sitting, scoot towards the front edge of your seat.
- Plant both feet solidly on the ground.
- Sit up nice and straight.
- Roll your shoulders back.
- Lift your chin up slightly.
- Contract your gluteus maximus (your buttocks!).
- Contract your stomach by sucking it in and holding it.
- Now continue breathing and hold this position throughout reading this article!

Many of us don’t actually know our own core very well, so let’s take a quick look at its function and what is actually part of “the Core.” It consists of muscles in the abdomen, pelvic floor, sides of the trunk, back, buttocks, hips and pelvis. Core muscles stabilize the spine and help transfer forces between the upper and lower body. In fact, there are 29 muscles attaching to the ribs, hips, spinal column and other bones in the trunk of the body.

Lack of core muscle fitness can create an unstable spine, and stress muscles and joints. Although back pain can be the result of a sudden and traumatic injury, more commonly it is due to weak and inflexible core muscles, poor posture and poor body mechanics during activities.

With the advent of modern technology, humans have started sitting more and moving less. This has contributed to poor posture and weak core muscles, as these are NOT stimulated sufficiently. Weak core muscles, especially the gluteal muscles, contribute to an unstable pelvis, which can lead to increased pronation of the lower extremity. In addition, the knees and feet can be severely impacted due to forced rotation of the lower extremities and injuries may result. Other parts of the

body may be forced to pick up the slack of weak core muscles.

Have you noticed how many of us have started to be permanently slouched over? It is because much of what we do each day includes a forward curve in our upper back, such as driving, typing, watching TV, etc. When the core muscles are weak, they cannot counteract this forward position. Slouching can contribute to neck tension and headaches.

The answer to many of these issues is to strategically train all core muscles to become stronger and more fit. You can build up core strength doing whole body exercises, using free weights and stability balls (just to name a few training modes) at least two to three times per week.

One of the best ways to strengthen your entire core is to incorporate a variety of planking exercises into your fitness regimen. Planking can be modified for all fitness levels and is a great way to start activating core muscles! At a minimum, however, you could begin working on sitting in the manner described at the beginning of this article on a regular basis.

Don’t underestimate the power of a strong core! It can prevent injuries, avoid pain and discomfort. It can protect your spine, improve posture and allow all areas of the body to function properly without overcompensating for a weak core. Do not delay; get “the Core” fit by starting your training today!

To learn, read and watch more, please visit: [dominiquegummelt.com](http://dominiquegummelt.com). ■

*Dominique Gummelt, director of Andrews University Health and Wellness*



▲ Dominique Gummelt