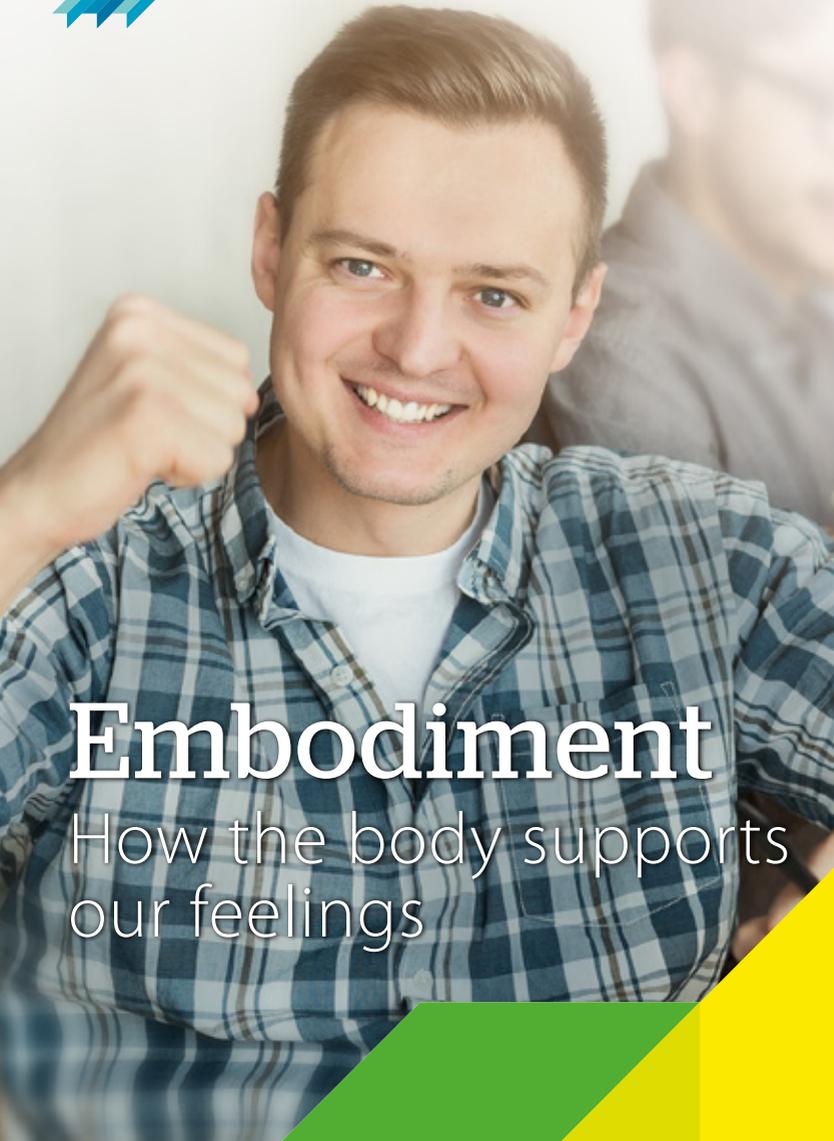




FÜRSTENBERG
INSTITUT

NEWS

October | 2018



Becoming
parents
- remaining a
couple

Embodiment

How the body supports
our feelings

Dear readers,



My daughter Sarah (22) recently told me that the fact that people these days are constantly gazing downwards to look at their cellphones facilitates the onset of depression. It's a fascinating idea.

Most people are aware that psychological states affect the body. When the soul expresses itself via the body, it can make you feel "sick to your stomach" or give you "butterflies in your stomach", or make your "throat clench up" or your "heart beat faster". However, many people do not know that we can influence our mood in a very simple manner through deliberate postures, facial expressions or gestures.

Also referred to as "embodiment", this is precisely one of our topics in this newsletter. Enjoy the read, and: Just give it a try!

Best wishes,

Reinhold Fürstenberg

Embodiment – How the body supports our feelings

We are living in an era that focuses a great deal on the body as a fitness and health object. The body is nourished, trained and optimized for beauty or endurance – perhaps even to boost our sense of well-being. Recent brain research, especially that which has been conducted by the psychologist Maja Storch and neurobiologists like Antonio Damasio, impressively shows that the body is more than just a beast of burden that carries our brain and our knowledge from place to place. Rather, it allows us to acquire and structure knowledge in the first place and has a significant impact on our version of reality, depending on how we use it. After all, our bodies decisively determine how we understand our world – what we perceive, in the truest sense of the word.

"Embodiment" refers to the subtle interplay between feelings, body language and reality.

This branch of research addresses the question of how environmental stimuli pre-consciously influence our assessments and how, conversely, we can use our bodily perception to help ourselves.

Research findings

In this context, a series of impressive experiments illustrating these relationships have been conducted: For example, the recently demonstrated Batman effect shows that children who are required to perform boring chores persevere longer when dressed in Batman

costumes than their peers. Identifying with the superhero and adopting the relevant posture triggers a different solution strategy.

The same is true of the often-researched palm paradigm. As they watch a political talk show, test subjects are asked either to press their hands against the tabletop from above (the “Go away!” posture) or to press them against the tabletop from below, which corresponds to a “Come here!” movement. There was also a plate with cookies on the table during the show. It became clear that the second group, which was in the receptive/“come here” mode, ate twice as many cookies as the first group.

It can be shown that treating frown wrinkles with Botox has a positive influence on depressive symptoms in patients, because the physical feedback about one’s own negative feelings is inhibited. Conversely, it can be shown that when subjects are asked to assume a grinning expression by holding a pen between their teeth their “happiness hormone” level rises significantly after only two minutes.

If happiness is so easy, how can we make use of these findings in everyday life?

Suitability for everyday use

The impressively simple answer is: “Fake it till you make it!” Your body listens to you carefully and usually follows your instructions. If you allow yourself to crack a smile (and it doesn’t matter if it is somewhat exaggerated, as described above), you will soon notice how easy it is to see the positive side of things. In this context, it’s worth mentioning the difference between a grin and a “cold” smile, or a proud versus an arrogant posture, etc. Embodiment is not about the perversion of a

target state, but about consciously inviting body and mind to work together to make things easier and more helpful.

A good coach does not shout at her team, telling the lazy losers to get their act together, but rather motivates them to focus on their strengths and successes. This is precisely the language our body needs. Instead of compounding our listlessness with the associated speech and posture, it is worthwhile to counteract that apathy with an upright posture or head position, in order to help boost our mood.

It can also help to train the kind of physical muscle memory that helps against life’s everyday downers: Missed the bus? Instead of hanging your shoulders and swearing, you could wave or make a pushing hand gesture along with a friendly or funny remark. This will emphasize your acceptance and thus generate a more positive feeling. Your colleague is in a bad mood? While he is grumbling, push against the edge of your table with an inward smile, for example, and reflect on the area you can protect against his bad mood.

Try different embodiments to find out what helps and strengthens you. **It is important to realize that each of us is a work of art – a synthesis of body, consciousness and soul.** Like any team, we are most successful when each member does their best and everyone supports each other.



Author:
Elke Schicke,
Counsellor at the
Fürstenberg Institute

On failing and dealing with crises in a healthy manner



Author:
Dr. Leila Steinhilper,
 Counsellor at the
 Fürstenberg Institute

Ms. Wagner was beside herself – she felt like a complete failure. The prestigious project she was responsible for as a project manager failed. She felt deep shame about having failed. She could not even talk about it for a long time. Most people react the same way as Ms. Wagner – we tend not to speak about failure and the ensuing crisis; if we do so at all, then it's behind closed doors and in hushed tones. American sociologist Peter Sennett even referred to failure as the last major taboo of modern times. In a Western culture, everyone strives for happiness, because happiness seems to be a calculable part of life – there is thus no room for failure. Experiences of failure nevertheless accompany every human being from childhood. Nobody can learn to walk without falling.

Failure is a valuable developmental step

As dramatic as failing can initially feel, it is also a great opportunity: to learn and improve yourself. That's why it's worthwhile to disassociate failure from its taboo status and place it on the table. Why is this helpful?

The approach: planning for failure

Positive "side effects" are hard to find in the moment of failure. It is more than understandable (and reasonable) to not immediately see the opportunity failure constitutes when you are in the thick of it. You must first come to terms with the failure, and that takes time. It nevertheless helps to develop an "upfront" approach to failure. Because we all know: failure is not preventable. An awareness of the possibility

of failure should thus always accompany our actions and be seen as a self-reflective developmental step. This will make it easier to get up again after the fall.

The evaluation: differentiating failure

An important criterion for the question of how to constructively deal with failure is evaluating the situation. How are you experiencing it? As a failure or rather as a personal disaster? People can have very different evaluations. Whereas one person sees the situation as the tragic end of a chosen path, another person may very well evaluate the same situation as an unfortunate but meaningful twist of fate. How one sees oneself – the evaluation of one's own abilities – also plays a key role. After all, the essential question is whether one sees "only" the project in question as a failure, or instead considers oneself to be a "failure of a person" altogether. Paying attention to this disparity makes the biggest difference in answering the question of whether I can learn from failure.

The reflection: developing self-awareness

Another important determinant of "wise" failure is the ability to analyze oneself. Am I aware of my potential and my core competencies as well as my limitations and blind spots? And based on that: What could I have changed in the situation? What couldn't I have changed? For which part of the failure am I responsible and for which not? If I am self-aware, then I can consistently reflect on my goals and readjust them if necessary. That tells me when it would be a good idea to let go of goals, when they no longer make sense or are impossible to achieve. A person who struggles to meet standards that are set too high is destined to fail – unlike someone who learns to orient themselves by actual possibilities when setting goals. In that case, I will see giving up as more than defeat, but rather as an opportunity to do a better job of setting my goals next time.

Failure in organizations

A few more words about how companies deal with failed projects – in the case of Ms. Wagner, this is inseparable from her personally experienced failure: Compared to the personal sphere, failure in a professional context seems even less accepted. You can at least talk to close friends about a broken marriage, for instance. But failed projects, teams or business models, on the other hand, are hardly ever openly discussed in the company.

How can organizations fail more constructively and reap the maximum benefit from it? Companies should say goodbye to the very convenient solution of always finding a person that is responsible, a scapegoat, for failed projects. Although doing so allows the company to stay as it is, this mechanism is devastating in the long term, as it does not take advantage of the opportunity to review corporate structures and culture. No collective learning process or further

development for companies and employees takes place. The fear of failure also limits entrepreneurial success.

Top management and executives play a key role in making employees less afraid of the consequences of talking openly about mistakes or failures: They should create fear-free spaces in the organization, and not be afraid to speak openly about their own failed projects and wrong decisions. Failure criteria should be shown in presentations in the same way as the classic success criteria. And the following is important when it comes to selecting and developing personnel: they should rely on employees who admit to having failed and have learned from it. After all, although many people may think that good riders have never fallen off their horse, true good riders know that it is essential to have fallen off in order to have learned to be a good rider.

“The more I fail, the more successful I am.”

With these words, I would like to encourage you to speak openly about failure and to accept it as part of life. And not to forget that we can at least significantly influence the way we fail. By that I do not mean that you should try to fail in a way that brings you loads of success. It is much simpler: We can fail worse and we can fail better. We can fail more cleverly.



Becoming parents – remaining a couple

The partner relationship as a foundation for the young family

The first encounter – BANG – is either love at first sight or gradually falling love in the course of getting to know each other. Being together for the first time and then staying together is something you never forget. Exciting! Uncertain! Beautiful! You not only get to know and love another person intensively, but you also rediscover yourself – in togetherness.

When you were alone, you may have wished you had a partner to share things with, lean against, be loved by and love in return. On the other hand, the following question may have crossed your mind: "How can I make time for another person in my life?" Your average week was busy as it is with work, friends, simply being alone with yourself, family, going out, reading, hobbies, going to concerts, holidays and adventures. And you nevertheless somehow finally managed to find time and space for the new love in your life. And then... after a few months or years of living together, you can hardly imagine life without the other person at your side. Something has changed! You yourself, your life, has changed because of the other person.

Two become three. And now what?

Once you begin to feel the desire to have a child, another upheaval is on the way. When will it happen? Immediately? Or only after a few months or even years? If one partner does get pregnant, what is in store for the couple? Physical changes, check-ups, joyful anticipa-

tion as well as worries about pregnancy and childbirth, conversations about the time after birth, what needs to be considered? What sort of needs and expectations will each partner have, and what will they expect of their significant other? Who will take parental leave? How will the childcare tasks be shared? What about the other household tasks? How will you adapt to the new structures and circumstances relating to breastfeeding, feeding, lack of sleep, diapers, limited time for yourself, and so on and so forth? You have conversations about how it will be to have three in the family. This raises the question of how to create space for the newcomer! Just like at the beginning of a relationship, you may once again wonder: Do we even have any room in our life for another person?

Although some things can be planned when it comes to founding a family, many things cannot, because they tend to turn out differently than expected anyways. It is not possible to imagine what it is like to be a parent and have a family life of your own until you experience it firsthand. You can, however, prepare yourself for certain things, and with some luck you will remember these things when the initial excitement over the newcomer has settled. One of these things, for example, is the following very important question: How and when can we spend time for us as a couple and for each of us on their own? And where can we find this time?

As a rule, childbirth means that the child and caring for them becomes the priority, and that is also good and right! The well-being of the parents nevertheless also continues to be important; they should neglect neither themselves nor their relationship. After all, a happy and healthy family is based on the parents' sense well-being! This remains important even after the first diaper battles and organizational disasters have settled and a bit of order has been restored to the general chaos.



Author:
Maren Mönninghoff,
 Counsellor at the
 Fürstenberg Institute



The return of order and daily routines. How are things going to continue for us?

Some new structures and routines have become established after the first twelve months. Things are a little more organized and plannable again, which usually also means there is more time! Time that both partners should use in the most “couple-friendly” manner possible. (If this period coincides with the planned return to work, the window of regained free time is of course postponed, as returning to work also requires energy and organizational talent!)

Thus far insomnia, heteronomy, task allocation, uncertainty, unexpected situations, and the constant interruptions have been exhausting, stressful, and conflict-laden. Now the newly regained time might be hard to fill with activity. Talking about the child and household some more? No thanks! But what is left of our former twosome? What else do we do apart from looking after the household and child and at most a little exercise or gardening? It is now time to rediscover and structure this together.

A partnered relationship and parenting - Yes, it's possible!

Here are a few simple tips and ideas that anyone can implement:

- ▶ First, **clarify** things. What do you need and from whom? How often? When? And who has to know what about this?
- ▶ Ask yourself the following questions: Which of the **expectations** you have of yourself come
 - from external sources? For example, from society, the media, your family, friends...?
 - What part of it is truly your own?
 - And which of the expectations do you want to and can you fulfill?
- ▶ Minimize your silent expectations of others. **Be specific** about what you need and say it! It is best to express it as a wish. Most people prefer to fulfill wishes rather than demands.
- ▶ Take a look at what needs to be done and **set priorities!** With the advent of new tasks to complete, the degree of organization has increased. What can be ignored and what is really important? What can you delegate?
- ▶ **Make sure times are reserved** to dedicate completely to your child! Without shopping, without phone calls, without diapers or feeding. Time for play, cuddling, and little adventures inside or outside.
- ▶ Thank your partner for the little things too. **Everybody needs appreciation.** All the more so if you are caught in stressful situations or feel insecure. “Thank you for setting the table. Looks great!”
- ▶ Continue with the **compliments and small favors/surprises**, and keep up your **physical intimacy.** A hug, a kiss, a short neck massage, a “You’re doing great!” is always welcome! Stay in touch about each other’s desire for sex and see how and how often you

can make it happen. Alongside the many discussions about daily matters, the non-verbal and physical level is very beneficial for a relationship.

- ▶ Stay **attentive and interested**. Check with your partner! “How did you sleep? How are you doing? Can I do you a favor? Let me make you coffee/tea!” or “How is your parental leave/work going?”
- ▶ Stay **generous with little things**. The situation is new for both of you, and either of you may be feeling tired, insecure or simply stressed out. If one of you does not overreact to other’s stress, unfortunate tone or forgetfulness, it’s simply nice for a change. It is wiser to address such things in a more relaxed setting, of course.
- ▶ More than one way! People tend to do things differently. Parents are no exception to this. Although it is certainly important to agree on fundamental points of behavior and education, countless things can nevertheless be handled differently. Let your partner have their own way of being with the child, thus allowing the child to experience different ways of showing love for one another. By doing so, you will also support each other in your parenting role. **Mothers do many things differently – fathers too!** And that’s good.
- ▶ **Let your partner get settled when they come home**. Give the partner who comes home from work a few minutes of rest.
- ▶ **Apologize!** If you notice that you’ve done or said something that may have hurt your partner, say you’re sorry. Since you probably didn’t mean to hurt them, it’s best to also say so once you notice.
- ▶ Arrange for an **evening just for the two of you**. Turn off the TV, smartphone or tablet. Talk about yourselves. What else interests you outside of the child and everyday life? Retell each other the story of when you first met and the first time you fell in love with your partner. Or what are you dreaming about today? What are your wishes? What is going through your head? In doing so, stay

in the self-communication mode (“For me, at the moment...,” “I often think of...,” “It is important for me to...,” “I wish...,” “What I especially appreciate about you...”) and avoid demands, reproaches, or interpretations of your partner.

- ▶ Give **each other free space** in which each of you can be alone: for exercise, soaking in the bathtub, meeting friends, going out, self-care, sleeping, reading. Encourage yourself to also make use of such free space. And give your partner time off from their duties.
- ▶ Where in the house/apartment can you arrange a **common place of refuge**, a “couple’s island,” where you meet evenings or one evening per week to cuddle up and share your thoughts and desires? A time and place to enjoy each other, share thoughts, or simply be quiet in a relaxed way together.
- ▶ Perhaps much of what you did before becoming a parent no longer interests you. Or perhaps it still does. Think about **new things** or reactivate **old** habits that gave you a feeling of balance and joy in your life. Feel free to do so!
- ▶ **Be daring!** Get back in touch with old acquaintances and friends. Join a choir or jogging group. Go downtown, to a museum or a coffee shop alone. Open yourself to different and new impressions! This can also bring momentum and new ideas into the conversations with your partner.
- ▶ Stay attentive to how your relationship develops! If you find that you or your partner is withdrawing, you can no longer have a conversation without arguments, you feel helpless, every little problem results in conflict, or you are no longer treating each other with respect, then get help from a professional. **As parents, you form the foundation of your family.**



FÜRSTENBERG
INSTITUT

Impressum

Fürstenberg Institut GmbH
Gorch-Fock-Wall 3
20354 Hamburg

Tel. 040 / 38 08 20-0
Fax 040 / 38 08 20-20
info@fuerstenberg-institut.de
www.fuerstenberg-institut.de



Folgen Sie uns auch auf XING!

Redaktion:

Vi.S.d.P.: Anika Ohlsen
Mitarbeit: Kirsten Friedrich, Elke Schicke,
Dr. Leila Steinhilper und Maren Mönninghoff
Gestaltung: Jenny Poßin

Bilder: Titel: ©Prostock-studio_fotolia, ©Ridofranz_iStock

S. 6: ©pxel66_iStock

S.12: ©Ridofranz_iStock

S. 2, 5, 6, 11: ©Fürstenberg Institut