On Your Mind

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**Health Theme**

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Dear Dr. Robinson,

My middle son, Caleb, age 12, had a diving accident last summer. It’s been nonstop caring for him. Hospitals, rehab, physical therapy. The tragedy left him a quadriplegic. The doctors tell us his condition is not live threatening, but it’s all-hand-on-deck to attend to his bodily needs, not to mention his overall adjusting to his new normal.

As much as my heart goes out to Caleb, I’m writing you about his younger brother, Colt, age 8. He’s doing the best he can with our family struggles, but he’s left with babysitters or family friends a lot, as we go to doctor’s and rehab appointments. He seems to be quietly understanding, stays in his room a lot playing video games, and otherwise apologizes when he needs something or feels in the way. How can we care for both of our children, given how much more Caleb needs us right now? Signed, Troubled

Dear Troubled,

My heart and prayers go out to you and to all of your family. It feels so senseless when such a tragedy befalls a family. Given the overwhelming, 24/7 labor of love you folks need to have with Caleb right now, you’re a great mom for recognizing Colt’s needs as well.

Here’s what comes to mind. With your description of how Colt seems to be handling this family trauma, he’s not going to volunteer any thoughts, feelings, or needs that he has. He’s just trying to melt into the shadows and is focusing on his not adding to the family focus.

So, I encourage you to start by showing him your letter to me. Let him know that, of course, he will always be an important part of the family. Ask him how he feels about Caleb’s condition. If he doesn’t know or is reluctant to tell you, go hypothetical, such as, “I was talking to another mom and she told me her son felt…,” or, “If I were your age and having to deal with all of this, I would feel…” Active listen his responses until he seems to have gotten all of it out.

After Colt seems settled, ask him how he would like to be helpful to Caleb. He could feed him, push him in his wheelchair, read to him. Caleb could also help Colt with his homework. Join in the discussion you sons could have together on this topic. Include him in the taking care of Caleb’s needs.

Finally, talk with your husband about each of you having one-on-one fun time with Colt. Play video games together. Go to the movies, be a part of his scouting or recreational activities. Of course, the four of you will have fun family time together as well, but your one-on-one time with Colt help him adjust to your new family normal. With these thoughts, I hope you are now less troubled.

Dear Dr. Robinson,

My daughter is only 5 years old and her pediatrician has diagnosed her with chronic migraines. I have them too, and he says there is a genetic link. But, 5 years old? I am thrown for a loop. None of the migraine medicine is approved for children less than 18. She’s very active and really doesn’t complain about the headaches much. Just go, go, go. Should I be concerned? What to do? Signed, Now what?

Dear Now What,

Most children are spared migraines. Even when genetically predisposed, most migraines are not diagnosed until late teens, early twenties. Nonetheless, you should be concerned. Here’s what to do.

First, get a second opinion from a child neurologist. However well- intentioned your pediatrician is, migraine headaches are not a part of his specialty.

Second, if the diagnosis is confirmed, follow the child neurologist’s recommendations about medication. Regardless, medication is not the primary treatment for patient’s your daughter’s age. A lot of such medications have sedation as a primary side effect. Be careful about that.

Third, her being on the go, go, go, might be part of the migraine triggers. Some well-intentioned parents these days load up young children with an abundance of after-school activities. Think ballet, piano, gymnastics, robotics, scouting, sports recreation. While none of this is “bad,” all of it might be a bit too much. Encourage at least one afternoon a week where she can just play in the back yard, or hang out with you.

Finally, teach her calming techniques and mindfulness. Yes, 5 year olds can do these things. Help her learn deep breathing and simply being present within herself, as means of stress management. If you don’t already do this, she may also benefit from some “down time” when she gets home. A half hour of cookies and milk with you after school can soothe the troubled soul.

These are options that come to mind. Good for you for being on top of this. Hopefully, these thoughts will fill your Now What?