

Cowichan author says it's a mistake training our kids to be normal

Krista Siefken

News Leader Pictorial

Gerry Fewster doesn't want kids to follow in his footsteps. He doesn't want them following in anyone else's either.

Instead, Fewster argues kids need to be different, because they'll need a different mindset as they move into a different kind of world.

"We have an incredible problem now in looking to the future," the Cowichan Bay author said. "I don't believe we're preparing our children for a future that is very uncertain and very scary in many ways. Asking them to follow in our footsteps is not a good thing to do because our footsteps are leading us to some awful messes environmentally, politically, socially, you name it."

Which he why he wrote *Don't Let Your Kids Be Normal*, a book geared toward parents and childcare professionals.

"Normal is taking it in the wrong direction — we need to work with kids in a very different way (for them) to become un-normal, unlike us and to start looking at the world and facing challenges in a different way," he said. "The old parenting practices are not working — they're not about the future, they're about the past, and they're leading us down a very dark alley."

He's got a lot of ideas, but some are as simple as listening.

Truly listening.

"Not just say, 'that's nice, dear' — be really curious, really interested. And don't do anything about it. Parents often feel they have to do something, to make things better, or have an answer. It's a real skill to learn to listen. Because above all things, children — and

adults — need to be seen and heard for how we truly are."

The goal is to foster a creative, curious and responsible generation.

Fewster, who ran Canada's largest private treatment centre for troubled children and families for 22 years, has also written a number of other books about children, childcare and personal growth. He's president of Serenity Child and Parent Society.

He's donating all proceeds from sales of *Don't Let Your Kids Be Normal* to the Centre for Child Honouring. The book is available for sale online at www.amazon.ca but copies will also be available during Saturday's Mad Hatters Tea Party.

That's when parents will have the opportunity to engage with Fewster and children are invited to dress for the occasion, hang out with a real Alice in Wonderland Mad Hatter (portrayed by professional Johnny



The Mad Hatter will be the featured attraction at a book release party Saturday.

Depp impersonator Denise Pearson) and snack on Alice's favourite jelly and fairy cakes.

Julie Salisbury, publisher of *Don't Let Your Kids Be Normal*, said artist Robert Cerins will be working with local children to create a huge painting, while a stage will be set up for kids to showcase their own artistic abilities — singing, dancing, and everything else.

"We just want kids to have lots of fun and be really creative," she said.

Salisbury will also have a table set up to receive children's work for a Cowichan Valley children's book, filled with stories, poems, essays and illustrations from local kids.

Your ticket

What: Mad Hatters Tea Party

When: Saturday, August 14 from 2 to 5 p.m.

Where: Hosted by Serenity society founder Lorna McPherson at 5847 Banks Rd.

Tickets: Free