

Parents Crosslink

Linking parents to one another and the cross



NEGLECT AND EMOTIONAL ABUSE

Sheryl Cowling

More than anything in her life, Sarah enjoyed being a mother. She was thrilled when the Lord blessed her and her husband with a son and a daughter. These blessings had not arrived without some challenges, however. Infertility had been an unexpected trial in their marriage. After several years of prayers, tests, consultations,

and a variety of treatments, Sarah conceived twins. When they were born happy and healthy, she thanked God for such precious blessings.

But Sarah also ached in her heart to love even more children. She knew it didn't matter to her whether she carried them for nine months or not. She wanted to fill all the bedrooms in

the house with little ones who needed love and safety. So she began praying about this.

Not long after, Sarah saw an advertisement about the need for foster families. She and her husband prayed about this together and concluded that God was providing this option as a way of expanding their family. After completing the necessary assessment and classes, they became licensed foster parents. Over time, their home became a safe, loving place for boys and girls of all different ages. Most of the children were there just a short time, until one or both biological parents demonstrated that they could provide food, clothing, shelter, safety, and love. A few others were placed with biological relatives. Some were adopted by an aunt, uncle, or grandparent.

Then Jacob, age 10, and June, age 8, arrived. They were placed in Sarah's home due to neglect and emotional abuse. Their parents had always struggled financially. Their father was a seasonal laborer, so work was inconsistent. They had gotten by, but just barely. All that had changed, however, when their father left for a job one day and never came back.

Jacob and June's mother fell into a deep depression and started drinking heavily. Unable to pay her rent, the family was evicted. They packed up their few belongings and moved to the next place, where the same scenario was repeated. Sometimes they had utilities, and sometimes they didn't. There was no guarantee they would have lights or a hot shower in the morning because the electricity might have been turned off overnight. Sometimes classmates teased Jacob and June because they wore the same

(Continued on page 2.)

(Neglect and Emotional Abuse . . . cont.)

unwashed clothes several days in a row or because of body odor when they couldn't bathe. Sometimes there was food in the refrigerator, and sometimes not. Often the children would scrounge for a few dollars and go to the nearest gas station to buy some chips and soda for dinner. Breakfast was considered "optional" because the pantry was usually bare. Sometimes teeth got brushed, but often they didn't. Poor hygiene and nutrition had taken its toll on the condition of their teeth.

So when Sarah showed Jacob and June their separate bedrooms with nice mattresses, fluffy pillows, clean sheets, and blankets, each child volunteered that they could share a bed, because they had done so many times before. They told Sarah that in many of their apartments, they had slept on the couch because they didn't have beds. Or, if there hadn't been a couch, they had slept on the floor.

When Sarah showed them their closets with clothes that were about their size, June began to cry. She couldn't remember the last time she had cute, clean clothes that fit. When Jacob saw the computer and tablet, he felt like he had won the lottery. When Sarah gave each of them a new book bag with paper, pencils, pens, and markers, they looked at each other with amazement. They rarely had had the school supplies they needed. When their teachers would ask for missing homework, they had several clever excuses to hide their embarrassment that they didn't have the supplies to be able to complete their work. While other children created elaborate class projects, Jacob and June often got failing marks for incomplete assignments, not because of laziness but because of lack of access to supplies.

As the days turned to weeks and weeks to months, Sarah was amazed at how well Jacob and June fit right into her family. They were so appreciative of the three healthy meals and snacks every day. They conscientiously folded

and put away their clothes as soon as they came out of the dryer. They made new friends at their new school. Their grades improved. Cavities were filled. The pediatrician was pleased with their weight gain. All immunizations were up-to-date.

All of this was wonderful news, and Sarah thanked God in her nightly prayers that he was allowing her to watch these two precious children grow and mature. What caused her heart to ache, however, was the lasting impact of the emotional abuse both children had experienced. Several times she overheard Jacob call himself an idiot or tell himself that he was never going to amount to anything. He was repeating the cruel words that had been thrown at him too many times to count and that he had started

Sarah pulled out her Bible and showed both children Scripture passages that reflect their amazing value and worth in God's eyes. Together they read Psalm 139:13,14: "For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well." They recited these passages often, and they became some of their favorites.

Sarah made a point to speak blessings over Jacob and June every day, knowing that words have such power. She was encouraged by Proverbs 16:24: "Gracious words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones." And Proverbs 12:25: "Anxiety weighs down the heart, but a

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to believe. Many times Sarah hugged June as she cried because she had been told that she wasn't wanted, that she was a burden, and that she was a bad girl. June often apologized for "bothering" Sarah with requests for things like toothpaste, new shoes, or money for a field trip.

Sarah could see just how evil the emotional abuse was. It taught the children lies—lies about being unloved and unlovable, lies about being unwanted.

Sarah decided to teach the pair the lyrics to "Jesus Loves Me." Each night at bedtime, they sang this song about Jesus' love. And she taught them how much Jesus loves little children, including each of them.

kind word cheers it up." Cruel words and lies had damaged the hearts and minds of these awesome kids. Sarah was determined to use loving words, especially God's loving Word—his truth as revealed in the Bible—to heal the invisible wounds and scars caused by emotional abuse and neglect.

(See page 8 for more on emotional abuse and neglect.)

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Activities for the family

adapted from www.enchantedlearning.com

HANDPRINT WREATH

Your preschooler or grade schooler will enjoy working with you to make this universal symbol of Christmas.

Supplies needed

- 9" paper plate
- Front of used Christmas card
- Green construction paper
- Red construction paper or a red ribbon
- Pencil
- Scissors
- Glue
- Paperclip or yarn
- **Optional:** Glitter glue

Trace your child's hand on green construction paper, making between 10 and 15 tracings for each wreath.

Cut out the handprints.

Glue the front of a used Christmas card with an appropriate scene at the center of the paper plate.

Glue the handprints together in a wreath shape, with the wrists overlapping a little bit, around the edge of the plate.

Glue on a red ribbon bow (or make one from red construction paper).

Glue a paperclip or piece of yarn to the back for hanging.

2019 CALENDAR

Prepare for the New Year by making a customized calendar with your child. Be sure to include important dates of family, community, and church events.

Use calendar-making software or search the internet for calendar-making websites. Some provide the option of importing family photos for your calendar.

OTHER SUGGESTIONS:

Use child-generated Bible story art, newspaper or magazine cutouts, or prized schoolwork to decorate each month.

Check out www.mycalendarmaker.com and similar websites.



WINTER WONDERLAND FAMILY

If you live in an area where the winter weather is cold and the winter season is a long indoor season, brighten the day by making fun winter characters participating in snow-time activities. If you live in an area where the winter climate is pleasant and you seldom see snow, your children will still enjoy this winter activity because you can eat your creations when you are done.

Supplies needed

- Large and small marshmallows
- Tubes of decorating frosting
- Fruit rolls or sheets
- Pretzel sticks
- Graham crackers
- Raisins, peanuts, decorating candies, etc.
- Toothpicks
- Tissue paper

Use the toothpicks, frosting, marshmallows, pretzels, and fruit sheets to make snow people doing snow-time activities. Use your imagination and other edible items to make them "come alive." Crackers make neat toboggans, circles cut from fruit sheets can be snow coasters, marshmallows make igloos as well as snow people.

Drape tissue paper to create a snowy hillside. This can make a great centerpiece scene for a winter birthday party.

All eyes were on Thailand this past summer as the plight of the Wild Boars soccer team occupied the global media. A coach and a team of 12 boys entered a cave system on the verge of the monsoon season when caves can become flooded very quickly. It was a terrible mistake. They became trapped. Because the monsoon season was just starting, the waters inside the cave system could have remained flooded for months. By then it would have been too late. Only with the help of expert divers and military personnel from around the world were the 13 members rescued safely. And even then there were consequences: one rescue worker died, and the long-term effects of this traumatic event on both the team and rescue workers is still not yet known.

In their first interview after being rescued, some of the boys talked about what they had learned. One said he would “be more careful and live my life to the fullest.” A teammate added, “This experience taught me to be more patient and strong.”¹ The boys probably learned much more than they expressed. It was a terrible mistake that impacted not only themselves but the lives of many, many others.

We can be thankful that most of the mistakes our children make are small, perhaps even “honest mistakes.” But even if our mistakes are not intentional, how we *react* to them is intentional. And how do we make sure our children learn from their mistakes?

Taking the time to discuss the impact can sometimes take care of the issue. For example, my teen driver turned the wrong way down a one-way street. “I was confused,” he said. True, but it was also a mistake. A mistake like that impacts others, such as the other passengers in the car as well as oncoming drivers forced to react to unexpected conditions.

Learn From Other People’s Mistakes

In 2003, child psychologists studied a group of two- and three-year-olds. They gave the children a tool that the children were not able to operate. Then they showed the children a wrong way *and* a right way to use the tool. The researchers found that by age 3, children can observe both the right way and the wrong way to do something and will, most of the time, be able to differentiate between the methods to get the preferred result. What did the three-year-olds do? They learned from the adults’ mistakes.²

In a similar way, younger children watch and learn from the older ones. If an older child makes mistakes, however big or small, and nothing is ever done, what impression will be left with the younger siblings? While your eldest might feel “picked on” when you draw attention to his mistakes, the reality is that your firstborn will naturally have the opportunity to make “first” mistakes: first school program, first sleepover, first date, first driver’s test, etc. But

IF PARENTS SIMPLY IGNORE THE BEHAVIOR, THEY ARE MISSING THE OPPORTUNITY TO TEACH AN IMPORTANT LESSON.



Learning From "WRONG"

Heather

the others are watching. And they will learn both from the sibling’s mistakes as well as the parental reaction to those mistakes.

Recognize/Acknowledge/Repent

If our children are going to learn from their mistakes, they have to realize that many of their mistakes involve sin. We’re all guilty of sin. Martin Luther once pinpointed the

one thing all people *don’t* have to learn: “Nothing is easier than sinning.”³ Boom. Nailed it. But how do we react when we recognize our sin?

When David sinned with Bathsheba, he implemented an elaborate cover-up. But, as is always the case, the sin was known to God. Nathan was sent to confront David. Nathan succeeded in driving his point home. “I have sinned against the LORD,” David confessed. “Nathan replied, ‘The Lord has



FROM LIFE'S TURNS"

er Bode

taken away your sin” (2 Samuel 12:13,14). Upon David’s recognition and acknowledgement of the sin, also known as repentance, Nathan proclaimed forgiveness.

God wants us to be repentant. A person who is not repentant forfeits forgiveness. What Paul told the Ephesians applies to us as well: “I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus” (Acts 20:21). We are repentant when we acknowledge our sinfulness and need for a Savior.

When children repeatedly make sinful mistakes, it may be that they aren’t recognizing or acknowledging that they have done something wrong. (Strong-willed toddler, anyone?) This is the sinful nature at its best . . . or should I say worst? If parents simply ignore the behavior, they are missing the opportunity to teach an important lesson. A better approach would be to identify the sin, listen for an acknowledgment of sin, and state, “I forgive you.” Then

ask, “What needs to be done?” For older children, it may be time to pull out the Luther quote and remind them that they’ve learned how to sin, but something much more humbling and harder to master, repentance, will be met with freedom from the burden of guilt they often carry.

Point Out the Impact

Once the sin is recognized, it is important to point out how it impacts not only the individual but others. Whether you call the actions of the coach a sin or a serious error in judgment, the soccer team rescue illustrates the far-reaching ramifications of sin. Trained professionals admitted this was the most traumatic rescue they had ever been a part of. Was the intention of the Wild Boar coach and players to cause such turmoil? Most definitely not. But the scars that resulted from their decision will remain. And that’s the nature of sin.

When Adam and Eve sinned, did they think of the impact on future generations? Even you and me? No. That’s also the nature of sin. It tends to put each of us on “Captain ME Planet.”

The impact of sin takes a toll on the individual and on those around us, and it took the ultimate toll on Jesus, who was sent to the cross for those sins. Yet he willingly took his place on the cross to save us.

Determine the Punishment (if Necessary)

David and Bathsheba’s sin did have consequences. David’s reaction to his son’s illness was intense—to the point that his servants were afraid to tell him when the infant died. But afterwards, David went to worship. He endured the consequences and moved forward.

Sometimes the guilt of a mistake can weigh on a child to the point that punishment comes as a relief. Other times, it may be at the parents’ discretion to determine whether a punishment is appropriate. My son’s wrong turn down the one-way street? Not a punishable offense. Purposefully driving recklessly? There’s a situation requiring discipline.

Make a Grace-ful Recovery

When God issued the Ten Commandments, he knew they were impossible for humans to keep. Yet he said, “Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates” (Deuteronomy 6:7-9). Why? As the law points out our sins, we continue to realize our need for the Savior. We seek God’s guidance and rely on his grace and mercy even as we continue to learn and grow.

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1 Howard Johnson, “Unbeatable Team Spirit,” BBC News (July 18, 2018), bbc.com/news/world-asia-44868907.

2 Paul L. Harris and Stephen C. Want, “Learning from Other People’s Mistakes: Causal Understanding in Learning to use a Tool,” *Child Development* (January 28, 2003).

3 Ewald M. Plass, *What Luther Says: A Practical In-Home Anthology for the Active Christian* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959).

RICH BLESSINGS ARE OURS Through the Word

Mollie Schairer

“Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long” (Psalm 119:97). We agree with the psalmist that meditation on God’s Word is time well spent. But as busy parents, our Bible study and personal devotions can easily fall off the radar.

The Holy Spirit continues to call us, eager to shower us with all the

afflictions, becoming sin for us, so that we can have eternal life with God.

How often do we need to hear this message of sin and grace? As often as we stray “like a lost sheep” (verse 176), led away by the sinful nature still in us. When I complain about the blessings God has given me, lose my temper with my kids, or feel envious

“things” above the Lord, we soon learn how worthless they really are. Spending time in the Word is like hitting the reset button, allowing the Holy Spirit to refocus our eyes on the Lord and turn our hearts back to him.

WISE COUNSEL FOR PARENTING THROUGH THE WORD

Today, myriad voices offer parenting advice. We can read online about a dozen different ways to handle tantrums or to get our teen to talk to us. Some advice is good, some is silly, and some is spiritually dangerous. But the counsel that our greatest Help provides in his Word is limitless in its perfection (verse 96), has been thoroughly tested (verse 140), and imparts knowledge and good judgment (verse 66) so that we can make the best decisions for our families.

PEACE AND JOY THROUGH THE WORD

Parenting is tough—emotionally, physically and mentally. Sometimes our children break our hearts. Sometimes we ache for a decent night’s sleep. Sometimes our brains hurt just trying to manage the daily chaos. Consumed with our children’s needs, we forget to listen to our heavenly Father who longs to provide the care, direction, and peace that we, his children, need each day.

Let us regularly take hold of the blessings God intends for us in his Word. It makes us better parents here on earth, and it leads our families to lasting joy in heaven.

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Spending time
in the Word is
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blessings of regular contact with God’s Word. We parents need these gifts now more than ever. Through the Word, God gives us eternal life. He keeps our priorities straight. He provides wise counsel for parenting. And he fills us with peace and joy.

LIFE THROUGH THE WORD—PSALM 119

“If your law had not been my delight, I would have perished in my affliction,” writes the psalmist. “I will never forget your precepts, for by them you have preserved my life” (verses 92,93).

Without the Word, we would fail to realize that we too suffer from a grave affliction. We are afflicted with sin, which separates us from God. Without the Word, we never would have learned that Jesus took on our

of other families’ circumstances, I am straying from my life source. I need the Word to convict me of my sin and then comfort me with God’s full forgiveness.

RIGHT PRIORITIES THROUGH THE WORD

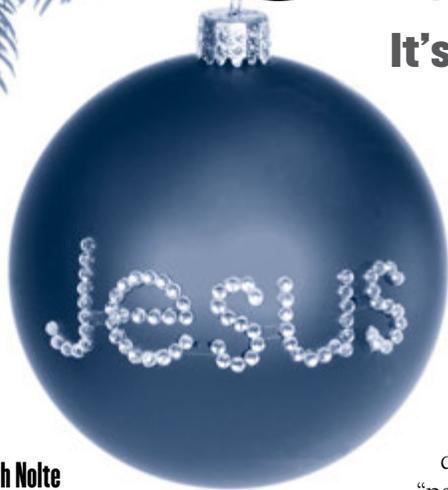
The psalmist knew how easily we get our priorities mixed up. “Turn my heart toward your statutes and not toward selfish gain. Turn my eyes away from worthless things” (verses 36,37).

We want our families to have nice homes, money set aside, recreational opportunities, and the list goes on. Much of what we pursue for our families are necessities—or they are extras that are not harmful in and of themselves. Yet we harm ourselves and our families when we set our hearts on those things. When we prioritize

Preparing Our Kids for

Christmas

It's time to rehearse for the Christmas service and time to center on what's important.



Carl and Beth Nolte

The *Best Christmas Pageant Ever* by Barbara Robinson is a popular children's book about children performing in a Christmas pageant. The "bad" children in the story turn out to be the stars of the show, but is that how things are in real life?

Many children in our churches prepare for an annual "Children's Christmas Service." Since Lutherans like to focus on the true meaning of Christmas—that Jesus was born to be the Savior of the world—we naturally think that these services would be rather formal events.

For anyone who has attended these once-a-year services—or planned and rehearsed them—the service is often anything but formal. Consider the children who participate. In many of our churches, some of the children may be new to the Lutheran faith or even new to Christianity. Teachers and leaders should never assume that all of the children are acquainted with the basic facts of Jesus' birth. A student once asked her teacher, "Is this real?" What a wonderful opportunity we have to lead children to see the Son of God who was willing to be born into this world.

Parents of children may also have limited knowledge of Christmas and the Bible. They may also have experienced their own version of a secular Christmas pageant and assume that the Lutheran congregation puts on the same "show." How often don't you hear that the children "performed well," "were cute and adorable," or "looked so nice"?

Have you been to one of these "shows" where the parents (or grandparents) struggle to get a really good picture of their "star" in the front of

If we remember that a Christmas service tells the wonderful news of how Jesus was born to save us, we can do some things to keep the focus on Christ.

church? Or maybe they wave and smile at their precious little ones to let them know they are watching them perform. Perhaps you've seen relatives presenting bouquets of flowers after the event for a "job well done."

If we remember that a Christmas service tells the wonderful news of how Jesus was born to save us, we can do some things to keep the focus

on Christ. Here are a few ideas to get you started:

- As you enter the Advent season of the church year, start talking about how it is a time of preparation for Christmas.
- Discuss with your children in language they can understand the reason why Jesus was born.
- Talk about the way Jesus became human like us—a baby who grew up.
- When the school or Sunday school sends notes home about the children's Christmas service, discuss with your children their role in telling others about Jesus.
- If homework is assigned with readings and songs to be learned, help your children understand what they mean.
- Play music of the season, including traditional hymns and carols that tell about Jesus.
- If special practices for the service are held, be sure to have your children there on time and not distracted by the busyness of the season.
- Be sure that your children are rested, well-fed, and dressed in comfortable clothing for the actual service.
- After the service, remind your children how wonderful it was that they could tell others about our Savior and share the good news.

During this coming Christmas season, may the wonderful news of Jesus' birth into this world lead you to enjoy all of the special traditions and events that take place. May you also lead your children to see Christ as the center of Christmas.

Carl and Beth Nolte are members at St. Jacobi in Greenfield, Wisconsin.

EMOTIONAL ABUSE AND NEGLECT: What are they?

Emotional abuse of a child, by a parent or other caregiver, involves a persistent pattern of calling a child names or putting them down. These words can have a significant negative impact on the child's self-worth. They can have devastating consequences on the child's academic, social, and psychological development. The scars left by emotional abuse often persist for decades, or even an entire lifespan.

Neglect is defined as the failure to provide for a child's basic needs—food, clothing, shelter, education—but not because of poverty. Many parents who neglect their children do so because of substance abuse, untreated mental illness, and/or domestic violence.

For more information about child abuse and neglect, and their impact, read about the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) study. Take a quick online survey to learn your ACEs score and what it may mean for you. Have your children take the survey. Talk about your score and think about ways you may want to respond as a result.

You may want to seek professional help and support from a trained counselor. There are many Christian counselors, in addition to secular counseling programs, that offer highly effective, empirically proven treatment options. Another option is FreedomForCaptives.com, a website designed by the WELS Special Needs Committee for

Mental Health that includes a variety of resources for pastors, teachers, and other adults regarding child abuse and neglect.

Last, but not least, anyone who is genuinely concerned for a child's safety is encouraged to contact Child Protective Services or law enforcement to share their concerns. A child's life may depend on it.



SCARS LEFT BY EMOTIONAL ABUSE OFTEN PERSIST FOR DECADES, OR EVEN AN ENTIRE LIFESPAN.

Illustrations: Shutterstock



"We call it the Slope of Faith."

Cartoon by Ed Koehler

Parents & Crosslink

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• He came a babe of lowly birth.
• He was God's son of greatest worth.
• We like the angels sing with mirth
• because God sent his son to Earth
• to ransom us and claim our worth.
• Praise God this babe of lowly birth!

MaryAnn Sundby 2017