Dealing With Childhood Trauma and Abuse.



Introduction

Child abuse and neglect is a common occurrence in our world today. In fact, as the year passes by, more children are becoming victims of this form of violence.

This can be completely exiled from our society, but if we don't know what constitutes child abuse and neglect, and the signs of this violence, we cannot eliminate it from our society.

Hence, this book provides in-depth information and insight into what we should know about child abuse and neglect. It talks about the signs of an abusive parent and an abused child and how to stop abuse dead in the tracks.

When we have this knowledgeable, only the can get rid of child abuse and neglect from our society.

Part 1. How Your Parents Shape Your Life



Human offspring are born to be dependent on their parents. During the first two years of life, they gradually undergo massive brain development, growth, and neuron pruning.

However, the brain development of human babies, including social, emotional, and cognitive development, largely depends on the type of bond or attachment they build with their primary health giver, which is usually the parent. The quality of this bonding with the parents has a long-term effect on the overall well-being and dispositions of the child to life in general.

Although there is countless evidence from the field of neurobiology, development psychology, and even animal epigenetics to support the importance of the parental role in shaping a child's life, this field of behavioral psychology is yet to be fully explored.

There are countless studies done in this field to help understand how parental roles affect the child. A recent study found that women start becoming their mothers at age 33, and men start becoming their fathers at age 34. Another study shows that parental inconsistency, neglect, and the absence of love may lead to future mental health problems and affect the child's potential for happiness.

In truth, your relationship with your parents is arguably the most significant in your life. It is the earliest connection and experience you have, and it goes a long to impact everything you do in the future; from the way you treat the people around you to the way you see the world and your future relationship with the one you love, your social and spiritual life, and practically your disposition to everything in life.

Thanks to science, we know about genetic inheritance, which explains that a parent's DNA gets passed down to the offspring. While that might suffice to explain certain physical traits, such as eye colors or height, found in offspring, the effect of the parents' relationships with their children goes way deeper than that.

In fact, some believe that we are born with some specific genes, possibly passed down from parents, that shape or predict our personality. Although certain particular genes may genuinely shape personality development, the core and extent of our personal development are borne out of different environmental factors.

The human brain is so flexible it adjusts to and absorbs these influences, especially during the growth phase. Parenting is fundamental and probably the most important of these factors. It shapes your temperament and even physical appearance.

1.2. Family Climate

Child development goes beyond the input of the biological parents. Growing up, we learn a lot from our family, including siblings, relatives, and everyone around us. Environmental factors influence the behavioral development of children.

As we have already established, these influences can either negatively or positively affect a child's personality depending on the kind of exposure while growing up.

Children learn in different ways; the most common, however, is by observation. They observe everything that happens around them every day, learn from it and develop habits around it. The family mainly influences a child's social life because the family forms the child's primary social group.

Family is so fundamental to a child's overall well-being and personality. It forms the basis for physical, emotional, social, and intellectual development. If this foundation is not solid, it becomes difficult for the child to succeed at work, with others, in health, and social life.

- **Values**

The values a child grows up with largely depend on that of the family. Values, generally, would mean understanding the difference between wrong and right. As a society, we have standard values that ensure sanity and healthy living. However, families have diverse personal values and norms. For instance, respecting people and things of high esteem. At age 3, 80% of your child's brain is developed, which means they see and notice everything that happens in the family.

Whenever you treat and show respect to people, your child notices, and when the day you throw caution to the wind and scream down the roof, they clearly see and notice it. These seemingly tiny pieces of information they gather, over time, go on to form an integral part of them.

These exposures don't come only from the parent but everyone around the home the child is growing contributes to the values the child learns. For instance, in a home with house help, over three siblings of different age groups, extra care must be taken to control what the child gets exposed to.

In a family where fairness, respect, compassion, and responsibility are some of their values, the child will definitely grow up to become responsible, respectful, etc. Also, we are in a digital world, and as such, it requires more conscious effort to make the home conducive for the growth of children.

- **Socialization**

Socialization is another key aspect of a child's development. The early interactions between the child and family go on to form the basis of the level of trust and friendship the child builds with others in the future.

As humans, relationships with others are important and key to our survival. The ability to develop these social skills starts and is strengthened with the family. They learn interpersonal skills and how to build and sustain trust, friendships, and comfort with others.

In a dysfunctional, broken, or incomplete family, these crucial skills are mostly absent. The child experiences parental neglect and deprivation, which could affect the child's motivational and interpersonal skills. The child grows up lacking cognitive and social skills, including the ability to hold face-to-face interactions, facial expressions, etc. In fact, a study in the field of psychology development shows that children who experience parental neglect while growing up may end up lacking communication skills.

Conversely, an enriching and thriving environment promotes resilience and sociable skills in children. A simple dinner conversation with the family goes a long to solidifying important skills, and confidence in the child. Little things count!

- **Security**

Children rely on the family for some basic sense of security. They rely on you for primary needs such as food, clothing, and shelter. However, most importantly, a child relies on the family for emotional security. In fact, the level of emotional security children get at home cannot be compared with any other place.

A safe and enabling environment is key to developing emotional security in children. If the environment is safe and open, children become expressive. They share with their parents everything going on around them, and in turn, they develop feelings of security.

More so, when children feel safe and secure, they are more likely to develop many more social, cognitive, and emotional skills. It breeds trust between the family and the child; they are more willing to be themselves.

If this is missing, the child grows up without trust, security, or attachment, which would mean a lack of consistency, dependability, responsiveness, and respectfulness.

1.3. Understanding The Impact

The Austrian neurologist, Sigmund Freud, theorized that our early childhood experiences shape our personality. There are many ways your relationship with your parents affects your personality and life in general. However, these four seem to be the most fundamental.

1. **The More Attentive and Expressive Your Parents Are, The More Open & Sociable You Might Be in The Future**

An infant's brain is complicated yet vulnerable. It is proven that 90% of the human brain is fully developed before age 5. Without parental love at this crucial stage of development, children are unlikely to grow up to be independent, resilient, and happy adults.

The importance of attention and love in a child's cognitive, social, and emotional development is powerful and can, in fact, not be overemphasized. Infancy is such a crucial time for brain development. Love and attention, however, at this early stage, can help nurture and build memories and relationships that help develop logic and learning.

When you experience love from your parents in your childhood, you will grow up to know what love is and be able to share it. You are not afraid to express love to everyone around you, including your siblings, relatives, colleagues, and everyone who will come into your life as the day passes.

Also, children who enjoy adequate loving from their parents grow up to become adults that adore family gatherings and holidays; they tend to spend quality time with people that matter. They rarely forget to celebrate their loved ones on their birthdays, and maybe even get them gifts just to make them feel good.

Research has also shown that children who experience and support their parents grow up to become happy emotionally stable people. They are less anxious and usually less vulnerable to mental health problems in the future. In fact, the golden rule puts it simply "better parent-child communication means fewer psychological and behavior problems of the child in adulthood".

Most importantly, if your parents are expressive and attentive, you will grow up to become comfortable expressing yourself as well as listening to other people's opinions and thoughts.

2. **If Your Parents are Neglectful, You Will Likely Demand and Seek More Attention In Adulthood**

Depriving babies of genuine love and support can cause lasting impairment to their emotional, well-being, social and cognitive abilities. They grow up feeling unwanted and not important. This rubs off on their confidence and self-esteem, making them more reclusive, and ultimately seeking attention,

Sadly, this attention-seeking behavior sometimes extends in their romantic relationships. Children that lack attention either from or both parents often have troubles in their love life and constantly seek attention.

This is because parents who are inconsistent in their parental duties or lack emotional stability end up raising children with low self-esteem. These children are hostile, aggressive, anti-social, and attention seekers all because of the neglect they experienced at a younger age.

This lack of parental attention and love is not found in things that are not crucial to a child's brain development, such as buying them toys, going on expensive holiday trips, etc. These are necessary things, but a lack of them can not negatively affect the child's development.

Instead, the most significant and valuable thing is love. In fact, science has shown, through different studies, that a baby's brain needs love more than anything. Interestingly, research has shown that even before birth, babies have an in-built expectation that adults, parents, will be available to care for them.

The absence of this care, love, and support leaves a void in the child, and the child goes on seeking and even demanding attention for the larger parts of their adult life.

3. **The More Emotionally-Reserved Parents, The More Reserved You Might Be In Relationships**

A child constantly craves the attention of the parents. It's a biological and natural concept. If these expectations of love, attention, protection, and nurturance are met, the child's brain experiences delight and pleasure, boosting their outspokenness and confidence.

However, if the parents are non-expressive and emotionally reserved, the child is denied this nurturance and love. Gradually stops expressing these cravings and attention-seeking desires. Over time, the child's feelings get repressed, and the child grows up to become stoic and inexpressive.

Although sometimes, such children may express love in non-verbal ways, such as buying gifts, physical touch, etc, they are always stingy with hugs and kisses and prefer spending their time on hobbies or work.

Sadly, this also impairs their willingness to express pain. Due to the neglect they experienced while growing up, their brain is conditioned to repress their feelings, including pain, and resolve to figure things out themselves.

Such children will find comfort and solace in other things, including gaming, alcohol, etc., rather than expressing their feelings of pain and hurt. This could result in addiction that can be lifelong.

4. **When Your Parents Are Divorced or Unmarried, You Tend to be Skeptical About Love and Variable Relationships**

If a child grows up in a dysfunctional or broken home, it may affect such a child's relationship and marriage perception. Many children are raised in incomplete families, and they grow up to build an incomplete family.

Some are skeptical about love and marriage and are excessively cautious or unwilling to get into one. Sometimes, they become so reckless and end up with someone they have some crazy chemistry with. This, usually, is explosive and short-lived and often ends up in divorce.

Apart from the disposition to love and relationships, children who grow up in an intact, two-parent home tend to do better on different outcomes than those who grow up in a single or broken home. Hence, the importance of family, which will be discussed later, in building functional and healthy children cannot be overemphasized.

1.4. Are You Walking in Your Parents' Footsteps?

We all have a story. We all grew up in different family backgrounds. And while there might be some similarities in the kind of home we all grew up in, the differences and peculiarities are more distinct. It all boils down to every individual.

We have explored how primary caregivers, parents, and the family can influence and affect different parts of our lives. We have also established that personality, values, certain cognitive functions, and even a child's job can be traced back to the parents.

Now, the big question is: Are you walking in your parents' footsteps? Look at your parents and yourself, are there similarities in the way you talk, react to problems, treat visitors? What's their standpoint on domestic violence and what's yours?

Sadly, you may already be walking in their footsteps without knowing or you just have been ignorant to these signs. Later, we will talk about these signs for you to know what to look out for.

Part Two. Understanding Childhood Abuse and Neglect



Childhood abuse and neglect is a devastating social problem in America and even the world at large. In 2020, about 18,399 children were victims of abuse in the United States. About 136 600

victims were one year old and younger, and a further 150,673 victims were between the ages of two and five years old.

Also, the average number of deaths resulting from child abuse and neglect in the United States is estimated to be more than 1,700 deaths. Although child neglect and abuse casualties are most common among children younger than the age of 5, these death occurrences spread across children and adolescents between the ages of 5 and 17.

While there has been a gradual fall in the number of child abuse and neglect cases over the last 7 years, these current figures still point out clearly that this social problem is still very much a threat to our society. Although no sets of rules or standards serve as a benchmark for acceptable parenting practices, there are absolutely what amounts to child abuse and neglect.

2.1. What are Childhood Abuse and Neglect?

According to the Child Abuse and Prevention Treatment Act, child abuse and neglect is defined as "any recent act or failure to act on the part of a parent or caretaker, which results in death, serious physical or emotional harm, sexual abuse or exploitation, or an act or failure to act which presents an imminent risk of serious harm."

Failure to meet a child's basic needs is neglect, which includes not providing for their basic needs, emotional support and security, and medical and mental health. Lack of all this results in childhood neglect.

Neglect is a failure to meet the child's basic needs, e.g., not providing enough food, shelter, basic supervision, necessary medical or mental health treatment, adequate education, or emotional comfort.

Physical abuse inflicts injury on a child on purpose, such as kicking, striking, beating, biting, and any other thing that can cause physical harm to the child. And sexual abuse is engaging a child in sexual acts or imitating it either by persuasion or using force.

All of this amounts to childhood abuse and neglect and could lead to impaired lifelong physical and mental health. The social and occupational outcomes can ultimately slow a country's economic and social development.

Abuse and neglect happen everywhere in the world and every religion, ethnicity, and outcome. Sadly, there is no single cause of childhood abuse and neglect. In fact, it doesn't happen overnight. It happens over a period of time and occurs as a result of diverse factors working together to impact the family.

Knowing and understanding these risk factors is the first step to getting rid of childhood abuse and neglect. Four major factors put a child at the risk of getting abused or neglected. Let's consider them;

Parent or Caregiver Risk Factors

Parents and caregivers are usually the primary cause of neglect and abuse in their children. The following are some characteristics of parents that may increase the risk of child abuse and neglect:

- Low self-esteem, poor impulse control, depression, anxiety, or antisocial behavior.
- Experiencing or witnessing violence as a child teaches violent behavior or justifies it as proper behavior.
- Substance abuse interferes with mental functioning, judgment, self-control, the ability to be protective of one's child, and making the child's needs a priority.
- Lack of knowledge about normal child development and unrealistic expectations, frustration, and/or inappropriate methods of discipline.

Family and Environmental Risk Factors

Some characteristics of family and the environment that could increase the risk of child abuse and neglect include the following:

- A broken home or the absence of any of the parents could result in reduced social support for the child.
- Dysfunctional or violent homes could lead to reduced attention for the child.

- Real-life crises, such as losing a job, physical illness, marital problems, or the death of a family member, may aggravate anxiety and hostility among family members and towards the child.
- Living in dangerous neighborhoods
- The ease of alcohol and drugs accessibility
- Social, economic, health, and education policies lead to poor living standards, socioeconomic inequality, or instability.
- Insufficient policies and programs to prevent child maltreatment, child pornography, child prostitution, and child labor.

Child Risk Factors

It's noteworthy that children are the victims of abuse and neglect and should therefore not be blamed for the abuse. With that in mind, below are some factors that could increase the possibility of the child getting maltreated:

- Deficiency in social, cognitive, and physical skills and disabilities in children
- Kids and teenagers. Kids because they are little and need constant care from their parents, and teenagers are at a greater risk of sexual abuse.
- Feeling unwanted due to failure or falling short of parent's expectations
- Aggression, attention deficits, abnormal physical features, neurological disorder, difficult temperaments, and behavior problems in children
- Identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender.

All these may worsen if the parents have poor coping mechanisms. And usually, neglect and maltreatment often aggravate the problems.

Childhood abuse may result from any of these potential sources and could be a combination of all. Hence, it becomes very important for parents and caregivers to provide an enabling, healthy environment while regulating and controlling the type of exposure the child gets.

2.2. The Effects of Childhood Abuse and Neglect

The effects of childhood abuse and neglect can be very destructive. It impairs the child's physical, neurological, psychological, behavioral, and emotional development. These effects could vary from minor injuries to lifelong issues like brain damage, destroyed self-esteem, and even death in extreme cases.

Moreso, the consequences of childhood abuse and neglect present in different stages of child development (childhood, adolescence, and adulthood) differently. And some consequences are more prominent in some stages than others. Invariably, the effects not only impact the victim but also the society they live in at large.

Sadly, childhood abuse and neglect victims don't show signs of extreme disturbance. We will look at four consequences of childhood abuse and neglect for better understanding and possible recommendations.

1. **Medical and Physiological Effects**

The leading cause of brain damage in children is physical injury. Although there are other causes of brain dysfunctions in children, physical injury can not only impair the child's cognitive function through damage to the brain, but it can also lead to death. In fact, the most common cause of death resulting from childhood abuse and neglect is physical injury.

Unfortunately, a child does not necessarily have to be injured physically to sustain severe injuries to the brain. Research has shown that children who are shaken aggressively may sustain intracranial and intraocular bleeding with no sign of external head trauma. This is the scary part; everything looks good on the outside, but the brain is damaged and severely impaired.

As we already know, early detection of any medical decreases severity and increases the chances of getting treated completely. If these disorders are not detected early in children, it affects the child's behaviors depending on the part of the brain that is affected.

If this goes on for too long, the damage could be permanent, thereby confining the child to lifelong brain damage problems. Hence, physical abuse can be very devastating for the victims.

Another form of childhood neglect is associated *with nonorganic failure to thrive in infants*. This basically measures the physical features, and growth, of the child. Usually, a child that has stunted growth probably lacks crucial nutritional requirements.

However, non-organic failure to thrive defines a condition in which the child just refuses to grow or the growth is retarded. This is not caused by a lack of nutritional requirements or medical conditions. Instead, it is an aftermath of emotional deprivation and child abuse. neglect or due to accident.

Usually, when a child suffering from this condition is transferred to another location, either a hospital or just a change of home, there is significant weight gain. Some of the symptoms include feeding problems, irritability, low activity, changes in routine, and a decrease in sociable skills.

Sexual abuse is another form of physical abuse. Although it is more rampant among teenagers, past experiences have shown that children of all ages can be sexually abused. Child pornography and child prostitution are all forms of sexual abuse.

This can leave the victim with heightened sexuality and genital manipulation, and the most severe is the risk of contracting sexually transmitted diseases. The psychological implication and trauma of sexual abuse experience can be lifelong.

Finally, child maltreatment has been associated with diverse life-threatening medical conditions, including diabetes, stroke, high blood pressure, arthritis, heart attack, cancer, chronic bronchitis, and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease.

2. **Cognitive and Intellectual Effects**

Childhood abuse and neglect greatly threaten victims' cognitive and intellectual functions. In fact, child maltreatment has been associated with the impairment of different parts of the brain, including the prefrontal cortex, hippocampus, and other parts responsible for brain regulation and endocrine responses. All of which leaves individuals vulnerable to all forms of functional impairments and disease

The consequences of child abuse and neglect vary from delayed intellectual development, especially in the area of verbal intelligence, to deficit cognitive functioning. Poor grades in

school are a good indicator of reduced cognitive functioning. Inability to process social information and the tendency to get aggressive may indicate the signs of physically abused and neglected children.

They become less attentive to social cues, flounder with personal problem management, and sometimes get hostile with others, increasing the risk of attentional, emotional, cognitive, and behavioral disorders. Unfortunately, these disorders may be unnoticed in the child, becoming almost irremediable or, at the very least, requiring some form of rehabilitation.

Furthermore, experiencing childhood maltreatment is a factor for depression, anxiety, and other psychiatric disorders throughout adulthood. Post-traumatic stress disorder is characterized by continuous re-experiencing of the traumatic events related to the abuse, avoiding people, places, events, or anything related to the abuse; feeling of guilt, fear, shame, and anger; substance use, defiant, and suicidal behaviors.

3. **Behavioral Effects**

Child abuse and neglect victims often exhibit physical aggression and multiple antisocial behaviors, even after the maltreatment ends. One of the behavioral consequences is involvement in unhealthy sexual practices.

In a 2016 study, it was found that children who were victims of abuse and neglect are more likely to involve in sexually risky behaviors, including having a high number of sexual partners, engaging in transactional sex(sex for money, sex for gifts, etc). Sadly, these behaviors have dire social and health outcomes.

According to the Centers for Disease and Control, there are an estimated number of 20 million new sexually transmitted infections each year in the United States. Shockingly, half of them are among young people ages 15 to 24. Similarly, although there has been a significant decline over the years, the teen pregnancy rate is still the highest in the United States (57 per 1,000 15–19-year-olds). The implications of these sexually risky behaviors on health and well-being are long-lasting.

Similarly, child maltreatment has been linked with juvenile delinquency and criminal activities. In another research, the result shows that childhood abuse and neglect victims have a higher risk

of engaging in adulthood crime through antisocial behaviors during childhood and adolescence, as well as forming relationships with other antisocial romantic partners.

In addition, boys and girls are influenced by childhood maltreatments differently. While girls tend to exhibit internalizing behaviors such as depression, social withdrawal, anxiety, etc., boys are vocal with their behaviors, such as bullying, hostility, aggression, etc., all of which are proximal predictors of adult crime.

Children who have experienced abuse and neglect are at a higher risk of substance and alcohol use disorders in adults than those who didn't experience maltreatment.

4. **Societal Effects**

Although children who experience child abuse and neglect shoulder the bulk of the physical, psychological, cognitive, and behavioral consequences, sadly, society also pays a price for it. The impact on society can either be direct (e.g., effects on hospitalizations, foster care payments) or indirect (e.g., effects on long-term care, lost productivity at school, juvenile and criminal justice systems costs).

The economic burden of child maltreatment is rather substantial. In 2012, the total lifetime estimated financial costs of just one year of confirmed cases of child maltreatment (physical abuse, sexual abuse, psychological abuse, and neglect) is approximately $124 billion. However, in 2018, a whopping sum of $831,000 per child was estimated to be the lifetime cost for nonfatal incidents of child maltreatment. For fatal incidents, the lifetime cost was estimated to be around $16.6 million per child.

Going by these figures and the number of substantiated cases of nonfatal maltreatment, the estimated US population economic burden of child maltreatment is $428 billion. That figure increases to $2 Trillion if you consider the number of estimated incidence of investigated annual incident cases. Lifetime costs include both tangible costs (e.g., child welfare, health care,

juvenile justice) and intangible costs (e.g., pain, suffering, grief).

2.3. Identifying The Risk Factors of Being a Victim or Victimizer

Anyone can be a victim of childhood abuse and neglect; similarly, anyone can be a victimizer. For a fact, no sane person wakes up in the morning and decides to deliberately inflict pain on their children. And even truer is that fact that no child wants to be a victim of abuse and victims.

However, we find ourselves in this detestable situation. Sadly, you don't have to necessarily beat a child or inflict physical pain to become a victimizer.

There are some behaviors that communicate neglect and abuse to the child. And there are factors that increase the chances of this happening. The good thing is if these factors are known, it becomes easy to avoid being a victimizer.

Hence, if you notice any of these following factors as parents or caregiver, you may already have become a victimizer:

- Unable to recognize the physical and emotional needs of your child
- Lack or little care for the child
- Blames the child for everything
- Continuously using abusive and negative words, such as 'worthless' or 'evil', or belittles or berates the child
- Subjecting the child to harsh physical punishment
- Being too hard and demanding inappropriate level of academic performance from the child
- Severe restrictions from peers and colleagues.
- Demanding unnecessary and inappropriate attention and care from the child, and getting jealous of other families.
- Giving the child unregulated access to internet and technology
- Having no and unconvincing explanations for the physical injuries on the child

- ❖ Taking the child for medical evaluations repeatedly or requesting medical tests for concerns not seen during the health professional's examination.

If you find yourself in any of these, you may have to take some time off to see a therapist or your health professional.

Unlike a victimizer, the victims have little to no control on what they are experiencing. Afterall, they are just kids seeking to be loved, and nothing more. Although the victims may not be able to stop the abuse and neglect, there are red flags to know a child is being abused. Below are some

General Signs

- ❖ Anxiety, depression, loss of self-esteem and confidence
- ❖ Withdrawals from peers, colleague and usual activities
- ❖ Drastic changes in behaviors, such as aggression, hostility, hyperactivity, a decline in school performance, self-harm, thoughts of suicidal, rebellious or defiant behaviors
- ❖ Frequent absences from school
- ❖ Excessive sleep or lack of it
- ❖ Too much lack of supervision

Physical Abuse Signs

- ❖ Unexplained bruises, injuries, broken bones, or burns
- ❖ Injuries with unconvincing explanations

Emotional Abuse Signs

- ❖ Excessive demand for affections
- ❖ Social withdrawal, loss of interest or enthusiasm
- ❖ Bruised self confidence and self-esteem

- ❖ Avoidance of certain situation and maybe persons
- ❖ Loss of previously acquired skills
- ❖ A decline in school performance
- ❖ Delayed emotional development

Sexual Abuse Signs

- ❖ Display of sexual beahvior or knowledge that is inappropriate for the child's age
- ❖ STIs, and pregnancy
- ❖ Genitals bleeding, pain or injury
- ❖ Unbefitting sexual behavior with othe children
- ❖ Statement of sexual abuse from the child

Neglect Signs

- ❖ Stunted growth
- ❖ Lack of personal hygiene
- ❖ Stealing, especially food
- ❖ Lack of basic amenities such as clothing, and supplies for physical needs
- ❖ Poor record of school attendance
- ❖ Excessive weight issues with medical complications that are not properly addressed.
- ❖ Lack of proper medical attention and records

2.4. What Legacy are You Living Behind?

Although victims of child abuse and neglect could not have controlled or stopped the experiences they went through, they absolutely can decide not to pass on the maltreatmentt to their to the next

generation. It all begins with making a deliberate decision to protect your child from any abuse and exploitation you may have gone through.

If you fear you may abuse your child, seek help. Start by talking to your family health care provider. Your doctor will provide you with proper medical attention, and may refer you to counseling or a support group for parents to help you learn the right ways to deal with your anger.

Preferably, you should take time to heal before bringing a child into the world. Be sure you are ready emotionally, physically, and socially to parent a child. We have discussed signs to let you know you may already be a victimizer. Seek help and set the right legacy for your child and everyone around you.

Part Three. Understanding the Long-term Effects of Abuse and Neglect



The consequences of abuse and neglect are far beyond the immediate physical, and emotional injuries they suffer. A child can suffer lifelong injuries that will not only impair the child's quality of life, but also have intergenerational impacts.

Childhood abuse and neglect have been associated with later physical, emotional, behavioral, psychological consequences, and even an economic impact on the society. These outcomes are

usually interrelated, and can be independent. A neglect or abuse, for instance, may affect the development of the child's brain, leading to psychological problems, such as low self esteem, which would go on cause high risk behaviors such as substance use, and suicidal feeling.

The consequences of child abuse and neglect vary significantly with differnet factors, including the child's age, developmental status, the type, frequency and severity of the abuse, and the relationship with the victimizer.

3.1. How Abuse and Neglect Get Passed On

Whether we believe it or not, our childhood shapes who we are today. Our childhood experiences influence our decisions, the way we relate with others, and life choices. And when it comes to childhood abuse and neglect, the effect can be cyclical.

The likelihood of child abuse and neglect victims inflicting such pain on others, their children, is pretty slim. However, according to research, they tend to do so more than adults who were not maltreated.

This particular concept is called the Intergenerational Patterns of Maltreatment, IGM. Intergenerational patterns of maltreatments, or abuse is when the violence experienced in childhood is repeated by the victim, as they grow older, within their own family. Many times, this results in victimization of their children, spouses, or even their relatives.

Another side to intergenerational abuse is the tendency of the victims, usually female, ending up with an abusive partner to be re-victimized. These violent, unhealthy and unsafe practices create an unconducive environment for the children, and over time, it becomes a pattern of maltreatments that goes on for many generations.

Several theories have been cited to explain why abuse manifests through intergenerational patterns. Let's consider some of the popular ones.

1. **Social Learning Theory**

The theory of social learning explains that behaviors are shaped by imitation and observation. Invariably, the social learning theory proposes that childhood experiences influence adult parenting. Meaning, that if individuals experience parental abuse and neglect while growing up, they believe the neglect and abuse are acceptable and, therefore, may influence how they parent their children in the future.

2. **Attachment Theory**

The attachment theory emphasizes that human babies are born with the need to form an early and strong attachment with a caregiver. Usually, this bond is formed in the first six months of the baby's existence. In the absence of a caregiver, usually the parents, or if the caregiver is not sensitive and available to tend to the infants' needs, the baby grows up struggling to form healthy attachments with others, which ultimately increases the risk of abusive behavior as an adult.

3. **Trauma-based Models**

The trauma-based model proposes that if symptoms from posttraumatic events are left untreated or unresolved, they may increase the likelihood of the individual engaging in violent behaviors, especially behaviors that lead to the traumatic symptoms, which in this case are child abuse and neglect.

4. **Ecological-Transactional Theory**

This theory simply suggests that child abuse and neglect occur as a result of the influence of different factors, including family, community, and societal factors. This theory provides an integrative framework and better explains the intergenerational patterns of maltreating.

Lots of research has been done trying to understand this IGM concept fully. While some studies conclude that there is no connection between parents' and children's experiences of abuse and neglect, some studies believe a man's disposition is a combination of knowledge and experiences.

However, below is a summary of some of the research done so far on this concept:

- Not all parents who experience childhood abuse and neglect will maltreat their children. In fact, more than 95% of the research done on this shows that parents who were victims of childhood abuse and neglect will not maltreat their children.
- A group of parents who experienced childhood abuse and neglect is more likely to have abused and neglected children than parents who didn't. Research is still ongoing to understand the impact and role of families in this.
- Approximately 1 in 3 victims of childhood abuse grow up to continue a pattern of neglectful and abusive parenting.
- 30 to 60% of perpetrators of intimate partner violence also abuse children in the household.
- The tendency of maltreated parents to abuse their children also varies with the type of abuse the parents experienced.
- In a survey of women in the United States, 1 in 10 women who had experienced one type of abuse in childhood were victims of domestic violence. Furthermore, for women who had experienced physical, sexual, and emotional abuse, 1 in 3 were victims of domestic violence.
- When IGM patterns were found, the adults who experienced the abuse were not necessarily the perpetrators. This means children of abused and neglected parents are at higher risk of being maltreated either by their parents or another caregiver.
- Although women are more likely to be victims of childhood abuse and neglect, they are more likely to stalk, attack, and even abuse their partners

Although there are risk factors, called mediators, that increase the risk of IGM, so far, there is no conclusive research to ascertain that maltreated parents will pass it on to their children.

3.2. Identify Long Term Emotions That Do Not Serve You

It can be really difficult dealing with pains, hurt, and bruised emotions of the past. The frequent traumatic episodes, and flashes of the abuse and neglect can be mind-shattering and hard to get over. Sadly, trauma it's easier for trauma to pass on to generations. But you can break that cycle!

The first step doing that is identifying and coming to terms with the negative emotion. And that will involve you having the courage to look back on the pain, your loved one's action, and most importantly looking at your own hurt with clear eyes.

Shying away from the pain only gives you a moment of relief and years of regrets. Hence, it is essential you let all the pain in, so you don't repeat the same behaviors. You may have to go against some unsafe practices, accepted norms of your family, and this will take some laudable courage, strength and resilience to pull through.

The next step, which doubles as the most crucial step, to breaking the intergenerational violent patterns is recognizing and accepting that neither you, nor your children deserves to suffer just because someone in your family did in the past.

In addition, trying to unlearn violent patterns may be challenging. However, you don't have to do it all by yourself; reach out to professionals for help. For instance, mental health professionals, such as therapists, will help you go through tough and painful memories, and make you see how they affect your present behaviors and dispositions in a comfortable and safe manner.

Joining support groups, which could be locally or online, is another way to get comfort and let out all the painful memories. The support group could be made up of friends with related issues, or a couple of healthy family members. Going through this recovery journey can be quite discouraging and challenging. Hence, seek for help, and lean on trusted people for support.

Ultimately, breaking the cycle of intergenerational patterns of abuse requires awareness and conscious effort from individuals, and the society at large. Be aware of every decision and step you take. Understand how your childhood experiences affect your present adult life and ensure you are not setting a legacy of abusive behaviors for your children; that is how to build a better tomorrow for yourself and the next generation.

3.3. Why Many Parents Become Abusive to Their Children

There are various reasons parents abuse their children. From psychological, to mental, health, emotional, and intergenerational reasons. The reasons vary from parents to parents. And there are different factors that indicate signs of an abusive parent, some of which we have discussed in earlier chapters already.

The variances in circumstances alone, make it impossible to pinpoint the causes. However, we will consider three of the most common reasons parents abuse their children.

1. **Bad Parenting**

Maybe the most common reason parents abuse their kids is because they lack proper skills, guidance and knowledge to cater to a child's needs. Bad parenting is not a single action, or a one-time-thing. Rather it is a set of poor nurturing that could result in physically, and emotionally abusing the child. It affects the child's psychology and demeanor.

Sadly, these parents don't know they are in the wrong, they just lack the right parenting skills and knowledge.

Most times, they do all of this just to correct the child. Sometimes, they are too busy to be an active parent or just don't care enough. They prioritize their selfish interests over the best interests of the child. All of these are signs of bad parenting. Here are some signs of bad parenting:

- Demanding ridiculous level of obedience
- Overbearing and too controlling
- Using harsh, and negative words
- Withdrawing affection and attention
- Punishing the child inappropriately
- Lack of interests in the child's behavior

- Physically intimidating the child, etc.

Although the parent might be ignorant of the extent of the damage, it will not save the child from the possible outcomes of child abuse and neglect. However, with proper guidance and knowledge, parents can get rid of these harmful behaviors and learn to care for their children.

2. **Dysfunctional Parents**

Another reason parents abuse their children is because they are suffering from some condition which could be emotional, psychological, medical or some real-life crisis. Parents in this category are not capable of loving, or giving the child the required attention and affection because they are not in the right frame of mind to do so.

Usually, they resort to neglecting the child. And sometimes display some extreme behaviors that may not only scare the child but also some physical damages. Some of the behavior include:

- Humiliating or constantly criticizing a child.
- Threatening, shouting at a child or calling them names.
- Making the child the subject of jokes, or using sarcasm to hurt a child.
- Blaming and scapegoating.
- Making a child perform degrading acts
- Rejecting the child's ideas or opinions, etc.

Moreso, parents going through life crises have the propensity to abuse a child. When an excessive life changing event happens to parents, such as loss of a spouse, divorce, loss of job, bankruptcy, it may affect their state of mind, and render them emotionally unavailable. This, in turn, leads to neglect and rejection of this child.

Mentally ill parents, especially if it is yet to be diagnosed, are mostly ignorant of what they are doing when inflicting injuries on the child. Physical abuse is common with this category of parents. They beat the child at the slightest opportunity, and for ridiculous reasons.

Unfortunately, this may go on until the parent is diagnosed with the condition and admitted for proper treatment.

Furthermore, some parents just lack empathy. These people are sane, and stable but they just don't care. Or even worse, they are amused by it. This may be another form of mental illness, though.

Dysfunctional parents need help, and support. And sometimes, it is best the child is taken from them.

3. **Intergenerational Pattern of Maltreatments**

Sometimes, parents abuse their children because they also experienced it. This is not usually an intentional behavior. But because they grew up experiencing different forms of abuse and neglect, and somehow, they believe it is the right thing.

This becomes aggravated if child abuse and neglect is accepted norm in the family. The tendency is there, and if conscious efforts to break the cycle is not taken, the violent patterns will continue in forthcoming generations.

3.4. How to Protect Your Children

It is never too late to love and care for your children. If you are dealing with some life crisis that may affect your relationship with your children, take some time off to seek help and heal. Once you need to protect your children from neglect and abuse of any kind from anyone. Be interested in day to day activities.

The goal is to create an enabling, safe, and stable environment to nurture healthy relationships with your children. Hence, with the following steps, you can protect your kids from abuse and neglect.

1. **Show Your Child Love and Attention**

A baby is born to crave love and attention. They are naturally wired for that, and that is the best way to prevent neglect and abuse; show love and attention to your child. Be actively involved in

your child's life. Develop trust and good communications with your child. Nurture and listen to them.

This is so important for their self-esteem and self-worth, and even to trust you with happenings in their life. More so, ensure everyone in your home is not projecting wrong emotions to your kids. Build a loving environment, and supportive family for them.

2. **Never Respond In Anger**

Children can be a handful sometimes, but never take out your anger on them. If you are out of control or you feel overwhelmed, take a break. See your doctor, therapist on how to better deal with your child, and the resulting stress.

In fact, you should also be mindful and careful of how you relate with other people when your kid is around. Treating everyone with love and respect, especially when your child is around, builds empathy and respect in them.

3. **Supervise Your Child**

Never leave your child alone at home, in the public or anywhere. Keep a close tab on them, and be involved in everything they do. Know their friends, and colleagues at school. You may need to volunteer at school to do that. Know their teachers and adults they spend time with.

When they are old enough to go out on their own, encourage them to keep off strangers, and spend more time with friends. Ask how their day went, where they were, who they spoke with, and more. Make them comfortable enough to share this with you. And ensure you do this at all times.

4. **Know Your Child's Caregivers**

If you are a busy parent, your child may be spending more time with your caregivers; it is only ideal if you know and certify who your child is spending time with. Abuse and neglect can come from anybody, including caregivers.

Make irregular, but frequent, unannounced visits to see what's happening with and to your child. Actually, ensure you certify the caregiver yourself, and never allow substitutes if you don't know them.

5. **Teach Your Child When and How To Say No**

Teach your kids it is perfectly fine to say "No." Let them understand they don't have to commit to any threatening, uncomfortable and scary situations. Teach them to run away from anything that frightens them, and seek help from a trusted adult.

Build trust and healthy relationships with your kids such that they can share with you any frightening, scary, or uncomfortable thing that happened to them. Let them know it is OK to talk about it and won't get into any trouble for it.

6. **Teach Them Safe Online Practices**

Kids now have access to computer devices these days. Well, that is not bad as long as you ensure safe online practices. Preferably, put the computer in a common area of your house, and use parental controls to restrict and regulate what they have access to. Do the same with their iPad, phones, and other devices they use.

If your child is secretive about what they do online, that's a red flag. You may have to check their social media private settings to know what they are keeping from you. Let them know the dangers of using the internet wrongly and teach them how to stay safe, such as not sharing any personal information online, not responding to any hurtful, inappropriate, frightening messages online, not arranging or agreeing to meet an online contact in person, etc.

Moreso, tell your child to inform you if a strange person contacts them through any social networking site. And report any online harassment, or inappropriate contact to your local service provider or authorities, if necessary

7. **Reach Out**

If you have neighbors around, reach out to them. Meet parents, children, and develop a cordial relationship with them. These children will most likely become your child's friends, they will go to school together and do other things together.

Offer to help, if you can, if any of your neighbors seems to be struggling with their kids. Consider joining a local support group so you can have a place to let out your anger when it gets overwhelming. Most importantly, you are doing this to create a safe and secure environment for your child.

Part Four. Accepting the Truth and Understanding Your Feelings



The English playwright, poet and actor, William Shakespeare, once said 'To thine own self be true.' Sometimes, we just want to dwell in denial of things happening in our lives, and in the past. And honestly this is quite understandable. Having to accept all the hurt, and pain of the past can be very overwhelming.

More so, the momentary, distraction, relief and joy it brings is worthwhile. But that is all there is to the relief; momentary. In a short while, the hurt and pain will come back, and this time, much more overwhelming. At that point, you become livid, overreact, hurt the people you love, including your kids, and even do regretful things. That's not good for you, or anybody around you.

Maybe it’s time to face your fears. Time to let go of all the hurt and pain from your childhood experience. Your feelings are founded, and legit, so take it all in. Understand that you cannot change what has happened, you can only change and control how you feel about it.

If you love your child, and do not want this pattern of violence and abuse to continue, then you have to heal. Accept the truth about your emotions, and choose not to be controlled by what you feel.

4.1. Accepting the Truth and Dealing With Reality

No matter how genuine your feelings or emotions are, the truth and reality won't change. The truth is what has happened can not be undone, you can either choose to keep wallowing in the pain, and stand the risk of passing the violence on your children, or accept the truth about it and face the reality.

Sadly, repressing the feeling is not an option.This is because unexpressed emotional pain not only leads to physical symptoms with unidentifiable cause, it can lead to anxiety, depression, intense distress, and uncontrolled rage. You find yourself angry at the slightest thing, and although you love your kids and don’t want to hurt them, you just find yourself hurting them.

Hence, it’s time to heal. Time to move on.Time to love yourself and know it wasn’t your fault that you were abused or neglected. Time to leave all those behind you and lead a normal life.

4.2. Identify and Coping With Emotion

Now that you understand that you are ready to love yourself, below are some great ways to cope, and give yourself and children the emotional attention, and validation you never got:

1. **Acknowledge The Neglect That Happened and How it Affects You**

This is not as easy as it sounds, but here are typical questions you should ask yourself:

- Was the abuse from one parent or both?
- Did your parents fail to respond to your emotional, physical, and psychological needs because they were struggling themselve?

- ❖ Or was it because they were selfishly focused on meeting their needs?
- ❖ Or maybe they didn’t know?
- ❖ Was the neglect passive, active?
- ❖ How did it affect you as a child, and how is it affecting you now?

These questions will help identify your emotion on a deep level, and set you on a path to freeing yourself from shame, and blame.

2. **Accept that Emotions are blocked off, but still there**

It might seem that your emotions are walled off or maybe they never even existed. That's not true; it's just your child's brain protecting you. The emotions are there and can't still be accessed.

If you believe your emotions don't exist, then you lose control of them. You make uninformed and unintentional decisions. By accepting they exist, you listen to them more, manage them appropriately, and make well-thought decisions.

3. **Listen More to Your Feelings.**

Paying attention to your feelings is the most powerful thing to identify and cope with your emotions.

Your emotions are true and legit. They tell you to do the opposite of what your parents taught you. You should start honoring them. Listen to them more. Reach for the richness, color, beauty and connections of your emotions, and begin to act accordingly.

4. **Sit With Your Negative Feelings More to Develop/Increase Tolerance**

Once in a while, the ulgy emotions will show up, and try to make you do some hurtful things, hence, you need to develop tolerance. Practice sitting with the negative feelings, learn and understand how you react to them, and develop tolerance to them.

5. **Keep a list of what you like, and don't like**

Take some time to sit and write down a list of what you like and don't like. The things that trigger your negative feelings, and make you happy. Make it an ongoing list; something you update regularly.

The list should contain even the littlest thing that you like or do not like; nothing is too small to be on the list. The list helps you know what to avoid and not to, thereby becoming a happy person.

6. **Love Yourself**

The truth is, you cannot give what you don't have. If you don't love, and have compassion for yourself, you cannot love your children, or any other person.

Understand that you deserve to be loved, and treated right. It's okay to make mistakes. It's okay to make poor decisions. It's okay to fail. It's all what makes you human. Don't be too harsh on yourself because of that. And just as you don't expect perfection from nobody, don't expect from yourself.

Sit with yourself more, love and practice compassion for yourself. Do the things you love more and stay happy.

7. **Check your Relationship With Your Loved Ones**

Has your childhood experience affected your primary relationships? Has it played out in your marriage? How is your relationship with your parents now? Do you love your kids wholeheartedly?

Another way to love yourself is loving your family. Your wife, children, and even your parents. Doing this brings your peace, and rest of mind. Look out for how your experience has affected your life, and make amendments. If not for anything, but for your sanity, and because you love yourself.

8. **Join a Support Group**

Own your story, and share it with someone else. You may have to join a support group locally or online to do that. A support group removes the feeling of loneliness. When you hear other people's stories, you know you're not alone, and you feel more willing to share your story.

4.3. Understanding Your Values

Still on the road to healing completely and living a happier life, understanding your values is very important. Value, in this context, would mean a set of principles or standards of behavior of what is important in life. The main point being ***What Is Important in Life.*** What are your desires, goals for living a meaningful life?

Values define what you stand for. Alexander Hamilton once said, “If you don't stand for something, you will fall for anything.” Understanding your values help you live an authentic life, a purposeful life that depicts the richness of what you want to be known for.

However, values are not your goals. You can easily scrape off your goals list once you achieve them. For instance, getting married is a goal you can scrape off when you do.

Conversely, values can not be scraped off. Values are your core beliefs about what is essential. They are things you continuously live towards. For instance, deciding to be a loving person to your spouse, and a caring parent to your kids is a value. It's a decision you work and move towards every day.

The day you stop doing that, you fall out of your values. You're no longer a supportive, caring and loving person you want to be to your spouse and kids.

Every individual has their own personal set of values. Only you determine, and define what these values are. You may have to explore for some time to identify your values. There are so many core values that people live by. We will look at four simple steps to help you come up with your values, but first below is a list of top 50 core values ideas:

- Achievement
- Ambition

- Caring
- Charity
- Collaboration
- Creativity
- Curiosity
- Dependability
- Empathy
- Encouragement
- Enthusiasm
- Ethics
- Excellence
- Fairness
- Family
- Friendships
- Flexibility
- Freedom
- Fun
- Generosity
- Growth
- Happiness
- Health

- Honesty
- Humor
- Individuality
- Innovation
- Intelligence
- Intuition
- Joy
- Kindness
- Knowledge
- Leadership
- Learning
- Love
- Loyalty
- Making a difference
- Motivation
- Optimism
- Open-mindedness
- Passion
- Perfection
- Performance
- Personal development

- ❖ Popularity
- ❖ Power
- ❖ Professionalism
- ❖ Punctuality
- ❖ Quality
- ❖ Recognition

This list is not exhaustive, but it's a good place to start.

1. **Pick and Write Down your Values**

Pick at least 10 values from the idea list that most resonates with your core beliefs and what you are passionate about. You can always do some research on more ideas you can select.

2. **Consider the People You Admire The Most**

If you can't come up with the list yourself, consider at least six of the people you respect, and admire. The list can include your heros, as well. And write out the things you like about them or better still, the values they embody.

3. **Consider Your Experiences**

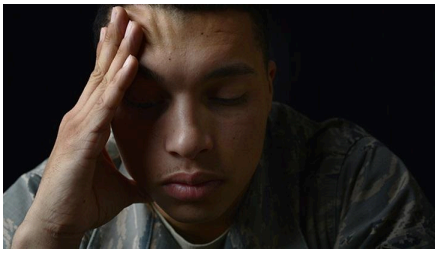
Also, you can consider your past experiences. The happy, and sad moments in your life, and reflect on what they reveal about your core values. For instance, reflecting on the abuse and neglect, you experienced as a kid may teach you empathy and compassion. While a happy moment may teach you motivation and leadership. It all depends on you, and what you stand for.

4. **Choose Your Top Core Values**

Having many values is good, but it's better to narrow them to between five and 10. If you have more than 10, sit and check out the most essential of all. Which ones resonate with your life the most?

You can always take some days off and come back to them later. Be sure the values are what you want to live by, and known for.

Part Five. Linking Current Traumas to Your Past



It's difficult to completely heal from childhood abuse, and neglect. There will always be certain triggers, and reactions to these ugly past experiences.

These reactions are not abnormal, and in fact, in most cases, they subside as a part of the body’s natural healing and recovery process over the time.

We all react to trauma differently. And the type and severity of the traumatic event varies with many factors including:

- Whether the person has any previous relevant experience
- The type and characteristics of the traumatic event(s)
- If they are active or helpless
- The amount of support following the incident
- Present stressors in the victim's life,
- Their personality, and
- Level of resilience.

Below are common reactions to past traumatic experience:

- Uncontrolled emotional upset
- Feeling extremely tired or fatigued
- Feeling extremely anxious and/or stressed
- Overly protective of others including family and friends
- Extreme neglect of others including family and friends
- Not willing to leave a particular place for fear of 'what might happen'

Mental Reactions Include:

- Decreased concentration and memory
- Recurring episodes of the event
- Intrusive thoughts about the events
- Disorientation and confusion

Emotion Reactions Include:

- Recurring shock
- Depression
- Oversensitivity
- Feeling detached, and numbed
- Isolation and social withdrawal: not wanting to connect and stay with people, including friends and family
- Continued fear - you feel like your victimizer is still lurking around
- Feelings guilt

- Exhaustion - you continuously feel let down, and deprived.

Behavioral Reactions Include:

- Avoiding certain events, such as family gatherings or functions that will bring you in contact with your victimizers
- Getting immersed in recovery-related tasks
- Inability to stop thinking about the events
- Distorted daily routines
- Appetite disorder, such as eating too much or too little
- Sleeping problems, such as sleeping too much or too little
- Engaging in substance use, such as alcohol, cigarettes, etc
- Addictions, such as gambling
- Engaging in certain criminal activities, such as stealing, fighting.

Physical Reactions Include:

- Fatigue and physical exhaustion
- Headaches
- Excessive sweating
- Increased heart rate,
- Nausea, dizziness, and vomiting
- In extreme cases, certain medical disorder such as hypertension

Do note that the frequency of these signs is what differentiates it from regular signs of sickness, or some body anomaly. In simple terms, you can have a headache as a result of some heavy work

you have done, or maybe a sign that you're about to fall sick. However, recurring headaches with no prior inducing activity, or diagnosis maybe an aftermath of your traumatic experience.

5.1. Knowing It Was Not Your Fault

A child comes to the world craving love and attention. Human babies want to be cared for. Their brains are wired in such a way. Hence, it's never their fault they were neglected or abused.

You were not demanding too much from your parents. All you wanted was parental love, care and attention. All you wanted was to grow up in a family that helps you grow your emotional, cognitive, physical, and intellectual skills.

It was never your fault you were abused or neglected. Although your parents might have struggled, too, but you were a kid and there was hardly something you could have done about it.

Don't be too harsh on yourself. You deserve to be loved, cared for and attended to. Always remember that it was never your fault. You didn't cause or bring harm to your parents.

5.2. Emotionally Separating From Your Parents.

A very effective way to cope with a dysfunctional family, or any toxic relationship is detaching. In fact, detaching from anything that brings your emotional pain and affects your sanity is the best way to care for yourself and feel at peace. Whether it's with abusive parents, broken home, a narcissistic spouse, etc.

Detaching allows people to experience the consequences of their actions, and it provides you the much needed emotional space to heal, and live peacefully.

Detaching is not the same as shying away from the problems. In fact, they are two separate things entirely. In a rather twist of events, adults who experienced childhood abuse, and neglect often find themselves repeatedly trying to fix their victimizers.

This is usually done from a good, caring heart but it can consume you, too. It's good to care for your victimizers, parents, but sometimes, they just don't need your help. They want to deal with it their own way, and this creates an unending push and pull where you're both trying to force

and control things, and no is happy. This kind of situation can eat you up so bad you lose track of what is really important.

Sadly, it can become an obsession. It would seem as though you are caring for your parents from the good intentions of your heart, but it's just you trying to run away from what really matters, dealing with your problems, and over some time, it becomes an obsession.

Always remember, **You Cannot Solve Other People's Problems.** We are all responsible for ourselves; worrying and trying to solve other people's problems doesn't help.

Detaching allows you to attend to yourself, honor yourself, your feelings and your needs, and also let go of the guilt and shame from trying to fix other people's bad choices.

Below are ways to detach from a toxic relationship:

Emotional or Psychological Detachment:

- Focus only on what you can control and let go of what you can't.
- Always respond, Never react. Take your time to think about what to and how to say it, and say it when you're calm and sober. Never react in the heat of the moment.
- Sometimes, you don't respond at all. You're never under any compulsion to reply to your abusers. Sometimes, shrug it off, or even make a joke of it.
- Never impose your decisions on them whether good or bad.
- Allow them to make their choices, whether good or bad.
- Don't obsess about your parents' problems.
- Set emotional boundaries, and never compromise
- Be sure your expectations are not unrealistic. Unrealistic expectations breed contempt, and frustrations.
- Love yourself more. Buy things for yourself.

- ❖ Deal with your problems first. In fact, that's how you can make rational decisions.

Physical Detachment:

- ❖ If you can, leave the toxic environment completely. Or just create some space from an unproductive discussion.
- ❖ Choose not to visit them, or arrive late and leave early.
- ❖ Leave (potentially) dangerous situations.

Detaching is not a one-time thing. It's a process. It's a decision to continuously choose yourself, and what's best for your mental, emotional and physical health.

Detaching yourself from your parents doesn't mean you don't care about them. It doesn't make you a bad person, or you're withholding love. It's you letting go of worries, and allowing them to take responsibility for their choices.

Your way out of chaos, worry, and all the emotional pain you're experiencing is detaching yourself from it. You don't have to cut ties with your parents, although, sometimes, it might be the healthiest decision. Set boundaries, and start taking tiny steps towards your emotional freedom and peace.

5.3. Facing the Truth about Your Family Legacy

Every family has a heritage, which is a physical, social, emotional, and spiritual legacy passed on from parents to child. We all live out our family legacy, and we pass it on to our children.

The social, emotional, physical, and spiritual legacy is like a three-stranded core; individually each strand cannot hold that much weight. It is important that we pass on a positive and affirming legacy. A negative legacy can be so destructive.

The good thing is whatever the legacy is in your family, you can always change the trajectory of it. You can always set a lasting positive, and enabling legacy for your children. If you don't

intentionally pass a legacy that is consistent with your beliefs, and values, your culture will pass on its own, and that often ends badly.

Earlier, we talked about how abuse and neglect is transferred from one generation to the other. To break this cycle of abuse, it is important you know your family culture and legacy as much as possible. Until you know what you're dealing with, only then can you adequately change the norms and set a thriving legacy for your children.

More so, understanding your family legacy will help you identify patterns of it in your children. There is a high tendency your children will show some family traits, but if you know and understand your family legacy deeply, you will be able to spot the signs when you see them.

For instance, if you notice any traces of abuse in your children, whether in the way they treat one another, or their peers in school and in the community, you can quickly correct them and make necessary amendments.

5.4. Breaking into the Dysfunctional Family System

To completely break the cycle of abuse, you will have to confront the dysfunctional norms and biases that created your family's legacy. You don't have the luxury of choosing the family you are born into, neither do we get to choose our family legacy. But you can choose who comes into your lives, what rights they have over you, and more importantly, how they treat you.

Breaking into dysfunctional family legacy prevents negative comments, or neglect or abuse that can destroy your self esteem and also, protect your children from experiencing any of such.

The consequences of not dealing with dysfunctional family legacy can be so grievous. It involves from abusive issues like alcohol abuse, drug abuse, domestic violence, sexual abuse, and emotional abuse, and even engaging in criminal activities.

Experiencing childhood abuse and neglect is enough to let you know the family system is dysfunctional. Some other signs of a dysfunctional family system may include:

- Secrecy and Denial
- Lack of good communication

- A closed system (family members are not allowed to speak up and seek external help)
- Rigid rules, and regulations
- Isolation and restricted friendships
- Verbal abuse or physical abuse between family members
- Emotional abuse
- Lack of respect and empathy
- Setting inappropriate or unrealistic expectations for children
- Lack of boundaries between family members
- Lack of forgiveness
- Stifled emotions and different opinions
- Love and affection withdrawal

How To Break the Cycle of a Dysfunctional Family System

It's noteworthy that you know this is not going to change others. In fact, breaking the cycle of a dysfunctional family system will not change what is already existing, the abuse and neglect, but rather, it's a conscious effort to ensure you don't continue to live out such behaviors.

You cannot change your parents or their behavior, but you can change yours and erase such abusive patterns, and traits. Let's get you started!

- **Seek Therapy**

Sometimes, you may not understand the extent of the damage done to you until you see a therapist. When you seek therapy, you get the opportunity to express yourself freely, to process your past experiences in a safe space.

Moreso, therapists can help see things from a different perspective, proffer relevant solutions, and ultimately, break the cycle of abuse, neglect, and chaos you're exposed to.

If your parents are willing, you may also go for a family therapy. It is beneficial in breaking the dysfunctional patterns.

- **Stay Away From Toxic Environment**

If you're trying to break a dysfunctional family pattern, you should stay away from the system that created it. You cannot control your parents from relentlessly trying to cause you pain, but you can choose to stay away from it. Distance yourself from the system that brings you pain, sadness, and hurt, and begin to set new standards for yourself.

- **Build a New Support System**

You need a new support system. The truth is you can't do it all by yourself. Building a network of trusted friends that can help you unlearn the negative behaviors and learn new ones.

Joining a support group is a good way to do this. You meet new people with similar experiences, and share your story, and heal. Nurture your friendships and seek comfort in a support system of your own making.

- **Choose Love, and Empathy Consistently**

Choose to love your children, and everyone around you. It's going to be difficult because it's like giving something you never had. But it's going to be worth it. Choose to love your children. Choose to be involved in their lives. Choose to never take out your anger on them. Ultimately, choose your peace of mind.

All of this requires conscious decisions and efforts. It's not a day thing. It's something you do all day, everyday. A common sign of a dysfunctional system is unpredictability. Parents' behaviors fluctuate daily, and even by the hour. Rules are unclear and get broken easily. Children have to guess what their parents' reaction will be everytime.

The home is just a grid of chaos, turbulence, abuse and neglect. No stability whatsoever. That's not the kind of home you want to build for your children.

Choose a home of love and affection; one that creates an enabling environment for children's growth and development, and choose it consistently. Never compromise on the integrity and quality of the love you give out.

5.5. Taking Full Responsibility For Yourself

Now that you're an adult, your actions are yours and you will be judged by it. Not by your experiences, or the abuse and neglect you went through. You're responsible for your action, own it.

Taking Full responsibility for your actions means you realize there are areas of your life you can control, and some areas you can't control or change. You accept and move past the things of the past that you absolutely can't control, you avoid blaming people for your actions, and start making positive changes to your everyday life.

When you do something bad, own up to it. Take actionable steps to resolve, and prevent it from recurring.

Let's consider five steps to help you take responsibility.

1. **Never Blame Other People**

It's easier to blame your parents when you hit your child; after all, they are the cause of your problem. But in all honesty, that's you refusing to take responsibility. Blame is a safe mechanism. It's a way to shy away from your problems. However, just because it's easier doesn't mean it is right.

Blaming others brings momentary stillness to negative emotions, but it will not provide any solution to the problems. In fact, after the momentary peace, you start feeling guilt, and become emotionally drained.

Blaming others will cost you quality relationships, too. For instance, neglecting your child, or spouse and blaming your parents for it will make you lose the respect your spouse and friends have for you. It makes you look weak, and you may end up losing them.

2. **Don't Make Excuses**

Making excuses is you taking the easy route. Own up to your actions. You're dealing with and trying to unlearn many years of abuse, and neglect. It's not going to come easy. There are going to be slipups. You will make irrational decisions along the line, it's all part of the healing process. But what you should never do is make excuses for it.

If any slip up happens, maybe you hit your child or intentionally neglect their needs, own up to it. Tell yourself you made a mistake, and show remorse.

Apologize sincerely, and do everything you can to ensure it doesn't happen again. That way, you shed off those negative tendencies and become the loving and caring parent you have always been.

Making excuses gives you reason to repeat the same act. You end up becoming resentful and emotionally drained.

3. **Accept Negative Emotions**

Taking responsibility also involves accepting that you're dealing with some negative emotions. Don't shy away from those emotions. Sit with them and practice mindfulness. Be mindful of your actions, and words when negative emotions are present. Don't allow these emotions to take hold of you. Develop tolerance to them. But you can only do this if you accept you are in a healing process.

4. **Act, Don't React**

As we have said earlier, there are going to be slipups. You are going to say or do something you don't intend. When these things happen, don't react immediately. At that point, your emotions are heightened and you cannot make any rational decisions. You may end up making things worse.

Take a step back from the environment, maybe even take some time off to clear your head, or call a friend.

Once you're calm and in a good place to make decisions, take actions to resolve the situation, and apologize to the affected parties.

5. **Practice Self Compassion**

Take responsibility for your actions and don't make excuses but also, be kind to yourself. If mistakes happen, don't blame others for it but also, remember you're only human. No one expects you to be without mistakes.

If you let yourself wallow in self-pity and resentment, it will absorb all the positive emotions in your life and leave no room for self compassion.

Taking responsibility for actions is not easy, but the benefits greatly outweigh the discomforts that come with it.

Part Six. Prevention Strategies



Nothing destroys a family faster than domestic violence. It ruins the family, permanently shatters children-parents relationships, and leaves couples emotionally damaged. As we have

comprehensively established, violence in families should be prevented at all cost. Not only between parents and children, but also between couples, siblings, and relatives.

Domestic violence cuts across all ethnicities, ages, gender, religious beliefs, and sexual orientations. Wherever there is tendency for violence, doom is impending.

Domestic violence prevention is basically 'preventing' violence from happening. Now, violence can happen between different parties in the family, as such, we will consider prevention strategies for different forms of domestic violence.

6.1. How to Prevent Partner Abuse

This type of violence is called Intimate Partner Violence, IPV. It can occur in different relationships, including marriages, courtships, cohabiting, or dating. No one is immune to domestic violence; you can be the victim or the victimizer.

Intimate Partner Violence includes all forms of abuse, including physical abuse, financial abuse, emotional abuse, and psychological abuse.

Here is how to prevent it:

- **Education**

Low literacy has been identified as a factor that negatively contributes to domestic violence. This is because lack of education or poor education make people economically less productive. They have less bargaining rights, and don't even know when they are being violated.

Educational training teaches you about women's rights, and men's rights. It helps you know when you're violating your spouse's rights, and ultimately teaches you how to prevent domestic violence.

- **Tolerance**

No one is perfect. Expecting perfection from your partner is, itself, another form of imperfection. Both parties must understand that, and be willing to help each other grow.

Both partners must exhibit maturity, tolerance, and acceptance of each other's imperfections. Tolerate one another, and violence will never rear its ugly head. Tolerance should also extend to children, domestic servants, and other members of the household

- **Effective Communication**

The truth is, no matter how tolerant you are of your partner, disagreement will occur. And that's perfectly OK. If that happens, sit down, and discuss it over like adults that you are.

Intolerance, anger, uncontrolled temper will only degenerate the problem into domestic violence. Minor issues will result in physical, and emotional abuse. Effective communication remains one of the most feasible solutions to domestic violence.

- **Seek Professional Help**

Some partners are suffering from emotional, and psychological damage from their past experiences. Emotionally, they are not well, and psychological, they are unstable. They make irrational decisions they regret once they are sober. It's never their fault. They just need proper attention, and care.

If you are such a person, you should consider meeting with relevant professionals for health, legal, psychological, or any other form of help and attention. And if your partner is the one going through an emotional crisis, help them seek help.

- **Avoid Bad Company**

Surprisingly, there are people who boast about their domestic violence exploits. They tell how they physically, or financially abused their spouse, they even put it on social networking sites. We live in a strange world!

These are not the people you should be friends with. This is because your peer has a strong influence on you directly or indirectly. Very soon, you will pick up the habits and start violating your partner.

Stay far away from such friends. Your partner is your friend, keep them close and love them unconditionally.

- **Join Support Groups**

The beauty of a support group is the feeling of inclusiveness it brings. You are not alone to bear the burden. Support groups offer an in-depth insight of who can be a victim of abuse and how to prevent it.

You hear people share their experiences, and from pick up one or two tips to prevent and deal with domestic violence. It's a safe place to pour out your worries and burdens without the fear of being judged.

- **Be Strict But Not Violent**

Maintain your ground, and don't allow your rights to be violated, but don't ever resort to bruise and batter. Be strict with your principles, not violent.

When disagreement erupts, make your agreement with a clear head, and sometimes, take a walk and come back to resolve the issue when you're calm.

- **Show Love and Affection**

Marriages and relationships are not bed of roses. There are challenging and trying times, which explains the high rate of divorce cases all over the world. However, with determination and love, there is always a way. Show genuine love to your partner.

You don't hurt, and violate someone you claim to love. You don't do things that will bring them pain. Be true to your partner. Even during challenging times, genuine love and affection will pull you through.

One way to show love to your partner is to avoid infidelity. Infidelity and jealousy can quickly stir up troubles that can result in violence. Stay true to your partner, and communicate with them if anything changes.

- **Adopt Rules and Home Dispute Resolution Mechanisms**

Set rules for resolving disputes. For instance, no disagreement must go longer than 24 hours before resolution, or no one must go to bed angry, etc.

If you have kids around, there can be light measures for offenders. This will help keep your home safe and free of any malice, poor communication that could result in violence.

6.2. How to Prevent Child Abuse



We have discussed the implications of child maltreatment on both the victim and the society. Let's consider some ways to prevent child abuse in your home and community:

- **Volunteer Your Time**

Be involved in community duties. Help vulnerable and abused children and their families. It's a way to keep yourself occupied and breed empathy. You could even start a playgroup.

- **Be Thoughtful When You Discipline Your Children**

The truth is your kids will get you worked up. But don't discipline them when you're angry. Give yourself some time to calm down, and decide on the best way to approach the situation.

This is not to discourage discipline but rather, to be mindful and thoughtful of it. Use privileges to foster and encourage good behaviors, and use thoughtful discipline to help your kid regain control.

- **Be Mindful of Your Behavior**

You should not only be mindful of your actions but also, your words. Abuse is not just physical. With your hurtful words, you can inflict deep, and lifelong emotional pain on your child.

If conflicts arise, watch your actions and your words. There are better ways to settle a conflict than hitting or yelling at your child. Discipline them with love, and affection.

- **Educate Yourself**

Child Abuse goes beyond hitting or beating your child. Neglect also constitutes maltreatment. Failure of parents or caregivers to attend to the emotional, psychological, and physical needs is another way to abuse a child. Children can be emotionally abused when they are rejected, berated, or continuously isolated.

Educate yourself adequately on what constitutes child abuse and neglect, and then ensure you don't find yourself acing out any of it.

- **Know The Signs**

Also, know the signs of child abuse. Unexplained injuries are the most common signs of abuse, but that's not all. Depression, inappropriate sexual behaviors, fear of certain adult, anxiety, social withdrawal, isolation, poor hygiene, secrecy, hostility, sleep disorder, eating disorder are all signs of emotional, physical, and psychological abuse and neglect.

- **Educate Others**

Just by supporting children and parents can be the best way to prevent yourself from abusing your children. Educate yourself properly about the dangers of child abuse, and then start a campaign against it. You can organize a seminar once in a while to educate people about child abuse, and how prevent. Start a support group, and be the voice in the community against this domestic violence.

You don't need a hundred people to start. Start small with the little you have and gradually build the campaign.

- **Teach Children Their Rights**

In your campaign, include teaching children their rights. Teach them how to stay safe, and seek help. When children know abuse is not their fault, they are more likely to report their abuser.

- **Support Prevention Programs/Campaigns**

If you cannot start a campaign against child abuse and neglect, support an ongoing program. Abuse can be prevented if there is proper orientation.

When people know what signs to look out for, abuse, and neglect will be stopped before it happens at all. If you are privileged, fund a campaign, invite professionals to come speak about it in your community. Encourage family counseling, and help those in need to better care for their children.

- **Report Abuse**

If you see a child being abused, or you notice any signs of neglect, don't hesitate to make a report to your state child protective service departments, or the nearest police station.

When you see an abused child, listen and hear them speak freely about their pain. Assure them they are safe now, and they did the right thing by talking to an adult. Let them know they are not responsible for what happened to them.

- **Invest in Kids**

Support the children and families in your communication. Create an enabling environment for them. Meet lawmakers and support legislation that will better protect children's rights, and improve their lives.

6.3. If You Have Already Become Abusive

If you're already an abusive person, you can decide to stop being abusive today. You may have hurt many people and even yourself in the process, but you can be compassionate and loving and be loved in return as well.

Changing your perspective, behaviors and attitude won't come easy. It's going to be challenging, and require some conscious efforts from you. The tendency to go back to your toxic behaviors will still be there, but when you continuously choose to let go of the violent behaviors, you will, over time, completely get rid of it.

If you're determined to let go of all negative emotions, reconcile with your true self and make peace with your victims, these steps will help you find your way back.

1. **Admit That You’re an Abusive Person.**

If you don't believe you have a problem, then you can find a solution. This is the most important step and the most difficult. Accept that you're an abusive person, and you're the problem in the relationship.

The moment you realize and accept this simple truth, every other thing becomes easy.

2. **Decide To Change**

Decide to change, and never stop working towards it. Things will get difficult when you try to unlearn these abusive tendencies and behaviors, but your determination, and resilience will keep you going.

At some point, you will feel like quitting, you will have to motivate yourself daily and put in the work. More importantly, you're doing this for yourself and not for anyone.

3. **Take Responsibility for Your Actions.**

Be responsible for all you have done. Don't deflect the blame, or make excuses for them, own up to them. Accept that you have hurt some persons, and they deserve your apologies.

Taking responsibility for the physical, emotional and psychological pains you have caused your loved ones will give you the strength to apologize to the involved party.

4. **Talk to The Survivor.**

This is another important step to stop being abusive. Talk to the survivor, and not to make excuses but to apologize and listen to them. Listen to how you made them feel, let them pour out their on your behavior has affected them, and how your actions broke them.

Listen to understand not to explain or make excuses. Be remorseful and sincere. Let them see that you're truly sorry for your actions, and seek their forgiveness.

Getting them something tangible and thoughtful is a good way to apologize. Not that material thing can cover for all the years of pain and hurt you have caused them. It's just you trying to show how sincere and remorseful you are.

5. **Forgive Yourself.**

Once you have gotten the forgiveness of your victims (might not be easy), forgive yourself, too. Yes, you have caused pain to some people, but you need to forgive yourself. Sometimes, you hurt your loved ones because of the hurt you feel inside.

When you forgive yourself and heal completely, you can stop being abusive and lead a healthy life.

Forgiving yourself also involves seeking professional help. Going for therapy and counselling on how to manage your anger, and love your partners, and kids even more.

6. **Lower Your Expectations**.

Don't be unrealistic with the expectations you set for yourself. This is because failure to meet unrealistic expectations breeds resentment, frustrations, and hatred. When this goes up for too long, it could lead to self abuse.

Lower your expectations not only from yourself but also from your partner, and children. It helps you manage your controlling behavior and act rationally.

More importantly, don't expect your victims to forgive you immediately. In fact, they may not forgive you at all. It's fine, but never stop trying to get their forgiveness.

7. **Love, and Respect Your Partner/Kids**

Finally, love yourself, your kids and your partner. Respect their wishes, and needs. If they need some time off, kindly oblige. Love and respect them enough to grant them their wishes. Don't impose anything on them.

Part Seven. Long-Term Healing Strategies to Help You Break the Cycle



Long term healing requires effort and determination. Everyday you have to choose healing and to break the cycle of abuse and neglect. We have discussed in detail some ways to achieve that, especially breaking the cycle of physical abuse. However, emotional and psychological abuse might be very difficult to get rid off.

Below are some common hurtful remarks that can damage your emotional and psychological health and how to deal with them.

7.1. If You Were Neglected, Rejected, or Abandoned: Healing the “I Am Unlovable” and “I Am Worthless”

The key to overcoming negativity is reaffirmation. Others opinions about you don't matter. They are not important. How you see yourself pretty much says it all.

That you experienced childhood abuse and neglect doesn't make you worthless or unlovable. That you're in a healing process doesn't make you unlovable. When the negative thoughts arise, reaffirm to yourself that you're lovable and absolutely valuable.

7.2. If You Were Overprotected or Emotionally Smothered: Healing the “I Am Nothing without My Parent”

Your parents don't determine who you are. They don't control your life. In fact, they are luckiest to have you as their child. You have your world ahead of you, and only you can limit yourself.

7.3.1 If You Were Overly Controlled or Tyrannized: Healing the “I Am Powerless”

The only thing that matters is you, and what you think about your life. Don't settle for any negative comments, or thoughts.

It takes courage and strength to come this far. You went through a series of abuse and neglect, yet you are here living, trying to be a better person for your children and future generations, if that doesn't tell you you're powerful, then nothing will.

You're strong, powerful and courageous. Spread your wings and fly.

7.4. If You Had Overly Critical, Shaming, or Perfectionistic Parents: Healing the “I Am Bad,” “I Am Unacceptable,”

Firstly, the way your parents treat you is a reflection of who they are. It tells you about them, and not about you.

An abusive parent is so because of who they are and not what the child does. After all, there are a thousand and one ways to raise a child without becoming abusive and neglectful.

You are not bad, and acceptable. All you wanted was love and attention, nothing more. Never forget that.

7.5. “I Am Not Good Enough” If You Had a Self-Absorbed or Narcissistic Parent:

You're good enough! You are simply humans with human flaws and that doesn't make you 'not good enough'. Your parents are just projecting their flaws and insecurities on you. But that's not happening again.

You're good enough to be loved. Good enough to be cared for. Good enough to be attended to, and absolutely good enough to parent your children. Never settle for the negative comments. However, you won't unlearn all these damaging remarks in a day. It's going to take conscious efforts, and some time to completely wall them off. But, it is possible! Be focused on healing completely and leading a healthy and happy life.

Part Eight. Celebrating Yourself



Now is the time to celebrate yourself. You fought through many battles, and you still stand strong and perfect. That's an incredible feat!

Abuse and neglect can be so damaging, but here you are, seeking help and wanting to heal, and to break the violent cycle. It takes courage to understand there is a problem, and even a greater courage to actively want to be a better person! That deserves some celebration. No more room for negativity, damaging remarks, or abuse of any kind. It's all healing, and a healthy life. You're a superstar, never dim your light!