

## Whats Going on Here?

Contributed by Leslie Karsner

More info...

Let me describe an all-too-common conversation I've had with increasing frequency over the course of my career: A parent enters my office and quickly begins crying. "My son speaks to me horribly. He is constantly berating me and criticizing my performance. Just last night he told me I'm the worst mother he knows. My feelings are so hurt."

Wow. Take a look at that last sentence. This mother's feelings have been injured by the comments of her child. The fact that her feelings have been hurt speaks volumes about the nature of her relationship with her son. And what it says is not good.

Let's begin with this fundamental contention: parents should never give their children the power to hurt their feelings. Our children can frustrate us, disappoint us, annoy us, delight us, or make us proud, but the relationship should never be one where our feelings can be hurt by anything our children say to or about us. Let's explore why.

Who is it that can hurt our feelings? Peers whose approval is important to us—friends, spouses, colleagues, other adult family members. But if our children can hurt our feelings—that is, if we give them the power to do so—it means that we want their approval. And if we want our children's approval, we don't have the sort of relationship with our children that they need from us.

Our job is to guide them, direct them, nurture them, restrain them, teach them, but it is not to have a good relationship with them or win their approval. They should be seeking our approval, not we theirs.

If you have given your children the power to hurt your feelings, then you have more of a peer-to-peer relationship with your child than an adult-to-child one. It seems preposterous to Esther Perel has written a book on marriage with interesting ideas in addition to an interesting title. The book is *Mating in Captivity* and it challenges the idea of the sexless marriage. Dr. Perel offers reasons why a couple's sexual relationship shifts after marriage and kids and offers solutions to remedy this issue. She examines cultural beliefs that support this problem in addition to a theory of how intimacy can squelch sexual desire. Worth reading if this is an issue in your marriage and even if its not.

At the risk of sounding like a dated Madonna song, we do live in a material world. As adults this effects our daily life but more importantly, it effects how our children are being raised and it is shaping the values of future generations. Our culture inherently supports the value of material items, especially for children. Go to McDonalds, get a toy, go to a birthday party and there is a treat bag full of goodies for you even though it's not your birthday. Play on a game system that costs several hundred dollars using games that start at \$30 each. Don't forget that IPOD to listen to music but pay attention because there will be a newer, cooler model out in just a few months. So why is this a problem? Our children are happy and stimulated and some might say even enriched by these perks. Who wants to deprive their child of the best? Who wants to revisit the childhoods of generations past when there might have been poverty and not enough food? My concern is that the focus on material things creates a sense of entitlement for our children and creates a standard of living that they may not be prepared to perpetuate for themselves. I wonder how this effects the work ethic for children who have been taught that there are immediate rewards for everything that you do. It could send the message that there is little value to old things since there is always something new and little need to recycle. Finally, there is a psychological value to longing, to not getting what you want when you want it. This value includes developing the discipline to set long term goals, using creative thinking and problem solving skills to making the goal happen and finally the gratification of knowing that you accomplished the goal. American culture isn't going to change any time soon but here are some ideas for things you can do at home to create some balance to combat the materialistic messages in society. **Set an Example** Be aware of the messages you send in your family about the importance of material goods. Are you trying to keep up with the neighbors? Is buying a big tag item a special occurrence or an every day thing? Are you sending the message that how much "stuff" you have is important to you? **Set Limits** Teach your children the difference between privileges and needs. Have them contribute financially to items that are special so that they know how much they cost and feel like they have earned them. Don't be afraid to say no, even if "everyone" has something. **Model Gratitude** Show your children that you appreciate what you have. Teach them about other countries or time periods that were less prosperous. Expect that your children be thankful when given something including requiring thank you notes. We are very fortunate to be living in a time and in a country of prosperity. It is important that we both show and teach our appreciation.

If you have experienced a recent challenge, change or loss you may benefit from compassionate and caring support. Loss, change and conflict often generate disabling emotional and physical pain, anger, sadness, loneliness, anxiety, guilt, shame and confusion. These common reactions may follow the death of a loved one, a relationship breakup, divorce, parent-child conflict, infertility issues, chronic illness, job loss, and conflicts at work, school or church. Individuals, couples, families, children and teens may benefit from professional help when resolution fails to materialize. Read the following questions and ask yourself if any of these behaviors are similar to what you are experiencing. Are you constantly thinking about what has occurred and can't get focused on routine tasks? Have you noticed you no

longer enjoy familiar activities or being around people that once lifted your spirits? Are you crying or on the verge of tears weeks after the change or loss occurred? Have your sleeping patterns and eating habits shifted significantly? Have you thought about using alcohol or other substances to numb your pain? Are you experiencing hopelessness and frequently think that life isn't worth living any longer? If you answered yes to three or more of the questions it may be time to take action and create a plan of healthy self-care. Call today for one free assessment, 317-753-9030 or contact me at [pamwright@comcast.net](mailto:pamwright@comcast.net). Compassionate Care helps you discover your strengths and in turn equips you to design solutions until hope emerges and you can embrace the future more confidently.

I work with children of all ages and college students. I enjoy working with families in forming solid attachments, abuse and trauma post-care, teaching parenting skills, working with learning and physical disabled, and helping foster children transition. I also work with families on a whole to discuss problems and issues and try to find healthy solutions for grieving families, blending families, and foster/adoptive families.

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