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To Those Who Know a Hurting Child

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To Those Who Know a Hurting Child

Abstract

"Current research tells us that kids who witness or experience hard things actually lose some ability to make good choices. It's not that they won't or don't want to make the good choice ... sometimes they just can't. When kids are chronically exposed to trauma the part of their brain that helps them with language, flexibility, and mood regulation actually shrinks. ... The good news is that God made our brains so thoughtfully that they can actually grow and change."

Posting about children and trauma and what we can do about it from *In All Things* - an online hub committed to the claim that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ has implications for the entire world

<http://inallthings.org/to-those-who-know-a-hurting-child/>

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Disciplines

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Comments

In All Things is a publication of the [Andreas Center for Reformed Scholarship and Service](#) at Dordt College.

To Those Who Know a Hurting Child

 [all in allthings.org/to-those-who-know-a-hurting-child](https://allthings.org/to-those-who-know-a-hurting-child)

Tara Boer

*The LORD your God is with you, he is mighty to save.
He will take great delight in you, he will quiet you with his love,
he will rejoice over you with singing. Zephaniah 3:17*

To those who know a child that is hurting:

When I was an infant I was put to sleep on my belly. I slept in the back window of our car on the way to vacation and my neighbors knew where our house key was (not that our house was ever actually locked). Years ago we didn't know the things we know now. We now know that putting infants to sleep on their backs means that there's a much better chance that they'll wake up in the morning. We know car seats keep kids safe and that we can't trust everyone. We also know that children who experience trauma or suffer hard losses are changed from the inside out.

Abuse, neglect, abandonment, loss...these things change kids. Even the little brains being formed in mamas' bellies can sense pain and fear.

Current research tells us that kids who witness or experience hard things actually lose some ability to make good choices. It's not that they won't or don't want to make the good choice...sometimes they just can't. When kids are chronically exposed to trauma the part of their brain that helps them with language, flexibility, and mood regulation actually shrinks. There is some growth in their little brain though. Growth happens in the part of their brain that learns how to fight or run. This part of the brain is becoming a well-oiled machine. It scans, it reacts, it survives...repeat. It becomes so dominant that this machine is quickly accessed when being exposed to any fear or worry. Logic goes out of the window and we see full blown tantrums, impulsive behaviors, and chronic tears. The good news is that God made our brains so thoughtfully that they can actually grow and change. We can help kids learn to label and express their emotions. We can help by not reacting ourselves and realizing their response is triggered by fear. We can help them make and grow new connections. Praise God for that!

Having worked with some of these kids I have seen the hurt and confusion in their eyes when the world isn't responding the way that they think it should. I see the sadness in their little bodies when they can't quite do things right. I listen to their parents who want to learn so badly how to calm them when they're upset or feel less guilt about what they are or aren't doing. These parents desperately ask "will they ever get better?"

YES

YES

They can get better. But it's going to take all of us.

Here's how you can start.

1. **Get educated:** We know more about child development and neurology than ever before. Take the time

to read some research, attend a trauma training, and ask questions. Know the signs of abuse and common responses to trauma. A few of my favorite authors/trainers are Dr. Karen Purvis (Texas Christian University), Dr. Daniel Siegel, Dr Tina Payne Bryson & Eliana Gil.

2. **Be vigilant:** Abuse, neglect, and trauma happen here. It happens everywhere. These are kids in your neighborhoods, your classrooms, and your church pews. It may be comforting to think that “bad things don’t happen here” but you’re horribly mistaken. Kids depend on adults to keep them safe and unfortunately some adults that are supposed to keep them safe are hurting them. If you see or suspect abuse, report it to your state hotline. So many adult survivors of abuse tell me that they never told because no one ever asked them.

3. **Be emotionally intelligent:** Kids don’t get better if we act like those hard things didn’t happen. We can’t just hope they’ll forget about it or assume that all kids are resilient. Kids need to process what happened. They need safe places to talk, to cry, to journal, to draw, to read. They need help labeling and naming these experiences (this is where they learn how to make those new brain connections). Kids desperately need to connect emotionally with their caregivers. God expresses his love for us over and over in his word. In fact, the entire Bible is love letter to us, God’s children. If being emotionally present and available to children is difficult for you, ask God to take away any baggage, burdens, or barriers that are getting in the way. Don’t pass any dysfunctional patterns down to your children or the children that you impact.

4. **Be Brave:** Just before Jesus died, he assigned a parent-child relationship between his earthly mother Mary and the Apostle John. This is significant to me because it demonstrates that Jesus understood the importance of family even if not biological. I encourage you to pray a bold prayer asking God how He wants you to be involved in the lives of hurting children. God may ask you to mentor, pray, go to a training, make a report, or even invite a child or family into your home. Consider asking God for the courage to walk that messy road with a hurting child knowing full well that it could be very, very messy.

If God has called you to be a part of a child’s life who is hurting, I thank God for you today. I thank God for trusting you with some of his most precious possessions. I thank him for those long hugs when your kids are so confused and angry. I praise him for the peace you bring to them when they wake up from bad dreams or when they can’t get those thoughts out of their heads. Please know that God longs to heal His children and He is so proud of you for loving them through those dark times. He has promised that He is near. He sings over them and He quiets them with His great, great love for them....and for you.

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