

PSYCHODYNAMICS OF PREVENTING CHILD ABUSE

Sandra L. Bloom, M.D.

Community Works

The roots of human violence extend deeply into the dark history of our species just as the roots of individual violence extend deeply and pervasively into the childhood history of each person. One of the fundamental questions of our era is "How can we prevent the abuse of children?". The answer to this question may, in fact, have a great deal to do with whether we are able to continue to survive and prosper.

If put to a referendum, it is clear that people of all socioeconomic and ethnic classes would vote to abolish child abuse. There could, indeed, be varying definitions of what comprises child abuse, but virtually all civilized peoples recognize the scourge of failing to protect children from harm. Given this consensus, then, what IS it that stands in the way of achieving a society that grants and enforces the right of all children to live and grow free from abuse? If we are going to prevent child abuse then we must come to a wider understanding of the factors that interfere and obstruct prevention efforts.

There are, presumably, historical, social, economic, and philosophical reasons for our relative lack of resolve in this area. However, it is the assumption of this paper that there are also unconscious forces at work, both in the individual parent and in the social group that interfere with child abuse prevention efforts. If we are to make further progress in child protection then we must illuminate these unconscious factors and make the unconscious conscious and therefore amenable to conscious choice and change. As long as these unconscious forces are unrestricted no amount of social, economic, or philosophical change will be sufficient to afford children the protection from harm that they require to achieve their full potential.

HINTS FROM OUR ANCESTORS

Abuse of the young is a rare finding in the animal kingdom. Among primates, abusing mothers have been experimentally produced by depriving the future abusing mother of her own mother from birth and allowing no other living attachments to occur until the

animal is well on the road to maturity. If this animal is then socialized with peers for an extensive period of time, her behavior will normalize. But when she is stressed and when she becomes a mother herself, her behavior will deteriorate and she will not be able to mother her offspring properly. She may even kill her first infant (Krasnegor and Bridges, 1990).

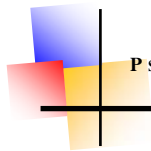
It is difficult to generalize from specific primate data to humans. However, since we know that the degree of child abuse perpetrated by humans is greater than that seen in other mammals, then there must be something unique about our particular species that lends itself to the loss of normal protective parenting functions.

In their book, Exiles From Eden, Glantz and Pearce (1989) describe the characteristics of what they call "the natural environment of childhood", based on observations of 20th century hunter-gatherer bands. Certainly, no one would be naive enough to idealize primitive childrearing. Presumably, had we stayed hunter-gatherers in small, conservative bands, we would never have made the cultural, intellectual, and technological advances so apparent in the world around us.

However, there is a down side to this civilizing process. All too often in human development we see the ravages of unbalanced progress. Lost is the concept of balance amid the need to throw away the old and usher in the new. It appears to be that our more "primitive" emotional needs can not be tossed aside because we intellectually believe that we have outgrown them. There may be aspects of our ancestral life that should be revived rather than dismissed as irrelevant or archaic. Let us take a moment to look at a few of the characteristics of hunter-gatherer child-rearing that are of interest to the present discussion.

The first observation is that after the first year of life, children of hunter-gatherers are parented by many adults, not just the biological parents and that even during the first year there are always other adults, both male and female, available to help out with parenting. Another observation is that in such a situation, parenting is never private and cannot be hidden from the group. Yet another significant finding is that the dangerousness of the outside world - and the relative safety of the social group - are quite clear and palpable to even the youngest children (Glantz and Pearce, 1989).

The modern situation into which children are born contrasts quite sharply with these observations. Most children live within nuclear families, the nucleus of which may be



composed no longer of two, but only one adult. Children rarely have close and prolonged contact with adult males and few adult females other than their mother. Parents rarely receive parenting assistance from other adults to whom they are connected in a social group.

Parenting is a private act. Children are, to a great extent, considered the property of their parents and have few legal rights. Even when the law proscribes certain childrearing practices, i.e. abuse and neglect, both the informal social and formal legal systems are hesitant to intervene on behalf of the child, justifying this hesitation by defending of individual rights to privacy. By custom, the unwillingness of people to interfere with other people's parenting practices is standard and acceptable social behavior. Only the most extreme cases ever are brought to the attention of the intimate social group, much less the legal system. Most child abuse occurs clandestinely, an awful secret closely held between parent and child (Fraad, 1993).

In earlier, more predictable environments, sources of danger were much more easy to define. When basic survival is a daily struggle, when nonhuman predators pose a routine threat to life, it is an easier matter to define the external limits of the group that provides safety within its boundaries. Humans have a need for a "safe base" which follows us from cradle to grave. Humans also have a built-in mechanism that causes us to increase attachment behavior when in the presence of any perceived threat (Van der Kolk, 1987). The need to provide a safe base and the need to increase attachment when threatened are natural, innate human responses to our early environmental situation.

In modern society, however, the safe base often no longer extends outside of the family, and for many children, even the family provides the threat of danger, not safety. The mechanism that allows for increased attachment in times of danger, has not altered, however, and therefore the need to attach promotes the development of often highly dangerous and pathological bonds with unsafe people. In addition, even the best of parents find it extremely difficult to protect their children from the dangers that may await children in their school, their playground, at their babysitter, or in their streets. Danger appears to stalk children everywhere. There is no safe base.

This combination of factors - constant but often secret, danger, extreme privacy and isolation, and unassisted and unsupported parenting - produces a parenting environment

which has become potentially lethal for both parents and children. The isolation of parents from other potentially helpful adults means that there is an unnatural burden placed on parents to adapt to a system for which they are neither psychologically nor biologically equipped.

If we are meant, as social animals, to live within social groups, then the extreme isolation of the nuclear family can only produce a certain level of emotional dysfunction even as it promotes the growth of individual achievement. The modulation of affective expression, the opportunities for stress management, and the modeling of alternative behaviors - all of which can be offered by other, experienced adults - cannot be found within the confines of the isolated nuclear family.

Extreme privacy puts parents in a situation in which absolute responsibility implies absolute authority. This conveys a message to parents that they have a right to exercise their dominance over children and that they must be totally responsible for all aspects of their children's conduct and appearance. The emphasis on private property rights subrogates the responsibility of the social group for its children and assigns that responsibility to the domain of private property. This ignores the quite obvious reality that we are all socially connected and that one parent's child will inevitably have an impact - for good or ill - on another parent's child and on society as a whole. This attitude of Western man towards children is in sharp contrast with a tribal society like some Native American groups. Fraad has quoted the sixteenth century Neskapi man talking to a Jesuit missionary who says, "You French people love only your own children; but we love all the children of our tribe" (Fraad, 1993).

The ever present sense of unclear danger results in confusion, hyperarousal, often a chronic fight-or-flight response and a consequent inability to experience a prolonged sense of security, calm, or safety. It is clear from multigenerational studies that such a state produces various psychiatric and social dysfunctions which have long-range and far-reaching consequences, not the least of which is an inability to trust other members of the social group or to be focused on the overall well-being of the social group.

As a result, the factors in earlier social development that served to attenuate some of the least desirable traits of our species are much less available to us than to our ancestors. Without social modulation, our tendency to use other people as "poison containers" for

unmetabolized emotions goes unchecked. Pathological family function is able to be denied far longer than it could be if family life were less private. Traumatic experiences can be much more easily reenacted since there is less opportunity for processing traumatic affect and less opposition to reenactment from the social group. The abuse of power and the use of violence to resolve conflict can be permitted unsupervised expression without the moderation of other, less aroused adults.

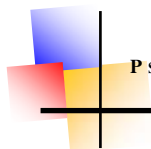
AFFECT THEORY

Historically, humans have had a great deal of difficulty integrating emotional experience, and particularly traumatic emotional experience, into the logical cognitive framework demanded by an increasingly complex social structure. Much of our training in early childhood focuses on the achievement of emotional control by which overt emotional expression is suppressed. As civilization has progressed with the ascendancy of individualism, increasingly less emotional expression is tolerated (Nathanson, 1992). But since the emotional bonds that hold one human being to another are the basis of all human attachment, this suppression of affect has proven to be increasingly problematic.

Donald Nathanson has written extensively about the psychobiology of emotions. According to him,

"A baby in the throes of an affect is a broadcaster of affect, and we observers resonate with their transmission..... Affective resonance is so powerful, so distracting a system of interaction, that infancy is the only period of our lives during which we are allowed free range of affective expression. In every society on the planet, children are speedily taught how to mute the display of affect so that they do not take over every situation in which they cry, smile, or become excited.... It is okay for mommy and baby to be locked in an interaction based on the interplay of innate affect, but society demands that these interactions become increasingly private as we grow up (Nathanson, 1992)."

Nathanson goes on to discuss the "empathic wall", the protective shield that we gradually erect around us to screen out the affect of other people. This empathic wall limits the extent to which we are aroused by other people's affect and allows us to maintain



boundaries between our sense of self and other people. The growth of Western civilization has been characterized by an ever increasing differentiation of the individual and nowhere is this more apparent than in American life where individual freedoms are often placed above the concerns of the social group. Without a functioning empathic wall, we would be constantly subject to the contagion of other people's emotional experience. Since emotion interferes with and often disorganizes cognition, such a lack of interpersonal boundaries would lead to internal - and external - chaos.

When confronted with an infant, a being characterized by unconstrained emotional broadcasting, a mother is required to lower her empathic wall enough to begin providing the infant with an emotional bridge into the world of socialization. Over the course of childhood, successful parenting requires that the caretakers be able to contain enough of the child's emotions to prevent him from becoming psychophysiologicaly overwhelmed, while gradually teaching him emotional modulation. To be acceptable within his society, the parents will have to teach him how to regulate his emotions enough that he will be found to be acceptable to others in his social sphere.

Empathic failures can occur at different periods in a child's life and at different periods in the life of the family. A mother can be an excellent parent for an infant, but experience serious difficulties in her ability to resonate with her adolescent daughter's emotions. A father can be perfectly suited to address the emotional needs of a latency age child, but may become overwhelmed by the emotional demands of a crying infant. Parents can serve as adequate emotional containers for an elder child, but due to family traumas such as loss of a member, illness, or financial reversal, be less than adequate for another child. Children also differ in their emotional constitutions, in how great the tendency is towards hyperarousal, in the ability to be comforted.

Healthy childrearing, is in fact, an astonishingly complex and difficult job, requiring a degree of understanding, sophistication, flexibility, and adaptability unmatched by any other job. Despite this, emotional education has had no priority within our culture, and in fact, talking about emotions or emotional needs can often result in ridicule. The "recovery movement" in all its aspects is the beginning of a movement towards emotional literacy and its widespread appeal is indicative of at least a rudimentary understanding of the need for emotional education. Generally, however, we still simply carry on emotionally responding to

our children and each other, in a way similar to the way in which we ourselves were treated as children.

It is becoming clear that an overly rigid or impenetrable empathic wall can severely limit the extent of our ability to become close or intimate with other people, as well as limiting our ability to experience empathy for others. It may be that our current social structure promotes "empathic failure". In earlier social structures such as those found among the hunter-gatherers, other members of the group could serve as affect resonators, affect modulators, as providers of the empathic wall. Sharing this function among various members of the group meant that no individual parent had to shoulder the entire burden of affect resonance, affect modulation, or develop an overly rigid empathic wall in order to screen out the affect of each child. For the child there were multiple opportunities to experience affect resonance and modulation with a variety of adults and as a consequence, the "fit" between mother and child did not have to be so exact and specific.

In such a social system, the entire group becomes the container for the affect and the boundaries of the self extend to include the social group. Such a system probably inhibits individual achievement but also inhibits individual extremes of behavior that is dysfunctional and dangerous. In our current social system, there are few chances to use a group as an emotional container and modulator in any personally meaningful way. Certainly, we are exposed as a group to stimuli from television, newspapers, books, but there is relatively little opportunity, encouragement, or support for group environments within which the expression of affect is tolerated and opportunities for new emotional learning is provided. People who seek out such opportunities through therapy or support groups are often portrayed as weak, lacking in self-sufficiency, self-indulgent (Sykes, 1992).

In modern society parents are expected to produce children who are successful, as defined by the culture, well-groomed, well-mannered, obedient, well-controlled and adaptable. Children are expected to be in control of their feelings quite early, and to develop independence, self-reliance, and autonomy as prerequisites for success. In about five short years, one to two parents are expected to turn a needy, entirely dependent, wildly emotional and expressive young human into an independent, relatively controlled, highly individualized young person who is ready to advance through the structure of a strictly regimented educational system.

The individual burden placed upon parents to accomplish these tasks is truly enormous. Much of the resistance to child abuse prevention efforts can be seen to center on the overwhelming sense of shame that parents experience if it is implied in any way that they are not adequate-to-perfect parents. The shame that parents feel at being judged negatively is toxic. Unfortunately, because empathic failure is a characteristic of our culture, it is usually the tendency of the parents to blame their child for their shame. As a result, to the extent that the parent cannot easily achieve the goals of parenting required by the culture, he or she may resort to more extreme, dysfunctional and dangerous behaviors to achieve the stated social expectations placed upon parents. Since parenting is unsupervised, largely unsupported, and occurs in private, the child often becomes the scapegoat for the parent's shame and this allows for all of the aberrations in childrearing that we read about every day in the newspaper.

Following this line of argument it is possible to suggest that part of the intrinsic difficulty in trying to prevent child abuse lies in our unwillingness to admit that our current social structure has become increasingly uncondusive to the perpetuation of human life. It is possible, that like the injured primate mothers, human life from its earliest inception, is characterized by such a compromise of the normal attachment bonds required by a highly social species, that the tendency to abuse children is reinforced by each generation as people become increasingly alienated from their support systems that are supposed to be designed to contain and modulate overwhelming affective arousal. It is possible, even likely, that the nuclear family is an evolutionary maladaptation that, if not soon curbed, will result in the premature closure of the species.

Within the nuclear family, there must be an optimal "fit" between the constitution of the infant and that of the primary caretaker, who is usually the mother, since it is almost solely through her that the child will experience its earliest experience with managing affect. The mother, likewise, must be willing and able to affectively resonate with that child, as well as her other children, without necessarily obtaining any relief from her own peers, or from her husband. Mothers who must leave the child in someone else's care in order to support the family may have to develop other coping skills that allow her to cope with all the emotional demands that are placed on her within an even shorter span of time, trying to juggle all of the various role demands that are placed upon her.

Such a system can only work effectively if the mother has had good enough

experiences with her own mother that she is able to contain the affect of her child without developing such a rigid empathic wall that she must repel her child's requirements for affect modulation. If she has not had such positive experiences, if her own caretakers were not able to permit her to resonate with them in such a way that her affect could be successfully modulated, then she will have difficulty containing the affect for her own infant.

In this way the cycle of abuse travels from one generation to the next, not necessarily initially through the vehicle of actual physical or sexual abuse, but within an affective system dysfunction that makes it impossible for the parent to truly empathize with the feelings of the child. Within such a context of dysfunction, physical abuse and sexual abuse can easily occur because they are all indicative of a willingness to use the child to satisfy the unmet needs of the parents rather than the reverse. It is not conceivable that physical or sexual abuse or neglect could occur if the parents were able to effectively resonate, modulate, and contain their child's affect.

As a species there is little evidence to support that we are very effective in dealing with our emotions. Our emotional selves are more likely to be viewed as the enemy within, the beast that needs to be chained and controlled, the source of all evil. As exemplified in our Biblical suggestions of original sin, and our historical views of the evil inside our children that needs to be wrestled and tamed, this notion has a long and fertile history. Because of their uncontained ability to broadcast emotions, children are seen as particularly destabilizing and intense efforts must be made to get them under control. Adults are caught in the conflicting cross-currents of a psychobiological need to resonate with the emotional responses of their children and social expectations that they will erect an empathic wall sufficient to permit higher level technological and intellectual pursuits without emotional interference.

In the past, the predominant mode of addressing this conflict has been through the stern and often harsh suppression of affect. The history of childrearing is replete with attempts to physically restrain and punish the child's expression of affect, efforts directed at defying the biological imperative to resonate with the child in favor of developing a wall that protects us from the child's affect broadcasting. If we have a predisposition to be aroused by a child's negative affect and we are unable to tolerate such affect because of our own early experiences of a lack of affect modulation, then we will have to use all our intellect to protect

us against that dangerous resonance. One of the most effective strategies is to blame the source of the affect for the problem. This is the root of child abuse; this is the root of all of social empathic failure to address the needs of people less fortunate than the rest of us. We do not want to resonate with - to feel - their suffering.

COMPOUNDED TRAUMA

The greater the trauma that the previous two or three generations have experienced, the more likely the family is to experience severe problems in childrearing. Post-traumatic stress disorder is a universal response to overwhelming stress. It is a biopsychosocial disorder that conveys its effects across and down through the generations. It is characterized by severe impairments in the affective system.

People who have been traumatized lose the capacity to modulate arousal as one of the core symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder. They tend to respond to even minor stimuli with hyperarousal, their bodies releasing epinephrine with minimal provocation, launching them into a full flight- or-fight response (Van der Kolk, 1987). This response is physiologically based and not easily controlled even with medication. People who have been traumatized as children sustain the same loss of affective modulation, only for many of them, too young to have even developed effective affective modulation, this loss is even more debilitating because they never get a chance to experience the normal developmental steps to affective control.

Traumatized people become "triggered" by all kinds of stimuli that remind them - consciously or unconsciously - of the traumatic experience. When the trauma has occurred in childhood at the hands of their own caretakers, the adult can later be triggered by any manner of stimuli that evokes memories of their own victimization. This is the reason why so many parents experience memories of their own childhood abuse once they become parents themselves. The accompanying affective arousal is so noxious, so disorganizing and overwhelming, that the person will do virtually anything to avoid having to reexperience the traumatic affect.

There are many defenses against such toxic emotional arousal. Many people turn to alcohol and drugs, which at least tranquilize them temporarily. Others internally defend against experiencing any emotions and become numb to all feelings. This numbness, of

course, profoundly reinforces the empathic wall that was created as a part of normal development. When a parent who suffers from profound numbing secondary to their own trauma is faced with the affective broadcasting of their child, they find themselves virtually incapable of responding in an empathic way. In fact, the child's emotional outpouring will be perceived as an enormous threat to the shaky equilibrium that the post-traumatic individual has created to protect themselves from becoming overwhelmed by the memories and associated affect of the past.

It is quite likely that when the post-traumatic, rigid empathic wall begins to crumble upon being faced with an emotionally broadcasting child, the parent may become overwhelmed by his or her own affect. When this happens the adult is affectively - and probably cognitively - plunged back into the state of awareness and arousal experienced as a helpless child. This is the time when it is most likely that the parent will lash out violently at his own child. It is conceivable that the parent will later completely or partially forget the experience as the memory of it, like the earlier memories, are so dependent on the state of consciousness he was in at the time of the violence. This may be the mechanism behind the many denials of parental abuse seen in and out of the court system. The false memory syndrome may actually be false memory on the part of the abusing parent who truly does not remember the incidents described by the child.

The barrier against remembering is not as critical in itself as is the barrier against remembering the associated affect. But it is the inability to remember the trauma that fuels the mechanism of traumatic reenactment. People who have been traumatized, compulsively repeat the trauma in very obvious or very subtle ways. Traumatized people, however, only perform in an exaggerated way, what everyone does as a mechanism of daily life, a concept Freud termed the "repetition compulsion". In traumatic reenactment, the victims provide themselves with the possibility of creative change. They establish a situation in which the dynamics of their traumatic past are recreated thus providing themselves with the opportunity for an outcome different from the original scene.

Unfortunately, the tendency to reenact trauma, perhaps the foundation for all ritual, drama, and other forms of group catharsis, can only be successfully managed in a group format. It is quite possible that this is the important human adaptation that is missing in our isolated and fragmented modern social condition. Among more primitive people, traumatic

affect could be shared, modulated, and contained by the group. A trauma to one was a trauma to all. When the traumatic affect could be contained by the group, it could be detoxified and modified through ritual, through dramatic and artistic creation, through symbolic acts and thereby purged from individual responsibility, transformed, and assigned some relevant social meaning. It is impossible to conceive how we could have survived as a species, given our traumatic and fragile past, had we not had some such mechanism available to deal with trauma.

From clinical experience it appears that the individual, left to his own devices, will continue to reenact his own traumatic scenario for a lifetime. He will reenact that scenario most commonly with his own children, thus creating a cycle of abuse that causes a steady deterioration in the family function, at least at a conscious level. Finally, the dysfunction becomes so severe that some unconsciously delegated member of the family enters either the psychiatric or the criminal justice system, alternatives that are often gender-preferential.

The response of the social group will have a great deal to do with whether the designated family delegate will have a creative healing experience or simply continue the traumatic reenactment. The power of the group in determining these two outcomes is profound. It is possible that the current increase in violence may have something to do with the social patterns of post-war modern life. the fragmentation of social support systems, and the isolation and alienation that often even the healthiest members of the society experience.

For the psychiatric patient, there is some likelihood that she may be able to achieve a positive affective response to her need for affect resonance and modulation. Clinical studies with adults traumatized as children indicates that a therapeutic experience in a specially designed social milieu does help to overcome the affective hyperarousal and numbing associated with post-traumatic stress and can break the cycle of traumatic reenactment.

The perpetrating individual is less likely to fare at all well in the criminal justice system and his social experience will be almost universally further traumatizing. As a culture we are slightly more able to overcome our empathic failure in dealing with victims. We have not yet reached the point where we know how to relate with empathy to perpetrators without condoning their behavior. Yet it is highly likely that the criminal system is filled with people who have had access to the very minimum of parental affective resonance and outcome which explains their own lack of empathy for their victims.

THE PROBLEMS

It is now possible to summarize at least some of the unconscious factors that are the underpinning for child abuse and our social difficulty in preventing such abuse. We know that in our evolutionary movement from an extended tribal society to a modern individualistic society, the task of affective resonance, modulation, and containment has fallen on the shoulders of only one or, sometimes, two parents. This intense and prolonged intimate relationship must have something to do with why we have been so technologically and intellectually successful, but must also have something to do with why our emotional growth is so stunted. The fact that we are emotional stunted is a given justified by the rate of continued child abuse, child malnutrition and disease, and infant mortality, all of which can now be largely prevented had we the will and desire to do so.

Privacy and secrecy go hand in hand. Parental behavior that would have been censored as dangerous to survival within a group is cloaked behind the veil of privacy within modern family life. It is well known that the more disturbed the family the greater the parental insistence on the maintenance of family secrets. Such privacy prevents the moderating influence of other adults, particularly during states of high emotional arousal.

All humans need a safe base from cradle to grave. In modern urban culture, areas of safety are difficult to define. Because of all the other factors discussed, the family may not be the source of safety but may instead be the source of danger. The boundaries between security and danger are difficult to perceive, changeable, and deceptive. Danger can be physical, but it can also be emotional. Given our relative cultural ignorance about the role of emotional resonance and modulation, people often respond to distressed others by shaming them for their emotional displays, producing more negative affect rather than diminishing it. How many of us can say that we feel truly safe - and therefore intimate - with more than one other person?

Our culture is characterized by an abundance of empathic failures. Faced with virtually any problem, as individuals and as a group we tend to focus major efforts on finding someone to blame and much less effort understanding the various facets and perspectives about the problem. Understanding requires the capacity to view a problem through another pair of eyes, to feel the impact of a problem through another person's heart. This requires the ability to sustain affective resonance with other people. To the extent that we have

experienced an unwillingness on the part of our own caretakers to empathize with us, we will experience a reluctance to resonate with others. Instead, we will find some pejorative label to apply to them thus enabling us to distance their affect from our own, defining them as "not me". In this way we are able to decrease our own arousal and uncomfortable resonance with others.

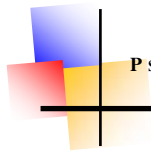
We are ignorant about the nature of our emotions, how to manage emotions, how to look beyond the obvious at our unconscious motivations. Emotional literacy requires a capacity to tolerate unpleasant emotional states, to learn how to integrate that experience into a cognitive framework through learning to express feelings through language. Capable of advanced mathematics and sophisticated technology, we resort to defenses that we use against our inner selves and each other that would seem primitive even to our primitive ancestors. Even they knew that it was important to talk about your feelings with other people in your group who care about you. They recognized the importance of group ritual and symbolic ceremony.

Our technological and scientific progress has lulled us into relying on a certain arrogance that convinces us that our way is the best way in this best of all possible worlds. Actually, it is time that we recognized that the nuclear family does not work, that it places an unreasonable and unhealthy burden on an already overstressed system, and that it is time for definitive change in the structure of our communities, housing, and laws.

Traumatic reenactment drives most psychological and social pathology. Unless we can recognize and intervene in high risk situations we will be unable to stop the cycle of abuse. Trauma theory provides the justification for the prevention of trauma on an individual and social scale since the long-term economic and social costs are unfathomable. The last few years has seen the creation of long-term, multigenerational trauma on a massive scale in places like Iraq and Bosnia-Herzegovina. And child abuse spreads its effects like a plague virus. One pedophile alone can disastrously traumatize literally hundreds of children, the results of which may persist for generations.

SOLUTIONS

Lloyd DeMause has suggested that we need an "emotional revolution" similar to the intellectual revolution of the nineteenth century that gave birth to the free education



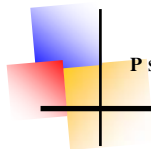
movement (DeMause, 1993). He is correct. This search for emotional literacy must be taken out of the context of "therapy" which implies that the receiver of "treatment" is sick, and placed in the context of education. No one considers a person with a computer "sick" because they need instruction on how to operate their new machine. Why then should it be considered "sick" for a parent to receive education about something infinitely more complex than any computer - a human infant?

What logic exists in teaching children reading, writing, and arithmetic if we do not teach them basic skills about relating to other people, defining themselves, managing their emotions? It is absolute nonsense to think that this emotional education is adequately being provided at home for all the reasons already stated. It is unfair to expect that parents can manage that alone, or that they have the skills and knowledge to do so. Put simply, there is enough known about healthy child development for us to unequivocally say a great deal about what is good and what is bad for children. This is no more an issue of value than whether the world is flat or round. That we still insist that parents have the right to treat children as property is simply a continuing reflection of our unwillingness to deal with our own empathic failures. At bottom we would rather that someone else feel bad if it will prevent us from feeling bad.

All of us needs affective education but the place to start is with parents and young children, before the damage has already been done. That is why parent support groups, parenting centers, and parenting education should be introduced universally and even mandated by law (Frenza, 1993; Linden and McFarland, 1993; McFarlin, Nelson, and Sherman, 1993). Why do we need a license to drive, a license to marry, a license to practice law or medicine, but not a license to raise another human being? And we say we value children?

As for the rest of us, it is clear that we all must be willing to tolerate more emotion, to be willing to resonate with the pain of people less fortunate than us. Our frantic need to control our individual destinies has led to a situation that is increasingly absurd. What good is all the wealth, freedom, or solitude in the world if we sacrifice the capacity for attachment, friendship, unity, meaning, intimacy, and love?

The social self-destructiveness that is in evidence all around us surely must be telling



us that we are so miserable we want to die. Or do we have to put ourselves in such danger because that is the only way left that we can secure attachment, by triggering off our underlying mammalian attachment response to increased danger. Note the ad placed in the New York Times by Deloitte & Touche, a major accounting firm, after the February 26, 1993 bombing at the World Trade Center:

New York City hasn't run out of heroes. On February 26, we saw thousands of them in the flesh. During the recent explosion at the World Trade Center complex, we saw the self-sacrifice and courage of the Police and Fire Departments, the Emergency Medical Service, and our partners, employees, and fellow tenants..... We love New York. But until February 26, we never knew how much. (New York Times, March 11, 1993)

After any disaster there are always examples of extraordinary heroism, acts of compassion, and human connection. Many people will talk about how they felt closer to others than any other time in their lives. During a disaster emotional broadcasting increases and we resonate to each other's feelings. The empathic wall falls and we recognize each other for the frail, sensitive creatures that we are. How many disasters must we create before we realize that the capacity for connectedness with each other exists within us, just waiting to be awakened, every day of our lives?

Community must become more than a word of political jargon. Architecture reflects and reinforces social norms. We need new living arrangements, places for people to gather together and talk, laugh, play, argue, and rest. We need spatial arrangements that provide for common childcare space, common work space, even common eating space. We need places to park our bodies together, not just our cars. Co-housing arrangements, long known in Europe but new to the U.S. are experiments in recreating a sense of community, differing from the "traditional multifamily developments [that are] wastelands that separate people from each other, isolating them from any comfort but that of consumption" (New York Times, February 25, 1993. Such community building efforts could be encouraged through the use of financial incentives available to a willing government.

If Ross Perot really wants to do something for the U.S. with all his billions, then let him create a company willing to put an "old-fashioned" new restaurant-coffee house-reading room in every neighborhood. If only we could drop in for a cup of tea after work to someplace other than a fast-food joint, someplace where you could actually have a conversation, or just rest quietly, with another human being who you might see more than

once in your life. For all the criticism of New York, it may be one place in the country where it is still possible to do just that, probably a necessary defense against the extreme anonymity of such a large urban center. But the suburbs are often just as anonymous - we just aren't supposed to notice. Those of us who have the most rigid empathic walls usually assume the roles of critics, judges, punishers, and blamers. They also often tend to seek power as a substitute for love and end up in positions of responsibility and rule. Those of us who have the least rigid empathic walls usually assume the role of scapegoats, artists, and helpers. They usually have the least money, the least power, and the least voice in the society. This is another example of the inferior way in which emotions are regarded. The more a person resonates with someone else's emotions, the more likely she is to be considered crazy, hysterical, and dispensable.

This value system must change. This can only come about through massive public education, increasing the political and social power of the more emotionally resonant segments of the population, and economically supporting the voice and vision of the artist.

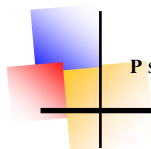
In the end, child abuse IS preventable. If we really want to prevent it. But to stop hurting children it will be necessary for us to feel our own individual AND social pain. From all the research that is a result of working with victims of trauma, we know that remembering the past and feeling the pain can only lead to healing if the pain elicits a social response. A person, even a child, can sustain enormous trauma without losing his sense of meaning in the world, if his social group responds with care and concern. Child abuse is so devastating precisely because it is the very people who are supposed to provide the care who provide the abuse. Whether we are six or sixty, on an emotional level we differ little. Ultimately, we all just want someone to "kiss our boo-boo" and make the hurt go away.

REFERENCES

Coe, Christopher L. (1990) Psychobiology of maternal behavior in nonhuman primates. In N.A.Krasnegor & R.S. Bridges, (Eds.), *Mammalian Parenting*. New York: Oxford University Press.

DeMause, Lloyd. (1974). *The History of Childhood*. New York: The Psychohistory Press.

Fraad, Harriet. (1993). Children as an exploited class. *Journal of Psychohistory*, in press.



Frenza, Lorraine. (1993). An early intervention approach to ending child abuse and neglect: the Hana Like Home Visitor Program. *Journal of Psychohistory*, in press.

Glantz, Kalman & Pearce, John K. (1989). *Exiles From Eden*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.

Linden, Kathleen & McFarland, Robert B. (1993). Community parenting centers in Colorado. *Journal of Psychohistory*, in press.

McFarlin, Isabella Fiske; Nelson, Marion R.; Sherman, Allen. (1993). Free the kids! and Quarry Hill Community. *Journal of Psychohistory*, in press.

Nathanson, Donald L. (1992). *Shame and Pride: Affect, Sex, and the Birth of the Self*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.

Sykes, Charles J. (1992). *A Nation of Victims*. New York: St. Martin's Press.

Van der Kolk, Bessel A. (1987). *Psychological Trauma*.

Washington, D.C.: American Psychiatric Press.

*Dr. Sandra L. Bloom, is a psychiatrist who specializes in the treatment of psychological trauma. She is currently CEO of CommunityWorks, a systems consulting firm and served as Founder and Executive Director of the Sanctuary programs from 1980-2001. She is a Past-President of the International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies and Past-President of the Philadelphia chapter of Physicians for Social Responsibility. She is the author of **Creating Sanctuary: Toward the Evolution of Sane Societies**, and co-author of **Bearing Witness: Violence and Collective Responsibility**.*

CommunityWorks, PMB 138, 12 West Willow Grove Avenue, Philadelphia, PA 19118-3952

www.SanctuaryWeb.com