

Everyday Abuse

By

Michael Mendizza

Personal and international peace is impossible when aggressive, violent abuse of children is accepted, even encouraged as normal throughout the world. I see it every day, rich and poor, black and white. Abuse is normal.

Walking down the street, a few yards ahead, were three large overstuffed derrières and a bright, bored four-year old. The swaggering behinds belonged to a set of grandparents and presumably to their son. Granny stopped the herd, grabbed the boy by the shoulder and smacked him in the seat of his britches, shaking him. "If you don't shut up I'll smack you again," and she did. Predictably, the boy cried and the matriarch smacked him again.



How would she feel if someone ten times her size, say a defensive lineman for the Raiders, did the same thing to her, in public, yelling and shaking her into sobbing submission, not once, but on a regular basis? She would scream bloody murder, call the police, and file assault and battery charges.

By their silence the boy's father and grandfather were supportive accomplices. I did nothing and I am ashamed to admit it. I let it happen, walked right by and did absolutely nothing.

Abuse of children is normal. It happens every day in every city and neighborhood. And no one does a thing about it.

As we walked the streets of Amsterdam, passing the Anne Frank house, a native of the Netherlands prefaced many of his observations by saying, "before the war." It happened so frequently that I, being born after World War II and a zillion miles away in the booming suburbs of southern California, asked: "what was it about the war that changed everything?" "Many things," he said, "but the deepest scar was the shame many felt for allowing it to happen." Most did nothing, he said, and by doing nothing they contributed to what took place.

Milton Mayer echoed this deep shame in "They Thought They Were Free (But Then It Was Too Late)," describing how *Fascists* undermined German democracy in the 1930s. "Suddenly it all comes down, all at once. You see what you are, what you have done, or, more accurately, what you haven't done (for that was all that was required of most of us: that we do nothing). You remember those early meetings of your department in the university when, if one had stood, others would have stood, perhaps, but no one stood. You remember everything now, and your heart breaks. Too late. You are compromised beyond repair." (<http://www.press.uchicago.edu/Misc/Chicago/511928.html>)

Drugged newborns are routinely snatched from drugged mothers shortly after 'delivery' by masked physicians and placed in plastic isolation containers. Gone are the scent, skin to skin contact, gentle movement, reassuring heartbeat, voice, and unique harmonic vibration known as mother. The shock of abandonment has taken her place.

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By every measure this isolation is sensory deprivation to a new nervous system. Rich, complex, affectionate sensory stimulation is like sun and rain to a sprouting seed.

Depriving the newborn of these sensations is a form of torture, similar to the disorienting treatment many prisoners of war suffer with lasting physical and psychological scars.

A few days later the majority of male babies are strapped to a table, legs spread, and the most sensitive surface tissue, designed by nature to experience pleasure, is cut off with a sharp blade and tossed in the trash. The trauma is so intense that many go into shock after screaming in vain until they turn blue. Abuse of children is normal. It happens every day and we let it.

There is a dark side to being a parent. Becoming a parent is a public event. Everybody is looking and they keep looking. I suppose this is a major reason most do nothing. Children reflect our competency in the supreme challenge called parenting. Our child's physical defects are an embarrassment. Bad behavior or bad grades are often equated with bad parents. Reinforcing this spotlight are bumper stickers that proclaim *My Child is on the Honor Roll of ABC Preschool*. Those awarded this honor are seen as superior to those who are less fortunate and obviously less skilled. The spotlight is bright. Children represent a social mirror. The pressure of that public reflection on parents is monumental.

I wonder how many child beatings, physical and psychological, have been issued because parents found themselves embarrassed by their child's behavior. And this work of the parent, to spare the rod and spoil the child, is legal in nineteen states, even encouraged by the good book.

We justify this abuse by saying and untimely believing that it is for the good of the child. But is that so? Are these beatings, like the one on the street before me, enhancing the child's journey towards self-actualization? What latent capacities are nurtured and developed by spankings, time outs, threats and dirty looks?

Everyday abuse comes in many forms. In a recent interview with neurobiologist and cross-cultural anthropologist James W. Prescott I discovered that the absence of connection, rejection, isolation, and neglect, all potential forms of sensory deprivation, can be more damaging to the developing brain than short bursts of physical pain.

Allen Schore, author of *Affect Regulation and the Origins of Self*, insists that maintaining the social bond is critical to a child's development. When a break occurs by accidental trauma or by manipulative design, it must be repaired as soon as possible. A momentary break can be sustained. The swat on the bottom, as outrageous as this is, is momentary. The real damage comes from the break in the bond, the rejection, social abandonment. And if that break goes unrepaired, scars become permanent.

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Imagine living in relationships where daily breach of the bond, punishment and the implicit betrayal of trust and respect stagnate, festering chronically unrepaired. Imagine how this feeling of rejection etches like acid into the child's emerging self-world view.

Oh – yes, we must domesticate our children to behave in predictable ways or they will poke their eye out with sharp sticks, burn themselves with fire, fall off tall buildings, run into the street and be squished like little bugs, or worse still be abducted by strangers. We must condition them, with punishments and rewards like Pavlov and Skinner, for their own good.

Might the increasing trend towards early and extended childcare be a form of abuse, both in the sense of breaking the bond and potential sensory deprivation, the loss of intimate and affectionate touch, movement and play?

Is the absence of breastfeeding a form of sensory deprivation and therefore abuse?

When we imprison young children in government regulated compulsory schools, day in and day out, in strictly monitored, controlled, military inspired, factory modeled environments, where art, dance, and free play have been replaced by 'no child left alive' tests and drills, is that everyday abuse to a sensory and emotional system designed to move, wonder, inquire, imagine, and make believe?

Is it sensory deprivation when we stop holding children in our laps and making up stories, when they stop hearing descriptive words that develop, stretch and expand their imaginations (and ours), and instead stick another episode of Baby Einstein in the player?

Is it everyday abuse when the wild boyishness of Thomas Edison and Mark Twain's Huck Finn and Tom Sawyer is caged, tamed, domesticated with mind altering prescription drugs, not in one or two special children but hysterically in millions? Ritalin and Prozac, as well as various combinations of similar stimulants and antidepressants, are prescribed together for an increasing number of children. The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry estimates that the number of "significantly" depressed children and adolescents is 3.4 million. And we let it happen like the neighbors of Anne Frank. I did, just the other day and I am ashamed to admit it.

We are enchanted, caught in a spell, hypnotized by our cultural conditioning and because of this obsession we punish and reward dimming the lights in our children's eyes before they even learn how to see – for their own good, and always with the best of intentions.

The adult-child bond is a dynamic channel of communication, and on many levels. Imagine if comparison, praise and grades, punishments and rewards were banished. Imagine if adults suddenly lost the capacity to threaten children by

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saying no, which, as you know, is often the first word a child masters. What then? What would most parents, coaches and educators do?

Imagine what would happen to most adults if children only perceived and responded to messages they trust and respect, all others not registering on their radar, as if the child was deaf or the message invisible like colors to the color blind. Break the bond, lose trust and respect and we lose any positive influence we might have with children. This is a reality, at least when it comes to positive influence which is the only form worth having.

Is it a mistake, a sin, when a child is playing and the blocks fall down? Is it a fight when kids rough and tumble on the grass? We all make mistakes every day. Two plus two is four, not three. We should have turned left, not right. The soufflé bakes at 350 degrees, not 450, and we suffer the natural consequences of our sins, a sin being, in its original context, simply 'to miss the mark,' make a mistake.

No failure is possible in true play. Mistakes don't exist, at least not in our adulterated sense. The tumbling blocks are a form of learning. Realizing that two plus two is four, not three, is an insight. Seeing the soufflé burn is an awakening of intelligence, a moment of awareness regarding the importance of careful attention. All are moments of profound learning and potential growth. None are sins.

Sins occur when the focus of attention shifts from leaning to the social self image we impose on our children. And the sin is ours - not theirs - and it usually brings every-day-abuse.

Shame on you! Can't you do anything right? I told you to never do that again! Get to your room and stay there until I tell you to come out! Why can't you be more careful! Don't touch. How many times do I have to tell you? The focus of these and a thousand phrases like them is our social image. It is this image and the behavior behind the image that is rejected, mistaken, wrong, inadequate, incorrect, unsatisfactory, a failure that needs improving.

We are born in the image and likeness of the divine, a pretty safe bet in a holographic universe. One of the early and most important commandments is 'thou shall not place and worship false images before that divinity.' But that is exactly what we do by creating and then focusing (a form of worship) on false social images rather than on the awakening of true intelligence.

Learning is always the goal and should be our overarching concern. The test is easy. Is the focus of our attention learning or the child's social image? *Shame on you. How many times do I have to tell you? Can't you do anything right?* The subject of each of these is the child's social image. *Notice how difficult it is to find a pair of socks when the room is so messy. Glass is slippery in soapy water. People driving fast cars can't see little people like you.* With these the subject is learning, not the child's false social image. No shame is possible without the image, which is its true social function, conditioning and control.

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Most abuse is linked to the social image either the child's for not matching the adult's expectations or the adult's for not matching society's expectations. There is a way of seeing and relating that is free from the harmful impact of social images. For more on this consider listening to the Who Do We Think We Are? - an 80 minute audio at http://tffuture.org/services/publications/cd_audio_mm.htm.

Ending every day abuse is easy. Replace authority and control, punishments and rewards, with trust, honest communication and respect. Replace shame and its false image with affection and a genuine focus on learning and shared meaning. It takes far less energy and the results are joy instead of tears. A good trade, don't you think?

Michael

PS

If you would like to learn more about everyday abuse visit No Spank (<http://www.nospank.net/resrch.htm>). Jordan Riak has done a magnificent job researching corporal punishment (spanking). **Parents and Teachers Against Violence in Education** (PTAVE) offers publications for the benefit of children everywhere. The ideas that you will read here are not new. There have always been wise and perceptive people in every civilized culture who have practiced and advocated violence-free interactions with children. But, for the most part, their good example and good advice have been ignored or rejected, and the consequences to humanity have been incalculable. In these few pages we have attempted to summarize their message and offer it once again.

States that support corporal abuse of children:

Alabama--Legal
Arizona--Legal
Arkansas--Legal
Colorado--Legal
Florida--Legal
Georgia--Legal
Idaho--Legal
Indiana--Legal
Kansas--Legal
Louisiana--Legal
Kentucky—Legal

Mississippi--Legal
Missouri--Legal
New Mexico--Legal
North Carolina--Legal
Ohio--Legal
Oklahoma--Legal
Pennsylvania--Legal
South Carolina--Legal
Tennessee--Legal
Texas--Legal
Wyoming—Legal