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The CAPC Connection

A publication of the Child Abuse Prevention Council of Santa Barbara County — because their world depends on us!
Member of the Coastal Tri-Counties Child Abuse Prevention Council

The Internally Injured

Emotional abuse causes psychological injuries to a child. Scars from emotional abuse are as damaging to children as the outwardly visible marks of physical or sexual abuse and often have life-long consequences, including damage to the child's self-esteem and self image. Emotional abuse of children is the hardest form of abuse to prove; this is because injuries are not immediately visible and children who are emotionally abused are even less likely than victims of other types of abuse to speak up and seek help when they need it. As educators and mandated reporters, you play a crucial role in helping to identify children who have been emotionally abused.

WHY IS EMOTIONAL ABUSE SO DAMAGING?

A child's development must be fed with an emotional environment that is steeped in positive self-esteem and self-image. In a family that is emotionally healthy a child feels loved, wanted, and has parental acceptance and approval which often leads to a secure and safe bond with the parents. Because of this, the child believes and feels that he/she is a "valued" member of the family. Out of this, a positive self-image is born.



When a family is emotionally abusive, the child often feels unwanted and unloved. An emotionally abusive parent may also encourage others to reject the child and treat them with the same disdain. This constant ridicule from all angles leaves the child wounded and confused. With no

love being expressed the emotional environment is "cold" and unsupportive. The psychological nurturing that the child is being deprived of will stunt the child's psychological growth and development.

WHAT IS EMOTIONAL ABUSE?

Emotional abuse consists of repeated offenses against the child and is rarely a singular event. The abuser displays a continuous negative behavior towards the child which reduces the child to the point of feeling unworthy of respect, friendship, love, and affection.



Specific examples of emotional abuse may be:

- belittling or repeated verbal attacks
- coldness, or showing little if any love and affection
- corrupting (engaging children in antisocial behavior)
- isolating a child from normal social experiences
- ignoring a child which goes beyond coldness
- inappropriate control

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Many often wonder how to identify a child that has been emotionally abused. Unfortunately the behavioral indicators can be difficult to identify. In physical abuse, sexual abuse, and neglect cases the injuries are generally easily visible. The hidden scars of emotional abuse must manifest themselves in other ways in order to be "seen". As an informed educator or caretaker of children you can identify behavioral indicators of a child with profoundly low self-esteem and negative self-image simply by observing the child's behavior. The response to emotional abuse differs leaving some victims responding "passively" or with self-directed anger, while others act out aggressively.

"Passive" or self-directed symptoms may include:

- difficulty in forming relationships
- inability to relate and bond to other children
- lack of self confidence and emotion
- extreme shyness
- being victimized and exploited by other children
- fatigue and listlessness
- helplessness and hopelessness
- feelings of inadequacy
- pessimism and preoccupation
- difficulty concentrating on school activities
- self denial
- inability to engage and enjoy pleasurable activities
- self injury: hair pulling and twisting, nail biting, accident proneness

- self-deprecating remarks, such as "stupid", "no good", etc.

Aggressive symptoms may include:

- bullying and hostility toward others
- intimidating and threatening
- ridiculing others
- cruelty to other children and animals
- destruction of property and fire setting
- repeated truancy or tardiness
- reluctance to go home
- constant attention seeking and hyperactive behavior

In all instances, whether the child responds to the emotional abuse, passively or aggressively, the child's grades and achievement are far below the child's academic ability. As educators and caregivers you have the unique opportunity to observe children in an element that few get to see which leaves you in the best position to help children that are victims of emotional abuse. At home, these children cannot escape and they need someone to be their voice and to advocate for them. You play a vital role not only in their education but in their protection.

If at any time you suspect that a child is being emotionally abused, as a Mandated Reporter you must contact Child Welfare Services as soon as it is reasonably possible (see page 4.) Remember, you do not have to be *certain* that the abuse is occurring, the law simply states "if you suspect it, report it." If you ever have questions, do not hesitate to contact Child Welfare Services at **1-800-367-0166** for clarification. For more information, legal definitions and useful fact sheets in English and Spanish, please refer to the list below.

EMOTIONAL ABUSE: RESOURCES AND REFERENCES

Child Welfare Information Gateway, Recognizing Child Abuse and Neglect: Signs and Symptoms; in English and Spanish
<http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/factsheets/signs.cfm>

The Educator's Role In Reporting the Emotional Abuse of Children
http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0FCG/is_3_27/ai_66355138

Child Welfare Information Gateway: Emotional Abuse
<http://www.childwelfare.gov/can/types/emotionalabuse/index.cfm>

American Humane Fact Sheet: Emotional Abuse
<http://www.americanhumane.org/assets/docs/about-us/AU-FS-emotional-abuse.pdf>

Prevent Child Abuse America, Fact Sheet: Emotional Child Abuse
http://member.preventchildabuse.org/site/DocServer/emotional_child_abuse.pdf?docID=122

Child Welfare Information Gateway:
 Legal Definition of Emotional Abuse
<http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/factsheets/whatiscan.cfm>

Building Self-Esteem



Each one of us play a critical role in assisting in building a child's self-esteem. From the cheers we yell on the sidelines, to the one-on-one contact we have with children, our actions impact children. As adults we can help children build a strong sense of confidence by:

- Helping them recognize and appreciate their uniqueness (for example: ethnic heritage, special talents)
- Being a model of self-confidence through your own words, actions, and attitude
- Communicating unconditional love
- Acknowledging and encouraging children's efforts
- Avoiding comparisons to siblings, friends, or peers
- Allowing children to make their own decisions and act independently even if they make mistakes, as long as they are safe (for example: choosing outfits, putting on clothes, tying shoes, feeding themselves)
- Using positive and encouraging language



The following self-esteem building tricks can be shared with children of all ages who might be suffering from low self-esteem. Use them to start a conversation with the child.

Make a list of the stuff you're good at. It can be anything from drawing or singing to playing a sport or telling a good joke. If you're having trouble with your list, ask your mom or dad to help you with it. Then add a few things to the list that you'd like to be good at. Your mom or dad can help you plan a way to work on those skills or talents.

Give yourself three compliments every day. Don't just say, "I'm so great." Be specific about something good about yourself, like, "I was a good friend to Jill today" or "I did better on that test than I thought I would." While you're at it, before you go to bed every night, list three things in your day that really made you happy.

Remember that your body is your own, no matter what shape, size, or color it is. If you are worried about your weight or size, you can check with your doctor to make sure that things are OK. Remind yourself of things about your body that are cool, like, "My legs are strong and I can skate really well."

Remember that there are things about yourself you can't change. You should accept and love these things — such as skin color and shoe size — because they are part of you.

When you hear negative comments in your head, tell yourself to stop. When you do this, you take the power away from the voice inside that discourages you.

Activities to Build Self-Esteem

Chain of Compliments

Age Group: Pre-K to Grade 2

Objective: Students will recognize how compliments can make a person feel valued.

Materials: Chain of Compliments handout (click [here](#)), pens, markers, or crayons, tape or glue

Class Time: 30 minutes

Activity: How can you be a good friend and classmate? How do you feel when you make someone happy or cheer someone up? Being helpful and friendly to others should make you feel important and good on the inside. One way that makes everyone feel good is to tell a classmate something nice about him or her. Make a chain of compliments with your class and get some practice giving and receiving compliments. Read each sentence in the Chain of Compliments handout. Each sentence is a compliment with missing spaces where you can draw or write words and names to complete the sentence. Fill in the blanks and share your compliments with the class. Be sure to thank the people who compliment you. Then cut out all of the sentences and tape or glue them together in interlocking circles to make a chain.



Who's in the Mirror?

Age Group: Grades 3 to 5

Objective: Students will recognize aspects of having good self-esteem, including valuing who you are and what you can do. Students will distinguish between interests and achievements and identify how both contribute to one's self-esteem.

Materials: Mirror, Mirror handout (click [here](#)), magazines, colored pencils, markers or crayons, glue

Class Time: 45 minutes

Activity: What achievements are you proud of? What are you good at? What are you interested in? What would you like to do better? Think about who you are and what you can do – you're worth a lot! Using magazine pictures or your own drawings, create a collage that shows your interests, your skills, and your accomplishments.

Think of it like a mirror: When you see your reflection, who is the person you see in the mirror and what is great about that kid? When you are finished with your collage, share it with your classmates.

The object is to tell the students to use pictures or their own drawings to create a collage inside the mirror that shows what they see when they look at their reflection: their interests, their skills and their accomplishments.



Self-Esteem Makeover

Age Group: Grades 6 to 8

Objectives: Students will recognize the signs of low self-esteem and identify ways to improve self-esteem.

Materials: Plain paper and computer with Internet access

Class Time: 45 minutes

Activity: As the self-esteem makeover artist to the stars, you've boosted the self-esteem of famous actors, athletes, and politicians. Now, you're looking for a character in a favorite book, TV show, or movie with low self-esteem to be your next challenge. Using your blank sheet of paper, describe the "before" self-esteem of your character. What characterizes him or her as someone with low self-esteem? What is this character doing to hurt his or her self-esteem? Then, create a "makeover plan" for your character. Describe in detail at least three steps that your character could take to improve his or her self-esteem. Finally, describe the character's "after" self-esteem. What specific changes occurred? How has the character's life changed now that he or she has better self-esteem?



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For further information visit **KidsHealth** at

http://kidshealth.org/kid/feeling/emotion/self_esteem.html.

The CAPC would love feedback on these activities once you've tried them; email us at capc.newsletter@gmail.com. Good luck, and above all, thank you for caring for children!

Members Corner

As a CAPC we are busy in our communities working with parents and children. From time to time CAPC members will contribute stories related to what their organizations are doing and how you can utilize them as a resource. The following was written by CAPC Member Deborah Holmes, Associate Director for CALM, an agency dedicated to prevent, assess, and treat child abuse by providing comprehensive, culturally appropriate services for children, adults and families.

Great Things Are Happening in Parent Leadership Programs

I had the great privilege of attending one of the most moving and inspiring presentations I've witnessed at the Early Childhood Mental Health and Special Needs Summit on May 11th in Solvang. CALM staff transported 7 women from our Spanish-speaking Women's Empowerment group to speak at a break-out session on promoting resiliency and breaking the cycle of child abuse. About 25 conference participants gathered in front of a simple table with a white table cloth, a vase of fresh red roses, a small bag of black stones and a wooden cross. Behind the table, pieces of art work that the women had drawn during group sessions were displayed.

After introductions from the group leaders, the women got up one by one and went to the front of the room. Although the entire presentation was in Spanish, I could tell that the women's words resonated powerfully with the audience who were spellbound by the testimonials they heard. The women spoke of the challenges they have faced in their lives, their experiences of child abuse, domestic violence, isolation, sadness, despair, and even suicide attempts.



Then they told of the activities and support that the group at CALM has offered in the form of yoga, writing, drawing, music, singing and sharing. These have helped them to explore their childhood experiences, current relationships and integrate the different parts of themselves. They talked with great affection of the group and the group leaders who have provided a safe place for healing from past and current hurts, an opportunity to examine their roles as wives and mothers and to obtain support for parenting challenges.



Above all we witnessed the way in which the group has empowered, beyond measure, women who normally would not attend and whose voices would not be heard at such a conference. The women showed incredible poise, courage and leadership qualities.

A sign up sheet that was passed around after the class had 16 names of people who would like to replicate the group in their agency or organization.

Reporting Child Abuse or Neglect

If you are a Santa Barbara County mandated reporter and you suspect child abuse or neglect, YOU MUST ADHERE TO THE FOLLOWING PROCEDURES:

1. Immediately call Child Welfare Services at:
800.367.0166 Santa Barbara County Hotline
805.683.2724 After Hours
 In the case of an emergency, please call 911.
2. Complete and file a Suspected Child Abuse Report, Form #SS8572 (www.CTC-CAPC.org/SCAR)
3. Retain a legible copy of the SCAR Report.
4. YOU are responsible for making this report. DO NOT ALLOW your supervisor/principal to make the report for you or assume because another co-worker has some of the same information that they will make the report.
5. Do not attempt to investigate, conduct interviews or interfere with the information you hold.
6. Remember that you are to report SUSPECTED abuse—you are not required to have witnessed or have complete proof of the incident. You are obligated by law to report what you observe or what you are told that caused suspicion the child is being physically, sexually or emotionally abused or neglected. When in doubt, call CWS or law enforcement and get their input about the scope of your report.

The Santa Barbara County Child Abuse Prevention Council welcomes your feedback, ideas and requests for training and resources.

Email us at:
capc.newsletter@gmail.com

The CAPC meets the third Thursday of every month (except August and December) from 10:30-12:30 at the Santa Ines Mission. All meetings are open to the public. To receive agendas or more information, call the KIDS Network at 346.8222, or email j.thomas@sbcsocialserv.org.

The CAPC Connection is compiled by Santa Barbara County CAPC member Ann McCarty.

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