

LESS RECOGNIZED CHILD ABUSE (Neglect)

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Abuse, not widely acclaimed is neglect. What does neglect entail? It can be any of the following: failing to perform a task; paying too little attention to, either intentionally or unintentionally; being remiss in care for; or keeping someone from developing to a particular level of maturity. Occasionally the media has breaking news about a child found shackled to their bed or locked inside a closet or house for years. They are emaciated and stunted in their growth. Often they display scars from beatings or torture. The abusers are usually people who are mentally ill. However, there are other neglect issues that occur and yet, through our lack of awareness, lack of knowledge or concern we can still be culpable.

Students love to comment and call kids names when they see them come to school in dirty clothes. Kids can be so cruel! I can remember a boy at elementary school who came from a neglectful home. He would smell of body odor and maybe pet smells. We called him 'Stinky Williams'. His sister was not attractive and she wore thick glasses. We all called her 'Four eyes'. I am so ashamed when I think about how that must have affected their personal growth. I never went to their home, but I could only imagine what it must have looked and smelt like. The resulting abuse of this kind of neglect lay at the door of the parents. Whether a family is poor or not does not enter the equation, because there are many poor families whose children are presented clean and tidy.

Neglect can also take the form of not picking your child up quickly from school when a secretary has called to say that the child has soiled himself and needs to be washed and given a change of clothes. Neglect can be failing to regularly pick your child up from school or get your child to school in a timely manner.

Neglect can be failing to provide your child with adequate affection. We all need to be touched, to be praised, to be affirmed, to sit on someone's knee, to be hugged, to be kissed, to be patted on the back or head. Emotional growth is dependent on it. Affection is free, should be easily dispensed and has great dividends.

Time is also free, however busy you might think you are. To buy your kids stuff as a substitute for not spending time with them is neglect, and it is an abuse. If any of us are so busy that we do not have sufficient time to give to our family our priorities are way up the creek!

Always taking our kids out to eat and not prescribing good nutritional habits is a subtle form of neglect. You might ask how this could possibly be an abuse. Firstly, processed food is high in harmful substances and can lead to obesity, diabetes and other forms of illness. Secondly, it is showing your children

poor financial habits. It is more costly to eat out. Thirdly, you are neglecting to teach your children how to cook so that they can at least make a wise choice when they grow up as to whether to cook or not.

Not teaching your children how to wash and dry clothes, iron, keep a tidy house, balance a checkbook, make wise financial decisions, do basic maintenance on a vehicle, be well-mannered and respectful, use time wisely and be punctual, be compassionate and outward-focused are all forms of neglect. Not preparing a daughter for womanhood or boys for manhood is neglect as is failing to provide sex education. There are probably others. When I look at the above list, I have been guilty of neglect, but I'm wiser now that I know what my responsibilities as a parent are.

Sometimes it doesn't enter our heads how our action or lack of action may be impacting our family. I don't want to be seen as being negative, but these are real issues that need addressing. Kids deserve a wholesome and happy life. It is up to us, as parents, to provide them with a secure home environment and the means maintain self-respect.

If you have any comments or questions on this subject, please do not hesitate to contact us at sally@forefrontfamilies.org. We invite you to also check out our website at www.forefrontfamilies.org and our blog site at www.forefrontfamilies.blogspot.com for further assistance.