

A Toxic Mother Is More Dangerous Than an Absent Father

Kids growing up in a complete family is not necessarily better off than kids growing up with single parents but the issue I'd like to talk about is not just about an unsupportive parent but a toxic one, a parent that not just shoots down your ideas but became the curse of your existence. It is a difficult journey growing up in a single parent family with kids getting the impression they are getting half the affection, feeling left out amongst their peers & most importantly growing up without a mental image or memories of a complete family. Parents on the other hand who have went on their separate ways for various reasons are doing their very best to make up for the lost opportunity their kids are going through, it is not an outcome everyone wanted but still an unfortunate situation. It is never an easy path for everyone involved but with serious effort & commitment, things can still improve...save for the family with a toxic parent. Regardless of what the situation may be, home should first & foremost be every child's safe zone. A place they can run back to no matter what happens but what if home has become a battlefield for you? Everyone is fighting their own battles, no point adding on the burden & growing up in a single family is already an uphill fight but growing up with a toxic parent can destroy you emotionally & spiritually. I have a handful of friends who grew up in a toxic environment where their parents are poisoning them day by day, cursing their existence. It really is alarming to see this happening, yet it is reality. I've seen parents berating their children's capabilities, shooting down their dreams & blaming them for the family's current situation. We now grow up in an ever-competitive environment where parents must balance the thin line of wanting the best for the child & pushing the child beyond the limit. Modern times have created huge parental pressure which in turn creates a generation that goes through epidemic levels of anxiety & depression (Levine, 2006). Substance abuse then have become an escape for some while others may turn to gang association & violence which then creates a more difficult situation to an already fragile relationship in the family.

Being exposed to toxicity in the long run can seriously affect our self-esteem, but what is a toxic behaviour? Physical & sexual abuse by parents can create highly visible & obvious injuries on the child but it is the less evident ones that leave almost nothing in sight. A single bad argument between a parent & a child is not a toxic relationship if it happened over something major many years ago but children of toxic parents can be so badly abused that it has become a norm for them & even insisted that everything is fine, maybe even to the point of saying their parents are excellent by believing a reality whereby they are the mistake in life & the world revolves around the parents (Forward, 2009). Toxic parents can be malicious & try to be nasty to their children but for most cases, they are usually self-centred & are unable to comprehend the fact that their children have their own various needs such as assurance, emotional support & desires. Some families may demand that their children care for them & take care of their needs, not in the sense of filial piety but more of taking care of parents like a baby instead. Whereby the parents' emotions always come before the child & the child will have to suppress their own emotions, do their best to calm their parents & be the bigger person instead. Kids of toxic parents are also burdened with keeping certain family situations a deep secret such as alcoholism, gangsterism, divorced parents or financial debts. On the topic of financials, it can be understandable when parents

restrict their children on impulsive purchases or limiting their pocket money as a form of punishment, it can be a good lesson to learn for children to learn financial management if applied correctly. However, if the parent refuses to provide financial aid if the child is in need of additional education, medical support, psychological support or simply moving out to be independent, it can be toxic. Money is often used as a threatening tactic, highly impactful if the child is financially reliant on the parent & they can threaten to take away that financial support if the child refuses to obey their instructions. Aside from financial threats, parents guilt trip their children, another powerful method of control which causes the child to refuse to do something without suffering the consequences (Baldassar, 2015).

Children will always be the child in every parents' eyes, it can be a sweet gesture on how every parent enjoys the occasional stroll down memory lane about carrying their beloved child as a baby but when should they let go & allow their children to become adults? The child can grow up in a difficult environment when parents actively discourage them from becoming an independent entity by showing autonomy & exerting authority. Children are not allowed to grow up & decisions made as an adult will often be criticised & undermined, often being harassed by parents until the child changes their decisions to appease the parents. Toxic parents tend to demand the same level of control they had over the child's life as they did when the child was young & these parents are unable to comprehend why they are unable to exert control over their adult child, often becoming offended by these actions & sometimes, aggressive when they are denied control. Additionally, a child's boundaries are not recognised & such parents believe they can simply open the child's bedroom door without knocking, calling them without regards to their schedule or work & simply saying anything to the child in private or in public. But if the child starts to fight back & limit their boundaries, parents will react with aggressively, guilt trip the child or become insanely passive-aggressive, maintaining a stranglehold of the family dynamics. Aside from the insurmountable task of trying to fight for their boundaries, children have to contend with parents undermining them. No one is perfect in every sense, everyone has their own strengths & weakness but when a parent digs their children's vulnerabilities such as their academics, height, weight or any achievements by covering up as a joke, they are exerting their dominance over the child. But when a child reacts to these jokes, they are labelled as being flawed for not having any sense of humour (Brown, 2004). As a child grows up to face the world, it is understandable if they have fears in overcoming life's hurdles such as a new work environment, new circle of friends & even stepping into relationships but what about fear of their parents? If a child is doing everything they can to put themselves in a position where their parents cannot hurt them physically or psychologically or when they jump in fear & experience a rush in adrenaline when they receive a phone call from their parents, it is a remnant of a toxic childhood.

So how should we work with saving ourselves from a toxic environment? Maybe the first step will be to recognise that we are better than what we are labelled as, not as abusive as they make us out to be & most importantly, we are of equal footing as everyone else. Children that have grown up in toxic environments will have to start with detachments, not physically maybe but at least on the emotional level. It means

to react in a proper manner against such toxic actions, not taking it personally & not feeling responsible for such parents' behaviour, feelings, wants & needs. When it is time to grow up, it will be important to set boundaries & limit their influence over decisions we make as an adult. Some parents may enforce knowledge & their opinion about life, but it will take wisdom to discern what is good for you & what is not. A toxic relationship with friends may be easy to walk away from but walking away from parents is a tall order for most people, that's why some chose to cut off their relationship with family due to unresolved anger issues & childhood resentment. It will be a big decision to make but it helps to reduce any emotional tension we may feel while growing up. I believe that it is important we all grow up into healthy human beings & not being moulded in an abusive environment, so it will be good to detach oneself from such an environment to recharge & slowly learn how to respond to such actions in a better way instead. We all do get lost in life for various reasons & thus it will be important that we all find a coach in life to help us see the bigger picture & guide us through it smoothly.

One day, as we all face our own demons, ask yourself this...

What are you afraid of?

References

- Baldassar, L. (2015). Guilty feelings and the guilt trip: Emotions and motivation in migration and transnational caregiving. *Emotion, Space and Society*, 16, 81-89.
- Brown, S. L. (2004). Family structure and child well-being: The significance of parental cohabitation. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 66(2), 351-367.
- Forward, S. (2009). *Toxic parents: Overcoming their hurtful legacy and reclaiming your life*. Bantam.
- Levine, M. (2006). *The price of privilege: How parental pressure and material advantage are creating a generation of disconnected and unhappy kids*. HarperCollins Publishers.