

# UTAH'S ADOPTION CONNECTION

CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES

NOVEMBER 2016

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CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES

QUARTERLY DCFS NEWSLETTER



Nevon (8), Giovanni (10), Calvin (13), Isaiah (14), Kiara (17)  
Photo by: Ted York

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**On the Cover**  
*Alex, age 14*

CHECK OUT THE NEWLY REDESIGNED  
**UTAH'S ADOPTION CONNECTION  
 LENDING LIBRARY**  
 WITH OVER 1,300 ADOPTION RELATED TITLES.

Alejandro, who likes to be called "Alex", is a collector at heart! Pokemon and kids meal toys top his list of favorite items. An athletic youth, Alex enjoys climbing, playing basketball and other sports, and has quite the talent for shooting three pointers. His favorite things often change, but his love for food never wavers as he is not a picky eater.

Alex is a ninth grader who interacts well with his teachers and thrives with one-on-one attention. He currently benefits from an IEP (Individualized Education Plan) and counseling. It is expected that Alex will need assistance as an adult, but he can have a bright future!

The caseworker prefers a two-parent home in which Alex can be the youngest child. If you can offer a loving, committed and structured home to this great kid, we urge you to inquire. Alex would like to maintain contact with his siblings and former caseworker following placement. Financial assistance may be available for adoption-related services.

For Utah children, only homestudied families from all states are encouraged to inquire.

Photo by: Scott Hancock

**If you are interested in any of the children featured in this publication, please contact The Adoption Exchange at 801-265-0444 or visit [www.utahadopt.org](http://www.utahadopt.org).**

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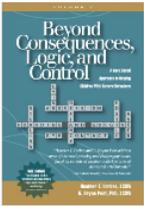
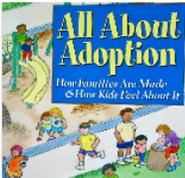
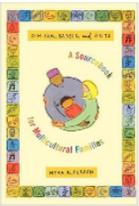
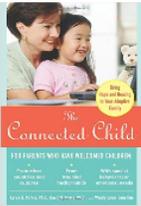
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**Featured Titles**

 <p><b>Beyond Consequences, Logic and Control vol.1</b> Heather T. Forbes, B. Bryan Post</p> <p><input type="button" value="Borrow"/></p>	 <p><b>All About Adoption: How Families Are Made and How Kids Feel About It</b> Marc Nemiroff and Jane Annunziata</p> <p><input type="button" value="Borrow"/></p>	 <p><b>Dim Sum, Bagels, and Grits: A Sourcebook for Multicultural Families</b> Myra Alperson</p> <p><input type="button" value="Borrow"/></p>	 <p><b>Connected Child, The</b> Karyn B. Purvis, PhD, and David R. Cross PhD and W</p> <p><input type="button" value="Borrow"/></p>
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[www.utahadopt.org](http://www.utahadopt.org)

# PARENTING A CHILD WHO HAS EXPERIENCED ABUSE OR NEGLECT

PART TWO OF A TWO PART SERIES

PART ONE WAS PRINTED IN THE AUGUST 2016 EDITION OF UTAH'S ADOPTION CONNECTION

## What Are the Effects of Child Abuse and Neglect?

Research shows that abuse and neglect can affect a child's ability to learn, form relationships, and problem solve, and children who have experienced maltreatment are at risk for many illnesses and poor health later in life. Knowing how maltreatment may have affected your child may help you recognize the effects of abuse or neglect and seek the appropriate assessments and help.

### Effects on Child Development

A great deal of research in recent years has examined child and adolescent brain development. We now know that the way the brain develops can change when a child has experienced stress from severe or ongoing abuse or neglect (Center for the Developing Child, n.d.). Maltreatment can delay or affect the ways a child is able to control his or her emotions, see right from wrong, identify consequences of actions, and learn from mistakes.

Most children experience developmental milestones along the same general timelines. Typically, children from birth to 5 acquire the ability to soothe themselves when they are stressed; children ages 6–7 have more control over their emotions and behaviors; and adolescents ages 11–14 might have frequent mood swings, but they learn to accept disappointments and overcome failures. Abuse or neglect can impair this healthy development. Some causes for concern about developmental delays include:

- A child ages birth–5 who exhibits an inability to relax or manage stress
- A child ages 6–7 who is frequently sad, worried, afraid, or withdrawn
- A child ages 11–14 who has strong negative thoughts about him or herself, or has an extreme need for approval and social support

It's important to remember that although crucial brain development occurs during the first 3 years of life, our brains continue to develop into adulthood. The brain development that takes place at age 2 is quite different from the development that happens at age 14. In fact, the brain experiences a growth spurt right before puberty that affects a preteen's ability to plan, reason, and control impulses and emotions.

It is normal for teenagers to act impulsively and take risks, because the part of their brain that regulates impulse control—the frontal lobe—is not fully matured. Adolescents who have experienced abuse, neglect, or other trauma, however, may be more impulsive. Teens who have been maltreated may:

- Struggle academically and socially
- Have difficulty with tasks requiring a higher level of thinking
- Experiment with drugs or criminal activity

A caring adult who provides healthy guidance to youth can offer the opportunity for them to model appropriate behaviors and develop the skills necessary for healthy adult relationships.

## Effects on Health

While child abuse and neglect can leave physical scars, there also can be a number of underlying, less visible effects. Several studies have demonstrated a link between negative experiences during childhood and poor adult health outcomes that can lead to early death, including (Saul, 2012; Felitti & Anda, 2009):

- Heart, lung, and liver diseases
- High blood pressure, diabetes, asthma, and obesity
- Alcohol and other drug abuse
- Sexually transmitted diseases

## Social, Psychological, and Behavioral Effects

Children and youth who have experienced abuse or neglect may also experience one or more of the following psychological and behavioral effects:

- Borderline personality disorder, depression, and/or anxiety
- Attachment issues or affectionate behaviors with unknown/little-known people
- Inappropriate modeling of adult behavior, aggression, and other antisocial traits
- Juvenile delinquency or adult criminality
- Future abusive behavior such as interpersonal violence or domestic abuse

For more information on research on adverse childhood experiences, see the website for the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: <http://www.cdc.gov/ace/index.htm>

## RESOURCES ON THE EFFECTS OF CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT

Child Welfare Information Gateway's issue brief *Understanding the Effects of Maltreatment on Brain Development*: [https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/issue\\_briefs/brain\\_development/index.cfm](https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/issue_briefs/brain_development/index.cfm)

Information Gateway's *Long-Term Consequences of Child Abuse and Neglect*: [https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/factsheets/long\\_term\\_consequences.cfm](https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/factsheets/long_term_consequences.cfm)

ZERO TO THREE's series of handouts with information about supporting healthy brain development in the first 3 years of life: <http://www.zerotothree.org/child-development/brain-development/healthy-minds.html>

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's National Center on Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities with resources on child development, developmental milestones, developmental disabilities, and parenting tips: <http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/index.html>

## How Can I Help My Child Heal?

Knowing the possible effects of child abuse and neglect is a first step. This section explores some strategies for helping your child or youth overcome these traumas, including some techniques for discipline that can help prevent future abuse or retraumatization.

### Building Resilience and Promoting Protective Factors

Resilience is a child or youth's ability to cope, and even thrive, following a negative experience. This is not an inherent trait but something that has to be developed and nurtured.

Some of the ways you can help your child build resilience include:

- **Build strong connections** with friends and family that can support children during challenges and teach them to think about and consider other people's feelings.
- **Allow children to feel their feelings.** Teach them how to describe those feelings, and commend them for expressing feelings of hurt or sadness without acting out.
- **Be consistent.** If you say you'll be there, be there. If you say you'll listen to concerns, listen. This will help to teach your child that people can be trusted.
- **Be patient.** Children's reactions to trauma vary as widely as the types of

trauma one can experience. There isn't a one-size-fits-all solution.

- **Express your support.** Express love and support for your child verbally and physically. Express your love through words, notes, and hugs.
- **Teach your child the importance of healthy behaviors.** Have open and honest talks about the dangers of drugs and alcohol, smoking, and sexual promiscuity. Teach your child the importance of eating properly and exercising.

Experiencing abuse or neglect doesn't mean your child *will* develop poor health or negative well-being outcomes. When caregivers and parents foster protective factors—circumstances in families and communities that increase the health and well-being of children and families—it may lessen the negative effects of maltreatment (Pizzolongo & Hunter, 2011). A strong and secure emotional bond between children and their caregivers is critical for children's physical, social, and emotional development, including their ability to form trusting relationships, exhibit positive behaviors, and heal from past traumas.

The healing process is not always a clear, straight path, and it takes time. Some things you can do to help your child heal include:

- Address the child's physical safety first by letting him or her know that no one will physically lash out. This will help the child create feelings of trust and open up to psychological and emotional healing.
- Address the past as the past. Help the child identify elements of his or her current life that are different from the

past. Use this as an opportunity to discuss new boundaries and expectations to encourage feelings of belonging and attachment (The Foster Care and Adoption Resource Center, 2012).

## Building a Strong Relationship With Your Child

A child's earliest relationships are some of the most important. Attachment is the sense of security and safety a child feels with caregivers and is important for your child's physical, emotional, mental, and psychological development. It is formed through consistent, positive affection and emotional interactions. The issues and challenges most caregivers face with children who have experienced maltreatment is the result of a break in attachment during the first 3 years of life (Keck & Kupecky, 2002).

To foster a secure relationship with a child:

- **Be available.** Provide consistent support to build feelings of trust and safety.
- **Offer comfort.** Support the child when he or she is upset, modeling appropriate displays of affection and building the child's self-esteem.
- **Be respectful.** Let your child know that you will keep him or her safe (Center for the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning, 2011).

## RESOURCES FOR BUILDING RESILIENCE AND PROMOTING PROTECTIVE FACTORS

The 2013 Resource Guide, *Preventing Child Maltreatment and Promoting Well-Being*, offers parent tip sheets and more information about protective factors: <https://www.childwelfare.gov/preventing/preventionmonth/guide2013/>

The American Psychological Association's (APA's) guide *Resilience Guide for Parents and Teachers*: <http://www.apa.org/helpcenter/resilience.aspx>

The APA's *Parenting After Trauma: Understanding Your Child's Needs: A Guide for Foster and Adoptive Parents*: <http://www.aap.org/en-us/advocacy-and-policy/aap-health-initiatives/healthy-foster-care-america/Documents/FamilyHandout.pdf>

The National Child Traumatic Stress Network offers a training curriculum, *Caring for Children Who Have Experienced Trauma: A Workshop for Resource Parents*: <http://www.nctsn.org/products/caring-for-children-who-have-experienced-trauma>

FOR ADDITIONAL SUPPORT AND RESOURCES  
[HTTPS://CHILDWELFARE.GOV/PUBS/PARENTING\\_CAN.CFM](https://childwelfare.gov/pubs/parenting_can.cfm)



# AVOIDING THE NEW ADOPTIVE PARENT BURNOUT

by Harriett McCarthy

Parent Burn-Out is a legitimate and very real concern for those who have children with any kind of challenging issues.

Frequently, parents of children with special challenges will complain that they feel trapped, disappointed, over-committed, and increasingly unable to cope. They seem to have lost any satisfaction in the job of parenting their special-needs child. They can't find ways to relax and renew their energy for what is acknowledged by all to be a very difficult job. Parents are understandably exhausted when they find themselves with children so needy or so difficult to handle that they require constant monitoring. Especially at risk are those parents who have poor or nonexistent support systems. They can't seem to imagine any options for easing

the constant pressure of their obligations and run the real risk of becoming more and more isolated. For those who are parenting the poorly attached or unattached child, the lack of emotional reciprocity makes things doubly difficult. For those who are parenting the neurologically challenged, there is the added worry that their child may never be able to live independently.

It may seem an oversimplification, but one of the most constructive things you can do in these situations is to re-evaluate any expectations you might have about your child. Unfulfilled expectations will only compound your feelings of being trapped and dissatisfied. It is frustrating to know that you are not being successful in changing those around you so they will behave differently.

One of life's most precious gifts, which evaporates the instant you become a parent, is solitude. Even when children are trouble-free and absolutely delightful to be around, a parent is never "off duty". When children are especially needy and difficult to get along with, the absolute lack of solitude and privacy can seem like a relentless invasion. All that emotional pulling and pushing can leave you exhausted and resentful. Those of us who suffer from the Superparent Syndrome are at particular risk from this problem. It's a lot easier to be a Superperson when there are no little people depending on you. It may be very difficult, but once again, you need to re-evaluate your expectations of yourself against the reality of your current life. Dependents are just that.....dependent, and they eat away at your energy,

attention, focus, motivation, and lifestyle. That's not necessarily a bad thing....it just IS.

There is nothing written in stone that says we are only good parents if we subsume our own needs for those of our children's. My favorite statistic is that 85% of the benefit we have on our kids is passive. That means you can be a good parent even while you sleep! It's impossible that a person's lifestyle won't be changed by a dependent and there's no payoff in experiencing guilt because of the way you feel about that. You can legitimately experience grief and loss, regret, longing for a different kind of life, etc., but you've got to get rid of any guilt because it's singularly counter-productive.

Once you have a more realistic understanding of both the expectations of your children's behaviors and that of your own, you can then start the real effort of making your life, both physically and emotionally, more pleasant and comfortable. The key to the process is finding time for yourself and away from your children. Send the kids off to bed early so that all of you can have some private, decompression time in the evenings. There's nothing wrong with training children to leave your presence when you declare you need some "private Mommy time". It's perfectly legitimate to set up these kinds of boundaries as a self-preservative measure.

I know people say that you should never remove yourself from attachment disordered kids, but I don't agree. There is something to be said for the fact that you are showing them you can go away but they can learn to trust that you'll come back. Take private walks, go out in the garden and pull weeds after dinner or early in the morning, go into the bathroom and simply close the door for 20 minutes or so and read a magazine or a few pages of a book. I went back and finished college in order to save my sanity. Figure out a way to reconnect with old friends or cultivate new ones. The logical place to start is at church or temple. Get involved in something there once a week. The most important thing is that you start doing something for yourself. If it helps you feel more whole, take a private mental holiday and just

do the minimum for about a week. These invisible mental holidays (you know you're doing it but nobody else does) have saved my sanity more times than I care to admit. So, the question is, how can you effectively pull-back? It's an individual decision. Will a shift in attitude be enough, or do you need some real private time in order to renew yourself? For me, it requires that I spend a lot of time in "solitary". I'm a gardener, so I always have the garden as an escape. I can be at home in case something goes amiss, but no one wants to come outside and pull weeds with me. It's a great place to hide, and weeds grow all year round!

Attachment disordered children may or may not ever be able to make a real connection with family. Neurologically impaired children are unwritten books and may remain so for years. Getting rid of preconceived notions of what should or may happen in future enables you to start each day without disappointment and it's a weight lifted off your shoulders. I myself unknowingly adopted a child with alcohol-related neurological disabilities (ARND). My unfulfilled expectation was that I was bringing home a child who could compete on a level playing field with other children his age. As it turns out, he had significant disabilities with which he will struggle his entire life. It's a daily challenge for me as well as for my son. I have to continually remind myself that life with him must be seen in a realistic light. Am I somewhat disappointed with myself for feeling this way? Yes I am. Do I wish I felt differently? There have been many times I was plagued by that guilt. But then I consciously remind myself that he needs to be accepted AS HE IS. That's not to say it makes me feel any better about my feelings or the situation in general, but it does enable me to do my mothering job to the best of my ability, and that gives me a feeling of self-worth and accomplishment. Over the years we've both learned to accept each other the way we really are and to make the best out of what actually exists.

Many years ago, when we first took my son who has ARND, to have a thorough evaluation at a developmental clinic, one of the

clinicians was a social worker. At the end of our evaluation she told my husband and myself that so far we were doing almost everything right but one thing terribly wrong. We weren't leaving the children to get away together alone. She told us that the most important thing we needed to do was to line up some sitters so we could have at least one night a week to ourselves. My husband and I have no extended family to rely upon, so we had to make a concerted effort to do what she advised, but eventually we did find people who would come and stay with the children so that my husband and I could get away. So don't think that just because you have no extended family that it's impossible to find some help. Ask at church. Ask all your friends who don't have extended families what they do. Call a nanny service. See if there are responsible kids at a local college who would like to sit. Make it a priority! It has saved our marriage. More importantly, it has strengthened our marriage. After all, when the children are finally gone, who will still be there? Our spouses will still be there if we're lucky. Let's not sacrifice our relationships with them when they are, ultimately, the most important (and potentially longest-lasting) people in our lives! They were here before the children arrived and hopefully they'll still be here after the children leave!

Avoid the debilitating burn-out that can come with parenting children with challenges. Acknowledge the difficulty of the job you're doing. Rid yourself of counter-productive expectations about your children. Make sure your expectations of yourself are realistic and constructive. Find ways to have some alone time and make an effort to keep yourself renewed and nurtured. Re-assess your family priorities. Devote some extra effort to your partner in life. Reach out for help and support. Keep things in perspective but most of all keep it real!

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This article was reprinted with permission from RainbowKids.com



# THE HAPPIEST TIMES OR THE HARDEST TIMES

by, Kathy Searle, CSW

In general many parents feel a great amount of stress during the holidays. For first time parents, and even those of us who have experienced many holidays together as a family, these can be stressful times. We want to create that magic that we have dreamed about or even experienced when we were children.

For many of our children being adopted out of the foster care system, the holidays have not always been a time of happiness. Many children, while in their birth families, viewed the holidays as a time to realize how dysfunctional their families really were. They may have spent Christmas Eve with parents who were strung out on drugs or sleeping another one off. They learned that Santa Claus came to other houses but not theirs. Some of our children experienced additional abuse during the holidays as already stressed out parents tried to deal with additional stress. Some faced disruption from foster homes or treatment facilities. Many experienced adoptive parents realize that for our children, the holidays, can be trying times.

So what can we do? First it's important to realize and remember our children's past; talking with them about what they have ex-

perienced in the past can give us information that may help us understand their behavior, thoughts and feelings that the holidays can bring for them. Talking about your memories both good and bad can allow your child the freedom to express their memories as well. All of us carry a lot of anxiety about having a memorable holiday. We frequently hear messages about how everyone should be happy at this time of year and when our families don't seem to measure up, this adds to our frustration. Don't set yourself up by thinking that your holiday has to look like the latest television show or magazine.

Be patient with yourself and with your children. Make sure that everyone gets enough sleep. If your child has had problems with certain activities in the past, avoid those activities or talk with the child in advance and have a plan in place for when something goes wrong.

Overcrowding your schedule can make everyone miserable. Many of our children get overstimulated easily; cutting back to a few great activities can be better than trying to fit everything in and not having any fun at all. Our kids may do better with picking out the cookies at the store instead of

baking. Long drawn out activities put a lot of pressure on everyone.

Remember your family can define your own fun; talking with your children in advance about the holidays and what they want to do and not do can really help.

Our family has had some traditions change over time as new children have entered the family. Many times we as the adults are hung up on some tradition that worked well in our family years ago, but might not be working out well anymore. Creating new traditions when new children come into your home helps them to feel more a part of the family. Often with traditions we just expect everyone knows what we do because that is what we've always done. Take the time to talk with them about what to expect so they, like the other children, can have the anticipation of the fun event.

Holiday traditions can be the glue that can cement a child to a new family, but it usually takes planning, time and effort on the part of the parents and possibly older children already in the family to make it a success.



# HOW TO DISCIPLINE A CHILD WITH FASD

By Kristin Berry

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Parenting children with FASD is an uphill battle. This is especially true when it comes to discipline. How do you balance necessary consequences with a child whose brain lacks the executive functioning to understand?

If you know a child with an FASD (Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder) you know that typical discipline just doesn't work.

In our home we are raising two sons diagnosed with ARND (Alcohol Related Neurodevelopmental Disorder), a type of FASD. Our sons were exposed to alcohol before birth. FASDs do not go away, and there is no way to heal the damage that has been done. Typically, children who are exposed to alcohol suffer damage to their prefrontal cortex. The prefrontal cortex is the command

center for the brain. It controls emotions, problem solving, self-control and decision-making.

For a long time we parented these children the same way we parented our children who don't have a brain injury. We wound up frustrated and hopeless and our children ended up confused and angry. We know our job as parents is

to teach our children the skills they will need to be successful adults. We were tempted to throw in the towel in terms of discipline. I'm glad we didn't. After a lot of research, and trial and error, we have come up with some strategies that have been effective with our sons.

### **Keep expectations clear and brief.**

Let's face it, I love to lecture. I have all kinds of wisdom, and I'm willing and ready to impart that knowledge on my children at anytime and for a long time if necessary. Lecturing is not typically effective for any children but for our children with FASD it is downright perplexing. When we need our children to understand an expectation we need to make our words as simple and brief as possible. Keep in mind that a child with FASD may have an emotional age that is about half of his or her chronological age. You must stay calm, brief and to the point.

### **Choose battles with confidence.**

The other day my son was using my phone to text a friend (our teens do not have phones of their own at this point). We go over the rules of texting each time he uses my phone. Texts are to be kind. Texts may go to people we know and approve. Texts may never be deleted. On this particular day, he got into an argument with a friend, and began to send her mean-spirited messages. After a bit, I noticed something was wrong and read over his shoulder. I reminded him that his behavior was hurtful and asked him to make things right with his friend. He quickly deleted as many texts as he could and became very frustrated with me for intervening. As he became dysregulated and angry, I considered sending him to his room for the rest of the night. I quickly realized that is a consequence that I cannot enforce (he is my size). Instead, I told

him that he would not be allowed to use the phone for one day. I knew this was a logical consequence for the infraction and it was a consequence I could easily enforce. I'm the only one who knows the password to my phone, so all I had to do was not unlock it. Choosing this battle was important because it created an opportunity for my son to learn respectful behavior. The consequence was effective because I had full control over implementing it.

### **Give ample time to change behavior.**

Children with FASD are often impulsive and lack self-control. When they need to change behavior, it is much like trying to turn an aircraft carrier. They need time and space. When we give our children instruction to change their course, it is important to give plenty of time for their brain and their emotions to regulate, so that appropriate behavior can follow.

### **Stay the course.**

Children with FASD can have an attention span that resembles a gnat. It is important to stay focused when trying to help a child change a specific behavior. Do not follow them down the rabbit trails of thinking. Our son will bring up at least 10 non-related issues whenever he is dealing with something difficult. It is our job as parents to stay the course. Redirect the conversation whenever it is no longer productive.

### **Turn down the heat.**

We were honored to do a webinar interview this past fall with Dr. Ira Chasnoff and Gabe Chasnoff from NTI Upstream. Dr. Chasnoff referred to the fetal alcohol brain as a simmering pot. A child with FASD is at a constant simmer, even the slightest frustration can cause the child to boil over emotionally. It is our job

to turn down the heat! I'm not just a lecturer, I'm also an admitted hot head. Once I realized that my quick-tempered responses were only multiplying my son's frustration, I took the opportunity to calm down. I now talk to my son in a calm tone of voice and do not yell (even when I really want to). By keeping my cool, I allow my son to take a boiling situation back down to a simmer. He is much quicker to respond to my requests, end tantrums and even apologize now that I'm not throwing logs on the fire.

### **Blank Slate.**

Children with FASD have difficulty with long-term memory. While this can be very frustrating when teaching life-skills, it can also be a blessing as a parent. All people deserve to be forgiven and have the opportunity to start over. Consequences must stand but anger, resentment and frustration don't have to. It is important to allow your child to have an opportunity to do better tomorrow without the reminder of yesterday's failure looming over them. It is also important to allow yourself to face each day as a new opportunity. Forgive yourself for your own shortcomings and give yourself a blank slate too.



# HOW TO TALK TO YOUR KIDS ABOUT INAPPROPRIATE MATERIAL ON THE INTERNET

by Stefanie Armstrong

“Ahhh. this is going to be so nice... I’m going to fold clothes and watch a documentary (one of my most favorite things to do). It’s going to be a relaxing afternoon.” Can you tell that I enjoy even the simplest of things? As I opened up the Netflix app I was stunned to find under the “continue watching for Stefanie” a list of shows like “Hot Girls Wanted” and “Love Seen” and to find that these shows have been almost finished! I immediately panicked and searched my brain for the reasons: maybe someone else had our ac-

count password, maybe my husband decided to watch these, maybe someone took one of the tablets (a cousin or friend of one of the boys) and watched these shows. And maybe (this was last on my list) one of my boys ages 10, 9 and 4 was watching these....my stomach sank and dismissed this and went back to, “well maybe it was my husband.” I was not going to believe it was one of my kids. I’m pretty sure I know what you are thinking right now: “Isn’t she naïve!” Well, my response: I like to think I’m hopeful! But, there

I was rationalizing this in my mind. I just couldn’t make sense of it as Mike and I don’t watch these things together and he has never had this desire. That sinking pit began to grow...it may be one of my kids. So when my husband came home from work, I asked him calmly, and of course his answer was not what I wanted. It was, NO! He said it had to be one of the cousins who often come to visit. Yes, it appears that he, too, is just as naïve as I! I began to get very nervous. As a child mental health therapist, this was

a nightmare for me. I know what happens when children's minds are exposed too early to inappropriate images. As a former school counselor, I have some pretty amazing questioning skills. One of my jobs was to investigate such issues as who threw the pickles on the ceiling of the cafeteria and who put shaving cream on the mirrors in the boys' bathroom. I learned that the best investigative method was to present the infraction to the group of possible offenders and then separate the possible offenders and question them individually. So when my 3 boys arrived home from school, I turned on my school counselor self and sadly discovered that my middle son, the one who seemed to have inherited all of the most challenging qualities carried by my husband and me, was the offender. "Mom you know those pictures of girls that Uncle Jim has hanging in his garage?" Isaac asked me with huge crocodile tears welling up in his eyes. "My brain just got addicted to those pictures and I just had to watch the girls kissing. One half of my brain was telling me it was wrong and the other half of my brain was telling me to do it. It was just so hard to stop." At this point, full realization hit, and I realized that my son's amazing, naïve and well-protected (or so I thought) mind had been exposed. Crocodile tears began to come over me. He began to question me: "Mom are you going to ground me from my tablet? Mom are you mad? Mom are you ever going to let me play with my tablet again?" And on and on....he was so scared that he was going to be in trouble. And that's when I stopped and asked myself, "What's going to teach him that this is wrong?"

1. Ground him from his tablet until further notice.

2. Tell him he is grounded from marshmallows for one week.

3. Make him sit in his room alone and "think" about what he's done.

4. Raise my voice, "I can't believe you did this. You know better! Do mommy and daddy watch these things? Do we EVER allow you to watch anything over PG? Haven't we discussed appropriate things to watch and what not to?"

5. Ground him all weekend to his room.

6. All of the above.

7. Or.....talk to him, use words, and attune to his feelings of "being addicted." Discuss what that means and tell him how important his brain is to me and how important it is that his brain not be exposed to things that are not safe for anyone's brain.

I chose #7.....not because I am a therapist, but because I know that using my sadness and anger to punish him would not teach him that our relationship is more important than those inappropriate images and that I can be with him through the hard times when his brain gets "addicted." I want to teach him that he can come to me when his life is confusing, and we will problem-solve, not blame and shame. So we made a plan that I would put the parental controls on the Netflix (I cannot believe I didn't do this before), his daddy and I will be more aware of his tablet time, and we will check on him to make sure his brain doesn't get drawn in again to things that are not healthy for his brain and his body. At the end of our talk, we hugged and said "I

love you," and he trotted away asking for two marshmallows. I said yes, not because I was rewarding his behavior, but because our talk was hard work and he loves marshmallows.

### **Clinical Commentary:**

Our emotions related to our children's sexuality and potential exposure to sexual images and experiences can lead us to react to their behaviors in ways that punish, shame, and shut the door to communication, teaching, and problem-solving opportunities. We cannot help our children navigate through the world of technology and sexuality if we have a relationship that is disconnected. Punishing and shaming do not help children understand their feelings or consider their actions. A punitive approach leads children to become more secretive and shut down to the guidance of the adults in their world, leaving them to manage in isolation. When we can regulate our own emotions, we become capable of remaining emotionally present, therefore strengthening our influence during a critical period of our child's development.

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Stefanie Armstrong, MS, LIMHP specializes in treating trauma resolution and attachment problems in children and adolescents. Before she co-founded The Attachment and Trauma Center of Nebraska, she spent 10 years working in the public school system as a school counselor. She is EMDR certified and is an EMDR consultant. Ms. Armstrong is part of the team that created the EMDR and Family Therapy Integrative Protocol for the treatment of attachment trauma in children. She is co-author of the treatment manual *Integrative Team Treatment for Attachment Trauma in Children: Family Therapy and EMDR* and the accompanying parenting manual, *Integrative Parenting: Strategies for Raising Children Affected by Attachment Trauma*. She has presented her expertise nationally to numerous parent and professional groups. Ms. Armstrong is a trainer for the Attachment and Trauma Center Institute, training clinicians in the Family Therapy and EMDR Integrative Team Treatment and training parents in the Integrative Parenting Approach. Ms. Armstrong has been invited to present at numerous professional conferences and workshops around the country and has also trained public school personnel in the area of trauma and attachment.



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### Salt Lake Region:

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### Western Region:

Jeannie Warner (A-L)	801-787-8814
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### HONORING EXCELLENCE *Emily Rogers*



I believe that every child deserves a loving home. As a caseworker for the Division of Child and Family Services, I have had the opportunity to work with many children in need of a permanent home. It is heart wrenching for me to see these children with little to no family or support who desperately need a stable, loving home. I have come to consider it a life mission of mine to help ensure long-term

security and belonging for these children. When working with The Adoption Exchange to place foster children, I have been impressed with the commitment to finding the right home for each child, not just any home that will take them. As a caseworker, I strive to focus my efforts on getting to know each child individually and securing their safety and happiness.

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