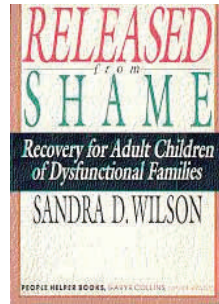


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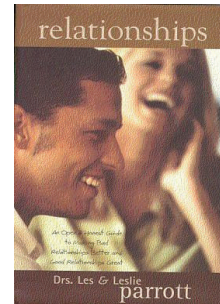
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SAFE PLACE NEWS

*Promoting safe places, consistent with the character of Christ,
for women and their families to heal and grow.*

Issue 18
January 2003

A HEALTHY FAMILY—WHAT’S THAT?!

“How do two people from unhealthy homes know what a healthy home looks like, let alone move toward crafting one themselves?”

It’s a question being asked frequently these days. From 1975 to 1995, roughly one-half of the 35,696,000 marriages ended in divorce. The median duration of the 17,543,000 marriages that ended was between six and one-half and just over seven years. During that time, over 17 million children were born into those homes. Most of their parents remarried, some two to three times, adding a growing number of complex relationships to the child’s world. And a whole generation learned to adjust to adult schedules as they shuttled from home to home, home to day-care, daycare to school, school to after-school activities—sports, lessons, homework, church activities—and home

again. Today, those children range in age from eight to twenty-eight. The oldest are starting new families of their own and have lots of questions. There are many ways to describe healthy families. We’ll look at three in this article.

Healthy homes maintain perspective.

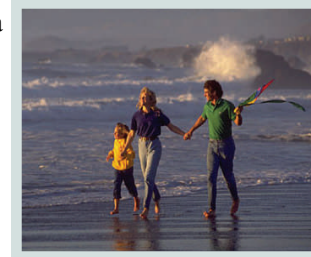
Perspective is a way of seeing how the individual parts of something relate to the whole. Parents

who develop perspective are able to look down the road twenty years or so and dream about the character of the young adults that will leave their home for adult adventures of their own. Much like people starting a new puzzle, they look for the edges that frame the whole.

The rest of the puzzle may be extremely challenging and frustrating; others fit together with ease but with time and observation and attention, the pieces will fit together to form a whole. Relationships within a healthy home are living, breathing puzzle pieces shaped by the framework of what the family values most.

Kim, a single mother of two, describes her perspective: “I believe my children are gifts from God, created in His image, with unique gifts and abilities. I believe they were created to enjoy relationship with God and others and have a need to contribute something to their world. Having that perspective helps me to major more on the important stuff—I want to raise

(Continued on page 3)

**MARK YOUR CALENDARS**

The SPM 3rd Annual Benefit Dessert is coming up! This year’s dessert will be in The Lookout Room at the Boise State University Student Union Building and will feature tasty desserts, special music, a silent auction, and our quilt raffle drawing. If you have not yet seen our quilt or purchased a raffle ticket this year, you may view the quilt on our Web site at



www.safepaceministries.com, and you can purchase tickets through the SPM office. This year’s dessert will be on Friday, February 7th. The Silent Auction will begin at 7:00 p.m. with dessert at 7:30. Admission is free but tickets are required and are available at the office. We hope to see you there!

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FROM THE DIRECTOR'S DESK

HAPPY NEW YEAR!

2002 was a

challenging and rewarding year here at Safe Place Ministries. In a year when many nonprofits struggled through the sluggish economy, we held our own. (Thank you, Jesus!) With budget increases of over 40% to cover new services, we often wondered where the funds would come from but each and every month we paid the bills.

Our newest addition, *The Transitional Program*, is thriving. Four women and nine children are partnering with SPM

to start a new life. We supply help with housing, vocational counseling, scholarships, case management, life skills classes, support, counseling, and emergency financial aid. They supply the honesty, strength, faith, courage, and hard work needed to truly heal and grow.

Our staff is learning and growing as we stretch ourselves to maintain existing services, develop our transitional program, and respond to more referrals (an 80% increase over the last six months from one year ago), more clients (77 since July 1st), and more complex situations. We are exploring a couple of

options to address our need to be able to get more work done—a special fund raiser will enable us to get a laptop computer for each staff member, and we are thinking through the option of a part-time receptionist/office assistant.

Each day we walk on holy ground as clients share their needs, their pain, their fears, and their lives with us. We are privileged and thankful to be involved in such meaningful work. Thank you for all your encouragement and support this past year! *Nancy*

DAYS IN THE LIFE OF A SINGLE PARENT

Compassion, to be effective, must meet the real needs of those we seek to serve. To meet those needs, we must understand the ongoing challenges and changes that co-parenting with an abusive ex-spouse entail. This is just a sampling of what many single parents face on a regular basis, in addition to their everyday responsibilities. (We use the word *she* because most victims of domestic violence are women, but men are also victims of domestic violence perpetrated by women.)

- Her household income may drop by more than 50% while expenses increase to cover childcare, legal fees, home evaluations, and mediation classes which are ordered by the court to work on parenting issues.
- Schedules must be arranged to meet court-appointed visitation schedules.
- She may have to return to work or enter the job market for the first time—giving up her dream of being a full-time mom.
- She must now work a full-time job, oftentimes until 5:00 p.m., then pick up the children, fix dinner, supervise homework, give baths, read stories, do prayers, and then fall into bed only to start all over again at 5:00 a.m. Then on Saturday her days are filled with laundry, shopping, cleaning, appointments, car repair, etc.

- Child support payments don't arrive or are delayed by weeks or months.
- She takes the children to the doctor only to discover that her ex-husband has changed jobs once again and the children no longer have health insurance.
- She may be asked to tell her story again and again as she applies for food stamps, medical insurance, housing . . .
- Her ex-spouse takes her to court repeatedly as he uses the legal system to harass and control her.
- He has enough money to pay his attorney, but not enough to support his children.
- She can no longer afford her house and must find a new place to live and help her children adjust to new schools, new teachers, and new friends.
- Her children's father promises to take them on an eagerly awaited outing, then calls and cancels minutes before they are to leave and she must deal with her children's hurt, disappointment, and anger—again.
- Her car begins to make ominous noises and the washing machine quits making any noise at all.
- Her children spend nights with



their father during the week. When he drops them off at school without coats, permission slips, or lunch money, the principal calls her instead of him.

- Her child wakes up with a fever. He can't go to daycare. She can't go to work. Her employer tells her she can't miss any more days.
- Her children don't want to go to their father's home but she cannot give them a choice because he will report her to the court.
- The abusive ex-spouse gains the support and sympathy of the church and she often loses her church home.

- Former friends take sides and distance themselves from her.

Compassionate friends cannot make any of these realities go away, but simple acts of kindness can help

single parents face these challenges. A meal, a few hours of babysitting, accompanying her to court hearings, offering to run errands, doing her grocery shopping, volunteering after-school care, and transporting children to lessons and activities are gifts that let her know you care.

A Healthy Family... (Continued from page 1) them with love and respect and help them become trustworthy, capable adults. That helps me make daily choices about the things we choose to do."

A second mark of a healthy home is respect. Individuals in healthy homes respect each other. Webster's New World Dictionary's (1980) definition for respect is "to show honor or esteem for...to show consideration for...avoid intruding upon or interfering with...courteous regard for the feelings of others." Healthy families provide an environment in which family members can safely express their thoughts and emotions; where bodies are safe and privacy is protected. Respect lets family members know that they are valued and loved. Children learn the language of respect that they see modeled by the bigger people in their lives. They observe, listen, and learn how people treat each other long before they can string words into sentences or begin to mirror the attitudes, words, and actions of the most important people they know. Parents demonstrate respect when they have realistic expectations for their children's ability, size, age, attention span, and developmental stages. Confidence grows as parents teach new skills and patiently respect their child's need to play, practice, fail, and try again before they master new ways of doing things. Parents also demonstrate respect when they arrange their lives to meet their child's need for rest and good food and free time to explore, think deep thoughts, dream, and create.

Words, and how they are used, may be the best indicators of how much family members value and respect each other. Healthy families use words to express affection, to encourage, teach, guide—to correct and express

appreciation more often than less healthy families. Words in the latter are often used to belittle, scold, blame, or shame.

Sue doesn't remember ever hearing respectful words in her family. "I never heard my parents say, 'You're doing a good job with that,' or 'I noticed the kind

way you helped your sister with her math.'" She does remember a lot of put downs, "You'll never be able to do that," and comparisons, "Why can't you be more like your sister." "My parents spent a lot of time pointing out what was wrong with me. At some point, I just quit listening and spent as much time as I could at my friend's house. Her family talked about lots of interesting things and really listened to each other."

John Gottman, a researcher at the University of Washington and author of *Why Marriages Fail, Why They Succeed*, believes that the first sign of a deteriorating marriage is when partners move from being able to express complaints (*I* statements) to criticism (*you* statements), contempt, defensiveness, and stonewalling. It's interesting to note that almost all domestic violence begins with this language of disrespect as well.

Respect can be learned. Attitudes can change because respect grows out of a willingness to begin to view people as people of dignity and worth.

A third characteristic of healthy homes is authenticity. Authentic homes are about "becoming what you should be and staying close enough to the children for it to rub off." (Anne Ortlund, *Disciplines of the Home*) Authentic people are real, genuine, and honest. They don't pretend to be perfect or more than they are. They readily admit

they are people in process. They make mistakes. They fail. They appropriate God's grace for themselves and try to extend it to others.

Authentic people don't have to know all the answers or be able to do everything. They know that everything we know we had to learn. And that failure is a good teacher. Parents who say, "Here let me show you how to do that," instead of "Do as I say, not as I do," model authenticity.

"In God's playful wisdom not only are we raising children, our children are raising us."

*David Robinson,
Presbyterian Pastor*

Parents who notice and encourage their children's unique gifts and aptitudes help them find ways to contribute to their world that are consistent with their talents.

Authentic people know that when they choose to sin and relationships are broken, there is a way to restore them. Wrongs can be

confessed, apologies can be made. Forgiveness can be extended and accepted.

In authentic relationships, there aren't discrepancies between life at home and life in public. Children are not expected to keep secrets or lie to protect the family's image or reputation. Parents model the attitudes and behaviors they want their children to learn. There's not one set of rules for parents and another for kids. Parents are more concerned about character than image and are willing to face problems honestly and find ways to problem solve.

Go back for a moment to the original question: Can two people from unhealthy homes craft a healthier home in which to raise their families? Armed with a willingness to think about the kind of adults they wish to raise, a large dose of respect for each other and their children, and a willingness to live authentic lives they can begin to find the help, hope, and courage they need to change old family patterns and enjoy healthier relationships.

"Man is born broken. He lives by mending. The grace of God is the glue."
Eugene O'Neil