

Theory of Intergenerational Transmission of Child Abuse & Neglect

“Professionals’ fascination with and emphasis on intergenerational transmission as a direct cause of most child maltreatment is misdirected. We need to focus on the entire spectrum of childhood experiences as determinants of parenting approaches rather than focus on certain events as critical markers that lead to a predictable outcome.” Starr, R.H. V.B. Van Hasselt, A.S. Bellack, R.L. Morrison, & M. Hersen, 1988 Handbook of Family Violence 119-155

“Contrary to the popular notion of a ‘generational cycle of abuse’, the great majority of survivors neither abuse nor neglect their children.” J Kaufman and E. Zeigler, “Do Abused Children Become Abusive Parents?” American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 1987

“Many survivors are terribly afraid that their children will suffer a fate similar to their own, and go to great lengths to prevent this from happening. For the sake of their children, survivors are often able to mobilize caring and protective capacities that they were never able to extend to themselves.” Judith Lewis Herman, M.D.. Trauma and Recovery, Basic Books, 1992

“Research findings lead to the conclusion that statements concerning the high probability of the transmission of child maltreatment across generations are unwarranted. It appears likely that the rate of transmission for any of the three forms of maltreatment is even less than the 30% reported by Zeigler and Kaufman (1987)” Raymond H. Starr, Jr. PhD. and David A. Wolfe, PhD. The Effects of Child Abuse & Neglect, Issues and Research, The Guilford Press, 1991

“It is surprising, in fact, that survivors do not more often become perpetrators of abuse. . . While suicide attempts and self-mutilation are strongly correlated with childhood abuse, the link between childhood abuse and adult antisocial behavior is relatively weak. J.L. Herman, “*Childhood Trauma*”, 1992

“Results of analyses of the validity of the intergenerational hypothesis that have used control or contrast groups suggest that the correspondence between being maltreated as a child and becoming a maltreating adult is far from the one-to-one relationship that has been proposed by some authors.” - Starr, Wolfe, et al, 1991

In extensive studies, Dartmouth Medical School psychologist J.Kirk Felsman and psychiatrist George Valliant found “evidence that things that go right in our lives do predict future successes and the events that go wrong in our lives do not forever damn us.” “Resilient Children As Adults, A Forty Year Study”; Guilford Press

Gavin De Becker- Quotes from The Gift of Fear

Why do some people grow up with violence and not be violent or abusive?

“The best research makes clear that if a child has some effective human contact at particularly significant periods, some recognition of his or her worth or value, some witness to his or her experience - this can make an extraordinary difference. The kindness of a coach, a teacher, a parent, a police officer, a neighbor, the parent of a friend is never wasted. These moments are likely to pass with neither the child nor the adult fully knowing the significance of the contribution. No ceremony attaches to the moment that a child sees his own worth reflected in the eyes of an encouraging adult. And though nothing apparent marks the occasion, inside that child a new view of self might take hold. He is not just a person deserving of neglect or violence; not just a person who is a burden to the sad adults in his life; not just a child who fails to solve his family’s problems, who fails to rescue them from pain or poverty or addiction, madness or unhappiness. No, this child might be someone else - someone whose appearance before this **one** adult revealed specialness or lovability or value. This value might be shown through appreciation of a child’s artistic talents, physical ability, humor, courage, patience, curiosity, scholarly skills, creativity, resourcefulness, energy or any of the many attributes children bring us in such abundance. Effective human contact in childhood is the key and it doesn’t take much.”

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