

Wounds of Childhood

Why do abusers act cruelly and violently to those they love? Many psychologists feel the abusive person has been wounded as a child, suffering some type of trauma which has arrested their emotional development at the point of trauma.

In his book, "Angry Men and the Women Who Love Them," Paul Hegstrom writes, "There are four broad categories of trauma that most commonly arrest the development of the child: rejection, sexual abuse (incest or molestation), emotional abuse, and physical abuse. Any one of these or a cluster of them can freeze the development of a child and cause him or her to shut down emotionally. The pain is simply too great for one so young to handle. The child does not have the ability to see the reality of the situation that causes the trauma. Instead, he or she assumes responsibility for the deviant behavior of the adult and thinks, 'What did I do to cause him (or her) to do that to me?'"

According to Hegstrom, a child learns how to cope with abuse, but those coping skills end up driving his/her behavior in adult life. When inner character does not develop normally in a child, the adult develops a pseudopersonality (like Jekyll/Hyde) to protect himself from rejection and further hurt, as well as give him the power to control other people.

Jan Silvius talks about the profile of a fool in her book, "Foolproofing Your Life" by describing the person as living in a "teflon bubble" in which no one is allowed inside in an attempt to prevent further hurt and to keep others from knowing the real person. The abuser comes out of his bubble periodically to reach out and control others or for a brief period of "nice" behavior in the "honeymoon" stage of the cycle of abuse.

Anger

Anger is one of the hallmark characteristics of an abuser. He lacks the ability to manage anger, much like a child who has not learned how to

control his temper. A child who is not properly guided by his parents quickly learns he can use a temper tantrum to get what he wants, when he wants it. If the child grows up using anger to manipulate people, very often he becomes verbally and physically abusive in order to stay in control.

"A fool always loses his temper, but a wise man holds it back." (Proverbs 29:11 NASB)

Control

When someone has been traumatized or abused as a child, they lack control to change their circumstances, and often do not have options to escape from the abuse. As they begin to develop their "teflon bubble," they vow never to let anyone ever control them again or make them feel shamed or unworthy. In order to take back their self-esteem which was wounded or lost, they need to maintain control at all costs.

Arrogance

When a child lacks security, he turns to himself for his own security. He begins to develop his own truth, and learns to cope through denial. He is always right and trusts in his own heart.

"He who trusts in his own heart is a fool, but he who walks wisely will be delivered." (Proverbs 28:26 NASB)

"The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man listens to counsel." (Proverbs 12:15 NASB)

Isolation

Because the abuser needs to protect himself from rejection, he works hard at keeping other people off-guard and at a distance. If someone gets too close, he lashes out at them to drive them away because he doesn't want them to find out who he really is. He may be like the wizard in "The Wizard of Oz" who used smokescreens to make people think he was mighty and powerful when in fact he was weak and small.

The abuser may also be hiding a sinister and deviate lifestyle behind the guise of respectability and religion. He will keep that side of him hidden at any cost! If

he is cornered, he will attack like a vicious, wild animal in order to protect his true identity and maintain his self-image.

"He who walks with wise men will be wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm." (Proverbs 13:20 NASB)

These four characteristics of an abuser (anger, control, arrogance, and isolation) are just a few of the destructive patterns carried over from childhood which can determine the course of a person's life. Paul Hegstrom writes, "In our dysfunction we don't leave one stage and graduate to the next. Sadly, we drag all our baggage with us, collecting more along the way. We go through life getting less than we deserve because we desperately want change, but have no hope for it. With the passage of time, we feel more unworthy, insecure, and frustrated. We have little ability to cope, and we live in a mode of exhaustion and depression. We're filled with shame as we model this behavior to our children. This cycle repeats itself in our children and grandchildren. Eventually, it becomes our norm for living."

But there is hope! According to Hegstrom, understanding where a person got stuck and how their lives have responded due to the arrest in their development is the key to moving toward the maturing process and becoming the person God intended them to be.

It is possible to trade self-destructive relationships that are built around power and control for healthy relationships built around respect and freedom. The first step is acknowledging there is a problem, followed by determination and courage to identify wounded areas that need maturity and growth.

If a person is truly ready to be honest with themselves and with God, and willing to work hard through the long process of healing and recovery, he will find his way back to wholeness and freedom through the strength and power of God, the support of fellow believers, and the expertise and guidance of professionals.