

## Dysfunctional Families: How to Protect Your Children From the Dysfunction

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### Dysfunctional Families: How to Protect Your Children From the Dysfunction *by Karla Downing*



#### ***Protective Shield***

Children are affected by the dysfunctional dynamics in your dysfunctional marriage, but there are things you can do to protect them from the dysfunction. You want good things for your children. [Matthew 7:9](#) says, "*Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake?*" Purpose to do the following things to protect them:

**Don't use your child as a go-between to your spouse; instead, keep your child out of your relationship with your spouse.** With the relationship problems, come communication problems. Whether your spouse is angry, sarcastic, withdrawn, punitive, passive, abusive, indirect, or rude, you probably don't like communicating with him/her. The way many dysfunctional parents solve this is to use the child to communicate for them. They send the child to bring messages to the other spouse. The problem with this is that the dysfunctional communication continues, it is just directed at the child and makes the child the recipient of all the negative toxicity and emotions. Don't use your child as a mediator or go-between. Take the responsibility to communicate with your spouse without bringing your child into it.

**Don't dump your toxic emotions on your child; instead, take care of your own toxic emotions.** The tendency of all human beings is to displace their negative emotions onto someone else. In dysfunctional families, an unhappy spouse is often an unhappy parent. If your spouse is angry with you, you will likely be angry with your children. If your spouse puts you in a bad mood, you will show your children your bad mood and direct it at them. This isn't fair to your children who assume that they did something wrong to make you feel the way you do.

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Find a way to deal with your toxic emotions, so you can have a relationship with your children that reflects how you really feel about them-and it isn't the way you feel about your spouse.

**Don't ignore their physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, and relational needs; instead, prioritize their needs even if your spouse doesn't.** It isn't uncommon for dysfunctional parents to be so consumed with their own marital problems that they ignore the needs of their children in extreme or subtle ways. Your children need you to be a good parent and they need all their needs met. You need to purpose to pay attention to your children by forcing yourself to take your mind off the marital problems. Look at your child and assess what the needs are and then figure out how to meet them, whether your spouse does or not. And don't be afraid to tell them about God and pray with them. It doesn't make you a hypocrite to show them a relationship with God just because your marriage isn't good and you aren't perfect.

**Don't ignore verbal, emotional, and spiritual abuse; instead, protect them from abuse.** If your spouse is abusing you, then he/she is probably abusing the children in the same way. It can be difficult to manage this dilemma, because protecting them may mean leaving the relationship and that brings additional problems. It certainly means that you need to get educated about the abuse and find a way to set boundaries. It also means you may not be able to leave your children alone with your spouse. One of the problems with an abusive spouse is that in a divorce, you have to prove the abuse to keep the parent from getting his/her share of custody. This isn't an easy dilemma and you will probably need professional help to maneuver it.

Even if you can't change everything in your dysfunctional family, you can change the way you protect your children in the midst of the dysfunction.

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