

How Abuse May Be Affecting Your Marriage in Ways You Didn't Realize

In the age of the comic book comeback, super heroes surround us. We have the *X-Men*, *Spiderman* and of course the leader of the pack, *Superman*. I love Superman; he can fly, he's strong, has a real job and struggles with his female relationships. Although he has laser vision and he can repel bullets and save the world in every movie, he also has a weakness.

His weakness is kryptonite, a stone from his planet of origin. Just being in the presence of kryptonite takes the mighty man of steel to his knees. It's not just Superman, though; most of our heroes and heroines have a weak spot. I think it makes our heroes more relatable to us. Who doesn't love when Superman is fumbling through a conversation with Lois Lane?

Like our heroes, even the best marriage can have hidden kryptonite that can cause the marriage to weaken. Some of these weaknesses are created way before we marry.

In the movie *Ice Age*, there is a prehistoric squirrel that provides comic relief. He is constantly trying to obtain or keep his precious prehistoric acorn. He tends to thump his prehistoric acorn into the ground. His pounding the acorn creates these little cracks. Then the crack travels quickly over great landmasses and creates some sort of natural disaster.

We also sometimes receive cracks early in our life that, if not addressed, can travel in our life throughout the years, creating significant pain in the future.

Sadly, past abuse is one area that, if not addressed, can develop cracks within a marriage.

Chet and Maria are a couple who were caught off-guard by a crack in their marriage. Chet was in his late 30s, handsome and pretty successful in his corporate career. Chet was from Kansas and was born on a farm. He remembers working on the farm before he even started first grade. Dad was a workaholic, working from 5:00 a.m. until he thought he was done, usually somewhere between 7:00 p.m. and 8:00 p.m.

Chet really was an object to Dad, who was constantly critical. Actually, Chet couldn't remember one kind word of approval from dad. Dad was also verbally abusive towards everyone, whether family or not. Dad wasn't afraid to hit his children or wife for that matter. Chet actually had a sincere heart to please others, especially Dad. Chet went to college and started working in the big city two states away. He met Maria at church and they fell in love.

Everything looked normal, but the crack of past physical and emotional abuse began to take its toll. The wounds from Chet's dad were not healed. Chet couldn't ever receive praise from Maria, so he felt unappreciated. If he had feelings, he wouldn't talk about them; he would just bury himself in his work. Chet's inability to be intimate seemed to be getting worse.

Chet was a survivor of abuse. In his case, Dad emotionally neglected him. He was physically abused as well, so conflict wasn't Chet's strong suit. Maria also had some abuses that she had never told Chet about. As a teenager growing up in the city, she was raped by an older man. She kept this a deep, dark secret and inside, blamed herself. She was impacted, and this crack grew over the years in her life, having several symptoms of a sexual abuse survivor.

People get abused in many ways. For some, it's physical and emotional abuse or neglect. There are many who also have suffered sexual abuse or rape as a child, adolescent or as an adult. Abuse impacts every person differently. For some, it

catapults them to work through the wounds. For others, they build walls or habits to protect themselves. Some of these walls or habits are more destructive than others. Regardless of the how one reacts, some of these reactions can impact a marriage.

I know personally that having past wounds, I had work to do to make sure that Lisa was not going to have to deal with the impact of the cracks created in my past. Abuse and neglect can be different journeys. Usually it takes a few steps to heal from the wounds of neglect or abuse. First, it takes truly acknowledging and owning that the abuse really did occur. Second, place responsibility on the person who actually did the neglect. Third, some anger work is usually very helpful. Fourth, moving into forgiveness is another step toward healing from abuse or neglect. Last, there may also be legitimate grief you may need to experience due to the losses that are connected to the specific abuse.

Now as a counselor for as many years, I know abuse and neglect impacts every soul differently. For some, just walking through the process we just outlined can bring about a great amount of relief. For others, getting professional counseling may be necessary to walk out of the wounds that many have been incurred along your particular journey of life.

Regardless of the wounds you may have experienced as a child, adolescent or adult you can heal from them. You and your spouse are worthy of a healthier and happier person. I know personally and professionally that as one spouse actively heals it makes the marriage easier and so much more fulfilling for both people in the marriage.

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