

How Not to Give in to Satan's Lie of Parenting Shame

I have journeyed down the road of painful parenting with a child who has struggled with many troubles: addiction, self-harm, mental health issues, sexual trauma and suicide attempts. And much of the time, I traveled alone. Embarrassment and shame led to isolation. Today, I know the choice to withdraw is never good, but that's what I did.

I couldn't bear for anyone to know the truth. *What would they think of me? Of my parenting? What would they think of my daughter? I wanted to protect myself and her. If only I could run away and hide; keep it all a secret. Shhhhhh! Don't let the truth come out. Don't tell anyone! Don't let your guard down! Pretend you're fine.*

But the bitter truth was that I was dying inside.

"Secrets keep us sick." I first heard this slogan in a family recovery meeting. When we give in to the lie of shame, we retreat, stay sick and remain alone.

What Can We Do?

It took the gift of desperation before I would open up and tell anyone what was going on. I had to be thoroughly convinced I couldn't do this on my own, that I needed others who understood. Without a strong community around me, I would have continued in isolation. With help, I learned to face the people in my world with the ugly truth.

A Huge Risk

The choice to be honest was a huge risk. I felt vulnerable and unprotected, like one of those bad dreams where you find yourself naked in public, unable to hide or take cover. A long list of what-ifs tormented my thoughts.

- *What if I were judged or reprimanded for my parental errors?*
- *What if my friends rejected me or thought badly of me?*
- *What if my reputation were ruined? How would I handle that?*
- *What if I couldn't answer hurtful questions like, "What do you think you did wrong?" "Why didn't you do this, or that?"* Could I hold back the tears? I didn't know.

As time rolled on, my husband and I talked about our daughter all the time; we were consumed. I married a wonderful listener and comforter, but after a while, this put a strain on our relationship. Some days, we were so depleted we didn't have much to offer each other. In time, we came to the conclusion that we had to take the risk and reach out to others for support.

With God's help, we'd have to learn to cope with our embarrassment.

Shame would have to be conquered.

When You've Been Wounded

When we finally began to open up and be real, we were super-careful who we shared with. Fortunately, we received understanding, comfort and compassion—from most people. But I know many of you have not been so fortunate. You've been deeply wounded, sometimes by family. Your emotions may still be raw.

I'm sorry if that's you. Please forgive them. It's not their fault. They're not able to understand. They can't comprehend what you've been through or how their words affect you. Try again, but with someone else. I promise you, there are safe people you can be honest with; people who care, will accept you and support you. People who won't shame you or make you feel worse.

Honesty is worth the risk.

Ready or Not

A key factor that helped us was when our daughter's story became public. Shared worldwide on the internet, her story became the fuel that started a nonprofit: To Write Love on Her Arms, . Its mission is: "presenting hope and finding help for people struggling with depression, addiction, self-injury and suicide. TWLOHA exists to encourage, inform, inspire and also to invest directly into treatment and recovery."

[Click here to read the story.](#)

In our situation, we had no choice. Nothing was secret anymore. We would not have chosen this, but we realized the publicity freed us to be more open, ready or not!

What You Can Do

I never knew how good that freedom would be. I quickly realized how isolation had only increased my pain, because shame allowed the hurt to fester in my soul.

Dear friend, our pain needs to be released, drained out. Once that happens, inner healing can begin.

I encourage you, find a few safe people to be real with. Find a support group and go. Talk to a counselor or a spiritual adviser. Ask God to help you be brave. Tell the truth about what's going on with your child. Be authentic. Bring your secrets out of the closet into the light. You might be surprised to discover how many other parents are suffering in silence, too. Just like you.

You Are Not Alone!

Take the risk to be honest and real and authentic. You will inspire others to do the same. It's contagious!

I recommend this book by Carol Kent, a mom whose unthinkable

tragedy with her son also became public, *When I Lay My Isaac Down* .

Try my book too. *You Are Not Alone: Hope for Hurting Parents of Troubled Kids*.

Go to our website to find a list of our support groups. We can also help you or your church start one with our materials. Under the “websites for parents” tab we list other support groups like Al-Anon, Nar-Anon, Hurting Moms Mending Hearts and Celebrate Recovery.

How have shame and embarrassment influenced you? What helped (or would help) you take the risk to be honest?

Dena Yohe is the author of *You Are Not Alone: Hope for Hurting Parents of Troubled Kids* (2017). Co-founder of *Hope for Hurting Parents*, she is a blogger, former pastor's wife and CRU affiliate staff. She and her husband, Tom, have been guests on “Family Talk With Dr. James Dobson,” “Family Life” with Dennis Rainey” and “Focus on the Family” with Jim Daly. A proud mom of three adult children, she loves being Mimi to her grandchildren. Find out more at .

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