

Dinah Monahan is the mother of five children and 26 grandchildren. Her life has been centered on children and single mothers for over forty years. According to Dinah, this series, Parenting Without Shame, is the single most important concept mothers should know when parenting their children. It is also the hardest to recognize.

Wanting the Best for our Children

Before you have children, most of us have said, “*My child will never do that!*” as we look with judgement on some harried mom with an out of control child. The times when our children are simply being children can be difficult, but not impossible to surpass. While working through these times, it’s important to realize the importance of shaping your child *without* breaking their spirit. It’s about training a child’s heart and helping him to develop character.

It’s about your child’s emotional needs being met by you, not the other way around.

Perfectly Impossible

Many mothers who are raised with abuse, chaos, criticism or neglect will tell you that they are going to raise their children differently. That statement was unspoken but underlying. They are going to raise their children *perfectly*. What they’ve failed to realize is that it takes more than love to raise up a child. Love is not enough. Love must be acted upon to meet a child’s physical and emotional needs. If you want to raise your child up to be honest, kind, respectful, industrious, responsible, happy, or any other positive description, you must make it happen. You, as a parent, are constantly teaching your child important life lessons. Your words and, more importantly, your actions are their teachers. Their home is their school.

Learning Their Value

Like learning a language, children learn the most important thing of all - *their value as a person*. They learn this from their parent’s behavior, words, eye contact, and body language. It’s not about saying “I love you” often. It is about meeting a child’s emotional needs.

When there is neglect or abuse of a child, or, when their emotional needs are not met, it lays down a message in their hearts. The message says they are stupid, never good enough, ugly, bad, flawed, worthless. They feel ashamed for who they are, not the things they do.

How Children See the World

Childhood messages don’t go away when you grow up. They become your identity. You don’t question them. You don’t even know the lies exist.

Children think adults are always right. This may seem hard to believe sometimes, but it’s true. Adults establish truth for children – even when that “truth” is a lie. And so, to a child, if an adult could consistently do or say painful things to them, it has to be that they are bad – not the adult. No matter how hard the child tries to act good, she feels bad. ***This is shame.***

What Shaming Looks Like

Shame happens quietly. It doesn't leave bruises or scrapes and there are no obvious signs that mark its presence. Shame is always the result of abuse. Whether it is physical, verbal, emotional or sexual. Shame affects a child's behavior by convincing them to feel bad about themselves for having normal childhood needs or wants. It is anchored in a child's heart when their emotional needs go unmet and their real needs as a child are a bother to a parent. Shame causes a child to shrink away from their potential, rather than be inspired by it.

Scenario	Shaming Reaction by Parent	Message to Child	Shame-free Reaction by Parent	Message to Child
A toddler is sitting at the table talking excitedly when she accidentally knocks over her milk.	"Look what you did! What is wrong with you? You are clumsy, stupid girl. You are a bad girl! I told you not to spill your milk."	I am clumsy, bad and stupid. There is something wrong with me that is not wrong with other kids.	"Uh oh. Look what you did. Let's get some paper towel and wipe it up."	Spilled milk happens, and paper towel cleans up spilled milk.
Mom and her little girl are out shopping. Mom is preoccupied and she is in a hurry to get home. Her little girl hurries on her short little legs to keep up with her mother but she can't. Like all little girls, she is distracted by pretty things in the store windows and stops to look.	"Will you hurry up?! Why can't you keep up with me! What's wrong with you? Stop being naughty and stay up with me. You are impossible!"	There is something wrong with me because I can't keep up with mom. I am bad.	"Sweetie, we need to hurry. Your legs are shorter than mine, so I'll slow down a bit and you speed up. And don't stop to look at things now, we don't want to be late."	To keep up with mom I have to walk faster and not look at store windows. Mom cares about me and will slow down so I can keep up.
Dad is laying on the sofa watching TV. He tells his six-year-old daughter to get him the remote. She can't find it where he is pointing. He points over and over and she looks harder but can't find it.	"What the *@#! is wrong with you? It's right in front of you. Quit being such an idiot! It's right in front of you. You are such a worthless little girl!"	I am bad. I am an idiot. I am worthless. I must be worse than every other six-year-old child!	"It's right there. Can't you see it? It's right there. OK I'll come and show you."	Dad will help me if I can't do something.
Mom comes home from work after a very difficult day. She is tired and still faces making dinner. Her twelve-year-old daughter has her project strewn all over the kitchen table. Paper, scissors, and paint are spread everywhere. She proudly tries to show it to her mom.	"Look at your mess! You are such a slob. You don't even care that I work hard all day. You just make messes and leave them everywhere. You don't give a *@#! about anyone but yourself. Clean up that mess!"	I am a selfish slob who doesn't care about others and my creations are worthless.	"That is really great work. Now clean up so we can set the table for dinner."	My creations are good. I need to clean up after myself.