

Our Culture Is Sick



By *Jamie Wells, M.D.* — November 16, 2018



Credit: Pixabay [1]

Lately, whether it be while watching the news on television, scrolling through social media or engaging in conversations no matter what side of the political spectrum, I am constantly thrust back into my life as a practicing pediatrician navigating the breakdown of families, in particular those enduring the sad realities of vitriolic divorce with children. The interparental animosity so readily spewed, routinely in front of the child, was often handily excused by impenetrable denial couched in virtue. For someone not ready to move out of the specter of hate and anger, no amount of reality testing is going to tip the scale toward a more productive, beneficial for all direction. People are where they are and until the light bulb goes off that a mindset of loving a child more than you hate your ex-spouse will pay the greatest dividends and is most worthwhile, only collateral and cumulative damage ensue - with compounding interest.

The short- and long-term adverse impact of this stance hurts the child the most, challenging them further in adulthood. But, when the bus is turned around with therapeutic and positive intervention early on, the future can absolutely be made very bright. Civility, kindness, respect or even the most basic but constant neutral state of non-venom and lack of gratuitous insults can facilitate progress. The active vitriol will undermine advancement at every turn.

Being reactive simply exacerbates challenging times. It creates no winners (see [here](#) [2]). It leaves no one better off, least of all those we claim we wish to protect.

This pattern of behavior mimics much of the rampant mudslinging currently evaporating our social norms of decency and fairness. With non-stop attacks on people and the accompanying perverse justifications and rationalization, clamors of “we need to protect children” and so forth fall demonstrably short. Why? Because the kicker with children is, they mimic what they see. If adults are stoking fear and name-calling - no matter the political side, then children will be riddled with

anxiety and consider this manner of communication acceptable. If the adults around them alternatively channel their upset in constructive outlets, then children will learn they can be impassioned about doing better and fighting real or perceived injustice in ways that can impact genuine change.

Yes, there are times to yell and feel a wide range of emotion. Anger is a part of the deal. Adding the mockery and acrid remarks is just extra, unnecessary animus. And that is contagious. Whether you love the current administration or believe it poses an existential threat, you can decide to contribute to more good than less.

This choice is what you can control. You will never be able to control the actions of others and lamenting them when you think they are wrong or ill-conceived doesn't give you a free pass to disregard all humanity. Parents have to come to this acceptance when they discover what goes on in the other parent's house is now outside of their scope. This is often a rude awakening and the adjustment can be quite protracted.

"Johnny made me do it" was not an acceptable argument in childhood, so why would it be now? Everything is not the fault of who is president. When every single event or snippet is framed as a trauma, then nothing is a trauma. When we polarize everything into "anti" and "pro," evil and good we get further and further apart.

If we are really worried about the children as is universally proclaimed, then we would consider how our individual behavior impacts their sense of security, their well-being and sets them up to cope with our ever changing, often taxing world. Panicking them is a suboptimal mode of teaching resilience.

Until this concept is thoroughly understood, our culture will remain sick and the disease will spread. To reflexively respond to a negative action or word from another person with a negative word or action will bring us nowhere closer to a cure.

We can all do better. Just because Johnny did it is not an excuse.

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[1] <https://pixabay.com/en/fork-in-the-road-fork-road-decision-3674578/>

[2] <https://www.acsh.org/news/2018/02/19/divorce-nobody-wins-when-hatred-ex-trumps-love-child-12589>