

PARENTAL AFFECTION AND CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT.

There is a relationship between parental affection and character development in children. This is why parents cannot separate the various forms of love from the moral construction of their children. Christ's love is moral in its outworking, and the love we show to our children should be the same. Parents should love their children with a great sense of moral purposefulness. Many contemporary clinicians reject this relationship. They focus more on self-esteem rather than esteeming others higher. They ridicule moral lessons but applaud various forms of overindulgence. The moral parent is not only good to the child but tenderly devoted to him. He or she summons the right word or gesture from the child at the right moment. The moral parent helps a child accept "no," understand the boundaries of "yes," and distinguish between the two. Ultimately, parental morality defines, directs, and controls the love we show to our children - it creates the framework from which our children will learn to love others.

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Other parents less sure of themselves tend to over-compensate just about everything, and in so doing, they functionally equate over-indulgence with love. The children become victims of bloated parental "love" leading to early signs of narcissism. The word "narcissism" ties parental affection with parental morality. The love of narcissism (love of self) wars against the love of others. It is a value antithetical to the expression of Christ's ethic contained in Mark 12:31, "...love your neighbour."

Remember Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris and Columbine. These were not abused offspring of harsh, uncaring parents coming from a cold, indifferent or impoverished community. But they were raised with the abundance of the wrong kind of love, the kind of love that feeds narcissistic tendencies. A love without moral boundaries or purposefulness.

A narcissist is a person who never progressed beyond the self-love of infancy, and one who learned superficial social skills.* Narcissists to this extreme are made, not born. They are not taught how or why to love others or see others as separate but possessing equal value. To the narcissists other people have no intrinsic worth - their value is purely instrumental. They are useful when they satisfy his desires and enhance his sense of self.

To the narcissist only self matters, and because his sense of self-importance is so grossly inflated, his feelings are easily hurt. When they do get hurt, when others thwart him or fail to give him the excessive, un-earned respect he demands, he reacts with rage and seeks revenge. This is true with two-year-olds and temper tantrums and seventeen-year-olds with guns and bombs. For the narcissist, the more dramatic the outburst the better.



So we say again, Growing Families International's teaching does not separate parental affection and character training. Christians simply do not have the freedom to do that. True parental love is morally focused, beautiful and attentive to a child's every need. It works to shape the child's heart rather than letting the heart shape the child.

* The description and character tendencies of a narcissist described in the following two paragraphs were adapted and quoted from an article by Dr. Barbara Lerner, The Killer Narcissists, National Review on Line (May 17, 1999). Dr. Lerner's article was frequently cited and quoted in GFI lectures with due acknowledgement given her and the National Review on Line. However, missing in this article was the appropriate footnote acknowledging Dr. Lerner's comments. This author offers a sincere apology to Dr. Lerner for that oversight.

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