

Flying Free Podcast with Natalie Hoffman, Episode 319 - Help! My Kids Are Acting Like Their Dad!

NATALIE: [00:00:00] Welcome to episode 319 of the Flying Free Podcast. Every day I interact with Christian women in my private kaleidoscope community.

I call it the kaleidoscope because that is the word for a flock of butterflies. And our private kaleidoscope is populated with hundreds of them. Christian women who are either in a destructive relationship, or maybe they're separated, or going through a divorce, or maybe they're already divorced. But basically it's women who have had to navigate a life dealing with emotion, an emotional abuser, or maybe an abusive family of origin, or a spiritually abusive religious community.

And we have a lot of resources inside of this kaleidoscope for these women. But one of the ways that I help them is by providing this forum where they can ask questions and get feedback from each other, as well as from several professional coaches that work with me inside this program. One of the most common struggles that I'm [00:01:00] seeing in the kaleidoscope is moms who don't know how to think about kids, especially boys, it seems like come up a lot, who are showing up in similar ways as dad is showing up.

So they are arguing, blaming, talking back, being rude, dismissive, not able to understand things from another person's perspective, and so on. So basically not showing up with a lot of emotional maturity. And the moms are coming into the forum with a lot of distress, experiencing a lot of triggering when their kids are showing up like their dad, like their husband or these kids dad.

So when they're triggered, they either back away from their child and hide. Or they lash out in anger and go on the defensive and push back. They project their husband's behavior onto their child and the part of them that's been wounded by dad for many years reacts to the same [00:02:00] behavior coming up from the kids.

I'm going to give you some examples of what I've seen. And, and hopefully you can kind of see what I'm talking about here. So for example, one mom said that her younger child was reacting to her choice not to attend a family event where dad was going to be present. Now, this woman was divorced. The child was

very angry and upset and accused the mom of some things that she didn't actually do.

The mother felt scared that her child was going to grow up and be just like his dad. Another mom wrote that her older teenager wouldn't help out with chores and resented that when he was with her, she would take privileges away from him, but he didn't have to deal with that when he was at dad's house.

So she wants to be able to make him do chores and be a decent human being, but she doesn't know how to do that. And she believes that dad is undermining her parenting. Another mom wrote that her son is emotionally distanced from her, doesn't want to hear her side of the story, and her [00:03:00] husband is turning her son against her.

Another mom said the same thing. My son is turning into my husband. And there are dozens of other posts that are some version of this. I mean, we're talking every week. We get several of these posts that have the same theme to it. The problem, I think, is that we moms We've spent years surviving an emotionally abusive marriage and we've raised our kids in the same programming that we ourselves believed that actually kept us stuck for so long and now we're setting boundaries in our relationship with our our husband or maybe our ex and some of us are even getting out of those relationships but our kids have been programmed a certain way And they're not changing their programming along with us.

So we are an older adult women with more life experience under our belts. And we've come to that place in our human development when [00:04:00] we are growing up and coming into our own agency and autonomy as adult women. But our children. They're not there yet. The other problem is that we've been living with a grown man who looks like an adult if you look at him on the outside, but he has never grown up emotionally on the inside.

So he is still depending on outside sources and circumstances to manage his big emotions and That's you. He expects you to be his mommy, his lover, his cook, his house cleaner, and his nanny and to keep him happy all the time. And since you're a human woman and you can't perform all of those roles perfectly, he gets mad at you and takes his anger out on you.

And if you point out his naughty behavior, then he accuses you of being the naughty one. This is a problem. To be a child in a grown man's body is a problem for him, and it's a problem for [00:05:00] whoever he's married to. But

remember that to be a child in a child's body, is normal. All of these same behaviors that are normal for your children are not normal for your husband.

Okay? Kids are developmentally supposed to depend on adults in their lives to help them manage their big emotions. They actually need a mommy, a cook, a nanny, and a house cleaner. Because they are children, they need someone to also help them regulate their nervous systems. And when they have that help consistently, they begin to feel safe and then they move toward that source of safety.

That's actually how they do develop emotionally so that they are able to become an adult who is able to manage their own adult lives and not depend on everyone else around them to do that for them. So the [00:06:00] only problem then is when we decide as moms that our kids shouldn't be kids either. We know our husbands shouldn't be a kid, but do we know that our kids should be kids?

An adult who says, I hate you is very different from a child who says, I hate you. One is possibly coming from malice or deep emotional immaturity. The other one is coming from emotional immaturity. Insecurity and normal childhood reactions to feelings of not being safe or heard or understood or to not getting your way, right?

Our reaction to the adult who acts like that should be to move away from that. It's dangerous, but our reaction to the child should be to move toward that child. What does he or she need from us as an adult? When we, here's the problem though, when we are drowning in our own woundedness. And we're unable, or [00:07:00] we don't have those, that skillset to regulate our own emotions, then we're not going to be available to help our child regulate his or hers.

Ask me how I know. Moms. Your own healing is necessary for your parenting. If you have unaddressed trauma, you will parent from that place. My parenting only began to shift when I started addressing my own childhood trauma. And also went right straight into that deep grief as I faced the realities of what I experienced and then process through it as I began to make sense of my own story and learn how to see it as my story and not as my identity.

And by the way, I'm still working on this, but I can tell you the changes are night and day and how I think about my parenting is [00:08:00] totally different how I feel towards my kids when they show up in some of these ways that are not very mature as kids do is completely different now than it was back when I was still stuck in my own trauma and the results

So many of our beautiful butterfly members have shared that their own work inside the Kaleidoscope as they've gone through the courses and listen to coaching on a regular basis, some listen every single day, it has transformed their parenting and changed the lives of their kids as a result. This is hard, painful work.

That requires an emotional investment on your part and a time investment, but it pays off in a million different ways in better relationships with your own self and with your kids. Now, if you want to join the Kaleidoscope, it's so affordable, it's [00:09:00] ridiculous. Go to joinflyingfree.com to learn how, but I'm in that forum every single day answering questions and interacting with our beautiful butterflies.

And I'm just going to share with you a couple of examples of this related to this topic today that I just wrote. So just wrote these things this past week to a couple of moms. The first one is a response to a mom who was sharing some things about her Rocky relationship with her son, who was not a teenager yet.

He was more in preteen age group. And I leave out all, I leave out the details because I don't want, I want to protect their privacy. So this is what I wrote to her in response to what she had written. I wrote, this is hard for me to say to survivors because I know what that dark night is like and how lost and alone and unseen we can feel.

But when kids are this age, it is so important to work as hard as we can to see things [00:10:00] from their perspective. My deepest, darkest regrets, I literally weep about this. The grief is so heavy sometimes. Is not doing this enough. When our own, when my own family was in the thick of upheaval. These formative years are critical to brain development and emotional development.

It is not going through tough things that can arrest the development of our children. What causes long term harm is when our children are not, our children or us or anyone growing up, is not being seen or heard or understood. Now, this does not mean that a parent should always give them what they want, but they need to feel that we also are feeling their pain and disappointment and sadness along with them about whatever it is that they're not getting their way in.

They can't even begin to understand the scope of [00:11:00] what might be happening in your relationship with your partner because their brains are undeveloped. And they have very little life experience under their belts. My kids, who were a lot younger back when they, when we were going through all of this, they have no understanding or even recollection of what was going on.

And even though I tried to give them my perspective, they couldn't see it. Not because they didn't want to, or because they were narcissistic, or because they were like their dad. But because they were children, developmentally, they just could not see anything. Not possible. I can also share that one of my children told me later that the most painful thing that she experienced in her relationship with me was when I told her, that she was behaving like her dad.

This crushed her. She felt so rejected and so hopeless in that moment. The [00:12:00] thing is, most of the time, I, even though I would never say anything like that out loud, other than that time that I did to her, I certainly had lots of thoughts to that effect about several of my children. And I'm sorry, but our thoughts come out in our behaviors and our attitudes towards our kids.

My kids could pick up on those attitudes that I had towards them in those moments. Our kids can pick up on all of those subtle things that we are giving off by our body language. This is why even if you have never said anything like this to your child, I'm glad that you're here to work on your own thoughts about this so that you can show up in your parenting in a way that's life giving for both of you, regardless of what dad is like or what dad is doing or saying.

One of your greatest challenges is going to be to get your focus off of your abuser. And his family, [00:13:00] in this post you had mentioned his, her in laws, and refocus your vision on your own life and the life and well being of your child. And that will change how you think about everything and how you make decisions when it comes to your child.

It won't feel good in the long run, or I'm sorry, in the short run, but in the long run, It's a game changer for all of you. Without writing a book here, I will just share that it all boils down to one simple thing with our kids. Relationship. They can have a relationship with dad and with grandpa and grandma, and all of that is normal and fine.

Even if it's a just emotionally destructive relationship, it is normal. For children to want to have a relationship with both of their parents and children, most often, it's very rare, but they most often do not know if a parent is being abusive or not, especially [00:14:00] if it's covert emotional abuse. We didn't even understand what we were going through.

Our children certainly can't. They don't recognize manipulation. They don't know what gaslighting is or what that looks like. And if you try to point it out to them, they're still not going to see it because again, they're not developmentally able to. Now, that does not mean we don't try to explain some things, but we

just need to hold space for the fact that they probably aren't going to understand all of it, or even most of it.

Now, I will add here, I'm going to come back to you here on the podcast and get away from what I was writing, and I just want to say that when we are telling our kids details, About our marriage relationship, or if we're going to do that, which I don't really recommend, I do recommend high level, letting them know what's going on, because when people don't know, when kids don't know what's going on, then they make up stories in their head that can sometimes be far worse than what's actually happening.

All right, so we [00:15:00] need to let them know some things, but when we tell them these things, they might get upset about that, because it's human nature to push back. Unless The caveat here is that if they have also been hurt by the other parent and they've felt that and experienced that abuse, then, of course, they're going to understand a little bit better.

It's human nature to champion for the one who appears to be under attack. So, for example, the kids in our family who were dad's favorites, they had a hard time seeing things very clearly, and they pushed back a little bit more than the kids who were typically picked on by their dad. But none of them liked it.

When I talked about their dad, In a negative way, because kids identify with their parents. It's natural for kids to see themselves in their parents and identify with them. So they [00:16:00] actually can feel attacked. In a weird, twisted, psychological way, if we are, if they think that we are attacking their dad and that's what it can sometimes feel like to them if we're saying, dad did this to me, dad did that to me, and then they're like, well, wait a minute, why are you saying these bad things about dad?

Now you're attacking dad. They don't see what's actually going on here. They don't see that you're actually just stating and coming out and saying these things happen to me. They're seeing it as you attacking dad. And of course, dad is spinning it that way as well. So they're hearing that, those, that kind of language and that kind of vibe they're getting from dad as well.

So that's how they're going to view it. I do think that there's a way to talk about what's going on without seeming to attack dad though. And we're going to talk about that in a minute. But my point here is just to say that if you insist that your child understand exactly what is going on, And why you have had to leave or why you had to set these boundaries.[00:17:00]

You do run the risk of driving a wedge between you and your child. They can't understand they're not supposed to understand that is adult business. That is your adult business. And while I do believe we need to be honest with our kids and speak the truth, high level, I think we can also be selective in what we share.

And this is something that I did wrong in my situation and something that if I could go back and do it over again, knowing what I know now, I would do that over again. So this is why I, this is one of the reasons why I started the whole Kaleidoscope thing is to help people avoid some of the mistakes that I made and also just to give them a place I didn't have anywhere to go that was helping me process through all of this and figure this stuff out.

And, and you do join flying free. com, but the one thing that you can control, I'm back to what I wrote to her. The one thing that you can [00:18:00] control and that you can develop with your child is your own personal relationship with your child. And that has nothing to do with your husband or anyone else. It is 100 percent between you and that child.

So in situations like these, I try to get deep into the heart of my child. To see things from his or her perspective, think through what is this kid thinking and feeling? Cause sometimes they don't even know. All right. So you're going to have to use your imagination. Try to remember when you were a kid, what would you be thinking and feeling if you were in this child's shoes?

You're an adult. You can do that better than a child can. Okay. So once you get to that place where you are thinking from their perspective, seeing things through their eyes and feeling the feelings that they're feeling of confusion and anger and frustration. That's when I ask myself, okay, what does this child need right now and what can I [00:19:00] do to let this child know that I see them and hear them and that they're a priority to me so that they can feel seen and heard and prioritized by me.

It no longer becomes about what I've gone through or what I'm feeling. Or what I need or what's fair to me, that part of me needs to turn to other support systems to get the things I need, including myself, I need to learn how to be a support system to myself, that is probably the most important thing that I teach inside the kaleidoscope, but my child will never.

be able to give me what I need. That is not their job. But my job is to give my child what he or she needs and also to give myself what I need that does not involve my child meeting those important needs. It's tricky. And you, like me,

will make many mistakes in your [00:20:00] parenting as you navigate this messy business.

I only wish someone had supported and helped me see this from a different perspective when I was in the thick of it. I would have done things very differently. Since that time I have read many books and taken classes and talked with thousands of people and heard thousands of stories. If I could go back and do things differently, I would, but we can't do that.

So I'm offering you these thoughts for whatever they're worth. I'm glad that you're here to get the support that you need so that you can then turn around and be a support for your son. Already, you are doing an amazing job as a mother. You are doing everything you can, including providing him with therapy.

Which can be so helpful for kids going through this. I hope that you and your own therapist will find a way through this as well as future situations that can be very painful.

And then another mom in the kaleidoscope wrote about how after her husband moved out, he was telling the kids about how she had victimized him [00:21:00] and forced him to leave against his will. So now the older kids were name calling and cursing and hitting and telling her that she was a bad mom and it's all her fault and they only wanted to stay with dad.

So this was my response in the kaleidoscope to this particular mom. It is not normal adult behavior for a grown man to act like this. It's immature at best and wicked at worst. However, for children to act like this? Yes, it's normal. Kids that age are devastated when their parents break up and they would react to that no matter what dad's acting like.

The fact that dad is acting like a child only gives them some ideas about how they can also act out, but they would be having all the same fears, thoughts, and feelings regardless. They are supposed to because they're kids. Your husband is not. Calmly letting them know the truth, and I don't know what that truth is, so I [00:22:00] can't give an example here, but, and reassuring them that everything is going to be okay, and that they are loved, and will be cared for no matter what, and that they are your priority, that will help.

Listening to their thoughts and feelings, and really experiencing the pain along with them, also can go a long ways. Saying something like, I can totally see how you would think that. I can't imagine how awful you must be feeling. I am

sad with you. I hate this for our family. It is so hard and you don't deserve to have to go through this.

Also, reading books about separation and divorce helps. It helps your kids. I'll just say this aside from what I wrote to this woman. There was, I would go to the library. And check out books, picture books for my younger kids about divorce. And then we would sit down and we would read about that or about separation.

We'd read about that to normalize the experience that [00:23:00] they didn't feel so scared. So they could see these fictional characters in the books having these experiences. And how did they react and how did they go through it? And then I can do that, too. This is, we tell stories. This is how we learn how to cope and how we grow up and figure out how to manage life when it gets difficult, right?

So, back to the, what I wrote. Normalizing this experience, you can sometimes say things like this. Things like this can happen and it's not the kid's fault when this happens. None of this is your fault. So instead of focusing on what an asshole your husband is and all the dramatic things that he's doing to get attention and garner the sympathy of his kids, you be different.

You focus on being an adult parent to your kids. Focus on what they need and offer that to them. Love them. Be a stable regulating force. [00:24:00] Emotionally regulating force in their lives, you have done nothing wrong, but you're going to need to believe that in order to unhook from your husband's lies. Make sure that the kids, this is going to be hard for some of you to hear, but make sure the kids get time with both parents.

Kids want that. Now, unless you are dealing with a dad who is physically hurting them or sexually molesting them or something like that, which in that case you really need to contact CPS or the police. But otherwise if they're experiencing just dad being mean you can say things like I know you only want to stay at dad's house.

But children need to spend time with both parents, and both your dad and I want to have relationships with our children. That is very important for your emotional development. Over time, they're going to see and feel the difference. What it's like at dad's house? What it's like at mom's house. At dad's, [00:25:00] they're going to have to, it sounds like they're going to have to deal with his drama and his ranting and his raving.

At mom's, let them be normal kids and think about normal things because mom doesn't do that to them. Let them parrot what they're hearing from dad. Uh, trust me, that's going to die down as over time, they begin to feel very different over at your house and lean into The relationship, the safe relationship that they have with you.

They get to be kids over at your house. Over at dad's house, they have to be adults that manage dad's big emotions. Alright, if you are interested in being part of our Kaleidoscope community and asking questions of me or other coaches or the other women that are in there, you can go to joinflyingfree.com.

to find out more. Here is what one person, we have these evaluations that people do their self evaluations and you do one right when you [00:26:00] join and then every three and then a month later you do another one just to see the kind of progress that you've made. And then every three months after that. So here's what one woman wrote after her.

Three, let's see, this is after her one month evaluation. She wrote, I just completed my one month self evaluation. I was amazed to see my confidence. In my ability to regulate my thoughts and emotions, it went from a two to a seven. Amazing. And here's what one beautiful butterfly wrote after her three month evaluation.

Because I have a great deal of margin in my life, I was able to totally immerse myself in the Flying Free resources upon joining. I am delighted. That I can notice a real change in myself in just three months. Here's the progress I was able to report today. Three months ago, I identified my biggest problem as reclaiming the person I [00:27:00] was before I got small and non functional.

In response to two and a half decades of abuse, the past couple of weeks, I have been experiencing glimpses of that person. I have found myself in small ways being her again, and it feels so good. Three months ago, I stated as my reason for joining, I am hoping this program will help me create a future for myself in which I thrive.

I am excited to now have a vision for my future and have begun taking initial baby steps toward making that a reality. My biggest breakthrough so far? Three months ago, I felt stuck. I truly believed that I was the only one holding me back. But I didn't know what to do to get unstuck. Turns out, that was just a thought that I could jettison.

Now I'm moving forward and it feels amazing. I've heard Natalie encourage newcomers, keep working through the [00:28:00] program, and in one year, you'll be amazed at how much you've changed. I am very eager to see who I will be in nine more months. If you, oh, she also wrote this, if you're sick to death of being stuck, you are going to love what's around the corner for you.

So I love that. I love reading those self evaluations. Do you want to be part of that? I hope so. I hope that one year from today, that can be you writing about how you have changed this last year. Just go to [join flying free. com](http://join.flyingfree.com) to find out more and you can join today. It's super affordable and we would love to have you join our kaleidoscope of beautiful butterflies.