

## WHAT TO DO WHEN OUR KIDS DISAPPROVE OF US

*Hi. This is Natalie Hoffman of [FlyingFreeNow.com](http://FlyingFreeNow.com), and you're listening to the Flying Free Podcast, a support resource for women of faith looking for hope and healing from hidden emotional and spiritual abuse.*

NATALIE: Welcome to Episode 241 of the Flying Free Podcast. One of the most heartbreaking fallouts of waking up to abuse and making the excruciating decision to leave that relationship is the reactions and responses of our kids. And that's what we're going to be talking about today.

A few weeks ago, one of the members of Flying Free posted this question in our private forum. Now, I've changed the question to make it a little more generic in order to protect this person's privacy, but basically, it went like this: "My young teenager went to live with their dad even though the divorce agreement gives us both time with our child. This child was upset with me because I divorced Dad. We had always been close, so just the fact that this child went with their dad, who had constantly picked on this child, has been hard enough. I want to give this child time, but they've been gone for close to two months, and I miss this child so badly. Any advice or thoughts would be helpful."

So whenever we're faced with a dilemma like this, it's important to survey the landscape of our reality to figure out what we can't control and also what we can control, where our opportunities lie. So often it's our human nature to just plop down and give up. But when we think, "There's nothing I can do," we feel hopeless in our body. And when we feel hopeless in our body, we tend to shut down. We aren't able to think creatively. We aren't able to see any opportunities because part of us has already decided we don't have any.

So the first thing I recommend is to look at the facts. Here are a few facts I pulled out of this post. First, legally, you have the right to a certain amount of custody with your child. Number two, you are now divorced, and this is a choice you hopefully made, and like your reasons for making that choice. Number three, divorce always comes with losses, and those losses, they bother people, they cause pain — and especially kids. Number four, your child believes that you have done them wrong by making the decision you did. This is what your child believes, okay? And number five, everyone who goes through that divorce is going to need to grieve and then heal at some point. All of those are... I mean, I guess some of them are kind of thoughts, but to me, those are things that I would say are facts, all right?

So then I would write down the things that you have no control over, and I picked out three things that I think you have no control over. Number one, you can't control anyone else's grief and healing process, including your kids. Number two, you can't control whether or not your ex cooperates with the divorce agreement. Number three, you can't control your child's thoughts and feelings about the divorce.

But then I want you to look at the things that you can control. And this is for anyone who's listening who might have a different situation. You can do all of these things no matter what situation you're facing. So if we look at the things that you do have control over, one, you have control over your own grief and healing process. Two, you can control whether or not you cooperate with the divorce agreement. Number three, you can control your own thoughts and feelings about the divorce. Number four, you can control your own thoughts and feelings about your child. And number five, you can control your own actions that you choose to take to show love to that child and make connections with that child.

So once we have all the facts on the table, meaning, once we fully and radically accept reality, now we can figure out where our opportunities are. We can let go of all the things we have no control over anyway, and then we can take back our power over what we do have control over.

So here are some good questions that I would recommend sitting down with your journal and answering in your journal. This will help you process. First of all, "What am I doing to facilitate my own grief and healing process?" Number two, "Do I want to follow the divorce agreement? Why or why not? And what can I do to make sure I'm doing my part if I do want to do that? What am I doing to make sure I'm doing my part and seeing that that happens?" Number three, "What do I believe about my child and how do those beliefs make me feel? How does the way I feel toward my child cause me to show up in their life, and what are the results for me?"

So, for example, if I believe my child hates me — I've seen this a lot — women will be like, "My child hates me now because I divorced their dad" — well, if I believe that, I might feel scared and maybe ashamed. Fear or shame might cause me to shut down and not reach out to them, not be able to think creatively about how I might be able to build a relationship with them. It might cause me to not take control of what is in my power to control. And then the result for me would be that I'm just not able to show up for my child in a way that resonates with my own core values.

Now, this particular person who asked this question is in my Flying Free program, so she can use some of the tools that we teach to process through this and come to a

place of greater love and confidence in her relationship with herself first and then her child. I have watched so many moms find healing in estranged relationships with their kids only after they did their own healing work.

And this is such good news because it puts you back in the driver's seat of your life and ultimately is not only healing to you, but it's healing for your kids in the long run as well. We are never going to be able to hold space for our own kids if we can't hold space for ourselves. And by holding space, all I mean is allowing and accepting all of the thoughts, all of the feelings, all of the good and the bad in love. We accept all of those things about ourselves, all of those things about our child. We encircle ourselves in love and acceptance and compassion and understanding, and then from that wholesome place we are able to do that for our kids. Now, you can apply to do this work with us in Flying Free by going to [joinflyingfree.com](http://joinflyingfree.com).

So number four, another question to use in your journal is, "How do I want to show up for my child in these circumstances? I can't change these circumstances — this child doesn't want to be with me — so how do I want to show up inside of these limitations that I have? Do I want to take them to their favorite fast-food restaurant once or twice a week? Do I want to take them shopping for a new pair of tennis shoes that they need? Do I want to take them to a movie they want to see?" There's one mom in our program whose child lived with dad full time, and she just started playing laser tag with this child every week. That's it. Just a simple thing of spending time doing what that child really loved to do. And then during this time, and it was several years, she worked really hard in Flying Free and Flying Higher on her own self-development and her own healing, and now, several years later, he moved in with her and they have a healed relationship.

I was also estranged from my son for two and a half years, but today I get to regularly spend time hanging out with him and his three beautiful babies, and it is such a miracle. You guys, there is so much hope, but it doesn't begin outside of ourselves. It begins with our own transformation on the inside.

All right, now, there are three questions that have come in via audio that I want to answer, and they're all related to what we just talked about, but each one of them kind of has a little bit of a spin on it. So here's the first one.

LISTENER: I just ended an emotionally abusive marriage to an alcoholic of six years, and we share a nearly three-year-old child together. I refuse to speak to my ex over the phone because it always causes a fight, and I only answer questions about our son in text form. I get bombarded almost daily with dozens of messages about how horrible a person I am. The abuse in this way has gotten worse. It's actually worse than it was

when we were married. And now he is threatening to turn our son against me as he gets older. My question is, how do my son and I overcome this? I just feel like there is no end to him wanting to hurt me.

NATALIE: Yes, there is no end to an abuser wanting to continue to hurt an abuse target. It's true. And they are notorious for using their own children as weapons to hurt the mother. As far as his texting you and torturing you that way, I usually recommend to people that I work with to get an app like Our Family Wizard or Talking Parents. And oftentimes a judge will actually put that into the divorce agreement, or an attorney will. And what that does is it enables communication between both parents that a record is kept of it. Records are kept of everything that they say. You can easily print them off or download them for court if you ever go to court again. And if your child is still that young, there's always a possibility that you may end up having to go to court again, especially if the abuser starts hurting that child or being physically abusive.

So I would recommend using an app like that or setting some kind of boundary like that. And you may need to reach out to your attorney to see if you can get the divorce agreement amended or if your divorce isn't finalized yet, you definitely want to make sure that something like that is built into your divorce agreement. That way you can block him on text and you can just say, "All communication goes through Our Family Wizard or Talking Parents," and then you have a record of everything that he's doing that is abusive to you.

And then also we recommend that if someone is asking a legitimate question related to co-parenting, obviously you want to answer questions like that. But if it's just he's just throwing up, you don't have to answer texts like that. Or I know some people have had a third party read through the texts and then forward the ones that are actually legitimate texts that deal with custody arrangements, or who's going to pick up when and what. So that's what I recommend for that.

But as far as him threatening to turn your son against you as he gets older, Lundy Bancroft wrote a fantastic book called "When Dad Hurts Mom," and it goes into this dynamic, which is a reality for many of us. And I highly recommend that book. Even though the book seems like it's going to just address physical abuse, it's absolutely applicable to any of you who are dealing with... And I don't say "just emotional abuse" to minimize it, but I mean it just in terms of if you don't have any physical abuse going on and you only have emotional abuse going on, that book is still going to be applicable.

But using what we just learned about looking at our reality and accepting what we do

not have control over while taking back control over what we can control, this is how we're going to find our way forward. So none of us can control an abuser. Yes, they're going to try to hurt us. They're going to try to hurt our kids. This is a given. Divorce is the ultimate boundary that we can set. And what divorce does is it removes our bodies and our minds from the abuser. It's the best solution. Is it perfect? No. As long as you're sharing kids, you can't remove yourself entirely, but it definitely takes away that where you're not immersed in that relationship anymore. And it also gives our younger kids an opportunity to live in a home at least 50% of the time that is abuse-free and peaceful. But beyond that, we can't control what the abuser says to our children, okay?

My ex has told my kids that I stole the smoke detectors from his home, that he pays too much in child support (he pays no child support), that I stripped the house of his belongings (I only took my own things that I paid for with my own money or that were given to me as gifts, and I literally left everything else). He's told them that I'm an adulteress, that I was on dating sites before I filed for divorce and after (I've never actually been on a dating site), and so many other big and little stories, really projecting his own behaviors onto me. And some of my kids have believed these stories for a while. But over time, as the kids have seen how he lies about them too and about others as well, their trust in his word has eroded, and they just don't have any respect for his word anymore. They don't give his words credibility anymore. And that's something that he, just by being himself, brought upon himself.

So when they tell me what he says, of course I'm going to tell them the truth. I don't say, "Oh, did he say I took his smoke detectors? Oh." No. I say, "No, honey, I never took his smoke detectors. Our home already has smoke detectors. In fact, before I moved out, I installed two brand new detectors that would last for several years because I wanted you kids to be safe when you were staying over there with him, and I worried that he wouldn't prioritize the smoke detectors and replacing those batteries. Now, I don't know why he would say that to you. It's very confusing, isn't it? Sometimes he says things that are confusing. How did that make you feel when he said that confusing thing?"

So now they've all accepted the fact that Dad lies sometimes, and they take everything he says with a grain of salt. That doesn't mean that they don't love him. It doesn't mean that they don't spend time with him or that they don't have a relationship with them. It just means that they just don't trust him. And they kind of patronize him, I guess, in a way, or humor him, I guess, the way you might humor an old person who's a curmudgeon.

But in the meantime, who am I? Who do I want to be? Am I a truth-teller? Do I want to

hold space for the thoughts and emotions of my kids? Do I want to spend time with them one-on-one in order to connect? Am I a good listener? Can they trust that I will have their back and that I will make sure they get to the doctor and to their therapy sessions and to their sports games? Am I going to show up at their sports games and their concerts? Am I going to make sure that they get enough food to eat and that they get lunches at school? That's what I have control over.

Now, after almost six years post-divorce, my kids do trust me. It doesn't matter what their dad says about me. He can't really say anything about me. I mean, the kids don't even believe him anymore, so it doesn't matter what he says. He's just shooting himself in the foot because of how I show up in my life with them. The reality of that is bigger or greater than the lies that he says.

So what matters to them is their relationship with me. And guess what? I get to be the architect of that relationship, but it starts in my own belief system about myself and my own healing, as well as my belief system about my children and who they are and how I want to think and feel about that relationship.

Now, when my son wasn't talking to me, I didn't think, "Oh, I don't have a relationship with my son anymore." I never thought that. I always thought, "I have a relationship with my son. It's just a relationship where that child is not talking to me right now." I could have thought about him in disparaging ways that would have created resentment and anger inside. Or I could think about him in positive ways that would create love and spacious grace in my life. It would feel so much better, so I chose the second. So when the opportunity came two and a half years later to reconnect, I was ready to take that opportunity and be open to that, and even be open to hearing him share some hard things with me that I needed to hear.

Now, in the Flying Free program, if you join, you will be able to take a course on parenting, which is going to help you find ways to connect and heal your relationships with your children and be that truth-teller in their lives. Again, you can go to [joinflyingfree.com](http://joinflyingfree.com) for more details about that. Let's listen to the second question.

LISTENER: I cannot begin to tell you how much your ministry has helped me in my marriage to a covert abuser, and your work has helped me so much. I do have a question for you. My daughter has gone no-contact with me for the last six months. She is married and has three adorable sons who love me as their Grammy, and I miss them so much. I would like to know what you would recommend in that case. Do you go no-contact? Do you go over there and plead with him? Do you send letters? I have opted to give her space as a past people-pleaser, but I also want her to know that I want a

relationship with her and I miss her and it's important to me. So what do you recommend? What have other people done to encourage a relationship? Do you send a letter? What do you do? I have sent the little boys gifts on their birthdays and holidays, and they have not told me to not do that. So at this point, it's just basically been no-contact.

NATALIE: Okay, so we're going to apply what we learned earlier to this situation as well. So in this situation, what are the facts? I actually don't know the facts of the situation. I couldn't quite tell if this particular listener has left her husband and maybe that's why the daughter cut her off. So that's usually, typically what happens, so I'm going to assume that, but I apologize if that's not why your daughter cut you off. But anyway, we'll just assume that and go with that, okay?

So let's say the facts are that number one, I chose to leave my daughter's dad and she disagrees with that choice. That could be a fact. Number two, her beliefs are creating feelings for her that are causing her to show up in her life in ways that hurt our relationship. Number three, she hasn't talked to me. Number four, they do accept gifts for the grandkids. So those are some facts. You might have other facts too, but those are just some I pulled right off the top of my head.

Okay, so what do I not have control over? Number one, I don't have control over my daughter's thoughts and feelings about her mom's life, and number two, I don't have control over my ability to see my grandkids. Those are things that I have to let go of because I have no control over them.

What do I have control over? Number one, I have control over how I want to think and feel about my relationship with my daughter. There are thousands of thoughts you could have about that situation. Now, we usually tend to go to the most obvious thoughts, which are, "She shouldn't be doing this," "She should be more understanding," "She shouldn't take the drastic measure of cutting me off like this." Like, I'm with you, man. That's what I would be thinking, okay?

But there are other thoughts that we could choose to think about that. And I'm going to let you come up with that. I don't want to necessarily just give you all the thoughts because I think the answers are inside of each one of us. But sit down with your journal and kind of think about some other thoughts that you could... Options, you know? You don't have to think them, but what are some other thoughts that you could have that are options?

Number two, I have control over my willingness or my choice to be open to connection.

Number three, I have control over my willingness or choice to initiate some connection and conversation, whether that be the letter that you suggested or a phone call or getting together for dinner or something like that. And number four, I do have control over my own healing journey.

Now, I don't want to tell you what to do. I know you asked for that, and I get it. I mean, sometimes we just want someone to say, "Hey, here's the best thing to do." And I do that quite a bit in Flying Free, probably more than I should. But I'm not going to do that here, because I don't know what is wisest for you in this moment. And what might be wise for you to do today might not be wise for you to do a month or two from now. You have all the wisdom for your situation inside of you. God has not left us without resources inside.

Remember the Wizard of Oz story? Dorothy wanted to go back home to Kansas, but as long as she believed that a good witch or wizard would get her there, she was going to be sorely disappointed. Also, as long as she looked for her rescue from outside of herself, she would never be able to see that her resource or where her rescue was going to come from was actually on her own self the entire time. She was given that gift of the ruby red slippers right at the beginning when she got to Oz. Her exit strategy was right there with her all along.

So I have the same tendency to look for specific answers and instructions from other people as well. I doubt my own ability to do the right thing sometimes. I want to know the thing that's going to work for sure and will not allow me to fail or make a mistake, because we hate failing and making mistakes. We don't like to take those risks. Or we want to be able to say, "Well, it wasn't my fault it didn't work. I did what my pastor said, and that's why I'm in this predicament. It's all his fault." I'm telling you, this is where I have come from, and I have a feeling that many of you guys can relate, but that is such a powerless way for us to live our powerful life.

If you're struggling with, "Well, I don't have the answers inside of me," just ask yourself this: "What if I did? What if I did have the answers inside of me?" You know yourself and your daughter better than anyone else on this planet. Do you know that?

Again, in the Flying Free program, we have a divorce course for people who are curious about that process, or maybe they're actually going through it. And there are strategies to keep yourself sane and safe during that divorce process. But one of the workshops that is in that course is on how to profile your abuser because you each know your husband better than anyone else, and yet we kid ourselves and we tell lies to ourselves all the time about them so that we feel better. But women who have done this profiling



workshop are amazed to discover they really do know the truth. They just haven't been honest with themselves about it yet. And once you lean into that truth, things get so much more clear.

So, let's apply this to our child. You know who your daughter is. You know what she needs. You know why she is hurting, what she might be thinking, what she might be believing. Use that expertise to help guide you toward your next steps. And by the way, if you're feeling like, "I really don't know what she needs. I really don't know why she's hurting," then put yourself in her shoes and ask yourself, "How would I be feeling if I believed the things she believes and I experienced the things that she has experienced? How would I be feeling?" Maybe you'd be feeling different, but if you really believed what she believes, then you would probably be feeling the same way that she's feeling. So that's another way that you can kind of figure out where the other person is coming from.

But there are a thousand different directions that you could go, but you won't see any of those opportunities if you're feeling paralyzed and afraid because you're feeling ashamed or you're afraid to take that risk. Sometimes we don't make any moves because we're protecting ourselves, and this could be a sign that we still have some healing opportunities. Where are we afraid? That would be a good question to journal about. "What am I afraid of and why? What am I believing about myself? What am I believing about my daughter? What am I believing about this situation? Am I believing that if she rejects me that I can't survive that, if I never get to see my grandkids that I won't be able to survive — I can't live without my grandchildren? Is it true that I can't live without my grandchildren?"

What if we could embrace whatever happens and know that we can fully enter into that grief and that pain and then come out on the other side eventually and move forward? How powerfully could we live if we knew that we could feel anything and still survive and even thrive in the long run? That pain would deepen and grow us, that our lives would only become more enriching for us and for those around us as we walk through the reality of life on planet Earth?

So my go-to question when someone is hurting me is this: "Oh, so this is who they are choosing to be right now. But in this situation, who do I want to be?" and then I just be that. I know that's bad grammar, but I just be that. All right, let's listen to the last question.

LISTENER: It's the struggle with children after a divorce. I have four children and two of them support me, but the other two say they support me, but they're ugly towards the

two that really do support me. But if I talk to the two that see their dad, then I get in trouble with the two that support me. What am I supposed to do?

NATALIE: In this situation, we have a bunch of people who all have a different manual for Mom. Some kids have a manual for moms that says, "It's okay for moms to divorce their abusers, but it's not okay for moms to talk to anyone who doesn't support them." Other kids have a manual for moms that says, "It's not okay for moms to get a divorce, and my job is to make sure that Mom knows it's not okay." Again, knowing that we can't control all of these people and their various manuals for Mom, what do we have control over? We have control over our own self.

When people get involved in other people's relationships and life choices and decisions, and they start trying to control or manipulate all the other people, this is called triangulation. And it's a sign that the people who choose to put themselves in this triangle have poor boundaries and are usually motivated by some level of fear or shame. Now, in the Flying Free program, we have a course on boundaries that helps women figure out how to establish healthy boundaries with all the people in their lives who are crossing those boundaries. And again, you can go to [joinflyingfree.com](http://joinflyingfree.com) for more information.

Here are some questions that I would recommend that you answer in your journal, okay? "Who do I want to be when my kids are fighting amongst themselves about their manuals for mom?" "What is my manual for my kids? What is my manual for myself?" And by manual, I'm talking about your rule book. Like, "What is my belief system?" I probably should have explained that earlier when I was talking about it with the other kids, but. "How do my rules make me feel in my body? And then how do I show up in my life when I feel that way in my body?" "What is the result for me when I show up that way in my life and I behave that way, and do I like that result or not?" "Do I want to keep those rules that I have? Do I want to keep my manual? Why or why not?"

Once you've processed through some of this on paper, you are going to be able to see and get so much more insight into what your opportunities might be as far as how it relates to these kids in a way that's going to keep you in control of your own life while also letting go of needing their validation and approval. See, as long as we are concerned about their manuals and we give their manuals credibility, their rule book and their ideas and their beliefs credibility for us, then our happiness and our sense of well-being is going to be all wrapped up in what they believe, what other people believe for us. And again, it's such a powerless way to live. So we want to figure out what our own manual is, what resonates with us and our core values, and then we just want to let our kids think whatever they want.

So if they're fighting amongst themselves about, "Mom, if you're going to talk to those kids who don't support you, then we're not going to talk to you either," you can just be holding so much love for all of them. "Oh, you guys, I just love you so much. That will make me so sad to not be able to talk to you. But I get it. I get it. You have this really strong belief system, and I love you so much, and I hope you'll change your mind. But I just want to hold space for you and whatever is working for you in your life. And then I'm going to go and work on my own self and my own healing process."

But we don't need the support and validation of our kids in order for us to have a sense of well-being and peace and joy. We really don't. If we believe we do, then guess what we're going to do? We're going to do what they're doing, and we're going to try to control them and their manuals. And now you've got all these kids and mom all twirling around in a little tornado trying to control one another and trying to manipulate one another so that we all feel good and have a sense of safety and wellbeing. And it doesn't work that way.

Let's just assume that our kids aren't as resourced as we are and that they're probably going to keep spinning the tornado for a while. They don't have as much life experience under their belts. But we do, and we can go work on our own healing. And as we heal, as we jump out of that tornado and find peace and healing, those kids are going to look at us from inside the tornado and go, "Look at Mom. Look what she's got. Man, I wish I could have some of that." And they're going to start being drawn to you and your wholeness and your peace and your love in a very real way. I know this because I've experienced this myself, and I've also watched other women experience this as well with their kids.

I answer questions like this every single day in the Flying Free private forum as well as in weekly coaching sessions as well as in a monthly live Q&A that we do. And if you would like to join us for the courses that I mentioned as well as many, many other courses, daily support, coaching, and hope, then I encourage you to head over to [joinflyingfree.com](http://joinflyingfree.com). All the details for how you can get involved are over there. And that's it for today.

Hey, beautiful butterfly. Thank you so much for listening. If you liked this episode, be sure to subscribe, and then consider leaving a rating and review so others can find us. To connect with me and get a free chapter of my book, head over to [flyingfreenow.com](http://flyingfreenow.com), and until next time, fly free.