

PARENTING SMALL CHILDREN IN AN EMOTIONALLY DESTRUCTIVE HOME

Hi. This is Natalie Hoffman of 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 94 of the Flying Free Podcast! Today we're going to be talking about parenting small children in an emotionally destructive home. So let's start by defining our terms. By small children, I mean kids who are younger than teenagers. And when I'm talking about an emotionally destructive home, I'm talking about a home where there is very little freedom to be authentically you without being shamed or put down.

So you can't express your emotions. They are bad. You can't express your opinion. It's bad. You can't express your hurt. You're being a whiny baby, dramatic, and a bad boy or girl. You can't express your dreams. They are stupid and crazy and ridiculous and unrealistic. You can't express your desires. They are selfish and rebellious.

Basically, when a child is rewarded for hiding, staying quiet, submitting without question, and stuffing emotions, you've got a Petri dish for emotional dysfunction to grow. Children growing up in these types of homes believe this is what love looks like. This is what normal looks like. They don't know anything different. They will grow up and be attracted to more of the same – and often get into abusive relationships as adults.

Likewise, an emotionally destructive home could look like this: A child gets his way all the time. The child runs the home. The child controls the parents. The child has no boundaries or limits. The child gets to treat everyone around him like dirt without any consequences.

In both of those environments you have a lot of shame and fear and control.

There is a spectrum here though. And maybe it might be good to contrast some of this with what an emotionally healthy home might look like.

In an emotionally healthy home, you have an environment of love, authenticity, freedom to be who you are, and respect for others. In a home like this, children grow up free to explore who they are in a safe environment where they learn what real love is.

No home is perfect, but some homes bend one way and some bend the other.

Since this podcast is for women of faith in emotionally destructive homes, we are going to address homes where the husband has patterns of behavior that are creating an environment of shame, intimidation, fear, and control. And husbands can do this overtly through yelling, disrespecting family members verbally, or physically expressing his disapproval. Or they can do it covertly by passive aggressively putting others down with a smile on their faces – like a joke, neglecting the needs of the family members, deceit, withholding affection or communication, or using the Bible to make others do what the man wants them to do.

I teach the women in my program the concept of how an abuser pretends the people in his immediate family are like Lego characters in his universe. When a child plays with a Lego character, he makes the little plastic character do and say what he wants it to do and say.

So abusers do the same thing with family members. The only problem is that real people aren't Lego characters. Real people have real opinions, ideas, problems, weaknesses, preferences, dreams, goals, and on and on. And all those things are different from person to person. From child to child. This means real people aren't Lego characters, so when the abuser experiences his family members showing up like the real people they are, he has a little hissy fit because they aren't doing what he says they should be doing. They aren't following his manual for how wives and kids are supposed to act in his universe. They aren't playing his game. It's emotionally destabilizing for the abuser.

He finds his balance and comforts himself by grabbing the real person and forcing him/her back into the Lego character role.

We all, as humans, have a tendency to want to control those around us. It helps us feel in control. The difference between a real bona fide abuser and an average human is that the abuser is literally unable to see how he does this. He has zero self-awareness. He literally believes his universe is THE universe. God's universe. He has made himself out to be like God, knowing what is right and wrong for everyone else. This is the sin of the garden. Playing God in his home.

And this has a devastating, lifelong effect on the other family members. It tells a lie about God – and it tells a lie about people.

You cannot have emotional or spiritual health in an environment like this. Not in a

home like this – and not in a church like this where people want to play the same role of God in the lives of other people.

You cannot love and pretend the universe is yours at the same time.

So what do you do? You're a mom living with a man who is doing this to you and to your children. You're all living in a home filled with smoke, and it's suffocating you.

So if you were in a home full of smoke and you couldn't leave, what would you do?

You would open some windows and get your kids to the open windows and tell them to breathe in the fresh air. Right? You'd all sit by the windows and breathe in the fresh air until you could come up with a different plan. A more permanent plan.

So let's talk about what that would look like, practically speaking, to bring your children to an open window and breathe in fresh air if you were living in an emotionally destructive home.

The smoke is the lies. Fresh air is the truth. We can't just tell kids about the truth. That's like sitting in the middle of the house of smoke and saying, "Kids, I know we are suffocating in here, but outside the air is amazing and clear and you can breathe deeply, and it's awesome and sweet!"

Are the kids going to understand the truth? Will they get it? Will they buy into it? Nope. They need to experience it.

You're going to have to show them what breathing clean air is like. You're going to have to GIVE THEM the fresh air yourself.

You know what I see a lot though? The moms aren't going to the window themselves to get the fresh air. Their beliefs are keeping them in the middle of the house. And as long as they won't breathe in clean air, their kids won't have the chance to breathe it either. This is why it is so important to get help for yourself first. You can't give water to a thirsty child from an empty bucket.

Ask me how I know this.

So, what are some of the beliefs that keep moms and kids huddled in the middle of their smoke-filled homes?

- I need to play small
- I'm not a good mom
- I'm not a good wife
- I'm not a good child
- I'm a failure
- I need to be silent
- Maybe I can make the smoke go away if I'm better
- I am rebellious
- I am dumb
- I can't succeed
- Maybe the smoke is my fault
- My purpose is to make my husband happy
- My purpose is to make daddy happy
- I'm stuck
- My duty is to submit
- My husband is God's representative
- Daddy is God
- I shouldn't use my voice
- Separation and divorce are sinful

Emotions we feel in those types of homes when we believe those things.

- Hopeless
- Worthless
- Numb
- Angry
- Frustrated
- Dead
- Empty
- Purposeless
- Overwhelmed

What do all the family members do when they feel this way?

- Fight
- Argue
- Cry
- Temper tantrums
- Withdraw
- Hide

- Defend
- Hit
- Run
- Freeze

The results? They remain stuck in the middle of the house choking on smoke.

The home won't change.

You guys – we can't change the fact that this home is a smoke-filled home, and it's always going to be that way.

I see so many women who have been sitting in their smoky homes for decades. WHY? Because they believe their home will change. Their husband will change. And they keep fighting the smoke.

You can't fight smoke by waving your hands around and yelling at it. You can't hide from it by crawling under a bed. The smoke is there, and it's there to stay.

You can either leave the home – or you can learn how to breathe out an open window. Those are your two options. That's where your power is.

So knowing that you can't change your smoky home, what CAN you do?

You can change what you believe about your situation. And that will change everything. Let me show you how this works:

New beliefs:

- God made me separately and with purpose that has nothing to do with my husband
- I'm a good mom and always striving to learn more and hone my skills
- I'm a good wife

I want to give you an illustration. I'm remarried, and I remember I used to think that my relationship with my former husband was like playing tennis. I would hit the ball in his court, and he would never hit it back. And I actually have a little article on my website where I talk about this analogy. And pretty soon all the balls are over in his court, and he's over there going, "Yeah, she's such a rotten tennis player. Look at all these balls over here."

Now I am remarried, and I am playing tennis just fine. I'm with a man who hits the ball back and we can play great rounds of tennis, right? Whereas before I thought, "Oh, I must be a terrible tennis player. There are no volleys happening here." Is that what they call that, volleys? But now I know I'm actually a really good tennis player. I was just playing with the wrong partner. So if you think "I'm a bad wife," just keep that in mind. It could be that you're an amazing wife and you just are playing with the wrong partner.

- I can do anything I put my mind to
- God gave me my voice to use
- The smoke is not my fault or my responsibility
- I am kind and loving
- I am smart
- My purpose is to love others – and sometimes love means letting go.
- I have choices, and I will take responsibility for those choices
- My duty is to tell the truth to myself and others
- My authority is God

Helping your children breathe is telling them every day,

- You are a wonderful little boy, and I love you with all my heart.
- You are special and unique, and there is no one like you.
- Your voice matters. I want to hear what you think.
- What happens in this family is not your fault.
- Your purpose in life is to be fully and completely YOU – that's God's destiny for you. Find out who that YOU really is! It's an adventure to discover!
- God is your Father, and He never yells or criticizes. He loves you just as you are! He is okay with mistakes and failures because He knows that's how we ultimately succeed!

When you are breathing in the fresh air of truth on a daily basis, you will begin to notice your emotions shifting. You and your kids will start to feel

- Hope
- Love
- Peace
- Freedom
- Safety
- Relaxed
- Confident
- Centered

- Kind
- Patient

And when you feel those things, you will see some new behaviors begin to emerge:

- Compromise
- More gentle tones when talking
- More self-control
- More creative activities
- More cooperation
- More sharing
- More helpfulness
- More respectful behavior

Am I talking about creating Utopia? Of course not. That's not realistic. But I am talking about creating shifts that will give your kids a fighting chance at having a healthier emotional life with opportunities for healthier relationships and greater success in life.

So the key takeaway for you today is if you live in a smoky home, quit trying to get rid of the smoke. What a waste of your energy. Instead, get to the nearest window and start breathing in the fresh air of truth. Then invite your kids to join you. Once you can breathe, you'll be able to start healing.

If you are in the Flying Free Sisterhood program and you want to hone your parenting skills and learn some practical tools, hit up the "Effective Parenting" course. And if you're not in the program yet, be sure to apply. You can do that by going to joinflyingfree.com.

Maybe you are already divorced, so you're out of the smokey house but you still feel like you're choking on the smoke that's still stuck to your clothing. Maybe you brought some of that smoke into your new home and you'd like to get your life back. You want to find out who you are without the smoke.

I encourage you to consider my new program for divorced women of faith called Flying Higher. In that group you'll learn how to organize your mind and your life. How to get things done. How to create the future of your dreams, how to lose weight, how to handle money, and how to find a good man. You can apply for Flying Higher by going to joinflyinghigher.com.

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and leave a rating and review for the Flying Free Podcast? Your review can be totally anonymous, and the ratings and reviews encourage Apple Podcasts to show this podcast to more potential listeners. This is how we can spread these kinds of messages to other women of faith who need to hear them!

You guys, advocates like me who work in this field get a TON of flak from haters. Abusers don't like us, and they aren't afraid to leave rotten reviews and try to destroy reputations. There are more of us than there are of the haters. Our people just tend to be more afraid and hidden, but collectively, we can make such a difference. So let's band together and support one another in spreading a message of love and freedom to our sisters.

And that's it for this episode! Thank you so much for listening and until next time, fly free!