

When Parenting Hurts: A Resource for Moms and Dads

by Carrie Bevell Partridge

Parenting can be one of the greatest joys in life, but it can also be one of the greatest heartaches. The love that we parents naturally have for our children is deep. And when we love much, we risk hurting much.

Unfortunately, the chances are strong that we will experience times of hurt during our parenting years. It might be because we and our children are very different from each other, because of our children's choices or circumstances, or simply because of physical, mental, environmental, or other types of changes. No matter the reasons, these difficult times can be incredibly taxing on our hearts, minds, and bodies. Although we can neither fully prevent nor rapidly resolve every situation, there are some things that we can do to help ourselves remain steady, resilient, and hopeful during challenging seasons.

Romans 12:12 has been particularly meaningful to me in my own parenting journey. It says, "Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer." That pretty much sums it up, doesn't it?

*We have such hope for our kids and their futures!...
But difficult times will come to them and possibly between us and them...
And we must be constant in communication with God our Father about all of it.*

Joyful. Patient. Faithful. Prayerful.

These are our most needed attributes in parenting.

Parents, we need help from the Lord and support from each other in this journey. While I don't have easy answers for you, I can offer you some of my own experience, what I've learned, and how I've grown through 23 years of parenting. The suggestions I offer do not formulate a comprehensive guide, but they are practical and specific ideas that can help generate even more ideas of your own! (Don't try to do everything I've suggested. Just choose the ones that appeal to you.)

Included in this resource are some ideas for things to do, things to remember, conversations to start, Scripture to meditate on, and even music to listen to when you, as a mom or dad, are going through a difficult time. When--for whatever reason--parenting hurts. I hope that it is helpful for you.

~ Carrie

Things To Do When Parenting Hurts

POST A PIC.

Find a favorite photo of your child from when they were younger--a photo that makes you smile every time you see it. Place that photo somewhere you will see it often and be reminded that this is the same child with whom you are having difficulty. Doing this will help you soften toward them and be reminded of your deep love for them.

TAKE A BREAK.

Whether it's a long or short break, find a way to get mental and physical respite from the difficult circumstances. Ideas: go for a walk or bike ride, take a bubble bath, read a book (not a parenting book!), draw/paint/color, watch a good movie, call a friend who makes you laugh, or go window shopping.

ASK FOR HELP.

Seek wise counsel, whether from a paid professional or from a trusted friend (or both!). Talk to someone you respect who is a few steps ahead of you--someone who will be kind but straightforward with you. We all need help along the way, and getting outside perspectives can often help us with our blind spots in parenting.

WORK IT OUT.

When our bodies and minds are consumed with stressful or difficult issues, it weighs us down. Doing something active can help relieve some of this pressure while also providing a good and healthy outlet for dealing with stress. Pick a physical activity you enjoy, such as walking, running, biking, dancing, swimming, boxing, or something else that helps you move your body and release some of the tension you feel.

DO SOMETHING CALMING.

When you need to work out some tension in a calm or quiet way, do something like drawing, painting, coloring, knitting, cooking, working a jigsaw puzzle, walking slowly beside a body of water, gardening, cleaning, or organizing. These activities can be healthy and productive ways to work through some stress and tension while also calming your mind. The natural rhythms of some of these activities also provide a good atmosphere for time in prayer.

MEDITATE ON SCRIPTURE.

Focus on truth that is found in the Word of God. Philippians 4:8 tells us, "... whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things."

SEEK OUT ENCOURAGEMENT.

When you are feeling discouraged, talk to a friend who will give you sincere words of encouragement. Allow yourself to be reminded of the things you are doing well as a parent. Encouragement can greatly help you continue to be steadfast.

PICTURE JESUS PHYSICALLY BEING PRESENT WITH YOU.

When you are feeling sad or discouraged, this image can comfort you. When you are feeling angry or like you're about to reach the end of your rope, this image can help keep your heart and mind in check. The good news is that although we can't see Jesus physically, we know that He is actually present with us. And this is a beautiful and comforting image to focus on, no matter what the circumstances are.

FIND THAT PERSON.

Find someone you trust and that your child responds well to. Ask that person to spend some time with your child and look for opportunities to speak wisdom into your child's life. Oftentimes, our kids are more open to accepting wisdom coming from someone besides their parents.

GET A CHANGE OF SCENERY.

If you feel overwhelmed with tension in your home, do something to get out of the house on a fairly regular basis. Even running errands can help shake some things up and help you get a different perspective. It doesn't have to be a solo outing, either. Sometimes, the whole family needs a change of scenery for a little while!

HAVE A SAFE PLACE TO VENT.

Find at least one person whom you trust and who knows you and your parenting situation well and will let you call on them when you just need to vent some frustration. This doesn't have to be a person who gives you advice--mainly a listening ear and a safe, non-judgmental space. Even better is someone who can help you laugh through the tears.

WORK TOGETHER.

Do something that requires you and your child to work together. Cook a meal or make a dessert together. Work in the yard. Do something to serve a neighbor or help your community. Plan a family night or another small gathering together. Do an escape room, work a jigsaw puzzle, or solve some riddles together. Team up and play pickleball, cornhole, or even a board game. Anything that helps you work together.

LAUGH TOGETHER.

When you and your child are caught in a cycle of conflict, sharp words, and tension, find something that makes both of you laugh and spend some time on that. Laughter lightens the mood, diffuses tension, and provides a welcome [temporary] distraction from difficult issues and conversations.

JUST BE TOGETHER.

Do something together that doesn't require much from either of you--something neutral and easy that doesn't call for a lot of energy or even conversation. Go out for ice cream. Go to a movie. Go bowling. Get milkshakes and go for a drive. Do something that is together but that shifts the focus off of each other and onto something else.

SERVE YOUR CHILD IN AN UNEXPECTED WAY.

Do one of their regular chores for them. Take them on a special outing. Offer to give them a hand or shoulder massage. Buy their favorite snack food and put it out for them to find as a surprise. Take them shopping for something they would especially enjoy. Get creative and do something that would be a pleasant surprise for them. Or just come right out and ask them what you can do for them that would be helpful or appreciated.

SHARE STORIES.

Tell your child cute or funny stories about when they were little. Even if they act like they don't enjoy hearing these stories, they probably do. Doing this can diffuse some tension between you and help both of you remember the love and relationship between you.

TURN YOUR WORRYING INTO PRAYING.

Worrying happens all too easily in parenting. It takes discipline to turn our thoughts, words, and focus toward the Lord. But this is the best and most helpful thing we can do. We need to believe that and put it into practice. 1 Peter 5:7 tells us simply and directly: "Cast all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you."

LISTEN TO MUSIC.

Music has the power to make us think, help us remember, shift our mood, and just stay with us. Make a playlist of songs that remind you of who God is and how He loves both you and your child. These are some of the songs that have been particularly meaningful to me during difficult seasons of parenting:

- "Glorious Unfolding" by Steven Curtis Chapman
- "Sovereign Over Us" by Michael W. Smith
- "Through All of It" by Colton Dixon
- "It Is Well" by Bethel Music, Kristene DiMarco

- “Even If” by MercyMe
- “Eye of the Storm” by Ryan Stevenson
- “Always Good” by Andrew Peterson
- “In Jesus Name (God of Possible)” by Katy Nichole
- “Sacred” by Caedmon’s Call
- “Motherhood” by JJ Heller
- “Weary Traveler” by Jordan St. Cyr
- “Great Is Thy Faithfulness” by Carrie Underwood, CeCe Winans (or any version of this hymn)
- “Praise You in This Storm” by Casting Crowns
- “Don’t Lose Heart” by Steven Curtis Chapman
- “Remember” by Bryan and Katie Torwalt
- “Abide” by Dwell Songs, Aaron Williams
- “Lilies & Sparrows” by Jess Ray
- “God Is Love” by Chris Renzema
- “Good Good Father” by Chris Tomlin
- “Be Still and Know” by Steven Curtis Chapman

Things to Remember When Parenting Hurts

WE CAN ONLY CONTROL OURSELVES.

We tell our kids this all the time, but do we remember it for ourselves? Though there are some things we can control about our children’s environments, we cannot control their thoughts, words, actions, and reactions. We can, however, control our own.

THIS IS A SEASON, AND SEASONS CHANGE.

Our children grow quickly. Their bodies, brains, words, and opinions change often. It can be quite helpful to remember that the difficult season we are in might not last very long. Some seasons just need to run their course. This is probably not the end of the story.

DECIPHER BETWEEN WHAT IS AN ACTUAL ISSUE AND WHAT IS JUST OUR PREFERENCE.

This one can be really difficult, but it is wise to take the time and brain energy to distinguish what is harmful or wrong from what is just annoying or childish. Or maybe what is difficult for us is something that is simply different from how we might think about or do something. It is important to separate these issues. Our goal shouldn’t be to raise smaller versions of ourselves but rather to raise our children to be the best versions of themselves.

WE DON’T KNOW HOW IT’S GOING TO GO. AND IF WE DID, WE MIGHT NOT LIKE IT.

Not knowing how the story is going to end can be scary. I’m not sure that this is a comforting thing to remember, but it does remind us that we can’t know and can’t control it anyway. The hard truth is our kids might have to go to some dark, scary, or lonely places before surrendering to the Lord. And even then, it might not happen. When we consider these things, we should be prompted to continually pray for and surrender our children to God.

GOD KNOWS AND LOVES US AND OUR CHILDREN PERFECTLY.

God created each of our children. He knows every thought, action, dream, breath, and detail about them. When (not if) we fail our children, we can be confident that their Heavenly Father will never fail them.

OUR KIDS ARE INDEPENDENT OF US. THEY ARE SUPPOSED TO BE.

As parents, one of our jobs is to teach and train our children to eventually be able to live as contributing, productive people in this world. They aren’t supposed to be dependent on us forever. Part of this growing independence involves developing their own ways of thinking and doing things, and it might sound or look different than what we are used to. This can be difficult, but it’s not necessarily wrong.

NOT EVERYTHING (NEGATIVE OR POSITIVE) IS A REFLECTION OF OUR PARENTING.

Remember this often! Sometimes, the choices our children make have nothing to do with how we raise them. They are independent thinkers and are responsible for their own actions. The flip side of this coin is that we also don't need to be quick to take credit for how our parenting affects the "great things" our children do or say.

WHEN GOD CALLS US, HE EQUIPS US.

When we are going through difficult parenting seasons, we can trust that God will give us what we need when we need it. He does not call us into parenthood and then leave us to figure it out on our own. He is faithful, and He is sufficient. Amen.

SCRIPTURE IS TRUE.

Read it. Memorize it. Meditate on it. Post it around your home, in your vehicle, on your laptop, on your phone... all the places. Here are just a few of the verses that can minister to us during difficult seasons in parenting:

- "Be still and know that I am God." - Psalm 46:10
- "Come to Me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." - Matthew 11:28
- "Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." - Philippians 4:6-7
- "But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own."
- Matthew 6:33-34
- "In peace I will lie down and sleep, for You alone, Lord, make me dwell in safety." - Psalm 4:8
- "The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; His mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness." - Lamentations 3:22-23
- "But He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me." - 2 Corinthians 12:9
- "Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer." - Romans 12:12

Keep The Conversation Going (Even When Parenting Hurts)

Communication is a key factor in any relationship, and it is especially important in the parent-child relationship because we are to model healthy communication skills for our kids. But in the difficult seasons of parenting, it can be tempting to let silence take over, whether it's out of laziness or frustration or just not knowing what to say. However, we cannot heal or make progress in our relationships without communicating with one another. So, since we're grownups, we need to take it upon ourselves to initiate conversations with our kids when it isn't happening naturally.

Thankfully, keeping the conversation going doesn't mean that we have to keep trying to plow through the rugged terrain of difficult topics, conflict, or hurt feelings. Certainly, we don't need to avoid these, but sometimes, we can benefit from taking a break from them for a little while. What we don't want to take a break from is communication altogether.

When bigger issues seem to be pressing, though, it can be challenging to think of something else to talk about. So here are some conversation starters for you. Keep in mind that these might be best used during “neutral times” (i.e., not in the middle of a heated discussion or when emotions are running high). When you ask these questions, be prepared to do a lot of listening and very little talking (See James 1:19.). Resist the urges to correct, argue, or defend yourself. Keep an open mind and look for opportunities to learn and grow through these conversations. Remember, the goal is to encourage communication, not shut it down.

- What is something you want me to know about you?
- What is something you want to know about me?
- In what ways do you think you and I are alike?
- In what ways do you think you and I are different?
- When do you feel the most loved by me?
- When do you feel the most supported by me?
- When do you feel the most heard by me?
- When do you feel closest to me?
- How do you think we best communicate with each other?
- What is one of your favorite memories of us together?
- What age do you wish you could go back to?
- When do you feel a lot of pressure in your life?
- Who do you feel the most comfortable talking to?
- What are some things we could do to help improve our relationship?
- When do you feel the most open to me?
- When do you feel the most closed off to or shut down by me?
- How can I be praying for you?

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Carrie has a heart to see families grow in relationship with each other and with God the Father. She and her husband, Kevin, live in Mississippi and have been married for 26 years—time that has been marked by their desire to follow Jesus and make disciples through college ministry, church planting, leading house churches, and parenting. They have five children, two of whom they adopted internationally.

Carrie is a writer who focuses on words of encouragement and support for marriage and family; she writes about her own family experiences and what God is teaching her through them. She is the author of [Growth Spurts: Growing Through Motherhood](#). She has been a contributor to [Family Christian](#), [The Love Offering Blog Series](#), [New Mercies for Moms](#), [Begin Within: A Gratitude Series](#), [Ministry to Parents](#), and other online sources. Her writing has been published in [ParentLife](#) and [BabyLife](#) magazines, and she is a contributing author to [The Favor of Forgiveness: Find Yourself Again](#) devotional book.

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