



To Raise Our Children, We Must First Raise Ourselves

By Carey Sipp



We've heard the quote before: "what a man thinketh, a man does; what he does, he becomes..."

When I clearly understood the importance of being a good example for my children, I revised that old quote: "What a child sees, a child does. What a child does, a child becomes."

With help from others wiser than I, I came to understand that wanting to do a great job of raising my children meant doing a great job of raising myself. In short, like millions of other COAs, I had to grow up with my children. I also had to go back into my own childhood and heal painful memories, as I am also a firm believer that, "What you don't feel, you can't heal," and "what you don't heal, you pass on to your children."

Children pay a high price for compulsive, addictive parental behaviors such as alcohol and drug addiction. We know genetics and home environment load addicts' children with the highest risk of becoming abusers of alcohol or other drugs, or addicted persons themselves. COAs are also more likely than others to suffer child abuse, depression, and anxiety. We have more behavioral problems and three times as many hospital admissions.

I started my life with addiction in a violent alcoholic home. Behaviors I adopted served me well as a child: taking the blame, being the hero, being a people-pleaser, zoning out. But in adult life they backfired, leading me to struggle with work

addiction, money mismanagement, a chaotic lifestyle, and alcohol.

Shortly after filing for divorce from my husband of seven years I read a quote from Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis and it struck me hard: "If you botch raising your children, nothing else you do really matters." I pasted that quote on my bathroom mirror, and thought about it often.

I was at a crossroads. Faced with two bewildered little children and a failing business, I toyed with swapping my two nightly beers for a six-pack to knock the edge off the day I couldn't do it. I knew if I repeated the alcoholism modeled by my father, my children would end up as scarred as I had been. I needed help.

Today I believe that knowing you need help is the first step to becoming a TurnAround Mom: a parent pledged to sanity, sobriety, gratitude, and responsibility. A mother who'd be proud to see her children do the same things she does.

For help with reparenting myself and parenting my children, I turned to a program for alcoholics' families and found instant and healing support. I devoured books on parenting and asked parents I knew and admired from church and school how they were raising their children. Studying parenting and recovery became my dual passions. I went to work with a parenting expert, attending countless workshops on parenting and personal growth. One theme kept rising to the top: if I don't like something my children are doing, I'd better look in the mirror to see if I am doing the same thing. I can't expect better than the example I set.

Sharing this "child see, child do" tip brought a lot of "Ah ha!" reactions from my peers, people like me who want to do a great job of parenting, but because of the hurtful, neglectful behaviors modeled to them as children, are clueless as to how.

In this time of turmoil, giving our children a sense of belonging, trust, and security is more important than ever. Without these anchors, many children seeking relief from their fears will turn to alcohol, drugs, compulsive sex, and other self-destructive behaviors, especially if parents model compulsive, addictive behaviors.

For many of us who grew up in the insanity of addiction, intensity, or abuse, or became addicted, abused, or stretched to the breaking point, incredible challenges erupt. Chief among these challenges: if I don't know what serenity feels like, what sanity looks like, how can I create a sane and loving home?

My book, *The TurnAround Mom*, is filled with experiences, processes, tips, and tools that I hope will answer that question. My hope is that it will raise awareness of the suffering that parental substance abuse brings, and comfort COAs by reminding us that sick old cycles don't have to be repeated. Working together we could see a grassroots campaign to create an association of TurnAround Parents that would help generations of children grow up and thrive in saner, more loving homes. It would be healing for our children, ourselves, and our nation.

Carey Sipp is the author of The Turn Around Mom, a parenting guide for ACOAs. She is an insightful blogger addressing everyday real life issues where early childhood experiences can impact adult responses and how recovery can alter those responses for the betterment of self and family. For more on Carey Sipp, visit www.turnaroundmom.com.