



## Steve Baron

I just was visiting with my 16 year old grandson and met his girlfriend. I later just reminded him to be very good to her. I had previously talked with him several times about how men should treat everyone, but particularly women - with respect and kindness. I also encouraged him to never stand by when he saw anyone, especially women or children, being mistreated physically or emotionally without trying to intervene in some kind of safe and constructive manner. By the way, I have given a different version of the same message to my 8 year old grandson several times already, with the suggestion for intervention and getting help limited to dealing with any bullying he sees of children around his age. The earlier the better. But talk is cheap, because children are more likely to do what they see their parents and role models do than what they say to do. So it's more important how they actually see me treating everyone, particularly women and children, than what I say about it.

It's also important for us to let children know that if they are getting bullied or abused, to tell someone they trust and get help, and not just try to deal with it on their own. And if the first person they approach for help doesn't believe or help them, to find someone else they trust and keep telling until someone helps. Secrecy breeds and enables abuse.

Earlier this year, in my role on the Child Abuse Prevention Council, I wrote an op-ed piece for the San Jose Mercury News in which I said that surrounding children with

“healthy relationships” (parenting, partner, family, teacher, coach, pastoral, etc.) throughout their entire childhood serves not only to prevent child abuse and neglect while also enhancing healthy childhood development and resiliency, it also provides long term prevention of domestic, family, school, and criminal violence.

So, what are “healthy relationships?” The child doing the voiceover in a Santa Clara Child Abuse Prevention Council PSA available at <https://www.sccgov.org/sites/cac/Pages/cac.aspx> defines them very simply as being “...emotionally and physically safe, respectful, caring, and never, ever, violent or abusive,” because, the child adds, “violence always hurts us...” How does it hurt children and their long term healthy development? Check out the California Attorney General's 15 minute video “First Impressions: Exposure to Violence and a Child's Developing Brain” available on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c1mnVfnBTQM>.

Neuroscience and research findings such as those provided by the Adverse Childhood Experiences Study out of Kaiser Permanente and the CDC, and hundreds of others, demonstrate that providing children with healthy, respectful, caring, supportive, violence-and-abuse-free relationships at home, school, and in between dramatically raises the odds of their experiencing emotional, behavioral, cognitive, social, and physical health throughout their childhood and adulthood. And it greatly reduces the likelihood of children growing up to be violent in intimate partner and dating relationships and otherwise. Children raised in an environment of healthy relationships are far more likely to be “resilient” and more capable of surviving the inevitable knock downs and losses of life, getting back up, recovering, and going on to lead full, constructive and meaningful lives.

Do you want to prevent violence? The World Health Organization says that actions that help to prevent domestic violence include: the absence of attitudes accepting of violence; creating a climate of non-tolerance and accountability for intimate partner violence and child abuse; enhancing gender equality and the empowerment of women, and; reducing poverty. So, surrounding children with healthy relationships, reducing poverty, providing early identification and effective intervention for victims of abuse, neglect, mental illness, and serious trauma, together with keeping guns out of the hands of those whose behavior signals serious instability or threat, will take care of the bulk of it.

“But wait!” some of you say. “You raise kids to be too nice, caring, and empathetic and you’re going to be raising a bunch of naïve and vulnerable individuals just waiting to be taken advantage of and victimized by those who think empathy is to be used solely for the purpose of manipulation, exploitation and domination.” Hmm, a valid concern, unless we also understand that treating people with respect, understanding, and empathy is, in fact, totally compatible with also possessing a healthy degree of vigilance, learning the warning signs of predators, abusers, and con people, setting and enforcing healthy boundaries, being appropriately assertive, refusing to tolerate abusive behavior, defending oneself and others when necessary, and pursuing healthy self-interest without exploiting others. We have to model and teach the whole package.

So, like the child says at the end of the Healthy Relationships PSA available at <https://www.sccgov.org/sites/cac/Pages/cac.aspx>, “Thanks for listening and understanding.” - Steve

---Steve Baron is retired as the Director of Family Court Services, Superior Court of California, Santa Clara County, also from a private therapy practice, and from Santa Clara University where he taught on the Adjunct Faculty for 28 years on subjects including domestic violence, child abuse, elder abuse, substance abuse, and psychological trauma. He currently sits on the Santa Clara County’s Domestic Violence Death Review and Child Death Review Teams, the Child Abuse Prevention Council and Social Services Advisory Commission, and is an occasional volunteer trainer for the Court system and community service providers.

