

Parenting in Public: Crying babies and stressed out parents

Imagine this scenario.

It has happened to all of us at one time or another. You are in a public place when your attention is drawn to sounds of an angry parent speaking harshly to a crying child. The parent is obviously stressed out. You may be asking yourself how you can intervene without making the situation worse. You may even be telling yourself that you have no business interfering because after all, none of us are perfect parents.

Consider the situation that escalates to verbal abuse, hitting, slapping, punching or arm-pulling. What message are we sending to a child if we walk by and say or do nothing?

Isn't it sad that there seems to be a taboo against intervening and helping each other in stressful situations? Could we all help prevent child abuse by helping bring calm to an emotionally charged situation, before it escalates? Remember: Not every stressed out parent is a child abuser. If you have been blessed with children, you most likely have been here. Parenting is not easy.

While these questions can be complex, experience has shown understanding and a non-judgmental attitude are the best methods of intervention. How would you want to be treated in the same or similar situation? Offer to help the parent carry groceries, hold the door for a parent with their arms full. One person I know keeps stickers in her purse for children who may be in need of distraction. If a child is left unattended in a grocery cart, stay near until the caregiver returns. There are many ways to offer kindness and help depending on the situation. In all cases, avoid negative looks and comments.

In situations where there is actual abuse occurring, be a good witness. Take note of the age and description of the abuser and the child. Get a license plate number. Notify the store manager. Call police.

If you are raising children and are stressed out, realize you are not alone. None of us are perfect parents. Get the support of other parents through quality programs such as Early Childhood Family Education. This link contains a few basic parenting tips.

<http://www.co.washington.mn.us/index.aspx?NID=812>.

If you have raised children, remember what it was like and reach out to parents and offer the help you would have liked to have had.

Aine Bebeau, Member of Washington County Child Protection Citizen Review Panel.

If you are interested in learning more about the work of the Washington County Child Protection Citizen Review Panel visit the Washington County

website: <http://www.co.washington.mn.us/index.aspx?NID=1549>

Or, call Don Pelton, Children's Services Supervisor, at 651-430-6631.