

Co-regulation Through Suffering

Guidance for helping children respond to stressors while refraining from the same kinds of behaviors that upset them in the first place

By Cam Lee Small, MS, LPCC
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Child comes home from school:

“Judas called me a name! What a loser, idiot, moron, completely stupid, he’s such a horrible person, I hate him and I’m never going back to school again!!!”

Here are five ideas to consider when a child is responding and needs help to organize emotions around someone's behavior at school (while also guiding her to refrain from absolutely labeling and villainizing the perpetrator):

1. **See it as a form of ["serve and return."](#)** [child is pouring their cup and allowing you to pour into her cup; Richard Rose calls it "peekaboo"] ... highly recommend just through as Rose gives a powerful metaphor that will stay with you long after you see it.
2. **Find ways to increase child’s awareness of the ["Sinner Sufferer Saint" constellation.](#)** Yes there are ways that sin comes at us from all sides... AND there are ways we suffer and get to lament and cry out in response to suffering in response to sins committed against us... AND how does God invite us, as needy recipients of grace, into "sainthood"

as we seek to live as ambassadors of the King on earth as it is in Heaven (we are saints at the core, remember to recognize the goodness found in one's identity as a saint, a beloved child of God). [the tension happens when we live with too much emphasis on any one of the three points; the journey certainly includes learning how to negotiate the intersection of all three; it's about finding ways to allow your child to "play peekaboo," show herself, and receive the kind of grace-filled guidance and shepherding God demonstrates and provides in Christ] NOTE [this comes with an obvious caution about spiritual bypassing and the minimization of harm caused by another's actions, particularly within the context of the school system and the local church community]

3. **Help your child discern between *behavior* and *personhood (identity)*.** Someone's behavior can be unkind, wrong, unsafe, and we're allowed to name that... AND they are still image bearers (as alluded to above) who are loved by Christ. Your child can report about what someone did (behavior), how she felt about it (emotion expression), but also may need space (and practice) to reflect on the perpetrator's identities (and her own), along with *her* heart and choices thereafter (see [Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands](#) for a dialogue about heart motives/desires and how they can be nurtured and/or distorted).
4. **When your child comes to you feeling hurt by another person's actions,** what parts from the [5th response in this vignette](#) could be helpful for her to experience in relationship with you? (Dr. Becky Bailey and her colleague give a lighthearted comparison of parental response styles; serves as a commentary on what children might need from us in moments of "flipping their lid") Of course this doesn't mean you cannot take action in other ways beyond your processing with your child. You'll need to discern for yourself when/how to address problematic behavioral patterns that exist in the context from which your child is reporting.
5. [Building Bridges is an activity book by Julie Lowe](#) and includes helpful prompts to draw children out and give space to sit with and walk with them through their lived experiences. It is recommended to adapt the material to fit your values and practices around the book's faith-based and spiritual components. [The Riley The Brave and Your Amazing Brain](#) series by Jessica Sinarski is another helpful resource to consider.

[Cam Lee Small, MS, LPCC](#) is an international adoptee from Korea, an experience that informs and inspires his current professional work as an author and licensed professional clinical counselor. He formed his own private practice, Therapy Redeemed, in 2018, to raise awareness and respond to the mental health needs of adoptees and their families wherever they may be in their adoption journey. Cam's vision for adoptee-centered advocacy is evident through his 1:1 counseling services, live workshops and support groups, Masterclass trainings, and his active content creation/collaboration in and through various media platforms. His work has been featured in [National Council for Adoption](#), [Christianity Today](#), University [Minnesota](#) School of Social Work, and [Center for Adoption Support and Education](#). He is currently working on a manuscript for a book to be released through InterVarsity Press to address the intersection of adoption, mental health, and social justice. Cam brings value and much needed perspective to the adoption community, personally and professionally. [See full bio here](#).