



IN A WORLD OF BUZZWORD PARENTING, WHAT'S A PARENT TO DO?

Well-known risk factors undermine children's health and development, but there are protective factors you can employ

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Helicopter parenting. Tiger parenting. Free-range parenting. These are buzzwords we hear all the time that are supposed to describe the 'best' approaches for parents to take raising their children. We all want the best for our children, and parents happily and eagerly adopt the latest, greatest advice. Even governments enact legislation that promotes one approach or another, like Utah did recently in passing legislation enabling parents to legally leave their children unsupervised to play outdoors or walk to school. But do any of these parenting styles have ample evidence to

support effectiveness as a parenting approach? Most people might be surprised to find that the answer is: Not really. Social scientists who study parenting rarely, if ever, use these buzzword concepts to categorize or characterize parenting approaches. When these scientists, like myself, want to predict what kind of parenting affects children's development, we consider very different variables. So what really matters in parenting according to the evidence? There are well-known risk factors that undermine children's health and development, and there are protective factors that promote children's health and development. Risk factors include traumatic childhood experiences that parents themselves may have experienced in their own families, such as mental illness or addictions, family violence

and low family income. These factors may prevent parents from engaging in consistent sensitive and responsive interactions with their children, which promotes children's optimal brain, cognitive and social-emotional development. According to the Harvard Center on the Developing Child, parental mental illness, addictions, family violence, child abuse and neglect are all considered to be "toxic" to children's development. This toxicity is observable at the cellular level - when children are exposed to these chronic stressors, in an attempt to cope, their bodies produce the stress hormone cortisol at persistently high levels. In normal situations, cortisol levels would come down as the stressor passes and the child's body would recover. However, in chronically stressed children, the high cortisol levels remain over

time, negatively impact a range of body and brain systems, and contribute to ill health over their lifetime. But there's good news in the evidence, too. Research shows that these stressors are only toxic in the context of low levels of protective factors. In other words, kids may be able to weather trauma if they have the right environment and supports to thrive. So what provides protective factors to children for healthy development? Abundant research shows that healthy serve-and-return relationships - parent-child bonds characterized by high sensitivity and appropriate responsiveness - can buffer the impacts of trauma on children's health and development. When a child serves up a cue to indicate a need and their parent reliably responds, this builds trust and a healthy parent-child attachment. It also contributes to children's

greater success and ease in peer and school relationships. Also important are parental social supports - the networks that parents can depend on to help them out and support them emotionally. Supportive people can include friends or family or even professionals like health-care providers. These people are reliably there for the parent who needs information, advice, reassurance, caring and even help with household tasks, like chores or child care. Over and over, it's been shown that social supports can buffer the impacts between toxic stressors, like maternal depression, on children's health and development. Social support is best thought of as reciprocal - a back and forth between people who care about each other and show it in tangible ways. 'Reflective function' is also a protective factor and describes both the ability to

have insight into your own thoughts and feelings and the ability to envision what another person thinks and feels. It helps a parent understand what might underpin their child's behaviour - so valuable when parenting young children who may not be able to communicate their needs and wants clearly. Fortunately for parents, this important protective factor can be learned with practice. These three protective factors are what most scientists study if they want to know or predict how children will develop. Experts who study parenting and child development don't waste time with popular culture conceptions of best or worst parenting approaches. You can throw the buzzwords away, in other words.

STRIP CLUB OWNER TRIES TO WEASEL OUT

GREENSBURG, LA - Liberty Counsel has asked the 21st Judicial District Court to affirm and award the \$55,000 in attorney's fees and costs for the defense of Rev. Richard Sandberg for a frivolous lawsuit brought by Tyrone Butler, a local strip club owner, seeking to silence his efforts to advance moral policy in St. Helena Parish. On July 31, 2013, Tyrone Butler, the owner of a local

strip club in St. Helena Parish, filed a lawsuit against Rev. Sandberg and his organization, The Moral Alliance of St. Helena. Rev. Sandberg and other local pastors associated with his group were petitioning the local legislature to adopt a proposed ordinance regulating the behavior of patrons and employees of strip clubs and other sexually oriented businesses in St. Helena Parish. Butler's strip club,

euphemistically named a "Gentlemen's Club," has been the subject of raids and arrests for illegal drugs and prostitution. As a result of Rev. Sandberg's efforts to advance a moral and public welfare agenda in the legislative body, Butler filed a harassing lawsuit against him saying that he had defamed Butler and his business. However, it was Butler who was behaving in a harassing

manner. Many of the pastors and religious community members speaking in support of the regulation of strip clubs were intimidated, harassed and confronted in public places by Butler. At a gas station in St. Helena, Butler approached one of the pastors and threatened to physically assault him and his family if he did not stop supporting the ordinance. The same day Rev. Sandberg was served

with the complaint at his home, his dog was poisoned and died. Liberty Counsel filed a special motion to strike the complaint, arguing that the First Amendment protects Rev. Sandberg's speech to public officials and that he was entitled to encourage the local legislature to reject Butler's harassment and bullying. The court granted Liberty Counsel's motion and dis-

missed the complaint against Reverend Sandberg. After Butler's frivolous lawsuit was dismissed and he failed to respond to numerous motions or appear at numerous hearings, he cried out to the court for relief from a judgment of attorney's fees that the district court was statutorily obligated to impose on him for his reckless disregard for the law. Butler now appeals this case in the same manner he began it, by premising his argument on a fanciful and fictional account of the proceedings, by blaming everyone (including the district court) for the abysmal failures of his counsel, by ignoring outright the very existence of one of his attorneys, and by submitting an unquestionably frivolous argument to this court. Neither Butler's fiction nor his arguments have any merit.

"This Louisiana strip club owner who tried to intimidate, harass, and bully pastors and religious leaders is now trying to avoid the consequence of his actions, paying attorney's fees that the district court was statutorily obligated to impose on him for his reckless disregard for the law," said Mat Staver, Founder and Chairman of Liberty Counsel. "The court awarded Liberty Counsel attorney's fees and costs, and it's time for Tyrone Butler to follow the law for a change and pay them," said Staver.

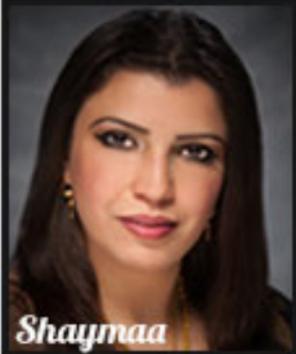
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