

Child abusers can become model parents

Parents who abuse their children can stop — and even become model fathers and mothers.

That's the finding of an Oakland University associate professor who spent four years researching and counseling groups of abusive parents.

"Absolutely. With proper treatment, not only will they refrain from abuse but many times they become model parents," said Mary L. Otto, associate professor of Human and Educational Services.

While most researchers have been concerned about the children involved, Otto approached the serious problem of abuse differently.

The Avon Township resident dealt with parents with the goal of developing a primary prevention model that would help stop abusive behavior and prevent it in future generations.

Citing National Council on Family Relations figures, she said one million children in the United States were subjected to violent abuse by their parents and two thousand children died painful deaths from torture in 1980.

"Child abuse, by definition, is the use of physical violence to make a child feel ashamed and guilty. The abuse destroys the child's self-value," explained Otto.

"Distinct from physical punishment, the abuse makes the child feel unworthy and that is emotionally worse than getting hit."

ABUSIVE PARENTS are not monsters or weird. They are simply un-

skilled at parenting and emotionally immature, explained Otto.

Her goal was the help the parents feel good about themselves and become the best parents they could possibly be.

She distributed self-assessment forms every six months to measure the parent's progress. The educator also discussed child development and organized a support group that encouraged parents to interact with each other outside the group session.

Her research indicated some primary factors relating to child abuse.

While not hereditary, abuse is very much learned. Statistically, most abusive parents were themselves abused as children.

In addition, she found stress is a significant factor.

"Most alarming was the number of incest victims in the group," added Otto. "In an average group of 12 individuals, at least five experienced some type of sexual trauma."

AFTER SEVERAL months of counseling, Otto noted an increase in the number of parents achieving their goals.

About 85 percent of the parents reduced hitting to less than twice a month, opposed to daily hitting. Also, all the parents perceived themselves as yelling less," she said.

Many parents in the self-referred group set goals higher than ordinary parents, attempting never to hit nor yell again.



ANN STRAKY

After four years of research, Oakland University professor Mary Otto found that abusive parents can change their ways.

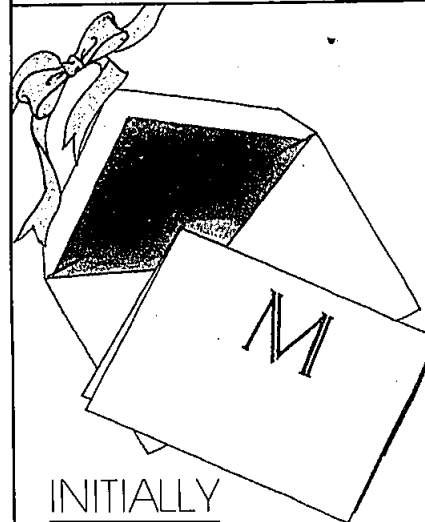


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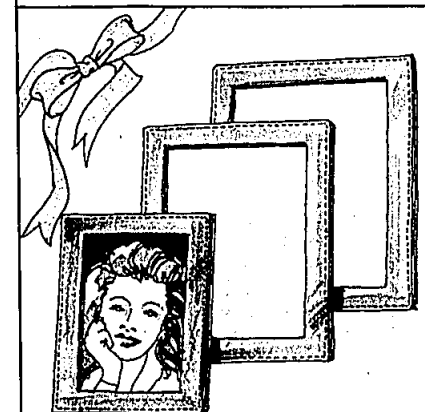


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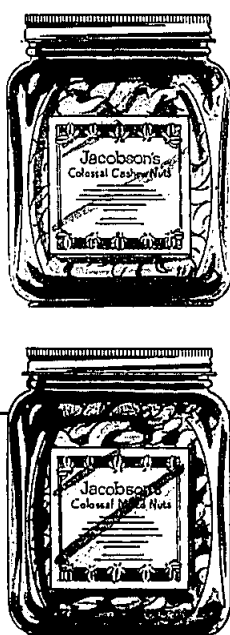
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