

Abuse of children can take many forms

CHILD ABUSE is not a recent invention. A look at morning talk shows or news headlines never one with a notion that this tragedy is a new phenomenon, another by-product of a bad age.

Columbus may have discovered America, but he did not invent it. Headline writers and some social workers may have discovered child abuse, but unfortunately it has been around for a very long time. Most child abusers themselves were once the victims of child abuse and not just recently.

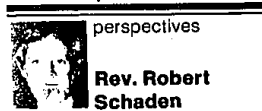
Sometimes it has been, and continues to be, in the form of physical violence. Sometimes it is in the form of sexual exploitation. And that is always violent regardless of the form it takes. Scars and broken bones inflicted on children by adults quickly draw our anger.

BUT THERE is another, more subtle brutality inflicted on children that does not seem to provoke much wrath at all. Nor is there ever any jail time hanging over the heads of these abusers.

This may be termed emotional abuse. While this kind of abuse does not provoke the same level of anger, it nonetheless leaves scars that far outlast the black and blue marks.

Whether the abuse in question is physical or emotional, child abusers all have one thing in common. They have a need or a want (usually perceived as one and the same), and they are willing to do anything to have it met, even harm a child.

But the emotional abusers often fail to see that they are abusing at all. In fact, they would



perspectives

Rev. Robert Schaden

be quick to condemn anybody who would harm a child, even while stepping all over their own.

THERE ARE many who abhor the effect of divorce on children. No one can argue the pain. But more often than not it is not the divorce in itself that brings the real harm, but rather the way in which some children are used in the process.

No child should have to put up with being pushed into the middle. But often they are, even by those who swear they would never do such a thing.

One approach is to have the child be the message carrier between two adults who have not learned to talk with one another. "You go tell your mother . . ." or "When you see your father . . ." What does it feel like to be a child in such a feud?

ON WHICH side is a child supposed to take when told how terrible his or her other parent is? The only issue at stake, of course, is the immediate need of the parent. It may be the need to make a last-ditch effort to stop the spouse from leaving. Custody-battle threats of

well on its way, the anger often is misdirected to the most available and least-threatening target. Again, enter the child.

Adults may make mistakes in their marriages or even their marriage choices. At times divorce is inevitable. But none of this can justify the kind of child abuse that often results in a selfish attempt to meet one's wants or needs.

Broken kids and broken sexual psyches are brutal realities, to say the least, but so are the many bruised emotions that no child should have to carry to adulthood.

Maybe the talk shows would like to take this one on. But one hour of exposure will not in itself solve the problem of selfish adults. Perhaps parental counseling should be a prerequisite for parents who are undergoing a divorce.

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OPEN HOUSE: The bureau will hold open house from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m., Thursday, Sept. 19, second floor, First United Methodist Church, 1589 W. Maple, Birmingham. Let volunteer interviewers match you with a volunteer opening.

MORALE BOOSTER — Patient, caring volunteers who love children are needed by the Wing Lake Developmental Center, Birmingham, to help with children in walking, riding, lunching and enjoying music. School year if possible. Minimum of one-half day per week. Phone 642-7272.

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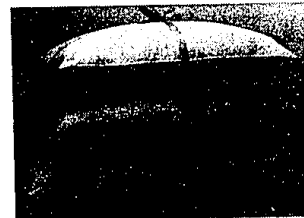
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