



USEP-OHIO PARENT TIP: It's Not Your Fault!

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A friend of mine just told me a story that I decided was very important to tell in a Parent Tip. Karen is a family therapist, who worked as a school counselor in the past. She told me this story of a family she is working with (without real names, of course) - that she hopes will be shared.

Carlie, who is 16, was molested by her Mom's 45-year-old boyfriend during the Christmas holidays. Mom (Erin) had known the man for almost a year, and trusted him with the kids, even allowing him to take them on outings while she worked. Carlie was home alone one afternoon during school vacation, Erin was at work and the boys, brothers Brian, 17 and Nick, 14, were playing basketball at the nearby rec center. Carlie told Erin about the attack when she returned from work. Erin immediately called the police, and brought charges. What struck Karen during a therapy session with Carlie was that she was desperate for support. Although she had talked openly to her mom, the police, hospital nurses, the prosecutor and even her school counselor, she seemed to crave more talk with Erin. She said, "My Mom is so sad, she doesn't like to talk about it. I don't know if Brian and Nick even know. I feel like I should not talk about it. I feel so guilty. I just did what he said. I knew he was going to rape me, and I was afraid to push him away or leave." Karen wisely suggested that they invite Erin to come in so mom and daughter could talk together with Karen in the therapy office. Erin said, "I'm the one who should feel guilty! I should not have trusted him with my kids! But I thought Carlie had enough people to talk to that we should not keep going over it again and again at home. I told Carlie it was not her fault."

Karen told Carlie and Erin, "It's not your fault Erin, and it's not Carlie's fault! She has explained to others, and me but she needs to talk to you, her mom! She needs you to help her talk about it over and over until she's finished with talking about it so much. She needs to know again and again that you understand and know it's not her fault. It will take time. You will both be OK!

Carlie feels that you don't want her to talk with her brothers. Since the kids have all been very close, now there is a barrier between them. This is the kind of experience that builds walls between family members and keeps us isolated from the ones we love."

I wanted to tell this story because of the importance of absolution, of helping our kids to know that hard things in their lives are NOT THEIR FAULT! Even when they do things that are their fault, they need to forgive themselves, and know we forgive them! They need reassuring dialogue with their parents, to know that we are sorry and understand. They need to hear us say, "I am sorry this is so difficult for you. I wish I could protect you from a world of hurt, and keep you safe."

When kids actually do something that they are responsible for, they still need to hear us say, "I

know you are sorry this has caused trouble for others, but I am also sorry that you have to go through this pain. Even if you are partly to blame, now it's time to move on. We can talk about it anytime you wish, but let's go on from here!"

Youngsters, who have the powerful blessing of parental understanding and forgiveness, learn to forgive themselves and others.

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