

Helping Children Find Peace

By Barbara A. Lewis

As the floodwaters of Hurricane Harvey washed into their home in Katy, Texas, the McShane family fled upstairs. Soon the first floor was completely flooded. They were trapped.

But the McShane family had a defense against the rising waters. During the flood, Patricia McShane wrote, “We know the Lord is in control. No matter what happens we will survive and we will get through this together! We will continue to pray and trust in our Heavenly Father.” With this attitude, she and her family were able to hold on until rescue came the next afternoon, when their daughter’s fiancé and his father arrived in a canoe with supplies and homemade bread.¹

Hurricanes rage in everyone’s life, whether they are actual storms or gales of personal troubles. Peace is not necessarily the absence of problems. Peace is an inside job. Like the McShanes, we can feel peace in our hearts even in the midst of a storm by focusing on Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace. As we practice cultivating peace within ourselves, we can help our children do the same.

Talk Openly about Feelings

Children are like barometers—they can detect the “atmospheric changes” in our feelings and moods. They easily read the body language, vocal pitch, and facial expressions of adults. If we feel agitated, they are often the first to sense it.

We can help children feel more peace by explaining why we feel troubled. Simple answers can sometimes be enough. If we don’t explain the problem, they might assume the worst or blame themselves. But when children feel included, their stress level is usually lower than it would be if they were left to imagine what might be wrong.

It’s also important to acknowledge children’s feelings. When children learn that feelings are a part of life, they can learn to work through them and turn to God for true peace.

A little girl named Abigail was afraid to go to sleep because she believed there were monsters hiding under her bed. Her father told her she was being silly. Instead, Abigail’s father could have lessened her fear by validating her feelings and admitting that he is also afraid sometimes. He could have shown her how to handle her fear by praying with her. This would help Abigail better manage her own emotions and trust in both her earthly father and her Heavenly Father.

Limit Media Consumption

It is not only monsters under the bed that can scare children. Children today fear such things as terrorist attacks, shootings, hurricanes, drownings, and kidnappings.² Much of their fear stems from media consumption. Children can see the news, watch frightening movies, and access inappropriate games and websites. Media violence can make children less sensitive to violence and more prone to nightmares, depression, aggression, and fear of harm.³

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A newspaper editorial observed, “A society that views graphic violence as entertainment . . . should not be surprised when senseless violence shatters the dreams of its youngest and brightest.”⁴

To combat the negative effects of media on children, set secure boundaries for technology use. Consider taking regular “fasts” from electronic media with children. Instead, spend time with them outdoors—hiking, swimming, running, climbing, or playing sports. Brainstorm ideas for service and allow children to choose how to serve. Praise the children for their good ideas. Help them notice the peace that flows from service.

Let Them Learn from Their Choices

A father took his son to a park to fly his kite. The father helped his son launch the kite in the air. The boy ran, letting out more string as the kite soared. Soon there was no more string.

The boy called, “Daddy, let’s cut the string and let the kite go; I want to see it go higher and higher.”

His father answered, “Son, the kite won’t go higher if we cut the string.”

“Yes, it will,” the boy urged. “The string is holding the kite down.”

The wise father allowed his son to cut the string. Immediately the kite was spinning out of control. It darted and swayed until it crashed to the ground. It was a startling lesson for the young boy, but he learned a great principle.⁵

Oftentimes we are tempted to jump in and solve children’s problems for them or to shield them from disappointment. But this robs them of the chance to learn how to figure things out for themselves. When children learn to accept disappointment and overcome simple struggles, they gain confidence and become more self-reliant. They feel more secure knowing that problems can usually be solved and mistakes can be fixed. This empowerment brings inner peace.

Teach Them to Feel the Holy Ghost

Children need to learn how to recognize the Spirit. One of the roles of the Holy Ghost is to bring comfort and peace.



LOOKING INSIDE: FINDING PEACE WITHIN YOURSELF AS AN ADULT

- Pray for a peaceful heart.
- Read scriptures, conference talks, and inspiring books.
- Forgive people and yourself.
- Reach out to serve others.
- Set personal boundaries for media use.
- Eat wholesome foods and exercise.

The sons of Mosiah must have felt some apprehension as they prepared to venture on missions into the Lamanite territory. The Lamanites at that time were ferocious people who loved to rob and murder wandering Nephites (see Alma 17:13–14). However, before the sons of Mosiah separated, they prayed together, and “the Lord did visit them with his Spirit, and said unto them: Be comforted. And they were comforted” (Alma 17:10). The peace they gained through the Holy Ghost strengthened them to continue.

We can teach our children to seek and recognize the peace the Comforter brings. When a child has a warmhearted moment after doing a kind deed, we can teach him or her that this tenderness is how the Holy Ghost makes us feel.



**LOOKING OUTSIDE:
REACHING OUTWARD TO HELP CHILDREN FIND PEACE**

- Listen to children and accept their feelings as valid.
- Pray with children when they are worried.
- Empower children by teaching them problem-solving skills and allowing them to solve simple problems.
- Show children how to handle frustration through prayer, scripture study, and activities.
- Help children recognize the peace the Holy Ghost provides.
- Set boundaries for media use.

Encourage children to pay attention to their feelings while they pray, study the scriptures, serve, or do other things that invite the Holy Ghost. With practice, they will be able to identify the peace and comfort that comes from the Holy Ghost and seek it on their own.

Build Righteous Habits

Studying the scriptures and praying together each day can build security and purpose for a family, even when a child is not engaged. A teenage son in one family refused to roll out of bed for scripture study each morning. So after reading with the other children, his mother knelt by his bed, prayed separately with him, and read scriptures to him while he dozed.

When the son left home, she often read scriptures to him over the phone. Years passed and storms raged in her son's life. Later, the mother wrote long, loving letters to him while he was in prison. The son answered her letters, but this time he quoted scriptures to her. He testified of the peace that the Lord's words had brought to him while in a dark place. The mother then knew that all the scriptures and peaceful words she had shared with him, even when he refused to listen, had been carried to his heart.

More years passed. The son fully repented and came back to church. Eventually, his mother was able to attend his endowment and sealing to a wonderful woman in the temple. She recognized the great answer to her prayers, as "peace, like a river,"⁶ flowed from her son's heart.

Focus on the Savior

Above all, we can teach children to find peace by pointing them toward the Prince of Peace. By following His path, we can avoid unnecessary fear and suffering. Sheri L. Dew, former Second Counselor in the Relief Society General Presidency, encouraged mothers to "teach their children where to find peace and truth and that the power of Jesus Christ is always stronger than the power of the adversary."⁷

The Savior said, "In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). Peace ultimately comes from knowing that our Father in Heaven has a plan for us and from exercising faith in Jesus Christ and His Atonement. As the McShane family learned, we can find peace inside, even when storms swirl around us. ■

The author lives in Utah, USA.

NOTES

1. See Delisa Hargrove, "Hope after Harvey: Some Personal Stories," MormonHub, Sept. 8, 2017, mormonhub.com/blog/faith/hope-harvey-personal-stories.
2. See Elizabeth Landau, "Terrorism, Kidnapping among Top Fears for Today's Youth," CNN, Apr. 16, 2009, cnn.com/2009/HEALTH/04/16/children.fears.
3. See Nicole Adams, "How Watching Violence on TV Affects Kids," Livestrong, June 13, 2017, livestrong.com/article/221006-how-tv-violence-affects-kids.
4. Quoted in Thomas S. Monson, "Finding Peace," *Ensign*, Mar. 2004, 4.
5. See Patricia P. Pinegar, "Peace, Hope, and Direction," *Ensign*, Nov. 1999, 67–68.
6. "It Is Well with My Soul," *Gospel Hymns No. 2* (1876), no. 76; see also Isaiah 48:18; 66:12.
7. Sheri L. Dew, "Are We Not All Mothers?" *Ensign*, Nov. 2001, 97.