



IGNITE PARENTING

*Open When . . .*

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# Parenting through Foster and Adoption

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WHERE BIBLICAL WISDOM  
MEETS MODERN PARENTING

*Open When . . .*

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# Parenting through Foster and Adoption

General Editor  
Ashley Grant

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# *Introduction*

The year was 2019. Overnight, I had become a single mother to four children. There were a myriad of concerns, doubts, and fears swirling around in my head. I began to resign myself to the fact that I now carried the sole responsibility for guiding four tiny humans into functioning and productive members of society. Aside from the fact that I was grossly outnumbered by the group, which was comprised of two kindergarteners, a toddler, and a newborn, I also bore the added weight of numerous therapeutic appointments. However helpful they were intended to be, the appointments needed to support that group's unique needs were simply overwhelming. Those needs included autism, Tourette's syndrome, low-cognitive functioning, post-traumatic stress disorder, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, and severe muscle hypertension. In those first months, Google and social media became my co-parents.

Even with all my counseling and child development knowledge, I felt so inadequate when it came to parenting in real life. Survival was the goal. If I could find any tip or trick to get me through that day, I consumed it like a starving animal. I had no time to add any kind of spirituality to my parenting, except for the hundreds of "Why, God, why?" pseudo-prayers I prayed throughout the day. The exhausted nighttime prayers I recited over the children were more ritualistic than spiritual.

Just when I thought I couldn't make it through one more day, one more meltdown, one more parenting challenge, God began to move. An army of friends and family stood with me and supported me when I was too weak to even ask for help. Five years later, I now realize how truly blessed I was (and

still am) to have such incredible men and women coaching me and cheering me on in my parenting journey.

Those months summated to the hardest, darkest, and most desperate time of my life. Some nights I thought, *If I ever make it to the other side of this valley, I want to be the coach, the cheerleader, the support for as many parents/caregivers as possible.* Not everyone has such rock-solid support as parents and caregivers, but everyone deserves a group of people in their corner, providing guidance and a sense of community when life gets tough. Thus, the *Open When* series was born.

## What This Book Is

If you are a parent, caregiver, or anyone else who's responsible for the physical, spiritual, and emotional development of a child, this series is for you. Research has shown that parents and caregivers are the single-most important influence in a child's life when it comes to the formation of their faith and values. Fostering Faith in Families, a parenting initiative and resource collection from the General Council of the Assemblies of God, exists to equip and empower parents and caregivers to effectively transmit their faith to the next generation through fun and memorable moments.

However, life isn't always fun, and there are things we wish weren't memorable. In our fallen world, sometimes life is just plain hard. When this happens, the *Open When* series is here to help.

These books are intended to be a quick-reference guide to some of the most challenging issues children face today. While the Internet can be a great resource, parents and caregivers are often torn between reading advice from an academic/clinical perspective or a biblical one. Much of the research found in modern-day child development and psychology focuses on raising children who are resilient and adaptable. We believe that biblical principles

aid in that goal. The *Open When* series provides practical, clinically informed, and biblically founded principles for parents and caregivers.

Although this is only a bird's-eye view of each topic, further resources for a deeper look at these issues are presented on the Ignite Parenting website: [IgniteParenting.com](http://IgniteParenting.com). Parents and caregivers will now have a source they can trust and a place to turn when they're hit with life's challenges.

## What This Book Is *Not*

First and foremost, this content is for *informational* purposes only. It should not be construed as medical, professional, or legal advice. The content is not intended to replace the services of a trained medical health professional or lawyer.

Secondly, this book is not intended to replace a parent or caregiver's responsibility to diligently study the Word of God and seek out His will for each situation. This book aims to offer a supportive word in the right direction, not to take over your responsibility as either a caregiver or a follower of Jesus. As you study God's Word for direction and discipleship, that study itself is shaping you into a biblically formed person who can make healthy decisions for the good of your family.

Finally, this book is not a one-size-fits-all solution. Children and families are as different and unique as each star in the sky. God, in His infinite wisdom, designed us that way. The opinions and views expressed in this book are based on the authors' best knowledge of, experience with, and research on each topic. There will be times when the tips in this series are not applicable to certain situations. Each situation should be approached with godly wisdom and sound biblical counsel of others whom God has placed in your life.



## Spiritual Disclaimer

The biblical application sections of this series are based on Scriptures and proverbial statements found in the Bible. It is important to keep in mind that proverbs should not be interpreted as direct promises. Instead, we should take proverbial sayings (identified in Scripture as such) as biblical principles and wise instruction that guide rather than guarantee. The wisdom of Proverbs 22:6 (NKJV) “Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it” does not give certainty that every child will lose their free will and be forced to become a faithful Christian as an adult if raised in the right way. It does mean that raising a child in the right way will give them the direction and foundation for becoming a faithful Christian should they choose to follow Christ.

God has designed each person with free will, even the children and youth we care for. No matter how many “right things” we do, our children, as well as everyone else in our life, are ultimately free to make their own choices. Their decisions aren’t prescriptive of upbringing, but instead, *typically* reflective of authentic faith being modeled in the home. While the likelihood of a life that is healthy, healed, and whole increases with biblical, intentional, and prayer-soaked parenting, no magic formula will override decisions made of free will.

The parental responsibilities of raising a child include loving the child, meeting the child’s needs, making the child feel secure and safe, disciplining the child in appropriate and healthy ways, raising the child in a community of faith, and modeling a faithful life before that child. Parents don’t have the responsibility to force a child to choose to follow Christ because no such decision can be genuine if forced. All that can be done in that instance is show them what a good choice that has been for their caregivers by the way that they are raised in a loving and godly home.

## The Issue of Forgiveness for Children

One of the biggest issues caregivers and parents will walk through with the children they're caring for is forgiveness. While these resources will encourage caregivers to lead their children down paths of forgiveness, the length of that journey must remain realistic and age appropriate. As caregivers, it's often easy to burden children with the responsibility of relational restoration. That kind of emotional responsibility is neither healthy nor age-appropriate for children. As you read each topic, remember that forgiveness does not automatically mean restoration of a relationship. Sometimes, forgiveness simply means choosing not to continue hating someone. The authors and editors of this book don't believe that children should be made to feel responsible for the relationships that adults in their life have broken. However, letting go of hate and bitterness allows for health and healing in children, and sometimes, that is as far as we can ask them to go in their forgiveness journey.

There are areas of children's lives that will require more than what parents or caregivers can provide on their own. When they are sick, we take them to doctors. When they are traumatized, we can rely on qualified counselors. When it comes to matters of spiritual development, we can cooperate with our church in all the resources it offers. And when it comes to those areas of life that no one can reach except God, we must continue to trust the Holy Spirit to do that work.

When raising a child, parents are not expected to do everything by themselves. One purpose for this book is so that you'll know you're not alone in the sacred calling of parenting. This book was written for you!

Ashley Grant  
General Editor

**NOTE:** Alternative caregivers include foster parents, adoptive parents, or family members of children who are not in the care of their biological parents.



# *A Child Discloses Abuse or Neglect*

Ashley Grant, MA

## Academic/Clinical Response

As a caregiver, especially of children who are not biologically your own, it's important to think about how you should react if a child discloses abuse or neglect to you. You should never promise a child that you'll keep a secret or not tell anyone what they've told you. Instead, say something like, "I'm here to keep you and others safe. If something you tell me might make you or someone else unsafe again, I may have to tell someone else so that everyone can stay safe."<sup>1</sup> Some disclosures may shock you or seem unbelievable, but it's always important to believe the things your child tells you in confidence.

Telling an adult about abuse and neglect takes a lot of courage and trust. It's also something that makes the child, and the perpetrator, vulnerable. This can be an especially confusing feeling for children when the perpetrator is someone they genuinely love and care for, such as a biological parent or family member. To protect the child from feeling shamed, embarrassed, or retraumatized in any way, it's important to consider the following steps:

### 1. **STAY CALM.**

It's easy to have verbal and nonverbal reactions of shock, anger, or disbelief when a child discloses abuse or neglect. But it's important to listen to what the child says without interrupting or judging them. Don't gasp, and don't offer advice. Just listen.

**2. DON'T ASK DIRECT QUESTIONS.**

As a caregiver, your job is to listen to the child and to notify the proper professionals to handle the information that was shared with you. Asking questions, digging for details, or trying to obtain other information about the incident can severely hurt an investigation by Child Protective Services and/or the police. Be present and allow the child to share whatever information they feel comfortable sharing, and then proceed to the next steps.

**3. PROVIDE IMMEDIATE SAFETY.**

If your child is in immediate danger, call your universal emergency service number (usually 911 in the United States) or your local emergency service.

**4. REASSURE YOUR CHILD.**

Let your child know that they did the right thing in telling you and that you believe them. Also, let them know that you're glad they trusted you enough to tell you and thank them for sharing with you. Unfortunately, you can't promise that nothing bad will ever happen to them again, but you can let them know that you're there to provide a safe environment for them. Remind them that they can talk to you if they ever feel unsafe again.

**5. DOCUMENT THE DETAILS.**

After the child leaves the room, write down the details of the disclosure, including what they said, when and where the abuse occurred, and who may have been involved.

**6. REPORT THE ABUSE.**

Call your local Child Protective Services (CPS) agency, or if it's an emergency, call the police.

## 7. SEEK SUPPORT.

Seek support from a therapist, counselor, or other qualified professional for your child and/or yourself as this can be an emotionally distressing event. Secondary trauma, which is trauma experienced from sharing the burden of traumatic experiences with others, is a very real thing. It's very important to take care of your own mental health as a caregiver.

## 8. ABOVE ALL, BE SUPPORTIVE AND UNDERSTANDING.

Reassure your child that they're not at fault for what happened, and that you'll do your best to protect them and provide the help they need. Ask the child if you can pray with them. If they agree, pray that God would continue to bring healing to their heart and spirit, and that He would keep them safe in His loving arms for the rest of their days.<sup>2</sup>

## Biblical Response

After a child has disclosed abuse, it's normal to feel a range of emotions—anger, sadness, disgust, or emotional fatigue. You may feel numb or even physically ill. Scripture reveals that empathy has its place as we “mourn with those who mourn” (Romans 12:15). However, it's important to model a biblical response for the child as you help them process what happened to them and you after hearing the disclosure.

The Bible teaches us to love our enemies and bless those who curse us, but it also recognizes the reality of human emotions and experiences. Ephesians 4:26–27 says, “‘In your anger do not sin.’ Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold.” These verses acknowledge that anger is a natural emotion but urges us not to sin while experiencing it. Instead, the Bible suggests that we should work toward

forgiveness. As Colossians 3:13 advises us, “Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.” Ultimately, the Bible commands us to love and forgive others, even as we navigate the pain and struggles caused by their actions.

This can be a challenging response for adults, let alone children. It wouldn’t be appropriate to immediately talk about forgiving the perpetrator, but you can model forgiveness in your words and actions. This teaches the child not to harbor hate and bitterness. For example, don’t show visible anger at what they disclose. Additionally, don’t refer to the perpetrator in an unkind way. Instead, let the child see kindness in the way you pray for the perpetrator and keep the conversation focused on what happened, not who committed the abuse. Find ways to discuss the true purpose of forgiveness: letting go the anger and bitterness that ultimately cripples the person holding the unforgiveness, not the person who did the offending.

God is a God of justice, but He is also a God who forgives. Helping the child experience forgiveness and healing is the primary goal. The goal is not to bring vengeance on an offender by your own hand. As hard as it may be, we must leave justice in the hands of the Lord and the authorities He chooses to use to bring about justice (Romans 12:19; 13:2–4).

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> This information is based on material acquired in training and learning sessions through Child First, <https://www.childfirst.org/our-work/training-and-consultation>.

<sup>2</sup> These eight steps are based on materials found in the Childhelp article “Handling Child Abuse Disclosures” (accessed February 10, 2024), <https://www.childhelp.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Handling-Disclosures-v2.pdf>.

## My Response

- Ask God to help you model forgiveness in appropriate and healthy ways.
- Listen as the child discloses new or additional information, but remember not to react with any emotional upset. Empathy is appropriate and healthy.
- As feelings of emotions such as sadness and anger flow through you, trying journaling to process the things you're feeling. Ask God to help you forgive so that you can model appropriate forgiveness.







*In Open When . . . Parenting through Foster and Adoption*, Christian professionals delve into the unique challenges and struggles encountered by foster parents, adoptive parents, or kinship caregivers. By addressing common parenting issues faced within these contexts, readers will be equipped with practical tools and strategies to navigate the complexities of guiding and nurturing children in nontraditional family structures.

*Open When . . .* is a parenting book series authored by academic professionals and biblical theologians that offers valuable insights and guidance for parents seeking to transmit their faith and values to the next generation. Parenting has moments of joy and laughter, but also moments of concern and apprehension, often as a result of new milestones in a child's life. By blending current, evidence-based research with the timeless truths found in Scripture, parents are offered guidance for life's most common parenting scenarios.

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