

FROM UNCERTAINTY TO SECURITY IN THE FATHER’S LOVE:
A PASTORAL GUIDANCE FOR WITNESSING THE HEAVENLY FATHER’S LOVE TO
THOSE PATERNALLY EMOTIONALLY NEGLECTED

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ABSTRACT

Emotional neglect affects 18.4% of the global population, accounting for 14.5% of the population in North America. For a childhood maltreatment as prevalent as emotional neglect, it is often left neglected. Despite the lack of public awareness, emotional neglect continues to cause psychological, developmental, and social debilitation that persists long into adulthood. This form of maltreatment directly attacks one's conception of his Heavenly Father; paternal emotional neglect is especially potent at warping one's perception to grasp the Father's love. The spiritual leader who is aware of the afflictions his members face, both physiologically and spiritually, is best prepared to show the Father's love, chief among which is the ultimate act of love in sending his Son Jesus as our sacrifice. He is equipped to demonstrate God's love in words and actions for those yearning to be loved. The pastor utilizes the gospel as the antidote to bring those with deep-seated anguish lasting peace and security in the love of God.

INTRODUCTION

“But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him” (Luke 15:20 NIV).¹ In his commentary on the Gospel of Luke, David E. Garland commented, “Can we expect anything less from a father who loves his son, longs for his return, and sees him coming down the road? He will naturally run to greet him.”² This is a beautiful image of paternal love, as displayed in the parable of the lost son.³ Pastors can utilize this parable—the analogy of the Heavenly Father’s love for his children—to bring comfort to those sitting before him on Sunday mornings.

However, for those who suffered from childhood maltreatment, these words of solace do not bring about comfort but distrust and apprehension. Instead of warmth and assurance, this foreign image of love may bring about feelings of alienation, fear, and hesitation.

In this paper, I will explore the impacts maltreatment has on an individual’s spiritual life, particularly those who suffered from paternal emotional neglect. I will also discuss the implications spiritual shepherds should be aware of when seeking to minister to survivors of paternal emotional neglect.

1. This paper has been checked and corrected for spelling, grammatical errors, and wording using the AI program Grammarly.

2. David E. Garland, *Luke*, vol. 3 of *Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 629.

3. Another common name for this parable found in Luke 15:11–32 is the “parable of the prodigal son.”

Content

The discussion of paternal emotional neglect will begin with an examination from a secular psychological perspective. I will explore why secular psychology stresses awareness of emotional neglect. With a comprehension of the biophysical aspects, the spiritual implications reveal why it is beneficial for the spiritual shepherd to be cognizant of paternal emotional neglect.

In his book *Doctor of Souls: The Art of Pastoral Theology*, John D. Schuetze described the *Doctor of Souls* as spiritual physicians who faithfully use God's word in their teaching and preaching to tend, guard, and feed their flock.⁴ Scripture is the foundation of the Doctor of Soul's work as he applies scriptural truth to hurting souls, whether to those who suffered from paternal emotional neglect or any other spiritual conditions.

As a pastor seeks to minister to survivors of paternal emotional neglect, he faces both biophysical and spiritual challenges. I will provide a survey of professional counseling approaches in treatment. Having contemplated these valuable skills and been equipped with God's word, the pastor is prepared to counsel individuals with scars from paternal emotional neglect and to guide the hurting souls in his church back to the Heavenly Father's love.

Research

In preparation for this comprehensive guide, I conducted interviews with six individuals—four of whom have experience in the field of counseling. By mutual agreement on confidentiality, the

30. 4. John D. Schuetze, *Doctor of Souls: The Art of Pastoral Theology* (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 2017), 29–

names of five interviewees have been changed; Victor Vieth permitted his name to appear with the references to our interview alongside the other quotes I made from his literature.

Counselor A currently—at the time of the interview—holds an in-training counseling license for almost two years along with twelve years of prior experience as a parish pastor.⁵

Counselor B is a Licensed Professional Counselor who previously provided clinical counseling for approximately six years along with twenty-three years of prior parish pastoral experience.⁶

Counselor C is a Christian Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist of five years. Her past experiences as a running and track coach at a junior college and a private DIII college for twenty years provided additional encounters with student-athletes from tumultuous familial backgrounds.⁷

Counselor D is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW), Board Certified Professional Christian Counselor (BCPCC), Board Certified Tele-Mental Health counselor (BC-TMH), and Board Certified Expert in Traumatic Stress (BCETS).⁸

Victor I. Vieth worked as a child protection attorney for ten years.⁹ Over the last twenty-eight years, he has been working under the United States Department of Justice's grants to provide research, training, and publications on childhood maltreatment. He has authored several

5. Counselor A has experience in counseling general anxiety, depression, grief, and marriage and family issues over his career in pastoral and professional counseling.

6. Counselor B specializes in treating sex addiction and abuse. He has experience in counseling those with emotional distress, identity issues, and sexual offenses.

7. As a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist, Counselor C primarily counsels young professionals—those in their late 20s and early 30s—on an individual basis, as well as with couples and families.

8. Counselor D specializes in trauma and crisis response along with experiences in addressing domestic violence, sexual assaults, abuse, neglect, and coordinating programs for refugees and asylum seekers.

9. Vieth dealt with cases of criminal child abuse and determining child protection.

publications on childhood maltreatment, a couple of which I will reference in this paper.

Additionally, he works for a nonprofit that advocates for the victims of childhood maltreatment, spreads awareness, and educates on the prevention and mitigation of maltreatment. He consulted various church bodies on seminary curricula and on establishing formal denominational responses to child abuse. Vieth continues to provide technical assistance and advice on trial strategy; he also serves as an expert witness consultant on trial cases.

Mary is a woman in her 40s who grew up with a controlling and narcissistic father. She suffered from multiple forms of childhood maltreatment—including emotional neglect, emotional abuse, and corporal punishment.¹⁰ She has been seeking counseling from a local pastor since September 2022 and from a clinical counselor since January 2023.

These six individuals became my candidates for interview either because of my prior knowledge of their professional counseling work or through referral from counselors or my thesis advisor. Each interview lasted approximately one hour; two interviewees allowed theirs to extend to two and two-and-a-half hours, respectively.¹¹ All interviews were conducted and sound-recorded in person, except for Vieth, whose interview was conducted and recorded over Microsoft Teams. The knowledge shared by these six individuals will serve as the basis for this paper, presented in the form of quotes and references.¹²

Complementary to the six interviews, I consulted a wide range of literature from secular psychological and counseling perspectives, governmental reports and documents, and Christian

10. These entailed beatings and physical seclusions as Mary was locked away in her room.

11. The consent forms and interview questions can be found in Appendices 1–3.

12. All quotes were transcribed using the AI program TurboScribe.AI, except Vieth's interview over Microsoft Teams—Microsoft Teams automatically transcribed the dialogue. Also, some of Mary's quotes are from her written responses prepared for the interview.

works on general counseling, childhood maltreatment, and theological commentaries on Scripture. These will complement the interviewees' first-hand experiences to provide a comprehensive perspective on paternal emotional neglect.

Purpose

In the article “Providing Pastoral Care to Survivors of Child Abuse,” Vieth commented, “Unfortunately, very few clergy receive seminary or other education on addressing the spiritual needs of maltreated children.... Without a base understanding of trauma research, a pastor may unwittingly make an error that results in additional harm to a survivor.”¹³ The first purpose of this paper is to raise awareness on the issue of paternal emotional neglect, including its existence and the complexities of the problem. Furthermore, I am raising awareness that this concern is not foreign to churches.

The second purpose is to equip the pastor with the knowledge to show love to hurting members. The mitigation of fear and hesitation in approaching survivors of paternal emotional neglect comes with knowledge.

The third purpose is to remind the spiritual shepherds of their call to reflect God's love—the love God showed to the pastors—onto their members. Indeed, the topic of paternal emotional neglect is niche, and not every pastor may encounter it during his ministry. However, this paper's spiritual foundation is grounded in the Bible. Therefore, there are general applications that are helpful to every pastor in his respective ministry, for all are called to share God's love.

13. Victor I. Vieth, “Providing Pastoral Care to Survivors of Child Abuse,” *Journal of Lutheran Ethics*, 27 March 2024, <https://learn.elca.org/jle/providing-pastoral-care-to-survivors-of-child-abuse/>.

These three purposes aim to determine how paternal emotional neglect presents unique spiritual challenges that warrant a pastor's awareness and competence in ministering the love of the Heavenly Father.

THE PSYCHOLOGY

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) defines child maltreatment as causing “direct physical, behavioral, social, and emotional harm and disability and is a risk factor for a range of other health risk factors that contribute to acute and chronic health problems.”¹⁴ As all forms of maltreatment cause harm, I will discuss the commonly observed effects in other forms of trauma that are, nonetheless, applicable to paternal emotional neglect. This paper will make references to general *maltreatment* and *trauma* along with specifications such as *abuse*, *sexual abuse*, *neglect* (i.e., general neglect), *physical abuse*, and so forth.

As this paper focuses on paternal emotional neglect, I will reference this issue henceforth as *PEN* and *EN* (general emotional neglect).

Victim and *survivor*, used without qualifiers in this paper, denote those who suffered from PEN or EN. Victims of other forms of maltreatment will be noted accordingly.

Child and *childhood* refer to those under the age of eighteen.¹⁵

14. Rebecca T. Lee et al., *Child Maltreatment Surveillance: Uniform Definitions for Public Health and Recommended Data Elements, Version 1.0* (Atlanta: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, 2008), 4.

15. Lee et al., *Child Maltreatment Surveillance*, 13. This paper’s definition is based on the CDC’s definition.

Why Paternal Emotional Neglect Occurs?

In general, PEN is an act of omission. Nevertheless, certain occurrences of PEN are the byproduct of a father's unfavorable personality traits. Mary recounted that her father was controlling and narcissistic.¹⁶ In other cases, the father has overwhelmingly high expectations of his children.¹⁷ This might cause the father to impose his unfulfilled interests, ambitions, and goals vicariously upon his children, neglecting their needs in the process.¹⁸

On the other hand, PEN is the unintended result of the father's simple parental deficiencies, weaknesses, or lack of knowledge without malicious intent.¹⁹ The father may, indeed, take his fatherly responsibilities seriously.²⁰ However, while he provides financially for his children, his long work hours deprive him of a relationship with his family.²¹

In another sense, the father is parenting in the manner to the best of his knowledge. Counselor D pointed out that fathers can accidentally hurt their children—without malicious intentions—by modeling the parenting style they observed in their own parents.²² As Cynthia Crosson Tower remarked, parents who grew up with emotional deprivation are particularly prone

16. Interview with Mary, October 16, 2025.

17. Henry B. Biller and Richard S. Solomon, *Child Maltreatment and Paternal Deprivation: A Manifesto for Research, Prevention, and Treatment* (Lexington, MA: D.C. Health and Company, 1986), 13, 80.

18. Judith R. Brown, *"I Only Want What's Best for You": A Parent's Guide to Raising Emotionally Healthy Children* (New York: St. Martin's, 1986), 5.

19. Jeannette Harder said, "Parents who abuse or neglect their children usually do not wake up in the morning with the intention of hurting their children." *Let the Children Come: Preparing Faith Communities to End Child Abuse and Neglect* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 2010), 22.

20. Brown, *"I Only Want What's Best,"* 3.

21. Henry B. Biller, *Paternal Deprivation: Family, School, Sexuality, and Society* (Lexington, MA: D.C. Health and Company, 1974), 4.

22. Interview with Counselor D, October 13, 2025.

to repeat the same parenting dynamic with their children; they may not fully understand the importance of reassuring, encouraging, and showing affection to their children.²³

Why Should We Talk about Paternal Emotional Neglect?

A conversation about PEN is crucial because PEN is often hidden. Counselor D remarked, “As clinicians, we are mandated reporters of child abuse.... Or if I think that they’re being neglected, I have a mandatory reporting law that says I must call that in. There’s no such thing for emotional neglect.”²⁴ EN is causing harm even behind the appearance of having all physical needs met, causing emotional loneliness—which hinders later adult relationships—and physical ailments.²⁵

For an issue as consequential as EN, it is, ironically, often neglected.²⁶ Counselor D shared, “Emotional neglect sort of doesn’t get nearly as much attention as physical abuse, sexual

23. Cynthia Crosson Tower, *Child Abuse and Neglect: A Teacher’s Handbook for Detection, Reporting, and Classroom Management* (Washington, DC: NEA Professional Library, 1984), 71–72.

24. Counselor D, interview.

25. Lindsay C. Gibson, *Adult Children of Emotionally Immature Parents: How to Heal from Distant, Rejecting, or Self-Involved Parents* (Oakland, CA: New Harbinger, 2015), Kindle edition, “Introduction,” ch. 1, “How Emotionally Immature Parents Affect Their Adult Children’s Lives,” and ch. 2, “Recognizing the Emotionally Immature Parent”; Brigid Daniel, “Introduction to Issues for Health and Social Care in Neglect,” in *Child Neglect: Practice Issues for Health and Social Care*, ed. Julie Taylor and Brigid Daniel (London: Jessica Kingsley, 2005), 13.

26. In her book *Let the Children Come: Preparing Faith Communities to End Child Abuse and Neglect*, Harder said, “This book is unique in that it considers all types of child abuse and neglect, including neglect, physical abuse, emotional abuse, and sexual abuse.” The unfortunate truth is that, even in a book that prides itself on addressing all forms of childhood maltreatment, EN is neglected. See Harder, *Let the Children Come*, 11.

abuse, emotional abuse, or physical neglect.”²⁷ The lack of research and attention toward EN throughout history had been noted by Biller and Solomon in 1986 and Brian Minty in 2005.²⁸

Nevertheless, a study published by Marije Stoltenborgh, Marian J. Bakermans-Kranenburg, Lenneke R. A. Alink, and Marinus H. van IJzendoorn in 2015 revealed that there is a 184/1000 prevalence rate for EN globally—ranking it fourth most common of all forms of childhood maltreatment behind sexual abuse, physical abuse, emotional abuse, and ahead of physical neglect—and a prevalence rate of 14.5% in North America.²⁹

The Child’s Psychological Needs

Growing up, children seek acceptance from their parents to discover their self-identity. Kenneth Barish posited that a parent’s comment of “I’m proud of you” is important because parental pride defines the child’s conception of herself, fulfilling a “deep and intrinsic emotional need, essential for her present and future emotional health.”³⁰ This is especially pertinent if the child is, by disposition, extrinsically motivated in actions and satisfaction.³¹

27. Counselor D, interview.

28. Biller and Solomon, *Child Maltreatment and Paternal Deprivation*, 3; Brian Minty, “The Nature of Emotional Child Neglect and Abuse,” in *Child Neglect: Practice Issues for Health and Social Care*, ed. Julie Taylor and Brigid Daniel (London: Jessica Kingsley, 2005), 57–59.

29. Marije Stoltenborgh et al., “The Prevalence of Child Maltreatment Across the Globe: Review of a Series of Meta-Analyses,” *Child Abuse Review* 24, no. 1 (2015): 37, 41, 43.

30. Kenneth Barish, “We Are Always Essential,” in *Parenting: Contemporary Clinical Perspectives*, ed. Steven Tuber (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016), 65–66.

31. Extrinsic motivation suggests that an individual determines his actions and derives the satisfaction thereof from outside sources; seeking similarities from outside sources brings a feeling of relatedness, belongingness, and connectedness to those to whom they feel close. Richard M. Ryan and Edward L. Deci, “Self-Determination Theory and the Facilitation Intrinsic Motivation, Social Development, and Well-Being,” *American Psychologist* 55, no. 1 (2000): 71, 73.

In other words, the child is seeking attachment with his parents. Children develop their system of faith and trust, which are instrumental to personality development, by observing their parents' attention and care.³² The child is confident in her parents' availability when she has a strong attachment to them.³³

The Father's Role

Although a child's needs for both his parents are in general agreement, the argument for the essentiality of the father's role is not so uniformly acknowledged.³⁴ Joseph H. Pleck stated that researches reveal no developmental differences in children of opposite-sex two-parent families compared to those of two lesbians.³⁵ Similarly, Michael E. Lamb asserted the importance of parental involvement, warmth, nurturance, and closeness regardless of the parent's gender.³⁶

32. Armin Grams, *Children and Their Parents: The Nature and Development of Personality in the Light of the Christian Message*, vol. 3 of *The Lutheran Studies Series* (Minneapolis: T. S. Denison & Company, 1963), 103.

33. Elizabeth Harlow, "Attachment Theory: Developments, Debates and Recent Applications in Social Work, Social Care and Education," *Journal of Social Work Practice* 35, no. 1 (2021): 85.

34. William Marsiglio and Joseph H. Pleck argued that those who maintain the essentiality of the father as a parent are propagating political ideologies or social concerns. "Fatherhood and Masculinities," in *Handbook of Studies on Men & Masculinities*, ed. Michael S. Kimmel, Jeff Hearn, and R. W. Connell (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2005), 252–4; Brigid Daniel and Julie Taylor, "Do They Care? The Role of Fathers in Cases of Child Neglect," in *Child Neglect: Practice Issues for Health and Social Care*, ed. Julie Taylor and Brigid Daniel (London: Jessica Kingsley, 2005), 265.

35. Joseph H. Pleck, "Fatherhood and Masculinity," in *The Role of the Father in Child Development*, ed. Michael E. Lamb, 5th ed. (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2010), 47.

36. Michael E. Lamb, "How Do Fathers Influence Children's Development? Let Me Count the Ways," in *The Role of the Father in Child Development*, ed. Michael E. Lamb, 5th ed. (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2010), 8, 11.

Nevertheless, one cannot deny that the paternal presence is influential, while the lack of the father's presence is detrimental.³⁷ Lamb even remarked, "Fathers influence their children directly through their behavior and the attitudes and messages they convey."³⁸

Counselor B proposed that fathers give their children a sense of curiosity, discovery, and identity.³⁹ Counselor D also said fathers—more than mothers—encourage children to take healthy risks.⁴⁰ Biller and Solomon posited that boys acquire positive masculine development when their fathers show them warmth and affection.⁴¹ On the other hand, a positive paternal relationship with a daughter develops a positive perception of her female identity.⁴² In general, one's relationship with one's father models expectations for future relationships; daughters, especially, tend to generalize their relationships with other males from their relationship with their own father, making a paternal relationship an indicator of a future successful marriage.⁴³

The father who spends time with his children also builds bonds.⁴⁴ The close relationship also allows the father to model delayed gratification and controlling aggression and impulses,

37. Pleck, "Fatherhood and Masculinity," 48.

38. Lamb, "How *Do* Fathers Influence," 8.

39. Interview with Counselor B, October 9, 2025.

40. Counselor D, interview.

41. Biller and Solomon theorized that the positive relationship fostered between father and son allows the son to easily respect, love, look up to, and model his father, which, in turn, reinforces the father's approval of his son. *Child Maltreatment and Paternal Deprivation*, 87–88, 93.

42. Biller continued, "However, this does not mean that he expects his children to rigidly adhere to cultural stereotypes." Biller, *Paternal Deprivation*, 167.

43. Biller and Solomon, *Child Maltreatment and Paternal Deprivation*, 93, 125; Biller, *Paternal Deprivation*, 122.

44. Graham Music, *Nurturing Natures: Attachment and Children's Emotional, Sociocultural and Brain Development*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2017), 202.

leading to healthier emotional development.⁴⁵ Counselor C mentioned that fathers, often more than mothers, tend to assume the role of the leader and are more impactful as disciplinarians.⁴⁶

Counselor B also suggested that the father provides a sense of trust.⁴⁷ Heather Bacon and Sue Richardson remarked that a close attachment to parents fosters a sense of security in the child, even in the physical absence of the parents.⁴⁸ Thus, Biller and Solomon suggested that the father provides a sense of security that protects the child psychologically and relationally as she ventures off into the world and faces adversities.⁴⁹

Finally, Counselor A shared, “I think, biblically, we would look to and say there’s definitely impact that a father has and how God has designed things to that, that dad is going to bring something different than mom does.”⁵⁰ His comment is harmonious with the apostle Paul’s instructions on fatherly duties, including, “Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord” (Eph 6:4).

45. Biller, *Paternal Deprivation*, 66.

46. Interview with Counselor C, October 13, 2025.

47. Counselor B, interview.

48. Heather Bacon and Sue Richardson, “Attachment Theory and Child Abuse: An Overview of the Literature for Practitioners,” *Child Abuse Review* 10, no. 6 (2001): 378

49. Biller and Solomon, *Child Maltreatment and Paternal Deprivation*, 67.

50. Interview with Counselor A, October 9, 2025.

What Is Emotional Neglect?

A healthy relationship with the parents—especially the father—fulfills many needs for beneficial childhood development. PEN, inversely, causes harm when there is a relationship deficit. Despite a comprehensive understanding of child development, defining EN—even emotional maltreatment in general—has proven difficult.⁵¹ The terms “emotional abuse” and “emotional neglect” have often been used as a catch-all term for any form of trauma that is not physical nor sexual.⁵²

It is vital to acknowledge that emotional abuse has many similar characteristics to that of EN—parents who emotionally abuse their children simultaneously ignore and neglect their children’s emotional needs while failing to provide a loving environment.⁵³ As Vieth noted, however, emotional abuse is “proactive,” including the act of calling a child “stupid” or “ugly.”⁵⁴

On the other hand, EN is the omission and failure to provide the child’s essential needs.⁵⁵ As EN is not the “overt act by a parent or caregiver that brings harm to a child,” as Harder said,

51. Daniel, “Introduction to Issues,” 13; Douglas Barnett, Jody Todd Manly, and Dante Cicchetti, “Defining Child Maltreatment: The Interface between Policy and Research,” in *Child Abuse, Child Development, and Social Policy*, ed. Dante Cicchetti and Sheree L. Toth, vol. 8 of *Advances in Applied Developmental Psychology*, ed. Irving E. Sigel (Norwood, NJ: Ablex, 1993), 36.

52. Minty, “The Nature of Emotional Child Neglect and Abuse,” 57, 63.

53. Tower, *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 29

54. Victor I. Vieth, interview by the author, October 10, 2025.

55. Minty, “The Nature of Emotional Child Neglect and Abuse,” 59; David Gough, “Research for Practice in Child Neglect,” in *Child Neglect: Practice Issues for Health and Social Care*, ed. Julie Taylor and Brigid Daniel (London: Jessica Kingsley, 2005), 44.

Minty described EN as the result of indifference and is unintentional.⁵⁶ Nevertheless, the persistent and long-term nature of EN deprives children of their emotional needs.⁵⁷

Surveys of Definitions

The US government defines child abuse and neglect as: “At a minimum, any recent act or failure to act on the part of a parent or caretaker, which results in death, serious physical or emotional harm, sexual abuse or exploitation, or an act or failure to act which presents an imminent risk of serious harm.”⁵⁸ Biller and Solomon noted, “Paternal deprivation can occur when the father is available but a relatively meaningful father-child attachment does not exist.”⁵⁹

In more detail, Douglas Barnett, Jody Todd Manly, and Dante Cicchetti defined emotional maltreatment in general as thwarting the child’s emotional needs of psychological safety and security, acceptance, positive regard, and age-appropriate autonomy that grants opportunities for independent explorations of the environment and extrafamilial relationships.⁶⁰ Minty saw EN as the “failure to show any warmth or stimulation to children, or appreciation of their efforts and achievements,” lack of positive attention, praise, affection, comfort, guidance, protection, and reassurance during times of distress.⁶¹ Similarly, the Association of Professionals

56. Harder, *Let the Children Come*, 20; Minty, “The Nature of Emotional Child Neglect and Abuse,” 59–60.

57. Minty, “The Nature of Emotional Child Neglect and Abuse,” 72; Barnett, Manly, and Cicchetti, “Defining Child Maltreatment,” 67.

58. CAPTA Reauthorization Act of 2010, Pub. L. No. 111-320, 124 Stat. 3482.

59. Biller and Solomon, *Child Maltreatment and Paternal Deprivation*, 2.

60. Barnett, Manly, and Cicchetti, “Defining Child Maltreatment,” 36.

61. Minty, “The Nature of Emotional Child Neglect and Abuse,” 63–65, 72.

Solving the Abuse of Children (APSAC) included tendencies of “being detached and uninvolved,” “failing to express warmth, affection, caring, and love for the child,” and “being emotionally detached and inattentive to the child’s needs to be safe and secure, such as failing to detect a child’s victimization by others or failing to attend to the child’s basic needs.”⁶²

This Paper’s Definition

In this paper, EN is defined as the omission—without ill intentions—of providing for or responding to the child’s emotional needs—in the absence of physical signs of maltreatment—for an extended period of time that causes psychological, emotional, and developmental complications.

The Effects of Emotional Neglect

Childhood maltreatment, in general, creates many problems. In 1998, the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) study investigated the correlation between abuse, neglect, violence, and exposure to people with substance abuse, mental disorder, or imprisonment with their adult risk

62. APSAC Taskforce, *The Investigation and Determination of Suspected Psychological Maltreatment of Children and Adolescents* (The American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children (APSAC), 2019), 4. The quotes are part of the definition for “emotional unresponsiveness” from the 2019 edition of APSAC’s “Practice Guidelines: The Investigation and Determination of Suspected Psychological Maltreatment of Children and Adolescents.” There is a 2025 update that recategorizes the definition of psychological. See Appendices 4–5 for both the 2019 and 2025 definitions of psychological maltreatment.

The Association of Professionals Solving the Abuse of Children was formerly the American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children.

behaviors, health status, and diseases among 9,508 respondents.⁶³ The researchers found that there was a linear correlation between exposure to the different types of maltreatments and obesity, depressive moods, suicidal attempts, and alcoholism.⁶⁴ Vincent J. Felitti and Robert F. Anda, two of the original researchers in the ACE study, concluded, “Traumatic life experiences during childhood and adolescence were far more common than generally recognized, were complexly inter-related and were associated decades later in a strong and proportionate manner with outcomes detrimental to medical practice, public health, and the social fabric of a nation.”⁶⁵

Even in dealing with the one form of maltreatment (i.e., EN), Biller noted that father absence is varied in form and in outcome, depending on what else is happening in the child’s life.⁶⁶ Similarly, Graham Music said, “Humans survive and develop while receiving loving, empathic care, or strict and regimented care, or even abuse or neglect. The developing brain will grow differently in each of these situations.”⁶⁷ The following are possible consequences of PEN.

63. Vincent J. Felitti et al., “Relationship of Childhood Abuse and Household Dysfunction to Many of the Leading Causes of Death in Adults: The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study,” *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* 14, no. 4 (1998): 245.

64. Cancer, stroke, and diabetes, however, showed no direct correlational trends. Felitti et al., “Relationship of Childhood Abuse,” 252–254.

65. Vincent J. Felitti and Robert F. Anda, “The Relationship of Adverse Childhood Experiences to Adult Medical Disease, Psychiatric Disorders and Sexual Behavior: Implications for Healthcare,” in *The Impact of Early Life Trauma on Health and Disease: The Hidden Epidemic*, ed. Ruth A. Lanius, Eric Vermetten, and Clare Pain (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 77.

66. Biller, *Paternal Deprivation*, 5.

67. Music, *Nurturing Natures*, 6.

Psychological Impacts

Attachment

Mary recounted, “Every night there was the routine of saying good night and either a half hug or high five and saying, ‘I love you.’ This, at some point, became very rote, mechanical, and didn’t have a lot of feeling. I didn’t feel a lot of love from him most of the time.”⁶⁸ Mary suffered from attachment issues. Attachment theory, first theorized by John Bowlby, “explains the principles, the rules, and the emotions of relationships—how they work and how they don’t, how we feel when we’re with the ones we love the most.”⁶⁹ There are multiple ways to categorize the different forms of attachment; this paper identifies four categories: secure, avoidant, anxious, and disorganized.⁷⁰

“When someone has loving, nurturing, consistent, stable parents, you say that they have a secure attachment style,” said Counselor D.⁷¹ In other words, secure attachment means having a positive outlook of oneself and others.⁷² Loving gestures, kind words, and praise convey unconditional acceptance and teach children they are “valued for who they are.”⁷³ Children have

68. Mary, interview.

69. Harlow, “Attachment Theory,” 80; Tim Clinton and Gary Sibcy, *Attachments: Why You Love, Feel and Act the Way You Do* (Brentwood, TN: Integrity, 2002), 12.

70. For example, Atilgan Erozkhan recognized secure, fearful, preoccupied, and dismissing attachments. See Atilgan Erozkhan, “The Link between Types of Attachment and Childhood Trauma” *Universal Journal of Education Research* 4, no. 5 (2016): 1074–75.

71. Counselor D, interview.

72. Clinton and Sibcy, *Attachments*, 24.

73. Harlow, “Attachment Theory,” 84.

a secure base of their parents' availability and care.⁷⁴ Secure attachment supports neurological development, provides a sense of safety and security, enhances threat management, and fosters empathy.⁷⁵

Avoidant and anxious attachments both involve one form of mistrust. Counselor D described the former as a chronic fear of being abandoned, while the latter produces a fear of hurt and rejection.⁷⁶ In both forms of attachment, children may have conflicting memories or feelings toward their parents, simultaneously recollecting parental care and absence.⁷⁷ With a pattern of ignorance and dismissal of help, the child with avoidant or anxious attachment may be preoccupied by the constant fear of losing the parent or become entirely dismissive of the parent as a form of self-defense against impending abandonment.⁷⁸

Disorganized attachment, as Counselor D explained, is the mix of avoidant and anxious attachment styles.⁷⁹ Mary may have suffered from one of these latter three attachment styles.

74. John Bowlby, *A Secure Base: Clinical Applications of Attachment Theory* (London: Routledge, 1988), 12–13.

75. Grant C. B. Sinnamon, "Eight Core Principles of Neurobiologically Informed Interventions for Trauma From Childhood Maltreatment," in *Child Abuse and Neglect: Forensic Issues in Evidence, Impact, and Management*, ed. India Bryce, Yolande Robinson, and Wayne Petherick (London: Academic Press, 2019), 347–48.

76. Counselor D, interview.

77. Music, *Nurturing Natures*, 67.

78. Bowlby, *A Secure Base*, 140; Steven Tuber, "Parenting Across the Lifespan: Some Personal and Conceptual Musings," in *Parenting: Contemporary Clinical Perspectives*, ed. Steven Tuber (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016), 13.

79. Counselor D, interview.

Internalization

Without a secure attachment, the child may take the neglect committed against her and internalize the situation, assigning herself value based on the EN.⁸⁰ This can develop low self-esteem.⁸¹ Counselor A mentioned that the child may perceive her absent father as proof of her being unlovable; the ASCAP similarly stated that children may even believe they are deserving of neglect, being unworthy of love and respect.⁸² The parents who continually proclaim that all they did was out of love and affection may aggravate the issue by sending the child the message that the problem resides with the child rather than the parents.⁸³ Therefore, neglected children “often do not believe that they can have an impact on others.”⁸⁴ EN can easily lead to a complete devaluation of one’s self-worth and value.

Mary recalled, “I felt like I was either a burden, worker, or slave a lot of the time at certain points of history ... I was a burden and inconvenience.”⁸⁵ Vieth, too, recounted that children of various forms of maltreatment often move on from physical and sexual abuse much more easily than emotional abuse since the latter causes them to internalize their worth.⁸⁶ Counselor D stated that this is distorted thinking to believe oneself to be at fault for neglect.⁸⁷

80. Counselor B, interview.

81. Counselors A and B, interviews.

82. Counselor A, interview; APSAC Taskforce, *The Investigation and Determination of Suspected Psychological Maltreatment of Children and Adolescents* (Association of Professionals Solving the Abuse of Children (APSAC), 2025), 9–10.

83. Bowlby, *A Secure Base*, 161.

84. Music, *Nurturing Natures*, 227.

85. Mary, interview.

86. Vieth, interview.

87. Counselor D, interview.

Furthermore, Mary recounted feeling shame, a lot of self-doubt, and the feeling of not being enough, broken, and a disappointment.⁸⁸ Jana Pressley and Joseph Spinazzola concurred, “Survivors of complex trauma are often prone to self-criticism and shame.”⁸⁹ According to Barish’s model of pride as fundamental to the development of the child’s identity, the lack thereof causes acute pain and loss, more than simple disappointment and sadness.⁹⁰

Therefore, Mary shared that she is a perfectionist, hard on herself, and often second-guesses herself because of the punishment, belittling, shame, and verbal abuse from her upbringing.⁹¹ Counselors B and C, likewise, acknowledged the tendencies of perfectionism among survivors of EN.⁹²

Relational Impacts

The neglectful relationship dynamic with their parents—especially the fathers—models how children will perceive their future relationships.⁹³ In short, PEN creates trust issues.⁹⁴ Trust issues handicap the formation of relationships in future social situations.⁹⁵ Trust issues arise when

88. Mary, interview. Counselor B also acknowledged this feeling of shame in victims during our interview.

89. Jana Pressley and Joseph Spinazzola, “Beyond Survival: Application of a Complex Trauma Treatment Model in the Christian Context,” in *Treating Trauma in Christian Counseling*, ed. Heather Davediuk Gringrich and Fred C. Gringrich (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2017), 220.

90. Barish, “We Are Always Essential,” 66.

91. Mary, interview.

92. Counselors B and C, interviews.

93. Pamela D. Mayhall and Katherine Eastlack Norgard, *Child Abuse and Neglect: Sharing Responsibility* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1983), 39; Biller, *Paternal Deprivation*, 49.

94. Counselors A and B, interviews.

95. Erozkhan, “The Link,” 1071.

survivors, due to a lack of exposure to trusting relationships, develop the core thought that all people in general are untrustworthy.⁹⁶

Both Counselors B and C indicated that trust issues hinder relationship building.⁹⁷ Counselor B stated that the fear of rejection could cause the victim to become oppositional toward others.⁹⁸ Mary displayed this phenomenon, explaining, “We simultaneously think we can and need to do everything on our own, and crave relationships and help, but don’t trust the sincerity of others. And if we do, we wait for the other shoe to drop.”⁹⁹

One particularly challenging relationship is that with superior or authoritative figures.¹⁰⁰ Mary mentioned the difficulty of trusting “father-like” bosses in the workplace.¹⁰¹ Counselor B said, “The struggle is trusting a father figure or trusting someone who is over me.”¹⁰² This is especially problematic for women; as aforementioned, daughters often generalize their relationships with other males based on their relationship with their fathers.¹⁰³

96. Counselor A, interview.

97. Counselors B and C, interview.

98. Counselor B, interview.

99. Mary, interview.

100. Counselor C, interview.

101. Mary, interview.

102. Counselor B, interview.

103. Biller and Solomon, *Child Maltreatment and Paternal Deprivation*, 130.

Developmental Impacts

Emotions

Mary recalled, “Tears got punished. If you’re going to cry, we’ll give you something to cry about”; Mary often suppressed her emotions.¹⁰⁴ Music stated that neglected children lack a parent who is sensitive to their bodily and emotional states and is unable to aid in anxious or frightening moments, so children stop communicating, nor do they understand their own emotions.¹⁰⁵ These children may even hide behind a false, compliant smile in the face of hostile situations.¹⁰⁶ Otherwise, Counselors A and C noted that victims may develop anger issues.¹⁰⁷ Lindsay C. Gibson proposed that anger may exhibit itself through suicidal feelings or antagonistic behaviors, such as forgetting, lying, delaying, or avoiding the parents or other authoritative figures.¹⁰⁸

Another typical emotional response is fear. Mary recounted the feeling of walking on eggshells growing up, which led to a fear of conflict and arguments that persists to the present day.¹⁰⁹ Henry Cloud and John Townsend stated that the fear of others’ anger developed in the past can become long-lasting.¹¹⁰ The amygdalae—involved in emotion and emotional learning—

104. Mary, interview.

105. Music, *Nurturing Natures*, 227.

106. Henry Cloud and John Townsend, *Boundaries: When to Say YES, When to Say NO to Take Control of Your Life* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), Kindle edition, ch. 4, “How Boundaries Are Developed.”

107. Counselors A and Counselor C, interviews.

108. Gibson, *Adult Children*, ch. 3, “How It Feels to Have a Relationship with an Emotionally Immature Parent.”

109. Mary, interview.

110. Cloud and Townsend, *Boundaries*, ch. 5, “Ten Laws of Boundaries.”

significantly influence the hippocampus—the part of the brain that identifies important information for long-term memory storage—to store traumatic information when strong emotional responses are attached.¹¹¹ While the two work in tandem with memory storage, they also identify threats posed by current events by comparing them with past stressful experiences.¹¹² The repeated exposures to threats, dangers, and trauma cause maltreatment victims to physiologically retain the fight-or-flight survival response, a continual state of emotional stress used as a self-preservation mechanism to protect against constant expectations of danger.¹¹³ It seems EN is especially destructive since it directly targets a child’s psychological and neurological development.

Identity

I have already discussed the survivor’s identity issues with oneself; in this section, I will discuss the survivor’s identity in relation to others. As previously indicated, the parents’ interactions with their children convey a message to the children about what they can expect from their parents and how to perceive themselves; these perceptions may persist on a subconscious level.¹¹⁴ Mary recounted the role she was expected to play in the family, “I was expected to be the perfect

111. William M. Struthers, Kerry Ansell, and Adam Wilson, “The Neurobiology of Stress and Trauma,” in *Treating Trauma in Christian Counseling*, ed. Heather Davediuk Gringrich and Fred C. Gringrich (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2017), 59–60.

112. Struthers, Ansell, and Wilson, “The Neurobiology of Stress,” 67.

113. Sinnamon, “Eight Core Principles,” 344, 348; Deborah van Deusen Hunsinger, “Trauma-Informed Spiritual Care: Lifelines for a Healing Journey,” *Theology Today* 77, no. 4 (2001): 362; Timothy C. Bourman, “Trauma Sensitivity as a Heuristic for the Lutheran Preacher,” *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 118, no. 3 (2021): 207.

114. Bowlby, *A Secure Base*, 146.

good student.” When she failed to fulfill this role, it created in her great distress: “I was never the daughter that looked like I should, I created problems, and I was a burden and inconvenience.”¹¹⁵

In this case, Mary’s self-worth was negatively affected, just as parents who overburden their child with unreasonable expectations neglect their child’s capabilities and well-being in order to fulfill their own needs vicariously.¹¹⁶

When children are expected to attend to their parents’ needs, thinking that fulfilling their assigned roles will secure a relationship with their parents, children develop the perception that the responsibility of building relationships falls solely on them.¹¹⁷ The survivors carry the need for approval into adulthood, even assuming that neglecting and sacrificing their own needs is the hallmark of being a good person.¹¹⁸ Victims live upon an illusion of who they think they are supposed to be, losing their own self-identity, believing they will only be noticed when acting as someone other than themselves.¹¹⁹ Survivors develop learned helplessness, concluding that any acts of self-expression will result in unfavorable outcomes.¹²⁰

At the same time, survivors develop a heightened sense of independence. Mary recalled having to figure out her distress by herself since sharing feelings was discouraged: a survival

115. Mary, interview.

116. APSAC Taskforce, *The Investigation and Determination* (2025), 3; Gibson, *Adult Children*, ch. 3, “How It Feels to Have a Relationship with an Emotionally Immature Parent.”

117. Gibson, *Adult Children*, ch. 1, “How Emotionally Immature Parents Affect Their Adult Children’s Lives.”

118. Cloud and Townsend, *Boundaries*, ch. 5, “Ten Laws of Boundaries”; Gibson, *Adult Children*, ch. 6, “What It’s Like to Be an Internalizer.”

119. Gibson, *Adult Children*, ch. 5, “How Different Children React to Emotionally Immature Parenting”; Brown, *I Only Want What’s Best*, 7.

120. Cloud and Townsend, *Boundaries*, ch. 14, “Resistance to Boundaries.”

tactic.¹²¹ Counselor D agreed, “They don’t want to get really close to people. They kind of keep their feelings very close to themselves. They’re pretty independent. Maybe even kind of present as being detached.”¹²² Gibson, too, said, “They perceive that the best solution is to grow up quickly and become self-sufficient”; she pointed out that independence was out of necessity, not from a willing choice.¹²³

Maladaptive Coping

In dealing with stress and trauma, survivors may develop maladaptive coping skills that prove unhelpful in the long term, as Counselor B stated.¹²⁴ Survivors may substitute the lack of parental validation with hedonism or narcissism; Barish contended that both provide temporary feelings of security but lack true emotional maturity.¹²⁵ Other forms of coping include alcohol, drugs, smoking, promiscuity, self-harm, or even violence, all of which have proven detrimental to oneself.¹²⁶ Mary recognized her unique lack of destructive behaviors despite the traumas she faced, saying, “Statistically, where should I have ended up? In a van down by the river or a prostitute, drunk, whatever. I didn’t go near that.”¹²⁷

121. Mary, interview.

122. Counselor D, interview.

123. Gibson, *Adult Children*, ch. 1, “How Emotionally Immature Parents Affect Their Adult Children’s Lives,” ch. 6, “What It’s Like to Be an Internalizer.”

124. Counselor B, interview.

125. Barish, “We Are Always Essential,” 67.

126. Vieth, “Providing Pastoral Care”; APSAC Taskforce, *The Investigation and Determination* (2025), 9–10; Felitti and Anda, “The Relationship of Adverse Childhood Experiences,” 80.

127. Mary, interview.

Difficulties of Diagnosing Emotional Neglect

Multiple factors contribute to the difficulty of diagnosing EN, much less PEN.

One Part of the Many

From an educational institutional standpoint, Tower noted the particular difficulty in detecting, proving, or reporting emotional abuse as social service agencies attend to the abundance of cases of physical and sexual abuse with concrete evidence.¹²⁸ In counseling, Counselor D recounted instances of EN as a comorbidity of sexual, physical, and emotional abuse;¹²⁹ Brigid Daniel also recognized that neglect may co-exist with abuse.¹³⁰ In general, emotional abuse and EN are direct consequences of abuse or physical neglect.¹³¹ The parents' alcohol and substance abuse may also lead to financial, physical, and emotional neglect.¹³² Therefore, while EN is a distinct form of maltreatment that requires attention, other traumas with clear outward signs often take precedence.¹³³

Even in families where there are no other forms of maltreatment, EN can be the result of unfortunate familial circumstances that are more visible. Counselor A's experiences with PEN

128. Tower, *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 29.

129. Counselor D, interview.

130. Daniel, "Introduction to Issues," 11.

131. APSAC Taskforce, *The Investigation and Determination* (2025), 12; Yolande Robinson, "Child Abuse: Types and Emergent Issues," in *Child Abuse and Neglect: Forensic Issues in Evidence, Impact, and Management*, ed. India Bryce, Yolande Robinson, and Wayne Petherick (London: Academic Press, 2019), 4.

132. Moira Walker and Mary Glasgow, "Parental Substance Misuse and the Implications for Children: Lessons from Research and Practice in on Family Centre," in *Child Neglect: Practice Issues for Health and Social Care*, ed. Julie Taylor and Brigid Daniel (London: Jessica Kingsley, 2005), 206–7, 210.

133. Minty, "The Nature of Emotional Child Neglect and Abuse," 60–61.

include those who had physically absent fathers due to military service.¹³⁴ Emotional neglect may also result from parents who are of ill health or have disabilities that hinder their ability to care for their child emotionally.¹³⁵

Even with the lack of other traumas or adverse familial situations, the side effects of EN hide the root cause of EN.¹³⁶ Counselor C recalled having to address such issues first before EN may present itself.¹³⁷ However, Counselor B asserted, “Presenting issues are just the tip of the iceberg.”¹³⁸ Felitti and Anda summarized this difficulty in the context of the ACE study: “Simply put, it is easier for all of us to deal with the presenting symptom of the moment than to attempt to understand it in the full context of the patient, particularly when that full context involves thematic material of child abuse and household dysfunction that is usually protected by social taboos against exploring these areas of human experience.”¹³⁹

Identification

Counselor B indicated, “People know they have something going on, but they don’t know why.”¹⁴⁰ Counselor D also said that PEN survivors acknowledge an unfavorable relationship with

134. Counselor A, interview.

135. Minty, “The Nature of Emotional Child Neglect and Abuse,” 66.

136. Counselor B, interview.

137. Counselor C, interview.

138. Counselor B, interview.

139. Felitti and Anda, “The Relationship of Adverse Childhood Experiences,” 85.

140. Counselor B, interview

their father, while not having the proper vocabulary to vocalize their condition.¹⁴¹ Victims may experience intense emotional loneliness and emptiness that affect later relationships and their emotional well-being; however, the lack of a third-party who helps to contextualize their life events, along with proper vocabulary, proves difficult for victims to comprehend their distress.¹⁴²

A significant factor of incomprehension is the victim's age. Counselor B cited the obstacle for young people to cognitively fathom the maltreatment that is unfolding.¹⁴³ Wayne Petherick, likewise, asserted children's inability to understand the abnormality and illegality of the abuse and neglect they are receiving.¹⁴⁴ Counselors A, C, and D posited that child victims may only perceive maltreatment at home when they notice the differences in other families.¹⁴⁵ Therefore, Daniel warned that child victims of maltreatment are often reluctant to seek help—much less victims of neglect—because they are “highly dependent on others to identify and respond to their needs for support and protection.”¹⁴⁶

141. Counselor D, interview.

142. Gibson, *Adult Children*, ch. 1, “How Emotionally Immature Parents Affect Their Adult Children's Lives,” ch. 6, “What It's Like to Be an Internalizer”; Hunsinger, “Trauma-Informed Spiritual Care,” 363.

143. Counselor B, interview.

144. Wayne Petherick, “Forensic Victimology Assessment in Child Abuse and Neglect Cases,” in *Child Abuse and Neglect: Forensic Issues in Evidence, Impact, and Management*, ed. India Bryce, Yolande Robinson, and Wayne Petherick (London: Academic Press, 2019), 145.

145. Counselors A, C, and D, interviews.

146. Daniel, “Introduction to Issues,” 15.

Lack of Desire for Help

Victims may not realize the need to address old trauma until its effects exhibit themselves in present relationships. The prevailing interactions that alert survivors to their troubles are friendships and romantic relationships, as both Counselors A and C noted.¹⁴⁷ Counselor C recounted how survivors' spouses are instrumental in recognizing presenting issues—often consciously unbeknownst to the survivors—and advising counseling.¹⁴⁸ In the context of the family, Counselors C and D also attributed having children to triggering unresolved feelings; Counselor C indicated that such relationships may produce anxiety about parenting with the model of parenting they observed during childhood.¹⁴⁹ Lastly, Counselor A noted that work relationships may also reveal deep-seated problems.¹⁵⁰

These situations reveal ingrained emotional pain that persists for a long time without being addressed. Mary recounted, “I tried to shove the past down so very hard.”¹⁵¹ Upon repeated occurrences, maltreatment causes primary emotional distress and secondary anxiety and shame (i.e., the victim's self-realization of their emotional responses to the initial parental maltreatment itself causes worries), which causes compounding emotional tension.¹⁵² With the cognitive

147. Counselors A and C, interviews.

148. Counselor C, interview.

149. Counselors C and D, interviews.

150. Counselor A, interview.

151. Mary, interview. Mary did share that she had sought help earlier in her life. However, when those she turned to did not support her or even aggravated the problem, she grew apprehensive about seeking further help. This will be discussed in more detail later on in this paper.

152. Hunsinger, “Trauma-Informed Spiritual Care,” 363.

dissonance of their emotional reactions and how they believe they should feel, the victims may develop distorted memories that hinder efforts to process traumatic experiences.¹⁵³

Over time, it becomes difficult for survivors to affirm the feelings of pain, hurt, and grief. Mary expressed difficulties in recounting traumatic memories, expressing the emotional distress, and crying over the pain, “I have a lot to grieve: loss of my childhood and loss of my father, loss-of-having-parents-that-actually-cared kind of thing. And honestly, still, I don’t really know what it will all entail.”¹⁵⁴ In a different scenario, Counselor C encountered a student athlete—who had to raise two younger siblings because their alcoholic parent was in prison—who said, “People have it way worse than I do.”¹⁵⁵ Whatever the scenario, Counselors B and D maintained that survivors will have to process through tough problems.¹⁵⁶ Reluctance to accept one’s feelings of sadness keeps the victim stuck in the cycle of pain.¹⁵⁷

However, Bowlby suggested that an even more painful truth to admit—beyond the victim’s own emotional hurt—is the fact that one’s parents caused the pain.¹⁵⁸ Mary found it particularly challenging when her counselor reflected that her parents’ actions were “evil” and that they were wearing the “mask of the devil.”¹⁵⁹ Children tend to have an intrinsic propensity to regard their parents positively.¹⁶⁰ However, when EN occurs, victims have to reconcile their

153. Music, *Nurturing Natures*, 67.

154. Mary, interview.

155. Counselor C, interview.

156. Counselors B and D, interviews.

157. Cloud and Townsend, *Boundaries*, ch. 14, “Resistance to Boundaries.”

158. Bowlby, *A Secure Base*, 157.

159. Mary, interview.

160. Petherick, “Forensic Victimology Assessment,” 145.

parents' physical signs of care (e.g., providing food, clothing, money, housing) with their emotional pain into believing the problem lies in themselves, not their parents.¹⁶¹ Therefore, Counselor C remarked, "Not everyone wants to throw their parents under the bus";¹⁶² Counselor D elaborated, "People who just feel like speaking anything negatively about my parent is sinful, bad, wrong, and am I violating the fourth commandment if I do this?"¹⁶³

Victims dismiss trauma as a form of self-protection.¹⁶⁴ Survivors develop apathy and reject their own feelings to distance themselves from the emotional pain.¹⁶⁵ However, this confined emotional pain builds up over time until the breaking point. Mary recounted, "I stuffed as much as I could, pretty much told myself it didn't matter. Nobody cared anyway, so file it away and we'll deal with it later. Well, later came and later came hard."¹⁶⁶

161. Gibson, *Adult Children*, ch. 2, "Recognizing the Emotionally Immature Parent"; Harder, *Let the Children Come*, 23–24.

162. Counselor C, interview.

163. Counselor D, interview.

164. Erozkhan, "The Link," 1073.

165. Gibson, *Adult Children*, ch. 6, "What It's Like to Be an Internalizer."

166. Mary, interview.

THE SPIRITUAL CONCERNS OF PATERNAL EMOTIONAL NEGLECT

Timothy Bourman asserted, “There is a delicate dance that takes place between the mind, body, and spirit in the human being. What happens in the mind has tremendous impacts on the body and spirit, and vice versa.”¹⁶⁷ A pastoral shepherd is called to minister to souls. But in consideration of the whole person—God created humanity to be body and soul—one observes the biophysical effect of EN’s impact upon spiritual health degradation. Fred C. Gringrich and Heather Davediuk Gringrich noticed how trauma survivors are faced with significant spiritual questions about life, meaning, and death: “Trauma tends to shake the foundations of survivors’ spiritual belief systems.”¹⁶⁸ The following are possible spiritual concerns of PEN.

167. Bourman, “Trauma Sensitivity,” 207.

168. Fred C. Gringrich and Heather Davediuk Gringrich, “The Crucial Role of Christian Counseling Approaches in Trauma Counseling,” in *Treating Trauma in Christian Counseling*, ed. Heather Davediuk Gringrich and Fred C. Gringrich (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2017), 35.

Modeling and Projection

As previously discussed, fathers model for their children a perception of future relationships.¹⁶⁹

In the case of PEN, if the father is a Christian, his neglectful actions become the basis for the child's view of Christianity and the lack of trust in religious institutions.¹⁷⁰

The first spiritual concern is the pastor's spiritual authority; victims may struggle with contemplating building a relationship with their pastor. Counselor A attested to fathers creating the lack of trust in authoritative figures when they fail to fulfill their responsibilities as the biblical head of the family.¹⁷¹ Mary described the impact her father made in this way: "My dad impacted the relationship with pastors growing up because I simultaneously doubted them and thought they were speaking straight from the heart of God. They were put on a pedestal."¹⁷²

Authoritative Figures

Survivors may enter the pastor's office seeking help and guidance, yet simultaneously not trust him. Victims are fearful to enter a vulnerable relationship where there is the possibility of hurt to arise again—Bowlby suggested that victims may perceive that the therapist will once again subvert their emotional needs for the therapist's own interest, as observed from their own parents¹⁷³—or reluctance to face emotional turmoil in discussing trauma. It is common, however,

169. Biller said, "The child may have memories of past interactions and/or develop a perception of his father from what others tell him. In this way the absent father can function as a model for the child." *Paternal Deprivation*, 49.

170. Bourman, "Trauma Sensitivity," 207; Erozkhan, "The Link," 1071.

171. Counselor A, interview.

172. Mary, interview.

173. Bowlby, *A Secure Base*, 163–64.

that victims do not recognize their subconscious mistrust.¹⁷⁴ Therefore, other presenting problems take priority while the root cause of PEN remains unresolved.

The Heavenly Father

Counselor B stated, “The struggle is trusting, trusting a father figure or trusting someone who is over me. So, trusting God is something we’ve discussed—feelings of abandonment—and then how that feeling of abandonment that I see in, maybe, my paternal father gets mirrored to my Heavenly Father.”¹⁷⁵ This is imprinting what was perceived in the victim’s earthly father onto the Heavenly Father.¹⁷⁶ A Christian father of a victim amplifies this modeling in PEN.¹⁷⁷

Counselor D shared that PEN often causes victims to perceive God the Father in the same neglectful manner as their earthly father, viewing the Heavenly Father as a God who does not care or listen to them.¹⁷⁸ Counselor A elaborated with the example of victims’ difficulties in praying the Lord’s Prayer when the Father in heaven is perceived as unloving.¹⁷⁹ Mary shared, “It is hard for me to see God as a good father. I don’t really know what a good father does, or how they treat their daughters.”¹⁸⁰

174. Bowlby, *A Secure Base*, 162.

175. Counselor B, interview.

176. Counselor A, interview; Joshua John Shandor, “Perceptions of God: Effectively Ministering to Men Whose View of God Has Been Negatively Impacted by a Dysfunctional Father Figure,” MDiv thesis (Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, 2017), 1–2.

177. Bourman, “Trauma Sensitivity,” 207.

178. Counselor D, interview.

179. Counselor A, interview.

180. Mary, interview.

In more extreme forms of maltreatment, Charles Kiser and Elaine A. Heath noted perceptions that “God is in fact an abuser, wielding judgment for sin in the form of spiritual abuse.”¹⁸¹ In other words, Shandor described this as the transference onto God as “a giant, cosmic, and all powerful version of their sinful earthly father.”¹⁸² In PEN, the imprinted image of a domineering Heavenly Father stems from the fact that earthly fathers, more than mothers, are more prone to accept their children based on performance and, thus, become uninterested, punitive, and rejecting if expectations are not met.¹⁸³ Mary recounted her struggles with the godly concept of discipline and honoring her parents because her father had misused the fourth commandment to justify abuse.¹⁸⁴

Mary had difficulty recalling the time when her parents comforted her in times of trouble, so she thought, “So wouldn’t God do the same thing?”¹⁸⁵ Trauma can easily create in victims the perception that God is untrustworthy and unreliable. Kiser and Heath further described the perceptions of a distant, deistic, non-controlling, weak God who is “absent at best and negligent at worst.”¹⁸⁶

These projections hinder victims’ ability to grasp the genuine relationship they have with their Heavenly Father. Mary shared:

For a while being alone with God sounded scary. There has been imagery of God holding us and saying, “mine,” comforting his children. That is foreign to me.... I struggle with

181. Charles Kiser and Elaine A. Heath, *Trauma-Informed Evangelism: Cultivating Communities of Wounded Healers* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2023), 85.

182. Shandor, “Perceptions of God,” 2.

183. Biller and Solomon, *Child Maltreatment and Paternal Deprivation*, 80.

184. Mary, interview.

185. Mary, interview.

186. Kiser and Heath, *Trauma-Informed Evangelism*, 85.

God as Father.... It is so hard to picture what a good father is like. I have the pictures given to me in TV and cinema, but that is the most I have. There were some examples of better fathers I had, and I wondered why and how I drew the short straw in the parent lottery. Kindness, warmth, and a loving relationship eluded me. I have a skewed view of what love is, and fear and uncertainty when making decisions in those areas.¹⁸⁷

PEN exacerbates the image of a “distant, all-powerful, cosmic ‘father’ that he is unable to please, unable to dissuade, unable to hide from, unable to lie to, and unable to run away from.”¹⁸⁸

Therefore, images pastors often employ may not connect with survivors, those such as “the loving Heavenly Father” and “in the arms of Jesus.” To the latter image, Mary recalled, “I didn’t get that. And, so, it’s very hard to picture.... I don’t know if I can picture being held by the Father, because I don’t think I’ve ever just kind of curled up on the couch and was just held by my parents.”¹⁸⁹

Mistrust

“I would ask God so many times why he was letting me go through so much and why he didn’t get me out of it. And the anger, fear, desperation, wishing it would all just end. And it seemed like he wasn’t answering,” Mary recounted the struggles she had with understanding the turmoil she faced.¹⁹⁰ Counselor A summarized this as the problem of theodicy, the understanding of why pain exists.¹⁹¹ This can be especially problematic when religion is incorporated into abuse, which

187. Mary, interview.

188. Shandor, “Perceptions of God,” 18.

189. Mary, interview.

190. Mary, interview.

191. Counselor A, interview.

Vieth asserted is a common practice in the U.S.¹⁹² Even when this is not the case, both Vieth and Bourman remarked that survivors may ask the theological question, hoping to reconcile meaning to the traumatic event they faced.¹⁹³

Therefore, victims may find it challenging to seek out and build a relationship with the pastor—the spiritual leader—for help. Counselor A pointed out that general distrust also extends to counselors and other helping figures, especially when there is already a negative perception of older males in positions of authority, such as a pastor. He further posited that victims may fear a repetition of revealing personal information and being betrayed with such personal details.¹⁹⁴ Mary shared how she was hesitating to seek out counseling from her current clinical counselor because past counselors had broken confidentiality and accused her and her belief in God as the cause of the abuse.¹⁹⁵ Kiser and Heath gave the example of a person’s disposition changing immediately, the body stiffening up, the visage becoming serious and sullen, or the individual changing the subject or ending the conversation upon hearing the profession of the pastor.¹⁹⁶

The Spiritual Shepherd’s Opportunity

Paternal emotional neglect, as do other forms of maltreatment, may cause great anxiety in the ministering shepherds. However, maltreatment is not a foreign concept in this world, nor is it

192. Vieth, interview.

193. Vieth, interview; Bourman, “Trauma Sensitivity,” 207.

194. Counselor A, interview.

195. Mary, interview.

196. Kiser and Heath, *Trauma-Informed Evangelism*, 123.

absent from the church's pews. In the face of such troubles, Bourman stated, "The best reason for Lutheran pastors to become familiar with the literature is the dear people who are sitting in the pews of Lutheran churches. Although it is true that traumatic events are generally extraordinary in terms of their frequency, trauma is in one sense very ordinary as a life experience."¹⁹⁷ Vieth also shared the quiet and often unnoticed blessings of the believers who are simply living out their faith: "We will never know till we get to heaven how many pastors and Sunday school teachers and Lutheran teachers and Lutheran basketball coaches were helping abused children just by being a good Christian role model."¹⁹⁸

Pastors help hurting souls when they are ministering to survivors. Cynthia B. Eriksson, Ashley M. Wilkins, and Nikki Frederick perceived this as a joyful opportunity: "Choosing the path of caregiver to trauma survivors gives us a front-row seat to the ways that life can unfold as tragedy, violence, and loss."¹⁹⁹ Pastors console those who have cried themselves to sleep.²⁰⁰

Pastors minister to those who developed faulty perceptions of their Heavenly Father. Vieth and Pete Singer remarked that the greatest difficulty in addressing theological concerns in victims of trauma is distorted religious beliefs.²⁰¹ One finding from Michael K. Prior and Andrew

197. Bourman, "Trauma Sensitivity," 199.

198. Vieth, interview.

199. Cynthia B. Eriksson, Ashley M. Wilkins, and Nikki Frederick, "Trauma, Faith, and Care for the Counselor," in *Treating Trauma in Christian Counseling*, ed. Heather Davediuk Gringrich and Fred C. Gringrich (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2017), 78.

200. During our interview, Mary recalled, "There were many nights where I cried myself to sleep."

201. Victor I. Vieth and Pete Singer, "Wounded Souls: The Need for Child Protection Professionals and Faith Leaders to Recognize and Respond to the Spiritual Impact of Child Abuse," *Mitchell Hamline Law Review* 45, no. 4 (2019): 1216.

S. Quinn's research suggested an inverse relationship between EN and adult spirituality (i.e., the prevalence of EN inversely correlated with strong religious connectedness).²⁰²

Pastors offer survivors comforting spiritual guidance from Scripture.

Pastors care for the ones Jesus cared for. Vieth asserted, "Jesus specifically told us to care for the least of these."²⁰³ Harder, too, proclaimed that Jesus welcomed the little children, even those who faced various traumas, as Scripture presented.²⁰⁴ Spiritual leaders help people see God's love as the Father first revealed his love to the ministering shepherd.

202. Michael K. Prior and Andrew S. Quinn, "The Relationship Between Childhood Emotional Neglect and Adult Spirituality: An Exploratory Study," *Journal of Religion & Spirituality in Social Work: Social Thought* 29, no. 4 (2010): 289–90. However, they noted that other findings have found no statistically significant correlation.

203. Vieth, interview.

204. Harder, *Let the Children Come*, 20.

TRAUMA INFORMED PASTORING

Mary shared, “I don’t think a lot of pastors realize the power their words hold, both from the pulpit and in conversation.... It feels terrible to be sitting in a pastor’s office, talking about something that has happened and literally see the fear on their face as they back up in their chair when you aren’t even telling them the worst of what’s happened.”²⁰⁵ These words highlight the powerful impact pastors have with their words and actions. Vieth, too, lamented the spiritual struggles trauma survivors face, those who are unable to turn to mental health providers for spiritual answers, nor to pastors, who do not understand the trauma. With the prevalence of trauma throughout the US and in churches, Vieth asserted, “We need to dramatically improve seminary education.”²⁰⁶

The Doctor of Souls administers God’s word to hurting souls. He applies scriptural truths, making them relevant and personal for each individual. However, trauma victims present unique challenges for the pastor hoping to connect God’s love with the survivor sitting before him. Therefore, I will present the professional counseling methodology for treating EN; an evaluation of these professional skills provides pastors with practical guidance for their approaches to trauma-informed ministering. The pastor who possesses an understanding of the psychological phenomena, scriptural truths, and practical skills will be best prepared to care for

205. Mary, interview.

206. Vieth, interview.

all his members. As Bourman noted, “You might think of trauma sensitivity as an Allen wrench in the Lutheran’s preacher’s toolbox. It is not the saw or the hammer or the tape measure, but it is a tool that is useful and belongs in the toolbox.”²⁰⁷

Professional Counseling Methodology

This section compiles the wisdom shared by the interviewees. I categorized their varied responses into two main counseling components: building trust and providing mental guidance.

Building Trust

Counselor A affirmed that everyone’s story is unique, even if multiple clients are seeking out counseling for EN.²⁰⁸ Biller concurred, noting that paternal deprivation manifests itself differently in each child’s case, even if the diagnostic terminology is the same.²⁰⁹ As each victim—with his own unique story—seeks out counseling, Counselor C emphasized that they are desiring a listening ear.²¹⁰ By listening, the counselor is “building a bridge” to establish a safe space that allows clients to be vulnerable and open themselves up.²¹¹ Therefore, listening is a crucial component in building trust in counseling.

207. Bourman, “Trauma Sensitivity,” 221.

208. Counselor A, interview.

209. Biller, *Paternal Deprivation*, 5.

210. Counselor C, interview.

211. Counselor B, interview.

During the early stages of counseling, the counselor seeks to formulate a comprehensive picture of the client's life by asking questions and listening attentively. Counselor D named this the "thorough biological-psychological-social-spiritual assessment."²¹² Counselor B explained that this "diagnostic detective work" extensively examines the client's upbringing, his current life situation, even medical history, work, hobbies, and relationships.²¹³ In the case of PEN, Counselor C would explore the client's relationship with his father, the relationships between the father and the grandfather, and even that of prior generations to establish a genogram.²¹⁴

However, listening is not confined only to the beginning stages, but it is an ongoing process throughout counseling. As new issues surface over time, counselors must maintain an attitude of curiosity toward their clients; Counselor A shared his standard practice of urging his clients to explore the new ideas they presented throughout counseling.²¹⁵

The work of listening, in essence, builds trust. Survivors may enter counseling with many reservations and expectations of repetition of past hurt. Mary recounted her experience: "I had been burned by counselors in the past and wanted a counselor who would not discount my faith or try to separate my faith from the rest of me in order to work with me. I have had counselors share my story around town, tell me that if God existed then I wouldn't be hurting."²¹⁶

212. Counselor D, interview.

213. Counselor B, interview.

214. Counselor C, interview.

215. Counselor A, interview.

216. Mary, interview.

In other cases, the clients' hesitation to be vulnerable and explore deep hurt is due to their lack of self-worth, believing they themselves and their problems are a nuisance to others.²¹⁷

Listening, therefore, conveys the message that the counselor is establishing a different relationship dynamic than what the victim had experienced. Counselor A vocalized his message as: "I'm a safe person. This is a safe space."²¹⁸ Counselor B highlighted the need to be patient and "do no harm"; although this is foundational in counseling any client, it is especially vital in attending to EN survivors.²¹⁹ As counselors build trust through active listening, they create a safe space that fosters support, guidance, encouragement, and sympathy, enabling clients to confidently explore painful aspects of their lives, both past and present.²²⁰ Andrew Lowe demonstrated how listening builds trust, particularly for investigators examining a child for abuse: listening assures the child she is heard.²²¹

Some practical skills that aid in building trust include offering guidance with gentleness and calmness—this is especially beneficial when dealing with children or guiding clients through traumatic memories that may evoke intense emotional responses.²²² Counselor B noted watching body language: looking for outward signs of discomfort that reveal how the client may be particularly stressed over a specific memory or issue.²²³

217. Gibson, *Adult Children*, ch. 6, "What It's Like to Be an Internalizer."

218. Counselor A, interview.

219. Counselor B, interview.

220. Bowlby, *A Secure Base*, 156.

221. Andrew Lowe, "Mandatory Reporting: Managing Disclosure and Information Gathering," in *Child Abuse and Neglect: Forensic Issues in Evidence, Impact, and Management*, ed. India Bryce, Yolande Robinson, and Wayne Petherick (London: Academic Press, 2019), 298.

222. Lowe, "Mandatory Reporting," 296; Music, *Nurturing Natures*, 140.

223. Counselor B, interview.

When the counselor notices his client exhibiting signs of overwhelming levels of stress, the counselor will work to guide his client back to a state of emotional stability. One technique counselors employ to calm the client's distress is to guide the client through mindfulness: regaining conscious awareness and recognition of one's current situation and location; this is beneficial when the client is lost in his memories.²²⁴ Another technique is changing topics. Changing topics can be beneficial when the client exhibits reluctance or outright rejection to discuss a particular topic; a more opportune time may present itself in the future when the client becomes comfortable revisiting this issue.²²⁵ The counselor may also switch to an unconnected, lighter topic (e.g., weekend plans) to end a session on a lighter note, especially if the session were particularly emotionally strenuous.²²⁶

For severe cases of debilitating mental conditions that impede counseling progress, pharmaceutical intervention (e.g., antidepressants) may be beneficial. However, Counselor B stressed that medication is only helpful when utilized as a part of the healing regimen in conjunction with ongoing counseling and not to be depended upon as the sole solution.²²⁷

224. Counselor A, interview.

225. Counselor B, interview.

226. Counselor B, interview.

227. Counselor B, interview.

Providing Mental Guidance

Counselor D described counseling as being “client-centered.”²²⁸ Counselor B, similarly, depicted himself simply as the “guest” in his client’s story.²²⁹ Both Counselors A and B noted that the clients are in control of the conversation, determining what they wish to reveal and discuss.²³⁰ Gringrich and Gringrich added that the client’s control extends all the way to the end of counseling; it is the client who determines when he feels “healed enough” and, thus, terminates therapy.²³¹

Nonetheless, a counselor’s focus on putting the client first does not imply passivity. Counselors A and B characterized their role in walking alongside their clients.²³² This role becomes more active, taking on the form of providing guidance, as the counselor aids his client through unprocessed trauma and confounding thoughts. The counselor can guide clients—who have no prior experience—in constructing specific, measurable, and observable goals.²³³ Counselor B remarked, “I can’t fix people, and I can’t push people. But I can gently guide, and I can explore.”²³⁴ While assisting the client in achieving their goal, the counselor’s own goal is to observe mental and physiological improvements in the client.

228. Counselor D, interview.

229. Counselor B, interview.

230. Counselors A and B, interviews.

231. Gringrich and Gringrich, “The Crucial Role,” 20.

232. Counselors A and B, interviews.

233. Counselor D, interview.

234. Counselor B, interview.

Reshaping Mindsets

At the beginning of counseling, clients often present themselves with various forms of destructive thought patterns. Whether it be internalization or intense irrational fears, these old cognitive habits trap victims in a state of hurt. Mary demonstrated this: “I am really good at going to the worst-case scenario.”²³⁵

Therefore, the counselor aims to equip his clients with the mental tools necessary to support their healing journey by addressing distorted thinking and establishing new, healthier thought patterns.²³⁶ The counselor will work with the client to identify the triggers and negative thought loops.²³⁷ Essentially, Bowlby indicated that one of the counselor’s main objectives is to help clients re-examine their current perceptions, expectations, feelings, and actions in view of their past experiences and understandings.²³⁸ William M. Struthers, Kerry Ansell, and Adam Wilson emphasized addressing the traumatic memories themselves beyond just paying attention to the current resulting symptomatic exhibitions.²³⁹

To help re-establish the client’s faulty perceptions of the past, the counselor must first guide the client through seeing past traumatic events as they were; this is seeing the truth as a fact.²⁴⁰ Gibson depicted this work of reviewing past memories and current perceptions of the

235. Mary, interview.

236. During our interview, Counselor B characterized this process as providing the client with another tool for the client’s toolbox.

237. Counselor B, interview.

238. Bowlby, *A Secure Base*, 157–58.

239. Struthers, Ansell, and Wilson, “The Neurobiology of Stress,” 65.

240. Counselor B, interview.

paternal relationship as that of a scientist conducting an objective observational study.²⁴¹ The victim can only progress in his life and heal once he affirms the truth of his past.²⁴² Moreover, by affirming the truth of the past, the counselor validates the client's traumatic experiences. Mary shared how comforting it felt to be validated for the pain she endured: "When you are told your parents are evil and the masks of the devil by someone who is trained in knowing what evil is, it hits differently than if someone else tells you that. It was validation on how I felt when I was younger as well as feeling now about what happened in the past."²⁴³

A New Outlook on the Survivor's Earthly Father

As aforementioned, acknowledging their father's fault can prove highly challenging for survivors, especially for victims of PEN;²⁴⁴ they recognize the feelings of hurt without the physical evidence of maltreatment.²⁴⁵ When dealing with victims hesitant to re-examine their past, counselors reassert that the act of examining one's past is simply exploring the facts.²⁴⁶ It is not being unloving to one's parents to simply acknowledge the truth of the past. Gibson

241. Gibson, *Adult Children*, ch. 8, "How to Avoid Getting Hooked by an Emotionally Immature Parent."

242. Bowlby, *A Secure Base*, 158.

243. During our interview, Mary indicated that her counselor is theologically trained and has prior pastoral parish experience..

244. Aforementioned under "The Psychology: Difficulties of Diagnosing Emotional Neglect."

245. Gibson, *Adult Children*, ch. 8, "How to Avoid Getting Hooked by an Emotionally Immature Parent."

246. Counselor D, interview.

contended that this is simply the acceptance of one's parents as they truly are.²⁴⁷ The counselor should continually remind the client, "The goal here is to speak the truth in love."²⁴⁸

An honest reflection of the past reveals the causes of present-day symptoms.²⁴⁹ A reflection of the past may uncover the client's development of false beliefs as a coping mechanism.²⁵⁰ Gibson posited that one form of these false beliefs with persistent impact into adulthood is the child's healing fantasies, the tainted belief that one's parents were better than they actually were, and that they would spontaneously change to repair all past hurts.²⁵¹ False perceptions about the current state of the relationship impede relationship improvements. Counselor B noted, "Before you can have a relationship, you got to understand who it is you want to have a relationship with."²⁵²

As a counselor aids his client in reviewing her past, the counselor examines the possibility of generational trauma, or, as Counselor C called it, "Intergenerational patterns."²⁵³ Because parents often parent in the same manner as they were modeled, exploring these familial patterns may uncover the client's father's own adverse childhood experiences. Counselor A hypothesized that the father's own father may have been absent.²⁵⁴ Tower discussed experiences

247. Gibson, *Adult Children*, ch. 9, "How It Feels to Live Free of Roles and Fantasies."

248. Counselor D, interview.

249. Pressley and Spinazzola, "Beyond Survival," 217–18.

250. Counselor B, interview.

251. Gibson, *Adult Children*, ch. 5, "How Different Children React to Emotionally Immature Parenting."

252. Counselor B, interview.

253. Counselor C, interview.

254. Counselor A, interview.

of generational disorder, poverty, and neglect as possible causes of later acts of maltreatment.²⁵⁵

APSAC added family violence or one's own lack of ability to cognitively process his traumatic experiences as additional factors.²⁵⁶

As the client becomes aware of her father's own traumatic upbringing, the client may comprehend that her father's EN was without malicious intentions. Counselor C illustrated the situation where the father faced worse forms of childhood maltreatment and exclaimed, "I'm never letting that happen to my kid." Despite his good intentions to protect his child from the trauma he endured, he may not possess the skills to meet his child's emotional needs.²⁵⁷ On the other hand, Counselor A hypothesized that the father may simply lack the skill to provide emotional care for his child or to recognize EN, as he lacked a model of a good father figure during his upbringing.²⁵⁸ Regardless of the possible cause, the unfortunate truth is that EN occurred, and the child is hurting. Nevertheless, exploring one's family can lead to a more complete understanding of the situation. The survivors could recontextualize the unintended PEN they endured with a greater comprehension of the father who raised them.²⁵⁹

255. Tower, *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 67.

256. APSAC Taskforce, *The Investigation and Determination* (2025), 11.

257. Counselor C, interview.

258. Counselor A, interview.

259. During our interview, Counselor D said, "I think hurting people hurt people. I think he was doing the best that he could with what he knew at that time. I think it was very lacking, but I appreciate that it, it wasn't done with malicious intent."

A New Outlook on Oneself

As the counselor aids his clients in altering old thought patterns of others, both past and present, he also guides them in repairing their perceptions of themselves. In the case of PEN, the counselor affirms to the client that the latter was, indeed, the victim of maltreatment in his upbringing. Reflection on the past may prove highly challenging for survivors; they are reliving the memories, the emotional reactions to the traumatic event, and even secondary fear and anxiety about the way they initially reacted to the traumatic event.²⁶⁰ The conglomeration of different unresolved thoughts and feelings traps survivors in a web of emotional distress. The simple solution to the overwhelming distress is to deny its existence.²⁶¹ However, experiencing emotional pain and reflecting on the emotional hurt are normal steps in the healing process.²⁶² Counselors become a crucial support in guiding clients through emotional and mental complexities that are not yet processed.²⁶³

The counselor patiently guides clients to accept that PEN occurred. Especially for EN, the counselor may need to reaffirm the reality of EN and the victim's hurt thereof, even if the parents were financially supportive.²⁶⁴ By affirming the survivor's victimhood in the PEN, the counselor validates the client—reaffirming that PEN is the father's fault and not a reflection of the child's lack of value to warrant the EN—and her innocence in the trauma.²⁶⁵ Mary now

260. Bowlby, *A Secure Base*, 157.

261. Discussed earlier under "The Psychology: Difficulties of Diagnosing Emotional Neglect."

262. Gringrich and Gringrich, "The Crucial Role," 20–22, 24.

263. Pressley and Spinazzola, "Beyond Survival," 220.

264. Counselor D, interview.

265. Counselor B said during our interview, "And we're moving from 'what's wrong with me' to 'what happened to me.' And there's a very different emphasis there. 'What's wrong with me' is very punitive, and that's labeling. 'What happened to me' is more objective."

understood, as her counselor continually reflected to her the fact of the matter, that she did not deserve the maltreatment growing up, nor did she cause it; it was evil that was committed against her.²⁶⁶

After affirming the client's victimhood in the matter, the counselor moves to the second stage of guiding clients past perpetual victimhood mentality, that is, the establishment of a permanent status of a victim in every aspect of everyday life in the present time. This prolonged victim identity traps the survivors in the past and prohibits personal growth or changes.²⁶⁷ Instead, Counselor B noted that the goal of reframing perceptions of childhood hurt is to establish a new relationship dynamic with one's parents.²⁶⁸ Essentially, this step guides the clients away from making the PEN the sole focus of their existence.²⁶⁹ This shift in self-perception enables the survivor to adopt new identities, hobbies, interests, and relationships. Mary was now able to say, "My parents were broken and I am paying the price for their brokenness. I am not broken; I am a functioning adult."²⁷⁰

The whole process of changing one's self-perception requires addressing negative thought patterns and trauma internalization.²⁷¹ Counselors may look out for "black-or-white" or

266. Mary, interview.

267. Counselor C, interview.

268. Counselor B, interview.

269. Bourman identified identity as one of the seven spiritual issues that derive from trauma: "The survivor makes the event the very center of their world, making it impossible for them to move on." "Trauma Sensitivity," 207.

270. Mary, interview.

271. During our interview, Counselor B demonstrated an example of negative self-talk: "He doesn't love me because I'm not lovable. Maybe he doesn't invest any time in me because I'm just that insignificant. I'm stupid."

“all-or-nothing” thinking, a lack of self-worth, low self-esteem, or low self-confidence.²⁷²

Counselor B summarized the thought patterns he looked for: “What are the false beliefs I have about myself that this relationship has created? How can I redefine and reframe those things? And in doing so now, how does that help me recognize the kind of relationship I want to have?”²⁷³

The counselor can then remind clients of their intrinsic worth. This step may take clients some time to fully comprehend. Mary shared how she has started being able to profess her identity as a child of God and her worth, albeit with many difficulties: “I’m reminded that I am a fill-in-the-blank-with-the-right-adjective ‘child of God.’ Some of my homework has been to write down the adjectives and say to yourself, ‘I am an accepted child of God. I am a known child of God. I am a protected child of God.’ So on and so forth. So, I’m working on it.”²⁷⁴

The counselor guides the clients to have a complete understanding of themselves and who they are, even in the context of the trauma they endured.²⁷⁵

272. Counselor D, interview.

273. Counselor B, interview.

274. Mary also shared in our interview, “I have been told positive things by my counselor that I haven’t heard much. Hearing them said to me has been foreign sounding, but I am assured they are true. I’m working on believing them. Many made me cry.” These truths include: “You can cry.... You did your best.... It’s not your fault.... You have value.... Fearfully and wonderfully made.... You are a good daughter. You are enough.... You have a lot of positive qualities.... Not broken. You are safe. Your voice matters.... You are not a failure.... Not a bad person.... Not weak for asking for help.... Not a burden.”

275. Gringrich and Gringrich, “The Crucial Role,” 24; Bourman, “Trauma Sensitivity,” 209.

New Growth

As clients continue to address and deal with core past issues, the survivor naturally experiences new growth in his life, both physiologically and relationally.

Diminishing Comorbidities

Clients often do not seek out counseling, asking to treat their EN. Instead, the external distress in their lives—often as the result of untreated EN—becomes the inciting reason for seeking counseling.²⁷⁶ Although presenting symptoms may no longer be the primary focus of treatment once PEN is identified as the core issue, treating EN leads to the alleviation of subsequent comorbidities. Counselor B said that addressing the negative self-talk and internalization leads to lessening negative thinking, which leads to decreasing intense emotional reactions or even depression.²⁷⁷ Conversely, increased mental tools also empower survivors to address emotional distress with greater control.²⁷⁸ Deborah van Deusen Hunsinger pointed out that harboring unprocessed emotional turmoil as reactions to trauma only serves to lock the victim in the cycle of suffering.²⁷⁹ The trust already established in the counseling relationship allows clients to share more of their stress and worries, allowing opportunities to address distress. Emotional affliction

276. Discussed under “The Psychology: Difficulties of Diagnosing Emotional Neglect.”

277. Counselor B, interview.

278. Pressley and Spinazzola, “Beyond Survival,” 223.

279. Hunsinger, “Trauma-Informed Spiritual Care,” 364.

can only be resolved once it is addressed. Leaving it out in the open allows for honest discussions toward healing.²⁸⁰

Despite an overall trajectory of emotional improvements, counselors will have to guide clients through the emergence of grief. Counselor B observed the hurt clients endure, stating that this is “something that is painful and has been as a part of my life, and it’s not a good part of my life.”²⁸¹ In the case of PEN, survivors grieve the loss of a childhood of warmth, affection, trust, and emotional safety that should have occurred as they observe in others’ families.²⁸² Grief mourns the loss that can never be recovered.²⁸³ Grief is a normal response to EN being uncovered; it is the body’s physical exhibition of the presence of the distress that requires attention and healing.²⁸⁴ For survivors who lived most of their lives without processing their trauma and suppressing their emotional pain, grief may be immense.²⁸⁵

However, Hunsinger noted regarding grief: “Be open to what is happening without judging it. Judgments about what should be only reinforce pain without creating the emotional

280. During our interview, Mary shared how she habitually suppresses emotional distress. Throughout counseling, her counselor would address this bad habit, saying, “How’s that working for you?” She would have to admit that her methodology of ignoring emotional pain has been unhelpful.

281. Counselor B, interview.

282. Pressley and Spinazzola explained in further detail, “For some, the absence of the desired nurturing relationship with a caregiver may emerge as a profound loss to be grieved. For others, the loss of a ‘normal’ childhood or the sense of self as damaged in ways that others do not understand may stand out as a significant injustice. There are countless losses that may emerge in the unique life of each client, and the emotionally significant process of realizing, naming, and mourning those losses can be deeply meaningful for healing.” “Beyond Survival,” 223.

283. Bourman, “Trauma Sensitivity,” 211.

284. Hunsinger, “Trauma-Informed Spiritual Care,” 364.

285. Gibson, *Adult Children*, ch. 9, “How It Feels to Live Free of Roles and Fantasies.”

space needed for true mourning.”²⁸⁶ Within the safety of the counseling relationship, the counselor creates a space for clients to process their grief.

Boundaries

As clients experience improvements in themselves, they may also develop positive changes in their relationship with their father, facilitated by the formation of boundaries. Cloud and Townsend indicated the myth that boundaries are harmful for establishing relationships. However, it is crucial to grasp that the creation of relationship boundaries is not selfish nor self-centered; it is a defensive tool—not used to control, attack, or hurt another person—that does not include the sole fixation upon one’s wishes and desires to the exclusion of the responsibility to love others.²⁸⁷ Counselor A illustrated, “Obviously, we still want to show love is Christ loved us. It doesn’t mean you need to be buddy-buddy. It doesn’t mean you need to spend every holiday with them. It does not mean that at all. You can love somebody from a distance, too.”²⁸⁸

In some instances, the client’s natural progression during counseling may naturally inform the client on how best to establish boundaries; Counselor C stated, “I think the client has a good intuition ... You know, it might just be like, ‘I’m only calling you once a week.’ Or it might be, ‘I’m calling you once a month.’”²⁸⁹

286. Hunsinger, “Trauma-Informed Spiritual Care,” 364.

287. Cloud and Townsend, *Boundaries*, ch. 6, “Common Boundary Myths.”

288. Counselor A, interview.

289. Counselor C, interview.

However, victims without exposure to proper relationship boundaries may require positive modeling and guidance to learn to set boundaries. In this case, counselors may educate their clients on what boundaries are and set an example of healthy boundaries through their actions in counseling.²⁹⁰ The counselor can demonstrate that the word “no” is the simplest form of boundary.²⁹¹ The counselor can advise their clients on establishing limits and physical and emotional distance from their father to protect themselves from hurt and maltreatment; this is vitally important for protection from abuse.²⁹² The counselor may also help their clients establish a support system with supportive people, such as coaches, friends, or positive role models in church.²⁹³ As the counselor aids in building a supportive safety net for the clients—both through the counseling relationship and their personal relationships—the counselor provides a safe space in which the clients can study, comprehend, and practice setting boundaries before applying such boundaries to their father.²⁹⁴

290. The counselor’s emotional and professional boundaries will be discussed later under the section “Words of Advice: Dealing with Burnouts.”

291. Cloud and Townsend, *Boundaries*, ch. 2, “What Does a Boundary Look Like?”

292. Cloud and Townsend, *Boundaries*, ch. 2, “What Does a Boundary Look Like?”

293. Counselor A, interview.

294. Cloud and Townsend remarked, “No matter how much you talk to yourself, read, study, or practice, *you can’t develop or set boundaries apart from supportive relationships with God and others*. Don’t even try to start setting limits until you have entered into deep, abiding attachments with people who will love you no matter what.” *Boundaries*, ch. 4, “How Boundaries Are Developed.”

Forgiveness

As the healing client begins to re-evaluate his relationship with his father, he may find the ability to forgive his father. This comes only from the mature recognition that one's father, even an emotionally neglectful father, is simply human. Counselor C said:

A lot of it is like learning to reframe things. Also, learning to view your parent as a human. You know, when you're a kid, there's a part of you that expects your parents to know everything. Or, like, they should know how to do it right. Or they're not going to make a mistake. You know, at some point, you, like, realize they're maybe a little bit more human. But I think when you're a kid, you really have high expectations for your parents.... There is no perfect parent on this side of heaven.²⁹⁵

The victim surrenders faulty past idolization and expectations of perfection to realize her father's capacity to err.²⁹⁶

The desire for forgiveness may also result from an improved understanding of one's familial generational trauma. Counselor D shared how empathy may arise in those survivors who are able to recontextualize the PEN they faced from their fathers, having understood now how their fathers endured the atrocity of physical abuse or other forms of maltreatment.²⁹⁷ This example does not diminish the impact of PEN, nor does it justify PEN in the context of comparison; indeed, the father is not faultless for neglecting his child's emotional needs. However, compassion for one's father, even for the neglectful father, is the result of an objective view of himself, his father, and the PEN.

As counseling progresses, the focus of the conversation may also progress. Counselor B noted this shift: "So maybe it's not what's wrong, [it is] what's wrong with him. And that can

295. Counselor C, interview.

296. Gibson, *Adult Children*, ch. 7, "Breaking Down and Awakening."

297. Counselor D, interview.

give a context of empathy.”²⁹⁸ Counselor C, too, stated, “Hopefully forgiveness is understanding your parents are sinners.”²⁹⁹ Forgiveness is the result of understanding that the victim and his father are both human, capable of making mistakes, and in need of compassion. Richard Langer, Jason McMartin, and M. Elizabeth Lewis Hall spoke of compassion:

Indeed, in far too many cases, perpetrators are acting out their victimhood by the sins they commit against others. The boundary lines between sinner and those who sin against us are not as clear as we would like. This opens the door to hope because perpetrators may still repent; it also opens the door to forgiveness because victims realize that one day they may be the violators and find themselves standing in need of grace and mercy (Rom 3:23).³⁰⁰

The Paternal Emotional Neglect Survivor’s Life Under the Cross

There is a popular anecdote that the church is the hospital for sinners. In this description, the Doctors of Soul are the physicians who tend to hurting souls with the life-saving word of God. This image illustrates well the reality that the church is filled with members who endure life’s sorrow as they carry spiritual wounds and the pain of complex trauma to the foot of the cross.

In their article, Pressley and Spinazzola suggested that Christian counselors have the ability to “connect deeply with the Christian client whose sense of hope and faith has been profoundly wounded.”³⁰¹ The spiritual shepherds of each congregation have no less of this unique opportunity to lead hurting souls back to their loving God. In doing so, the pastor addresses the

298. Counselor B, interview.

299. Counselor C, interview.

300. Richard Langer, Jason McMartin, and M. Elizabeth Lewis Hall, “Theological Perspectives on Trauma: Human Flourishing After the Fall,” in *Treating Trauma in Christian Counseling*, ed. Heather Davediuk Gringrich and Fred C. Gringrich (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2017), 44.

301. Pressley and Spinazzola, “Beyond Survival,” 214

existence of suffering in a Christian's life with the theology of the cross and the assurance of one's identity in Christ.³⁰²

Theology of the Cross

The truth of the matter is that all human beings living on earth face suffering; Christians are not immune.³⁰³ Although the forms may vary—whether PEN, abuse, or religious persecution—no human life is free from adversity. Throughout history, people have tried to solve the question of theodicy by various approaches. From the philosophical teleological perspective, which dictates that no human action is the result of an intention to cause suffering, one must harmonize the existence of suffering by searching for a greater meaning to the suffering that would bring profound value to the story of his life.³⁰⁴ For the Christian, inevitably, the question then arises, “How do we hold onto a God who is all-loving and all-powerful when there is suffering in the world?”³⁰⁵ In Douglas J. Moo's commentary on Rom 8:18–30, he expressed how believers' experience of suffering and weakness in life does not portray Christians resolutely as being God's children.³⁰⁶

Despite the suffering they face, the children of God dwelling in this world do not live in desperation nor despair. Instead, the apostle Paul proclaimed:

302. Bourman said, “Distrust of God and others also comes with trauma. The preacher will want to address the inevitable questions with the teaching of the hiddenness of God and the revelation of God on the cross.” “Trauma Sensitivity,” 208.

303. Jesus himself prophesied to his disciples, “In this world you will have trouble” (John 16:33).

304. Langer, McMartin, and Hall, “Theological Perspectives on Trauma,” 41.

305. Eriksson, Wilkins, and Frederick, “Trauma, Faith, and Care,” 86–87.

306. Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 515.

For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, “*Abba*, Father.” The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory. (Rom 8:14–17)

The Christian experiences the tension between being in this world—a world subjected to sin and death—and possessing the status of God’s child who waits for the full redemption of the inheritance of eternal life.³⁰⁷ Suffering does not diminish one’s status as God’s beloved child. Instead, God has revealed that the turmoil Christians face is an indication of the imminent glory of the life to come in Christ. Michael P. Middendorf stated simply, “Being a child of God, and a sister or brother of Christ, does entail suffering in this world.”³⁰⁸

The Christian Life Faces Difficulties

Living in this world is arduous. The human race has been subjected to an existence in a state of misery ever since the fall of Adam brought sin into the world.³⁰⁹ In this state of corruption, Bourman observed preachers’ tendencies to dogmatically differentiate between saints and sinners, contrasting God’s holy people living in a world of corruption with the wicked sinners who commit heinous acts. Additionally, Bourman suggested the third anthropological category of the “sinned against,” those who endure the effects of others’ aggression and violence, to fully

307. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 496.

308. Michael P. Middendorf, *Romans 1–8*, ConcC (St. Louis: Concordia, 2013), 650.

309. This is Middendorf’s commentary on Rom 8:18, “I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.” *Romans 1–8*, 670.

capture the human experience of living on in a broken world.³¹⁰ Indeed, those who endured trauma are confounded with the experience of evil; they neither need the conviction of the law to repent of their maltreatment nor have yet perceived themselves as saints of God.³¹¹ The application of God's word to such people involves relating their experiences to the universal experience of suffering in a corrupted world due to sin; the ultimate example is Christ's own suffering prior to his glory, having faced rebellion and rejection by those he came to save.³¹² Therefore, trauma survivors may find solace in identifying with their Savior who shared in their suffering—having been “beaten, spit on, emotionally abused, and tortured to death.”³¹³ Christ can genuinely empathize with human suffering because he himself understands suffering through his own experience.³¹⁴

However, the acknowledgment of a Christian's life of suffering is not an endorsement of suffering as a meritorious cause for salvation; namely, it is not because of one's suffering or desire to seek out suffering that God would deem him worthy of eternal life. Suffering is merely the syllogistic indication of the Christian's status as God's child.³¹⁵ Moo asserted explicitly, “We

310. Bourman, “Trauma Sensitivity,” 220.

311. This is not a claim that trauma survivors have no sin, for all human beings are born sinful and need a savior. As the apostle Paul stated, “No one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the law” (Rom 3:20). Anyone who reflects upon himself finds himself in the state of disgrace compared to the holy and perfect God. However, in this specific matter of PEN, the victim has been wronged. The culpability of the sin in question lies upon the father.

312. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 509, 511.

313. Vieth, “Providing Pastoral Care.”

314. Victor I. Vieth, *On This Rock: A Call to Center the Christian Response to Child Abuse on the Life and Words of Jesus* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2018), 32.

315. A common example for a syllogistic indicator is: “If an animal ‘quacks’ like a duck, then it is a duck.” The animal does not need to first “quack” as a prerequisite to become a duck, but the “quacking” is simply a characteristic already associated with ducks.

do not seek out more suffering with Christ in order that we might be glorified all the more.

Rather, as we bear the sufferings that God allows to befall us, we do so with the confident hope of how he will work everything out in the end.”³¹⁶

Therefore, as Christians face many difficulties in this life, they ought not seek to leave this world of pain nor to escape their very flesh that bears the scars of sin and its impurity.³¹⁷

Instead, God uses the very suffering that his people endure to bless them. The apostle Paul said:

Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.

You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Rom 5:3–8)

Through suffering, God produces perseverance, character, and hope in the Christian. These are the traits that are reinforced through suffering by turning the eyes of believers back upon the one true, steadfast hope for peace and security: redemption through Jesus.³¹⁸

316. Middendorf, *Romans 1–8*, 650.

317. Middendorf commented, “The solution, however, is not to try to escape bodily life; neither is it attempting to purify the unreformable ‘flesh’ (σάρξ). Instead, it is defined as being ‘in Christ Jesus.’” This is his commentary on Rom 8:3, “For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in the flesh.” Middendorf, *Romans 1–8*, 604.

318. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 303

The Christian Hopes for Eternity

The Christian proclaims that God works all things, even the evil in this world, for his benefit.³¹⁹

At the same time, the Christian proclaims that God is neither the cause of evil nor does he wish evil upon anyone.³²⁰ Nonetheless, God is indeed powerful to utilize the evil present in the world and control it for his good purposes.³²¹

The dilemma arises for trauma survivors in understanding the good that could result from the ordeal of suffering. Middendorf acclaimed, “Notice that Paul does not say our suffering itself is good.”³²² The suffering itself should be recognized for what it is: suffering. Paul indeed acknowledged the genuine hardships Christians face while living on this earth: “We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies” (Rom 8:22–23). Middendorf recognized the tension of living in constant expectation of the “not yet,” the concurrent status of adoption with the fullness of revelation and experience waiting in the future.³²³

In the lives of his children, God uses even the adverse experiences of this life to mold the Christians’ endurance, enabling them to face all the pressures of life with the singular hope that

319. “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose” (Rom 8:28). However, the Christian may never fully understand the full extent of God’s will and the benefits of suffering on this side of heaven.

320. “When tempted, no one should say, ‘God is tempting me.’ For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone” (Jas 1:13).

321. Middendorf, *Romans 1–8*, 686–87.

322. Middendorf, *Romans 1–8*, 393. This is Middendorf’s commentary on Rom 5:3–4.

323. Middendorf, *Romans 1–8*, 678.

looks to Christ.³²⁴ This hope sets itself solely forward upon the glorification of the bodily resurrection, just as Jesus suffered and was glorified by God.³²⁵ As the child of God gains mature spiritual insight through faith in Christ, she may come to see the totality of life as God sees it. God has intentions to bless his children with goodness; this goodness, however, is God's understanding of goodness, not humans'.³²⁶

As the child of God gains a greater understanding of his life with the eyes of faith, he recognizes that the temporary troubles that befall him upon this earth are pale in comparison to the eternal life Christ has won for him. The survivor who suffered PEN and is living with the ongoing scars of trauma can find peace and security in recognizing his rightful claim of inheritance to the everlasting, glorious union with his loving Heavenly Father.³²⁷

As PEN survivors—or survivors of other forms of maltreatment or any Christian in general—endure the experiencing of anguish on this earth, the pastor turns his members' eyes toward the comfort of eternity with the Heavenly Father awaiting them. The spiritual shepherd encourages and supports his flock as they endure the trials of life alongside the holy desire to receive the fullness of redemption.³²⁸ Vieth commented poignantly on the struggle of the believer's life:

In reality, a survivor may never be fully healed this side of heaven. Although significant progress can be made, there may always be those moments where a survivor is triggered by something they see on television or hear at church. They may always struggle with forgiveness of an offender or have a level of distrust of the church. This simply means the

324. Middendorf, *Romans 1–8*, 394–95.

325. Middendorf, *Romans 1–8*, 650. This is Middendorf's commentary on Rom 8:14–17.

326. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 529.

327. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 503, 505.

328. Augustine, *Love One Another, My Friends: Saint Augustine's Homilies on the First Letter of John*, tr. John Leinenweber (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989), 40. This is Augustine's commentary on 1 John 3:1–3.

survivor is human. Ministry is for life and some survivors may need pastoral care throughout their earthly pilgrimage.³²⁹

For those who grew up not knowing what paternal love looks like, the pastor mentors his members to affirm the reality of past hurt, recognize friends who did enjoy a better upbringing, and, most importantly, accept their lifelong cross as they await the glorious eternal future of being in the Father's love.³³⁰

Identity in Christ

"God is love," the apostle John proclaimed twice in his first epistle (1 John 4:8, 16). This is not a mere acclamation of a love God possesses or expresses outwardly, but as Bruce Schuchard affirmed, "God himself is love."³³¹ Love defines God; it is the immanent love "whose object is God himself."³³² As Shandor stated, "Nowhere is the Father's great love more clearly visible than on the cross."³³³ The Father's love is not an abstract concept merely spoken, but it is manifested in the action of sending and sacrificing his one and only Son for the sake of the world.³³⁴ The pastor continues to remind his people of scriptural truth: God is love, and God loves his people.

As victims are tormented by internalization and self-identification of worthlessness from PEN, the pastor reminds them of their true identity revealed in Scripture. God said, "Since you

329. Vieth, "Providing Pastoral Care."

330. Counselor A, interview.

331. Bruce G. Schuchard, *1-3 John*, ConcC (St. Louis: Concordia, 2012), 445.

332. Adolf Hoenecke, *Evangelical Lutheran Dogmatics: Volume II*, vol. 2 of *Evangelical Lutheran Dogmatics*, tr. Richard A. Krause and James Langebartels (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 2009), 89.

333. Shandor, "Perceptions of God," 20.

334. Schuchard, *1-3 John*, 438, 452.

are precious and honored in my sight, and because I love you, I will give people in exchange for you, nations in exchange for your life” (Isa 43:4). God’s people hold the distinct status of God’s precious, honored, and beloved children. They are so valuable in his sight that he deemed it worthy to employ whatever godly means necessary for their salvation.³³⁵ This is the status that God confers not only onto the church as a whole but also upon the individual Christian. R. Reed Lessing noted that God does speak to each of his children individually, intimately, and personally to declare his or her importance in God’s eyes.³³⁶ God values the individual.

Therefore, the spiritual leader continues to uphold the survivor’s true identity as a redeemed, precious, honored, and beloved child of God.³³⁷ Even in her Christian counseling,

335. God is holy, and he cannot and does not sin. However, he uses even the evil of this world to bring about good for his people, as displayed in Christ, who suffered wrongly and died an innocent death to forgive the world.

336. R. Reed Lessing, *Isaiah 40–55*, ConcC (St. Louis: Concordia, 2011), 308. Lessing made the assertion of the individualized address based on the singular pronoun “you” in Isa 43:1–7. The singular address, however, refers to the collective titles “Jacob” and “Israel” in v. 1 to denote God’s people as a singular unit. Nevertheless, Lessing underscored that God truly loves his people; his actions, likewise, reflect his love. In loving his people collectively, he is not distant or aloof but shows his love to the individual child just as he does to all his people.

337. “Do you approach counseling differently with a Christian than with a non-Christian?” This was the essence of the question I asked Counselor B during our interview. Counselor B responded that the counseling principles remain the same, regardless of whether the client is Christian or non-Christian; the nuances of the approach, however, may differ slightly.

He stated that he approached all his clients on a human level as a counselor who acknowledges, affirms, and empathizes with the individual personal experience of pain, loss, grief, loneliness, abandonment, and the longing to feel connected, loved, safe, and secure. As these are universal experiences among survivors, Counselor B walked alongside his clients’ hurt. However, because these are all universal experiences among human beings, they are also addressed and remedied universally through the ultimate antidote of the gospel. If possible, Counselor B tried to connect these experiences of affliction with Christ. In Christ, one finds the solution for his troubles in receiving God’s forgiveness, redemption, love, and the presence of the Father who never leaves nor forsakes. Nevertheless, Counselor B asserted that he tried never to force religion upon his clients nor make counseling become a Bible class.

For Christians, Counselor B found more freedom in discussing scriptural matters. Therefore, he could employ more overtly scriptural language and engage much more quickly in theological reflections.

For non-Christians, however, Counselor B returned to the principle of connecting to the client on a human level and seeing the situation from a human perspective. Nevertheless, the troubles the clients espoused will inevitably connect with Christian concepts of grace, forgiveness, identity, and love. As religious truth is universal truth, Counselor B shared how he had to eventually discuss general Christian truths, albeit with less overtly

Counselor C guided her clients back to their victor identity accomplished in the victorious Savior to comprehend God's grace, forgiveness, and unconditional love.³³⁸ Bourman, too, suggested that preachers can guide victims back to their baptism in Christ—baptized into Christ's death and resurrection—to be reminded of their true identity.³³⁹

The pastor guides his people to observe their value in Christ, which is found in their status as God's children.³⁴⁰ The apostle John proclaimed:

See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. All who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure. (1 John 3:1–3)

God's children are confident in their status as God's sons and daughters, entitled to the full rights and privileges of their heavenly inheritance, because God himself has secured this status in

Christian language. However, this was never an attempt to proselytize nor engage in apologetics with the client. Instead, Counselor B opened the door for further discussions of God's love, forgiveness, redemption, and steadfastness, should the client so choose. Thus, it is the client's choice. The non-Christian clients understood that Counselor B was a Christian. Therefore, if the client allowed, Counselor B would bring up the discussion of faith.

This discussion raises the question of whether a pastor should present the Christian identity to non-believers. However, the pastor's role differs significantly from that of a counselor. Whereas the counselor may only be sought out to address psychological or mental issues, the pastor is recognized as a religious leader. Most likely, those who seek out pastoral counseling already expect scriptural answers. Even if a non-believer happens to approach a pastor for counseling without expecting theological engagement, the spiritual shepherd's call as Christ's representative dictates that he returns to God's word to share biblical truth with all who ask him for guidance in this life. Nevertheless, the pastor can glean from Counselor B's approach by connecting with his counselees on a human level, affirming their experiences if they are suffering, and connecting them to scriptural truths that bring true healing.

338. Counselor C, interview.

339. Bourman, "Trauma Sensitivity," 208–10. See Rom 6:3–4, "Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life."

340. See the section "Professional Counseling Methodology: Providing Mental Guidance: Reshaping Mindsets: A New Outlook on Oneself" prior for the example of Mary's struggle with professing her true identity found in Christ.

Christ and given it to them.³⁴¹ The Son of God made the ultimate sacrifice for the benefit of his people, expecting no contribution nor retribution for forgiveness.³⁴² In his sacrifice is humanity's gain at his own expense.³⁴³ God's grace, goodness, and love brought Jesus down upon this earth to meet us in our miserable state.³⁴⁴

Whatever loss victims may have faced in this life with their own self-perception (i.e., the internalization of unworthiness, brokenness, and shame) and with their own earthly fathers, they are adopted by a far better Father, one who far surpasses their earthly father, one who is loving, kind, patient, gentle, and compassionate.³⁴⁵ This Heavenly Father demonstrated his immense love for the world—even for the individual survivor—that he sacrificed his one and only Son to make broken sinners his precious, honored, and beloved sons and daughters.³⁴⁶

The apostle Paul said:

For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, “*Abba*, Father.” The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory. (Rom 8:14–17)

341. Schuchard, *1–3 John*, 294–95, 320. See also C. F. W. Walther's quote: “Hence the way to salvation is this: We are doing nothing, absolutely nothing, towards our salvation, but Christ has already done everything for us, and we must merely cling to what He has done, draw consolation from His finished work of redemption, and trust in it for our salvation.” *The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel: 39 Evening Lectures* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1986), 223.

342. Thomas M. Winger, *Ephesians*, ConcC (St. Louis: Concordia, 2015), 609. This is Winger's commentary on Eph 5:25.

343. Edward W. Klink III, *John*, vol. 4 of *Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 206. This is Klink's commentary on John 3:16–17.

344. Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, vol. 1 of *Christian Dogmatics* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1950), 461.

345. Shandor, “Perceptions of God,” 21.

346. Schuchard, *1–3 John*, 452.

Christians have received the full rights and privileges to be called sons and daughters of God as God's adopted children. They, too, call out to the Heavenly Father, "Abba," utilizing the same Aramaic word Jesus used to address the Father, thereby demonstrating the close relationship they possess as Jesus does with the Father.³⁴⁷ God's children call out to the Father, "Abba," as a deep and emotional reaction borne out of the joyful recognition, in faith, that they are God's children.³⁴⁸ Counselor A highlighted this notable privilege pastors have in comforting souls by revealing the reality of the survivor's loving Heavenly Father.³⁴⁹

However, the truth of the loving Heavenly Father may prove difficult to accept after having witnessed years of the lack of love from one's own earthly father. Mary shared, "I'm still working on it, but he is Father and won't leave me."³⁵⁰ The best solution for those who are reluctant to acknowledge the Father's love is to point them back to their identity in Christ. Counselor B said, "I think affirming their value and their identity in Christ is always our go-to."³⁵¹ When the Doctors of Soul point hurting souls back to Christ, they are leading individuals uncertain about themselves back to the concrete proof of the Father's love found upon the cross, which attained their status as God's own children.³⁵²

347. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 502–3. This is also in recognition of the fact that Christians' relationship with the Father will never be exactly the same as that of the eternal, begotten Son of God with God the Father. However, this does highlight the status of sonship that Christ has given to Christians so that we may enjoy the full privilege and honor as God's sons and daughters.

348. Douglas J. Moo, *Galatians*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 270. This is Moo's commentary on Gal 4:6, "Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, 'Abba, Father.'"

349. Counselor A, interview.

350. Mary, interview.

351. Counselor B, interview.

352. See Schuchard's commentary on 1 John 4:16, "Love is best conceived of not as an abstract quality but as a determined and deliberate action whether you feel like it or not." *1–3 John*, 485.

Forgiveness and Reconciliation

As survivors begin to recognize their identity in Christ, their attention will shift toward re-examining the nature of their relationship with the earthly father who had failed to meet their emotional needs. Inevitably, survivors face the question of forgiveness and reconciliation as possible trajectories for the relationship. The counselor's goal in guiding a client through these proposals is to help clients redefine the relationship from what it was so that a healthy relationship may be established.³⁵³ As a pastor, however, his role is to help clarify the concepts of forgiveness and reconciliation in the light of Christ. In short, Cloud and Townsend defined the two terms as: "Forgiveness has to do with the past. Reconciliation and boundaries have to do with the future."³⁵⁴

Forgiveness

There are three prominent reasons people discourage survivors from forgiving the offending parent. Vieth observed the unwitting impression of silencing survivors that often occurs when Christians hastily advise forgiveness without considering the entire situation.³⁵⁵ As it often happens with more destructive forms of maltreatment, careless pronouncements of forgiveness may further embolden offenders in their abuse, as they are not held accountable for their sins.³⁵⁶

353. Counselor B, interview.

354. Cloud and Townsend, *Boundaries*, ch. 14, "Resistance to Boundaries."

355. Vieth said, "When pastors or other Christians focus too quickly on forgiveness, they unwittingly sound like offenders who often demand forgiveness from their victims in order to silence them and avoid accountability. Instead of jumping to forgiveness, pastors may want to focus on other teachings of the Bible including justice, mercy, and righteous indignation." "Providing Pastoral Care."

356. Harder said, "If a church intentionally does not protect a child, the child's hurt is multiplied—she is hurt first by the offender and then re-victimized by the church. Allowing an offender to remain in good standing in

At the same time, pressuring forgiveness may inadvertently portray abuse victims as culpable despite their innocence in the violence that occurred against them.³⁵⁷ Vieth noted that this is an instance in which the doctrine of the keys is given to the church as a whole but also to the individual believer, thus allowing survivors to withhold forgiveness from their offenders in cases of unrepentance.³⁵⁸

The preceding arguments are legitimate concerns for withholding or advising against forgiveness. However, as Vieth alluded to the doctrine of the keys, forgiveness ought to be administered only at the proper time and in the appropriate setting. When understood properly, forgiveness is neither an act of condoning the sin nor is it a victim's reversal back into old patterns of maltreatment.³⁵⁹ Counselor B defined forgiveness as:

Forgiveness is not reconciliation. And reconciliation is repair of relationship. Forgiveness is not repair of relationship. Forgiveness is letting people go of the hurt, and the ownership of that hurt, and the debt that I, that I [*sic*] have felt that they owe me in, in [*sic*] compensation for that pain. I cancel the debt and no longer hold you accountable to something you are either unwilling or unable to give me.... Forgiveness is canceling of

the church, not believing the child, or rushing all parties to forgiveness and reconciliation re-victimizes the child and makes the wounds fester and ooze rather than giving them opportunity to heal." *Let the Children Come*, 138.

357. Kiser and Heath stated, "To insinuate survivors are in fact culpable for their experience of abuse is to perpetrate further spiritual violence against them." However, Kiser and Heath also noted, "This is not to say that trauma survivors don't have sin in their lives for which they are responsible." *Trauma-Informed Evangelism*, 95.

Indeed, the Doctors of Soul need to identify the appropriate application of law and gospel at the proper time. When dealing with the sinned-against (discussed under the section "Theology of the Cross: The Christian Life Faces Difficulties"), the pastor applies the gospel to the victim and the binding key of the law against the offender to reveal his sin. On the other hand, when dealing specifically with the survivor who has engaged in a variety of sinful maladaptive coping mechanisms (discussed under the section "The Psychology: The Effects of Emotional Neglect: Psychological Impacts: Developmental Impacts"), the pastor ought to call out the sin lovingly and gently while having an understanding of the whole context of the EN.

358. Vieth, interview. Note that Vieth understood the doctrine of the keys from a Lutheran perspective.

359. Cloud and Townsend said, "Forgiveness is not denial. You must name the sin against you to forgive it." *Boundaries*, ch. 14, "Resistance to Boundaries."

the debt, which leads to the building of the trust, which leads to the establishment of the peace.³⁶⁰

A Christian's forgiveness allows her burden of pain to be lifted away. They no longer carry the weight of being abused or neglected; instead, this pain, too, is placed at the foot of the cross of Christ, who has taken on the sin of the whole world. As Counselor B elaborated, the believer's forgiveness is the transference of the victim's father's accountability for his actions to God, allowing God himself to cancel that debt.³⁶¹ Otherwise, Cloud and Townsend cautioned:

To forgive someone means to let him off the hook, or to cancel a debt he owes you. When you refuse to forgive someone, you still want something from that person, and even if it is revenge that you want, it *keeps you tied to him forever*.... If you do not forgive, you are demanding something your offender does not choose to give, even if it is only confession of what he did. This "ties" him to you and ruins boundaries. Let the dysfunctional family you came from go. Cut it loose, and you will be free.³⁶²

Without forgiveness, survivors may become stuck in the past, unable to move forward in life.

A Christian's forgiveness is only possible because Jesus has forgiven and redeemed even the most broken individual; the apostle Paul said, "You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom 5:6–8). Jesus suffered for those who hated him. Christ died on the cross for the unworthy, shameful sinners. In his commentary, Moo said, "Christ, sent by God, died, not for 'righteous' people, or even for 'good' people, but for rebellious and undeserving people.... Paul accentuates the love of God manifested in the cross of Christ by reminding us that the pinnacle of human love is the giving of

360. Counselor B, interview.

361. Counselor B, interview.

362. Cloud and Townsend, *Boundaries*, ch. 7, "Boundaries and Your Families."

one's life for a person one is close to—a spouse, child, or combat buddy—whereas God sent his Son to die for people who hated him.”³⁶³

Forgiveness starts with the recognition of God's tremendous love. Counselor C said, “It's just a good reminder of how God's always coming back for us, even though we, in the worst-case scenario, we're choosing our own path all the time.”³⁶⁴ Therefore, a victim could only apply forgiveness to her own neglectful father once she understands her father's sad and sinful state, just like all other humans on this earth who also need God's forgiveness. Counselor C illustrated forgiveness as covering the individual “with love all the time, even when they don't deserve it.”³⁶⁵ Therefore, forgiveness is a healthy step in the survivor's healing process, but one that should be taken and discussed only at the proper time, in the proper manner, and in the fullness of revelation of Christ's forgiving love.

Reconciliation

If forgiveness is advisable for victims, the assumption of reconciliation is the next logical step. However, whereas the counselors interviewed and most of the literature all encouraged forgiveness, there is a resounding consensus against the necessity of reconciliation. Counselor B noted that reconciliation with one's offending father is a possibility; he maintained, though, that it is not an absolute necessity, stating, “This side of heaven, I might not be able to reconcile with

363. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 306–8.

364. Counselor C, interview.

365. Counselor C, interview.

some people in life, but I can forgive them.”³⁶⁶ Several factors in one’s relationship with his father may suggest against the possibility of reconciliation.

The first factor is inability. Mary shared, “I had hope for reconciliation, but I now realize it probably would have never happened. Fast forwarding a little bit into the counseling thing. The whole, ‘There is no reconciliation without responsibility.’ And neither of my parents will take responsibility, or he didn’t, and she won’t.”³⁶⁷ Even for Counselor C, who would never recommend a definite termination of a relationship, citing this is rather a boundary issue, she recognized that not all her clients may have the possibility of reconciling.³⁶⁸

Reconciliation becomes more problematic when dealing with victims of worse forms of maltreatment. In the case of abuse, for example, safety issue may require the lack of reconciliation.³⁶⁹ Vieth emphatically said, “Reconciliation doesn’t mean I have to be stupid,” noting the dangers of risking placing a sexual abuse victim in the same room with her sex offender father.³⁷⁰ Likewise, Cloud and Townsend warned, “To continue to open yourself up emotionally to an abusive or addicted person without seeing true change is foolish. Forgive, but guard your heart until you see sustained change.”³⁷¹

As alternatives to reconciliation, the victim of any form of trauma should first seek to build proper boundaries. These boundaries include physical and emotional distancing that

366. Counselor B, interview.

367. Mary, interview. Mary shared that her father had died.

368. Counselor C, interview.

369. During our interview, Counselor B described such cases as: “If there’s serious physical and emotional abuse, and the trust betrayal is so deep.”

370. Vieth, interview.

371. Cloud and Townsend, *Boundaries*, ch. 2, “What Does a Boundary Look Like?”

provide the survivor with a safe space from her offender.³⁷² Cloud and Townsend noted that the emotional distance need not be permanent;³⁷³ instead, it may change over time in response to the changing state of the relationship.

Cloud and Townsend stated, “Boundaries in no way mean to stop loving. They mean the opposite: you are gaining freedom to love. It is good to sacrifice and deny yourself for the sake of others. But you need boundaries to make that choice.”³⁷⁴ Likewise, Counselor A said, “You can love somebody from a distance, too.”³⁷⁵ Survivors may never gain the close relationship they once hoped for with their neglectful father. Nevertheless, they can live in peace of knowing that their relationship with their loving Heavenly Father will never be broken.

However, if a survivor wishes to reconcile, there are several factors to consider. Vieth observed how each situation would resolve itself differently.³⁷⁶ It is wise to work through the process of reconciliation with the survivor’s mental health provider to establish the goal of the meeting, determine possible outcomes that may subvert the survivor’s expectations, develop a strategic plan for how the conversation should occur, and help process the meeting afterward. With more harmful forms of maltreatment, it is beneficial to hold the meeting at a safe location with another individual present for support and to stop the meeting should the emotional harm recur.³⁷⁷

372. Cloud and Townsend, *Boundaries*, ch. 2, “What Does a Boundary Look Like?”

373. Cloud and Townsend, *Boundaries*, ch. 2, “What Does a Boundary Look Like?”

374. Cloud and Townsend, *Boundaries*, ch. 7, “Boundaries and Your Family.”

375. Counselor A, interview.

376. Vieth, interview.

377. Vieth, “Providing Pastoral Care.”

The Role of the Church and the Pastor

The pastor cares for body and soul. He seeks to understand the turmoil that his people endure. He equips himself with scriptural truths and the practical skill; with this comprehensive knowledge, he delivers God's word of comfort to survivors. Similarly, the church is a haven for victims of trauma, a refuge for all of God's people from the torment of life. Christians who prioritize providing a loving and supportive community welcome in hurting souls to find shelter in God's love. Mary recounted, "Church became a place to learn, relax, and feel safe."³⁷⁸

Showing Love

For victims who lacked parental care and love growing up, the church functions as the model of godly love. Vieth illustrated an example of how a child undergoing familial maltreatment may find refuge in his church: "But when I go to my Lutheran school, when I go to catechism class, my pastor, my teacher, they don't yell. They don't use bad words. They don't tell me I'm worthless. In fact, they praise me for how well I've improved in gym class."³⁷⁹ The body of Christ shows love to people, even unwittingly to victims of trauma, by simply living out their lives of faith.

The church is a space for the body of believers to encourage and support one another in each other's earthly walk of faith. As this community is crucial for all aspects of Christian living,

378. Mary, interview.

379. Vieth, interview.

the body of Christ also provides vital support for its hurting members.³⁸⁰ Cloud and Townsend posited:

God has designed us to grow up in godly families where parents do the things he has commanded. They nurture us, they have good boundaries, they forgive and help us resolve the split between good and bad, and they empower us to become responsible adults. But many people have not had this experience. They are psychological orphans who need to be adopted and cared for by the body of Christ; to differing extents, this is true of all of us.³⁸¹

The body of Christ that pays particular attention to the members with PEN—or any other forms of maltreatment—can provide tremendous support for the survivors seeking healing from their past pain.³⁸² Survivors can genuinely connect with another believer on a human level, allowing them to be vulnerable and discuss the issues they are facing.³⁸³ The built-in trusted support system of the body of Christ also aids survivors in building boundaries, including boundaries with their neglectful father; Cloud and Townsend asserted that victims first need trustworthy and supportive relationships that provide the survivors a safe space to practice building boundaries before implementing boundaries in the broken relationship with their parents.³⁸⁴ In a system that mutually cares for one another, believers may be able to notice signs of distress in children who

380. During our interview, Mary shared how she had begun relying upon her fiancé, friends, and community for help.

381. Cloud and Townsend, *Boundaries*, ch. 14, “Resistance to Boundaries.”

382. Harder, *Let the Children Come*, 25, 138.

383. Pressley and Spinazzola lamented, “Contemporary culture often does not make space for the process of grief and mourning. This can be especially true in the Christian subculture, where some individuals and families feel the pressure to look good. Additionally, clients who identify as Christian will often report feeling guilty for a perceived lack of faith, hope, or forgiveness when they are walking through times of suffering. However, the Scriptures do not condemn or lecture those who are mourning; rather, they provide a method by which people can learn to process their pain in a spiritual context.” “Beyond Survival,” 224.

384. Cloud and Townsend, *Boundaries*, ch. 2, “What Does a Boundary Look Like?,” ch. 4, “How Boundaries are Developed,” ch. 7, “Boundaries and Your Families,” ch. 14, “Resistance to Boundaries.”

are not yet cognitively able to vocalize their trauma.³⁸⁵ The fellowship of Christians becomes the safe haven of mutual accountability that watches out for one another's best interests in times of hurt and trouble.

Positive Role Models

For victims who lacked a loving father figure, the church can provide positive father figures and male role models to reflect the love of the Heavenly Father. Biller suggested, "The father-absent child may not be paternally deprived because he has a very adequate father-surrogate, or he may be less paternally deprived than are many father-present children."³⁸⁶ Often, the fatherly role is fulfilled in another male family member, such as a brother, uncle, or grandfather; other positive interactions also include those with a male neighbor, teacher, or friend.³⁸⁷ In a school setting, Biller and Solomon also proposed establishing a program that fosters positive male mentorship and interaction with men from the community.³⁸⁸

The blessing of the church is the availability of godly men who desire to emulate Christ-like love. Counselor A observed, "And in the body of Christ, ... there can be strong male mentors and strong male friends that can provide, maybe, what your earthly father didn't, more so your Heavenly Father, who will meet all of our needs."³⁸⁹ It may be wise for a spiritual leader

385. Daniel, "Introduction to Issues," 15; Harder, *Let the Children Come*, 16.

386. Biller, *Paternal Deprivation*, 5.

387. Biller, *Paternal Deprivation*, 49, 71.

388. Biller and Solomon proposed, "Men from the community could come in during lunch breaks and eat with the children. They could also interact with children on the playground and ride with them on school buses." *Child Maltreatment and Paternal Deprivation*, 207.

389. Counselor A, interview.

to be aware of the faithful, Christ-like men in his congregation who can serve as positive role models. Then, the pastor could connect the individual with the PEN survivor for the latter to witness the emulation of the Father's selfless love on an interpersonal level. Counselor A stated, "I think that's the beauty to say, 'But you belong to another family, a family of believers in which you have a loving brother in Christ and a perfect Heavenly Father.'"³⁹⁰

The pastor is in a unique position to model the Father's love to survivors and to all members. He has been called to be Christ's representative on this earth. The pastor who shows genuine Christ-like love brings profound comfort to victims. In her first counseling session with her current counselor, Mary expressed tremendous fear of counseling due to her past traumatic experiences with counseling: "And he apologized. And I'm like, 'You didn't do anything wrong.' And then he said, 'You should have never gone through that.'"³⁹¹

As the pastor and the church show love to victims, they help defeat old stigmas that all men, especially older men in positions of authority, are inherently hurtful.³⁹² The Christians who model the Heavenly Father's love are also changing victims' apprehensive image of a neglectful God, as modeled by their earthly father.³⁹³ They are educating victims on a renewed perception of the Father in faith, as Counselor D stated, "Heavenly Father does love you so profoundly and so deeply and is concerned about every aspect of your life, including your emotions."³⁹⁴

390. Counselor A, interview.

391. Mary, interview.

392. Counselor A, interview.

393. Counselor B said during our interview, "And then how that feeling of abandonment that I see in, maybe, my paternal father gets mirrored to my Heavenly Father, and flipping that around and realizing that my earthly dad is not my Heavenly Father."

394. Counselor D, interview.

Hunsinger, in her article on the role of Christian counselors, said, “The witness of Scripture is that our merciful God listens to the cries of his people.”³⁹⁵ The church listens to hurting souls and shows all people, including survivors, what it means to feel secure in the Father’s love.

Private Pastoral Counseling and Conversations

In one-on-one interactions with survivors, a pastor shows love first and foremost through listening. Listening conveys genuine care, compassion, and empathy. Eriksson, Wilkins, and Frederick described the meaning of genuine compassion as: “Living with compassion means being deeply moved by the pain of others, engaging at a true level of human connection, and not shying away from the complexity of pain, doubt, rage, guilt, and relief that trauma survivors can hold.”³⁹⁶ For survivors who never experienced the emotional attention or care from an earthly father, the genuine pastoral concern—emulating the Father’s love—brings relief. Mary described the tremendous comfort she found from her counselor, who “was a good listener with a calming voice who didn’t judge me.... I can email when I need to process or am struggling outside of session, and he is responsive, helpful, and encouraging. I have also heard things that I haven’t been told by others.”³⁹⁷

395. Hunsinger, “Trauma-Informed Spiritual Care,” 369.

396. Eriksson, Wilkins, and Frederick, “Trauma, Faith, and Care,” 85.

397. Mary, interview.

Being Present

The ability to listen begins with being physically present. Kiser and Heath posited that the importance of trauma-informed evangelism requires spiritual leaders to be physically present for all.³⁹⁸ Mary remarked on the difficulty of relying on her former pastor because she often found him vacating the church building quickly after Sunday services or absent from the office during the weekdays.³⁹⁹

Being present also requires pastoral counselors to be attentive to the conversation with the survivor. Vieth said, “Pastoral care for a survivor of abuse begins with listening. Truly listening, truly, you know, putting away the laptop and the pen and the like, and truly just listening.”⁴⁰⁰ The spiritual leader engages in the ministry of presence, as Counselor B described:

Ministry of presence of being genuine with people and authentic, which means being genuine in the sense that I’m tracking with you, and I’m letting you know that I’m paying attention to you, eye contact, nonverbal, verbal. But then, authentic is when you share some things, I’m willing to be vulnerable and to go there with you within certain bounds.⁴⁰¹

398. Kiser and Heath said, “As important as it is to be present to our human neighbors, trauma-informed evangelism requires that we also be present to the rest of our neighbors in the natural world. For the same destructive forces that inflict violence, abuse, and neglect on people wreak havoc on the animals, insects, plants, soil, water, and air. If we are going to be good news for our neighbors, we must be good news for the planet, our neighbors, and our only home.” *Trauma-Informed Evangelism*, 62.

Although there is the good assertion of being physically present, one can conclude from reading this book that the author dealt more with issues of societal woes than with the scriptural and spiritual deliverance found in Christ. One can see this in their treatment of the gospel message. They understood the gospel account as merely a story—an allegorical representation—of a greater truth: should Jesus himself—who is God—be traumatized, die, but then rise from the dead as a symbol of trauma survival, so too is there hope for trauma survivors for deliverance from their anguish. See pp. 74, 84, 99–101 of *Trauma-Informed Evangelism*.

399. During our interview, Mary shared, “The same pastor I have trust issues with, more times than not, by the time I go to my mailbox and back, if I want to talk to him, he’s already out of the building. On a non-game Sunday, even. So, it’s very hard to communicate if you’re not present, and he’s decided that he’s going to do office hours from home office, which doesn’t make sense either. There’s a lot to be said about presence.”

400. Vieth, interview.

401. Counselor B, interview.

As the pastoral counselor is present and attentive, he can look out for speech of emotional wounds, emotional withdrawal, themes of shame, or tendencies toward perfectionism as telltale signs of EN.⁴⁰² Repetition of twisted theology may also reveal deep-seated hurt from abuse.⁴⁰³ As the pastoral shepherd listens, he engages with his counselee. He learns about his counselee's life. The pastor demonstrates to the survivor that they are worthy to be heard.

Building Trust

As the pastor listens, he builds trust with his counselees. Mary said, "For many people, their pastor is the first person they will go to for help. They are familiar with them, can work up the courage to talk to them over time and not have to go someplace special when they are hurting."⁴⁰⁴ The trust that a pastor establishes—both in everyday interactions with people and in pastoral counseling—gives people confidence to turn to him when they need help.

Inversely, several factors may degrade an individual's trust in reaching out to her pastor for help. Vieth cautioned against religious leaders' lack of knowledge on trauma-informed ministering as the reason why abuse survivors often seek out help first from a mental health provider.⁴⁰⁵ Mary described her vivid experience:

They need to be at the very least trauma informed or master their poker face. It feels terrible to be sitting in a pastor's office, talking about something that has happened and literally see the fear on their face as they back up in their chair when you aren't even telling them the worst of what's happened. Even if a pastor does not have the gift of

402. Counselor B, interview.

403. Vieth, interview.

404. Mary, interview.

405. Vieth, interview.

counseling, they should have the ability to listen, empathize, and direct a parishioner to the resources needed to address the issues they are dealing with.⁴⁰⁶

Otherwise, Mary also noted how confidentiality issues had prevented her previous attempts at seeking out counseling: “The only reasons I agreed were I had two friends and the pastor that insisted, and I found one who was doubly confidentiality bound as both a pastor and counselor. I know it shouldn’t make a difference, but it made me feel better that confidentiality would be taken seriously.”⁴⁰⁷ Without trust, progress toward healing will not occur.⁴⁰⁸

Even though pastors may lack the depth of knowledge on EN, the trust they build will enable them to engage Christ with survivors. Mary shared, “We need reassurance and positivity and to be reminded of positive things frequently because we tend to not believe them and forget them.” She further described how her counselor has created a beneficial counseling environment: “It is a safe space with someone who listens, doesn’t judge, can handle what I say without making me feel like a burden, and when I do, I am corrected.... I can process all of the junk running through my head and gut. When I am confused, he helps explain things and walks me through my thoughts.”⁴⁰⁹ To build trust, the pastor should be attentive in creating a calm counseling space for survivors by being patient, understanding, calm, and responsive to the counselee’s needs.

406. Mary, interview.

407. Mary, interview.

408. Kiser and Heath said, “If the survivor feels unsafe and that they cannot trust the one they are walking with, healing work will not succeed.” *Trauma-Informed Evangelism*, 122.

409. Mary, interview.

Another component of building trust is confidentiality within limits.⁴¹⁰ According to Schuetze, confidentiality assures counselees that the information they divulge will remain protected; the pastor should disclose these expectations at the beginning of the counseling.⁴¹¹

The trust that is first established on an interpersonal, one-on-one level between a pastor and his member will also benefit preaching. Bourman maintained that trust formed will allow preachers to speak safely from up in front of the church as they hold out God's promises of protection and provision to willing listeners.⁴¹²

Long-Term Relationship

Professional counseling typically lasts for eight to twelve sessions.⁴¹³ In cases involving complex and chronic issues, months or years of counseling may be required.⁴¹⁴ Although the general expectations for professional counseling are short-term, focusing on individual issues, Counselor A contrasted pastoral counseling as a lifelong endeavor, lasting for the duration of his service to the congregation.⁴¹⁵ Vieth poignantly commented, "From now until the day they enter heaven,

410. Limitations of confidentiality will be discussed under the section "Words of Advice."

411. Schuetze, *Doctor of Souls*, 272, 274.

412. Bourman, "Trauma Sensitivity", 212.

413. Counselor C recounted this experience during our interview.

414. Counselors B and D, interviews.

415. During our interview, Counselor A noted that this could be for six months, one year, or all throughout a pastor's ministry if he remains at one congregation.

right? And, so, don't put a time limit on how many times you'll meet with them, right? Ministry is for life."⁴¹⁶

Throughout this lifelong pastoral relationship, the pastor has the privilege of celebrating the joys of life of his counselee. Mary finally understood that she can celebrate the big and small wins.⁴¹⁷ At the same time, pastors walk alongside survivors in their times of turmoil, offering support. In those moments, the pastor becomes the solid ground in the midst of turmoil. He upholds the truth of Scripture. He leads survivors away from internalized thoughts of worthlessness to their true identity in Christ. Over the course of counseling, Mary shared her ongoing therapy, "I am held accountable, but with kindness and without punishment. And he gives me tasks to help me progress.... I'm really good at going to the worst-case scenario. And in situations like that, he talks me back off the ledge, and his voice is very calming and reassuring."

Mary demonstrated the realities of survivors' tumultuous healing process: "My journey has been a marathon rollercoaster with some hairpin turns and loop-de-loos."⁴¹⁸ With years of unprocessed memories and traumatic emotional responses suppressed, survivors may face great confusion about themselves and their own thoughts. Often, the healing process does not appear linear, which can cause confusion and frustration for pastors who are genuinely concerned about their people's improvement. Vieth cautioned against such false expectations:

Some pastors mistakenly believe that after two or three conversations and a well-placed reference to a Bible passage, a survivor should be able to "get over it." In reality, a survivor may never be fully healed this side of heaven. Although significant progress can be made, there may always be those moments where a survivor is triggered by something

416. Vieth, interview.

417. Mary, interview.

418. Mary, interview.

they see on television or hear at church. They may always struggle with forgiveness of an offender or have a level of distrust of the church. This simply means the survivor is human. Ministry is for life and some survivors may need pastoral care throughout their earthly pilgrimage.⁴¹⁹

Eriksson, Wilkins, and Frederick asserted, “Clinicians must have realistic expectations!”⁴²⁰ These words are no less applicable to the spiritual shepherds. The pastors must have realistic expectations of their members who survived PEN as they minister to them with patience.

In this lifelong relationship, the pastor cares for his people. Mary shared:

Many stuff it down, and one day, it will bubble over and will need to be shepherded to help.... A lot of retelling me things because, well, I need that.... Periodic check-ins if you know there’s been trauma.... Don’t underestimate the impact of a timely and well-worded email or text. There have been many times where an email pulled me back to center or gave me words to re-read that spoke love and truth when I needed it.”⁴²¹

The spiritual shepherd is in it for a long-term relationship with those who need his help as the stable assurance of God’s love throughout their tumultuous healing process from PEN.

Care for the Soul First

Ultimately, the spiritual shepherd administers to the whole person, body and soul. The spiritual shepherd may wonder about his role in serving an individual so severely wounded physiologically and spiritually by PEN. However, Mary formerly rejected counseling because past counselors discounted the importance of God and faith in treating her maltreatment, even claiming that her belief in God is the cause of her traumatic experiences.⁴²² The gospel is the

419. Vieth, “Providing Pastoral Care.”

420. Eriksson, Wilkins, and Frederick, “Trauma, Faith, and Care,” 89.

421. Mary, interview.

422. Mary, interview.

ultimate antidote for a suffering soul. Therefore, Bourman reminded, “The Lutheran preacher can bring applications that resonate with survivors of trauma by looking to meet their spiritual needs.”⁴²³

As obvious as it may sound, this is a reminder to pray for the counselees.⁴²⁴

The spiritual shepherd may also advise survivors to seek professional counseling to help them deal with EN.⁴²⁵ Professional and pastoral counseling complement one another. Mary noted that having access to her professional counselor and pastor throughout her healing journey has helped her find answers to many of her spiritual questions.⁴²⁶

When PEN taints the survivors’ view of God and creates an obstacle in their reception of the gospel, the spiritual leader should consider ways to remove such obstacles to connect God’s word to these hurting souls. Vieth gave examples of providing online worship, meeting with the pastor at a coffee shop, or excluding certain hymns from the service that recall strong associations with traumatic abuse memories.⁴²⁷ Mary also shared how she needed the assurance of the Lord’s Supper on impromptu occasions.⁴²⁸ The pastor should seek out the best way to share the gospel with his people.

423. Bourman, “Trauma Sensitivity,” 221.

424. Counselor C, interview.

425. The discussion on the necessity of referrals will be discussed under “Words of Advice.”

426. Mary, interview.

427. Vieth, “Providing Pastoral Care.”

428. During our interview, Mary also advised pastors to show interest and care by asking their members what prompted the request for private communion.

Preach the Gospel

“It will not take much at all for the law to touch such hearts already laid bare by the hand of God,” Bourman said.⁴²⁹ Survivors already carry a lot of guilt and shame. Traumatic memories traumatize their waking existence, and the emotional distress thereof debilitates their abilities to function. For those whose souls are overburdened with anguish, the gospel is the antidote that provides solace for their agonizing existence. C. F. W. Walther described the gospel as: “It is a promise of free grace. It asks nothing of us but this, ‘Take what I give, and you have it.’ That is not a condition, but a kind invitation.”⁴³⁰ The gospel is the unbridled promise of peace. It does not require compensation nor confirmation of pre-existing merit to administer consolation; the gospel itself changes the overladen hearts.⁴³¹ As a pastor administers to each of his members, he must correctly understand the role of the law and gospel and their appropriate administration: the law convicts the secure sinner, and the gospel uplifts the bruised, contrite, and miserable sinner.⁴³² As the spiritual shepherd seeks to bring relief to the sinned-against, those who endure the burden of PEN they did not merit, the pastor relieves their affliction by preaching the gospel.

The essence of the spiritual shepherd’s work is to connect an individual’s personal issue with scriptural truth, relating to the heavy-laden sinner how God’s word is personally applicable to her specific experience and bringing comfort to her situation. In dealing with PEN, pastors should observe the counselee’s repetitive remarks of pain, abandonment, loneliness, and the

429. Bourman, “Trauma Sensitivity,” 220.

430. Walther, *The Proper Distinction*, 10.

431. Walther, *The Proper Distinction*, 16.

432. Walther, *The Proper Distinction*, 101.

feeling of being forsaken.⁴³³ With the recognition of these common patterns of PEN hurt, the pastor is well aware to connect these feelings of deficiency with the truth of forgiveness, redemption, and security found in the loving Father who never leaves nor forsakes.⁴³⁴ The pastor guides his lost sheep, those living with the agonizing aftermath of EN, back to the stability that Christ provides through the cross.

For the survivors who are already overburdened with anxiety at the image of a father, the pastor may have to communicate the Father's love through an unconventional manner by first not talking about God the Father.⁴³⁵ Counselor A stated, "But God's love is poured out in other ways or described in other ways. So, you may pastorally focus on different pictures or different things that say, 'This is who God is.' And if this is who God is, this is who your Heavenly Father also is, because they're one and the same, you know."⁴³⁶ When addressing survivors, it may be wise to first convey God's love by referring to the many other ways God has shown his love that would resonate with the survivor; the ultimate expression of his love is the tangible and physical life of his Son, Jesus. Eventually, the pastor can connect all of these acts of love back to the source of God himself, who is love.

433. Counselor B, interview.

434. Counselor B, interview.

435. Shandor said, "When ministering to young men who grew up with an abusive or neglectful father, you should use caution not to lay out too quickly all the various aspects of God's omniscience, omnipresence, and omnipotence and then slap the term 'father' on them.... First, deep down on a subconscious level you have just introduced him to a distant, all-powerful, cosmic 'father' that he is unable to please, unable to dissuade, unable to hide from, unable to lie to, and unable to run away from." "Perceptions of God," 18.

436. Counselor A, interview.

Finally, as Counselor A noted, the goal is to demonstrate that the Father is loving, present, and provides for all of the survivor's needs.⁴³⁷ This is the pastoral art of applying God's comforting truth in a manner that will be most beneficial for bringing comfort to hurting souls.⁴³⁸

Corporate Preaching

A pastor who preaches about the loving God who brought his Son into this world as the ultimate solution for the world's affliction should also mention the issues of PEN. The pastor touches upon the issues of trauma because his congregants face trauma. The pastor talks about maltreatment because the Bible speaks about maltreatment.⁴³⁹

Vieth suggested that pastors should actively make it a priority to periodically preach a sermon on the topic of child maltreatment.⁴⁴⁰ Bourman also advised choosing specific texts that address traumatic loss.⁴⁴¹ Additionally, he offered the "lament" sermon structure that reflects lament psalms:

As an example, the elements of a typical psalm of lament are: 1) an address to God, 2) a statement of the cause of the psalmist's suffering or grief, 3) a plea to God for help, 4) a statement of confidence that God will help, and 5) concluding words of thanks and praise to God. That structure lends itself to Lutheran preaching very naturally, and it allows the

437. Counselor A, interview.

438. Walther said, "Accordingly, the preacher must understand how to depict accurately the inward condition of every one of his hearers. A mere objective presentation of the various doctrines is not sufficient to this end." *The Proper Distinction*, 53.

439. During our interview, Vieth asserted that the Bible speaks about trauma, even horrible acts of violence observed in the rape of Dinah, the rape of Tamar, and the sexual exploitation of Bathsheba, among many other accounts. He argued that since the Bible speaks openly about such a topic, the spiritual leader called to preach the Bible should, likewise, talk about the topics about which God speaks.

440. Vieth said, "Every pastor should periodically preach a sermon on one or more aspects of child maltreatment as well as offer Bible studies on the subject. This is the message from God's word that countless children are waiting to hear—and the church has long delayed in preaching." *On This Rock*, 52.

441. Bourman, "Trauma Sensitivity," 219.

preacher to capture the sadness and loss of trauma and the believer's certainty that God will hear and help for Jesus' sake.⁴⁴²

Although these are helpful considerations to consider, God's called messengers need to keep in mind their primary job of preaching the text. The preacher ought to faithfully expound on the message specifically espoused in the text assigned for the day. If this text should address maltreatment, the pastor will faithfully address the issue. This may not require overtly naming the maltreatment or illustrating it in vivid detail, but simply acknowledging its essence is sufficient. This also does not disregard exceptional circumstances that may arise, which would prompt the spiritual leader to select specific scriptural passages to address such issues.

The preacher remembers that trauma sensitivity is another tool in his ministerial toolbox. He should not overemphasize one malady from living in a sinful world to the expense of other hurting souls in his congregation. However, as trauma-informed ministers, the spiritual leader acknowledges the survivors of PEN and other forms of trauma sitting before him on Sunday mornings.

When the spiritual leader does broach the topic of maltreatment in sermons, he should be wary about his approach in presenting maltreatment. Describing the trauma in vivid detail may become a distraction to his primary goal of preaching Christ, both for the abuse victims—who may be triggered with traumatic memories—and all other listeners in attendance.⁴⁴³ Bourman further warned:

How might a sexual assault survivor or a child abuse survivor hear a sermon about sexual purity and the condemnation that comes down on the sexually impure? Without nuance and trauma sensitivity, the pastor runs the risk of pushing a survivor of rape to feel God's

442. Bourman, "Trauma Sensitivity," 213.

443. Bourman, "Trauma Sensitivity," 212.

condemnation for having intercourse when they carry no guilt in what happened. They were simply sinned against.⁴⁴⁴

Mary, too, cautioned, “Mother’s Day and Father’s Day are not always warm fuzzy type holidays for people, especially for those that have been hurt by their parents.”⁴⁴⁵ To deliver God’s word most effectively to hurting souls, the pastor may even consult with survivors in his congregation for feedback on their reactions to his sermon.⁴⁴⁶

The pastor seeks to address trauma in his congregation without letting the topic overwhelm the true focus of every sermon: the preaching of the gospel. It is the spiritual shepherd’s role to faithfully teach God’s word through a sermon, in Bible classes, or during day-to-day interpersonal interactions.⁴⁴⁷ Bourman commented:

Despair after trauma can best be addressed with the preaching of resurrection life, vocation, and mission. Sadness must be wrapped up and brought to the heart of God in the form of lament. Guilt, whether real or imagined, is removed through a proclamation of justification and grace.... Christian preaching can help the trauma survivor tell their story in the light of the cross and in the light of the resurrection. It is nearly impossible to overstate the importance of Christian preaching and teaching for the trauma survivor.⁴⁴⁸

The effective spiritual shepherd is the one who guides anguished souls, whether from PEN or the daily stresses of life, back to the cross where Jesus procured salvation and eternal life for them.

444. Bourman, “Trauma Sensitivity,” 220.

445. Mary, interview.

446. Bourman shared, “One preacher shared with me that he always sends the sermon to one person ahead of time so that she can be prepared for whatever is coming on that particular Sunday.” “Trauma Sensitivity,” 212.

447. Schuetze, *Doctor of Souls*, 30.

448. Bourman, “Trauma Sensitivity,” 208, 212.

Words of Advice

The following is additional information that is worth the spiritual leader's consideration.

Although they may not all address PEN or EN, the shepherd who is considerate of EN will eventually have to contemplate his approach toward maltreatment in general.

On Working with Church Governance

There is little information on addressing specifically EN corporately as a church. However, there is a lot more information on how congregations should address childhood maltreatment in general, which would inevitably touch upon EN.

Harder maintained that churches ought to be consciously proactive in their approach toward abuse and neglect, arguing that a church's dedicated efforts in addressing maltreatment or the lack thereof would illustrate its love and devotion to care for trauma survivors.⁴⁴⁹ Vieth further commented that a church's accessible and visible protocol against maltreatment may convey to survivors an image of safety.⁴⁵⁰ A public policy broadcasts the church's commitment to addressing trauma; the lack of a protocol, therefore, may inadvertently attract predators by giving the implicit appearance that sins are not held accountable.⁴⁵¹

Each policy differs from one congregation's unique setting and needs to another; however, Harder argued that the crafting of the protocol should take input from parents, teachers, youth leaders, church staff members, pastors, and all those who interact with the church's

449. Harder, *Let the Children Come*, 138.

450. Vieth, interview.

451. Schuetze, *Doctor of Souls*, 274.

facilities.⁴⁵² Vieth suggested establishing a church child protection committee that assumes the task of crafting, reviewing, and updating the policy to combat abuse within the church.⁴⁵³ Once a protocol is established, it should be disseminated among the church's staff and volunteers who regularly work with children.⁴⁵⁴ Vieth further suggested that abuse and neglect handling protocols should become regular mandatory training.⁴⁵⁵ To help with crafting the policy on handling maltreatment, Vieth suggested contacting a local Children's Advocacy Center that can advise churches on drafting a policy. These are facilities that provide medical services, mental health, law enforcement, and victim advocacy for abuse and neglect victims.⁴⁵⁶

The task of establishing an abuse and neglect protocol may seem overwhelming for a church to undertake. However, it all begins with addressing the issue; this is a conversation that the pastor can bring up with his church governance. The church welcomes in sinners; inevitably, the congregation would face the sins of abuse and neglect. This is simply the community of Christians' proactive deliberation before the issue arises. This is an act of love that prepares God's people to show love to hurting souls.⁴⁵⁷ This act of love may begin with the church

452. Harder, *Let the Children Come*, 153.

453. Vieth, interview.

454. Harder, *Let the Children Come*, 147, 154.

455. Vieth, *On This Rock*, 52.

456. Vieth, interview.

457. Vieth said, "In all that we say and do, it must be clearly communicated to the world that we believe our treatment of children reflects our view of God. When writing a church policy on child maltreatment, for example, the preamble must remind readers that these policies are not being done to avoid litigation or reduce our insurance rate—but because children are Christ's representatives (Mark 9:36-37) and we intend to treat them with the respect due messengers of God." *On This Rock*, 54.

providing literature on maltreatment and referrals to appropriate counseling.⁴⁵⁸ Nevertheless, whatever form of policy it may be (e.g., being displayed publicly or not) will be determined by the specific situation of the congregation as Christians seek to be ready to show God's love.

On Working with Secular Government Officials

When abuse and neglect arise, churches may hesitate to get the police involved. Vieth argued that it is the church's duty to faithfully carry out the teachings of Scripture and hold offenders accountable for their actions.⁴⁵⁹ By getting the police or Child Protective Services involved, Christians rightfully hold offenders accountable as they allow the government—the institution that is equipped to handle abuse and neglect—to administer justice against crimes.⁴⁶⁰ To avoid confusion in the moment, the church's protocol for notifying civil authorities should already be detailed in its maltreatment handling policy.⁴⁶¹

Additionally, the pastoral counselor may need to involve the police when a life is in jeopardy. Although confidentiality is a crucial component of building trust, the need for confidentiality does not supersede the revelation of intention to harm oneself or another.⁴⁶² Schuetze noted that some US states require pastors to report suspicions of abuse and neglect. However, he remarked that adhering to the law is not the pastor's goal in reporting; rather, it is

458. Vieth, *On This Rock*, 53. The advice on finding an appropriate clinical counselor is discussed under "For the Pastoral Counselor."

459. Vieth, interview.

460. Harder noted failure to report suspected child abuse may be breaking the law and leaving the church vulnerable to civil liability. *Let the Children Come*, 140.

461. Harder, *Let the Children Come*, 158.

462. Schuetze, *Doctor of Souls*, 274.

an act of love to protect life.⁴⁶³ It is wise for the pastor to inform his counselees of such exceptions to confidentiality at the beginning of counseling.⁴⁶⁴

Lastly, the church leadership may be most reluctant to involve the police in dealing specifically with cases of EN. Emotional neglect is the act of omission, often occurring without ill intention. In most cases, the pastor will not likely encounter current cases of child EN.⁴⁶⁵ However, should a pastor encounter it, he may first lovingly and gently discuss his concerns with the parents. If there are no ill intentions and the parents are simply ill-equipped to provide emotional support for the child, the pastor may refer them to a professional counselor.

For the Counseling Pastor

Referring to Professional Counselors

The trauma-informed pastor should remain well educated on the matters of maltreatment and the best practices to handle them. As Vieth proposed, the research on trauma is constantly improving; therefore, a pastor should keep up to date with the latest information.⁴⁶⁶ Furthermore, a pastor should be aware of how best to refer their members to professional counselors. As Mary pointed out, a victim's first point of contact for seeking help is often with her pastor.⁴⁶⁷

463. Schuetze, *Doctor of Souls*, 272–73.

464. Vieth, "Providing Pastoral Care."

465. Discusses earlier under "The Psychology: Difficulties of Diagnosing Emotional Neglect."

466. Vieth, "Providing Pastoral Care."

467. Mary, interview.

Therefore, a pastor should be prepared to utilize external help from professional counselors when needed.

The spiritual leader must not suppose himself capable of handling all the problems of his congregants. Schuetze illustrated that a pastor, as the spiritual shepherd, is not equipped to handle physical ailments and must therefore refer ill members to a physician who is trained to treat such physical maladies.⁴⁶⁸ Likewise, the Doctor of Soul is not equipped to handle the psychological aspects of EN as clinical counselors are.⁴⁶⁹ The pastor attends to the survivor's spiritual questions and dilemmas.⁴⁷⁰ It is not the spiritual shepherd's responsibility to diagnose EN.⁴⁷¹

However, the pastor's awareness of PEN can help him care for his members. When he refers his member to a clinical counselor, the spiritual shepherd should cooperate with the clinical counselor to provide the survivor with holistic care, body and soul. In those who experience major forms of comorbidities that require pharmaceutical intervention, only a licensed mental health clinician can legally prescribe medication.⁴⁷² Mary had found it beneficial to have concurrent counseling from both her pastor and professional counselor.⁴⁷³

468. Schuetze, *Doctor of Souls*, 274.

469. Counselor B, interview.

470. Vieth, interview.

471. Counselor C, interview; Shandor, "Perceptions of God," 12.

472. Vieth, "Providing Pastoral Care."

473. Mary said during our interview, "I have consistently had pastoral counseling concurrently with traditional counseling. So many questions about faith, scripture, and whys and hows have been answered and discussed."

To establish a cooperative relationship between the pastor and the clinical counselor, an open dialogue must be maintained at the discretion of the counselee.⁴⁷⁴ This is only possible if the pastor first finds a clinical counselor who is willing to cooperate. Furthermore, before the pastor can refer a member to a particular counselor, he must first conduct independent research on the counselors to determine their trustworthiness, cooperative attitude, and ability to engage in complementary discussions on Christianity that do not condescend to the member's faith during counseling.⁴⁷⁵

Dealing with Burnouts

The pastor who caringly attends to his members' emotions may experience compassion and emotional fatigue.⁴⁷⁶ A pastor's continual acquisition of emotional distress from his counselees will impede his ability to guide his counselees back to a state of emotional peace. Counselor B stated, "Somebody in the relationship's gotta be the one to lift us up. We can't just both sit in the pit. Somebody's gotta have the ladder."⁴⁷⁷ Therefore, the pastor must maintain emotional boundaries; he can empathize with his hurting counselee but not assume the distress as his own.⁴⁷⁸

474. Mary stated that she had given her pastor and professional counselor permission for full mutual disclosure about her in order to cooperate on her treatment.

475. Vieth and Counselor C, interviews.

476. Schuetze, *Doctor of Souls*, 277.

477. Counselor B, interview.

478. Counselor B and D, interviews. Counselor B illustrated, "I can feel it, but I can't own it. And at the end of the day, we both got to go home to our own places."

Furthermore, the spiritual shepherd must also take care of himself in order to take care of others. Self-care encompasses exercising, maintaining good sleep habits, following a healthy diet, engaging in enjoyable and fulfilling personal hobbies, and having a strong support system of friends and family.⁴⁷⁹ The pastor may need to deliberately establish these routines that incorporate relaxation, downtime, recreation, and time with loved ones.⁴⁸⁰ Furthermore, pastors can seek the help of fellow pastors, both for personal encouragement and guidance on challenging circumstances. In the latter case, a pastor can seek counsel from fellow pastors while maintaining the importance of confidentiality.⁴⁸¹ Most importantly, the pastor needs to be grounded in God's Word.⁴⁸² The preacher who preaches God's love must first believe and understand for himself what God's love means before sharing it with others.⁴⁸³

479. Counselor D, interview.

480. Eriksson, Wilkins, and Frederick, "Trauma, Faith, and Care," 88.

481. Schuetze, *Doctor of Souls*, 272. This can often be done through the descriptions of events and situations without revealing identities, as this paper has demonstrated.

482. Vieth, interview.

483. Walther said, "The second requisite for effective preaching is that the preacher not only himself believe the things he preaches to others, but that his heart be full of the truths which he proclaims, so that he enters his pulpit with the ardent desire to pour out his heart to his hearers." *The Proper Distinction*, 112.

CONCLUSION

In many ways, one may conclude that maltreatment is maltreatment is maltreatment. The various psychological, social, and developmental effects share many similar and overlapping symptoms. A victim's internalization of the maltreatment may cause low self-esteem and a devaluation of his self-worth. The lack of trust stemming from negative parental modeling results in a reluctance to form meaningful relationships out of fear of hurt. The victim suffers from many forms of comorbidities, such as anxiety and depression. Whatever form of maltreatment it might be, victims form a warped perception of God. They face anguish in experiencing evil in their life (theodicy) or fear that God is as abusive and neglectful as their earthly parents. Arguably, EN presents no different external symptoms than those of any other form of maltreatment.

In many ways, ministering the gospel to PEN survivors is the same as to any other members of the church, including those who had not suffered from childhood trauma. The pastor demonstrates God's love that is explicitly manifested in Christ. He shares the good news of salvation and administers this message with patience by listening, building trust, and establishing a long-term relationship of care and empathy.

Nevertheless, EN, especially PEN, presents differences that warrant consideration by those responsible for caring for individuals. Emotional neglect is hidden. This form of maltreatment is often not recognized semantically, either by the victim or those around the survivor. At the same time, victims suffer from the pain of past neglect, holding onto it

persistently for a prolonged period. Especially for spiritual leaders, PEN creates a barrier against the pastor's delivery of the gospel.

Therefore, it is wise for the pastor to be aware of his members' hurts, even the hurt survivors may not realize that is impacting their spiritual health. The pastor listens attentively to their expressions of hurt. The spiritual shepherd learns about the unique life story of each of his individual members. In doing so, the pastor truly knows his people. Only then could a pastor best practice the art of administering the law and the gospel. As Walther said, "In the first place, then, the proper distinction between the Law and the Gospel is a difficult and high art to the minister in so far as he is a Christian. Indeed, the proper distinction between the Law and the Gospel is the highest art which a person can learn."⁴⁸⁴ The pastor proclaims the justice of God to reveal God's wrath against the sin that harmed his people. The pastor shares the gospel to reflect and proclaim the Father's love to the hurting souls who have yet to experience a fatherly love.

484. Walther, *The Proper Distinction*, 43.

APPENDIX 1A: INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR COUNSELORS

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Dear Participant,

Thank you for your willingness to participate in this research. My name is Ronny Nguyen, a senior at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. I am conducting this study as part of my senior thesis project (TH3300) on the topic of pastoring to individuals emotionally neglected by their fathers. This project is in partial fulfillment of my MDiv degree. You have been invited to participate in this research because I believe that you can provide valuable information on the topic. I will be asking you questions about your experience, advice, and methodology as a professional counselor providing care for individuals who have suffered from emotional neglect. The interview will last approximately 1 hour.

Your involvement in this research will be shared in the form of quotes taken from our interview. The information you provide will be compared with other counselors' and modern psychological scholarship's approach in treating individuals who have suffered from emotional neglect to form an aggregated guidance for pastors to care for their members who have endured emotional neglect. As privacy is important, your own name and any names you share in your accounts will remain anonymous. And to build credibility for your work as a professional counselor, the following information will be shared: your role as a counselor, field of expertise, years of professional experience, gender (if that is an influential factor in the care you provide), and other professional backgrounds that contribute to your counseling work.

If you agree to the audio recording (video recording if the interview is conducted via videoconference) of the interview, the recording will be deleted after the research project is completed.

Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary and you may choose not to answer any or all questions. You may fully withdraw from the interview at any time and information that you provided will not be reported in the research.

"By signing this consent form, I acknowledge that I have read and understand the above information, and have had the opportunity to ask questions. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study under the conditions described."

Name : _____ Date: _____

"I furthermore agree to the audio recording of this interview, and understand that the recording will be deleted upon completion of the research project." _____ (initials)

APPENDIX 1B: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR COUNSELORS

Interview Questions

- The questions below will serve as a guideline to facilitate our conversation
 - o Questions may be asked out of order
 - o Other questions may be asked in response to our discussion
 - o As time permits, not all questions may be asked
- Throughout this interview, please feel free to share any relevant stories or experiences without compromising the privacy of the individuals involved

Background Information

1. How would you describe your work in the field of counseling?
 - a. Educational training?
 - b. Place of employment?
 - c. Years of experience?
 - d. Specialty?
2. Do you have any other professional or personal backgrounds that contribute to or influence the way you provide counseling?
 - a. *As applicable, please feel free to share your answer to this question throughout our conversation.*

Counseling

Clients

3. Do you have any experience with counseling those who suffer from paternal emotional neglect?
 - a. As this is a very specific form of child maltreatment, do you have experience with counseling those suffering from other forms of child maltreatment (*i.e.*, physical abuse, sexual abuse, physical neglect, etc.)?
4. How do you get connected with a client who suffers from emotional neglect?

- a. Do your clients approach you with the issue of neglect, or was neglect identified later on?
 - b. What problems prompted the client to connect with you for counseling?
 - c. Could you describe the client's emotional and mental state at the beginning of counseling?
5. What is the demographic of the clients whom you counsel for emotional neglect?
 - a. Age range?
 - b. Gender?
6. In your experience, how does the client's relationship with his/her father impact his/her life, positively or negatively?
7. In your experience, what other problems does neglect affect? How does neglect impact your client's life?
 - a. *Personally*
 - i. Mentally?
 - ii. Emotionally?
 - iii. Cognitively?
 - iv. Developmentally?
 - b. *Interpersonally*
 - i. The relationship with their father/parents?
 - ii. Relationship with others?
8. How do your clients' emotional and mental states change throughout counseling?
9. What do your clients' emotional and mental states at the end of counseling look like?
 - a. How has counseling reshaped the client's viewpoint?
 - b. Has counseling resolved the problems that first brought the client into counseling?
 - c. Has counseling affected the client's relationship with his/her father/parents?
 - d. Has counseling affected the client's relationship with other people?

Counselor

10. How would you describe your counseling methods for neglect?
11. How long does your counseling last?
 - a. Short term? Long term?
12. How do you identify the issue of neglect?

13. How do you identify the goal for counseling individuals who suffer from neglect?
 - a. Or does the client establish the goal?
 - b. What do the goals look like?
14. What methodology have you found helpful or not helpful in providing care for your client?
15. What is the greatest challenge for you in providing counseling to individuals who suffer from neglect?

Christian Approach

16. How does your Christian faith impact your approach to providing counseling?
17. Do you bring faith, religion, or the Bible into the discussion with your clients?
 - a. Do your counseling approaches differ depending on whether the client is a Christian or not?
 - b. If so, how do your approaches differ?
18. If the topic of faith is discussed, how does the client's experiences with emotional neglect affect his/her faith?
19. Do you have go-to scriptural passages that you employ in your counseling?

Advice

20. As most pastors do not have professional counseling training, do you have any advice for the pastor in caring for his members?
 - a. *For the pastor:*
 - i. Literature to read?
 - ii. Resources to be acquainted with?
 - iii. Further training or education?
 - b. *In caring for members:*
 - i. Ways to identify those who suffered from emotional neglect?
 - ii. How to care for those who suffered from emotional neglect?
21. Is there anything else you would like to add that was not covered in our conversation?

APPENDIX 2A: INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR VICTOR VIETH

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Dear Participant,

Thank you for your willingness to participate in this research. My name is Ronny Nguyen, a senior at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. I am conducting this study as part of my senior thesis project (TH3300) on the topic of pastoring to individuals emotionally neglected by their fathers. This project is in partial fulfillment of my MDiv degree. You have been invited to participate in this research because I believe that you can provide valuable information on the topic. I will be asking you questions about your experience, knowledge, and advice as a professional who care for trauma. The interview will last approximately 1 hour.

Your involvement in this research will be shared in the form of quotes taken from our interview. The information you share will supply contextual statistical information and will be compared with modern psychological scholarship to provide pastors with an aggregated understanding of the issue of emotional neglect. As privacy is important, your location of work, your own name, and any names you share in your accounts will remain anonymous. And to build credibility for your work, the following information will be shared: your job title, years of professional experience, relative demographics of your clientele (urban, suburban, rural), gender (if that is an influential factor in the services you provide), and other professional backgrounds that contribute to your work.

If you agree to the audio recording (video recording if the interview is conducted via videoconference) of the interview, the recording will be deleted after the research project is completed.

Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary and you may choose not to answer any or all questions. You may fully withdraw from the interview at any time and information that you provided will not be reported in the research.

“By signing this consent form, I acknowledge that I have read and understand the above information, and have had the opportunity to ask questions. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study under the conditions described.”

Name : _____ Date: _____

"I furthermore agree to the audio recording of this interview, and understand that the recording will be deleted upon completion of the research project." _____ (initials)

APPENDIX 2B: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR VICTOR VIETH

Interview Questions

- The questions below will serve as a guideline to facilitate our conversation
 - o Questions may be asked out of order
 - o Other questions may be asked in response to our discussion
 - o As time permits, not all questions may be asked
- Throughout this interview, please feel free to share any relevant stories or experiences without compromising the privacy of the individuals involved

Background Information

1. How would you describe your profession?
 - a. Place of employment?
 - b. Years of experience?
 - c. Specialty?
2. Do you have any other professional or personal backgrounds that contribute to or influence your work?
 - a. *As applicable, please feel free to share your answer to this question throughout our conversation.*

Work

Education and Prevention

3. Could you describe the work you do in educating people on the issue of childhood maltreatment?
4. What is the greatest challenge in identifying abuse and/or neglect?
5. Are there any pertinent statistics you would like to share?

6. From your article, "Providing Pastoral Care to Survivors of Child Abuse," you provided many helpful tips for pastors to care for their members. Is there anything more you would like to add?
 - a. Could you talk more about how a church can create a policy for preventing abuse?
7. Some churches are afraid of getting the police involved in issues of childhood maltreatment that arise within the congregation. How would you respond?
8. As most pastors do not have professional counseling training, do you have any advice for how a pastor can identify neglect?

Prosecution

9. Have you had any experiences of dealing with cases of paternal emotional neglect?
 - a. As this is a very specific form of child maltreatment, what are the other forms of child maltreatment you have come across?
10. Are there differences in the way you approach cases of abuse with neglect?
11. How do you often get connected to a case? How do you become aware of the issue?
12. What is the demographic of your clients?
 - a. Age range?
 - b. Gender?
13. In your experience, how does the client's relationship with his/her father impact his/her life, whether positively or negatively?
14. In your experience, what other problems does neglect affect? How does neglect impact your client's life?
 - a. *Personally*
 - i. Mentally?
 - ii. Emotionally?
 - iii. Cognitively?
 - iv. Developmentally?
 - b. *Interpersonally*
 - i. The relationship with their father/parents?
 - ii. Relationship with others?

15. Could you describe your client's emotional and mental state when you first came into contact with the client?
16. How do your clients' emotional and mental states change over the time you work with the client? At the end of your time working with the client?
17. Could you describe the work you do in survivor support?

Christian Approach

18. How does your Christian faith impact your work?
 - a. Personally?
 - b. When interacting with people?
19. Do you bring faith, religion, or the Bible into the discussion?
20. In your experience, how has faith played a role in the cases of abuse and neglect?

Other

21. Is there anything else you would like to add that was not covered in our conversation?

APPENDIX 3A: INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR MARY

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Dear Participant,

Thank you for your willingness to participate in this research. My name is Ronny Nguyen, a senior at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. I am conducting this study as part of my senior thesis project (TH3300) on the topic of pastoring to individuals emotionally neglected by their fathers. This project is in partial fulfillment of my MDiv degree. You have been invited to participate in this research because I believe that you can provide valuable information on the topic. I will be asking you questions about your experience with emotional neglect, its impact, and your path of treatment. The interview will last approximately 1 hour.

Your involvement in this research will be shared in the form of quotes taken from our interview. Your first-hand experiences will give a credible voice to the issue of emotional neglect, especially when compared with modern psychological scholarship on emotional neglect. Your accounts will demonstrate the importance of pastors being aware of members who have suffered from emotional neglect so that they can show godly, pastoral love. As privacy is important, your own name and any names you share in your accounts will remain anonymous. And to establish important contextual information, the following information will be shared: your gender and current relative age.

If you agree to the audio recording (video recording if the interview is conducted via videoconference) of the interview, the recording will be deleted after the research project is completed.

Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary and you may choose not to answer any or all questions. You may fully withdraw from the interview at any time and information that you provided will not be reported in the research.

“By signing this consent form, I acknowledge that I have read and understand the above information, and have had the opportunity to ask questions. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study under the conditions described.”

Name : _____ Date: _____

“I furthermore agree to the audio recording of this interview, and understand that the recording will be deleted upon completion of the research project.” _____ (initials)

APPENDIX 3B: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR MARY

Interview Questions

- The questions below will serve as a guideline to facilitate our conversation
 - o Questions may be asked out of order
 - o Other questions may be asked in response to our discussion
 - o As time permits, not all questions may be asked
- Throughout this interview, please feel free to share any relevant stories or experiences without compromising the privacy of the individuals involved

Paternal Relationship

1. How would you describe the relationship with your father growing up?
2. Did the relationship with your father impact other relationships in your life?
 - a. With your mother?
 - b. With your siblings?
 - c. With your extended family?
 - d. With your friends?
 - e. With those at school?
 - f. Others?
3. How did the relationship with your father impact you emotionally and/or mentally?
 - a. How you view yourself?
 - b. Impact on your academic work?
 - c. Impact on your professional work?
4. Did the relationship with your father have an impact on your faith?
 - a. Your viewpoint of the church?
 - b. The relationship with your pastor(s)?
 - c. How you view God?

Counseling

5. What reason prompted you to seek out counseling?
6. How did you get connected with a counsellor?
7. Did you seek out help from anyone else before seeking out counseling?
8. Did you have any goals when you first entered counseling?

9. Could you describe your counseling journey?
10. How long have you had counseling?
11. Are there any challenges or difficulties you faced during counseling?
12. What is helpful from counseling?
13. Have you sought out help from anyone else during your counseling?
 - a. Have you established a support system?
14. Has the topic of faith, church, or the Bible entered into the conversation in your counseling? If so, how?
 - a. Was it helpful? How?

15. How would you describe the changes (*if any*) you have gone through during counseling?
 - a. Emotionally?
 - b. Mentally?
 - c. Your viewpoints?
 - d. How you view yourself?
 - e. Your relationship with your father?
 - f. Your relationship with others?
 - g. Your professional work?
 - h. Your view of God?
16. Personally, what are your most significant takeaways from counseling?

Current Days

17. How would you describe the relationship with or your viewpoint of your father now?
18. How would you describe the relationship with others now?
19. How would you describe your current emotional and/or mental state?

- a. How you view yourself?
- 20. Has counseling resolved the problem you hoped to resolve? Was your goal in counseling met?
 - a. Do you feel yourself facing the same problems now?
- 21. Do you have a support system that you rely on now?

Advice

- 22. Knowing what you know now about emotional neglect, how does that impact your personal relationships or conversations with others?
- 23. As most pastors do not have professional counseling training, what would you like pastors to know about the issue of emotional neglect?
 - a. Any advice from an individual with first-hand experience on how they can care for their members?
- 24. Is there anything else you would like to add that was not covered in our conversation?

APPENDIX 4: APSAC 2019—DEFINITION AND FORMS

Table 1: Psychological Maltreatment Definition and Forms⁴⁸⁵

Psychological maltreatment is defined as *a repeated pattern or extreme incident(s) of caretaker behavior* that thwart the child's basic psychological needs (e.g., safety, socialization, emotional and social support, cognitive stimulation, respect) and convey a child is worthless, defective, damaged goods, unloved, unwanted, endangered, primarily useful in meeting another's needs, and/or expendable. Its subtypes and their forms follow.

SPURNING embodies verbal and nonverbal caregiver acts that reject and degrade a child, including the following:

- (1) belittling, degrading, and other nonphysical forms of hostile or rejecting treatment;
- (2) shaming and/or ridiculing the child, including the child's physical, psychological, and behavioral characteristics, such as showing normal emotions of affection, grief, anger, or fear;
- (3) consistently singling out one child to criticize and punish, to perform most of the household chores, and/or to receive fewer family assets or resources (e.g., food, clothing);
- (4) humiliating, especially when in public;
- (5) any other physical abuse, physical neglect, or sexual abuse that also involves spurning the child, such as telling the child that he or she is dirty or damaged due to or deserving sexual abuse; berating the child while beating him or her; telling the child that he or she does not deserve to have basic needs met.

TERRORIZING is caregiver behavior that threatens or is likely to physically hurt, kill, abandon, or place the child or child's loved ones or objects in recognizably dangerous or frightening situations. Terrorizing includes the following:

- (1) subjecting a child to frightening or chaotic circumstances;
- (2) placing a child in recognizably dangerous situations;
- (3) threatening to abandon or abandoning the child;
- (4) setting rigid or unrealistic expectations with threat of loss, harm, or danger if they are not met;
- (5) threatening or perpetrating violence (which is also physical abuse) against the child;
- (6) threatening or perpetrating violence against a child's loved ones, pets, or objects, including domestic/intimate partner violence observable by the child;
- (7) preventing a child from having access to needed food, light, water, or access to the toilet;
- (8) preventing a child from needed sleep, relaxing, or resting;
- (9) any other acts of physical abuse, physical neglect, or sexual abuse that also involve terrorizing the child (e.g., forced intercourse; beatings and mutilations).

EXPLOITING/CORRUPTING are caregiver acts that encourage the child to develop inappropriate behaviors and attitudes (i.e., self-destructive, antisocial, criminal, deviant, or other maladaptive behaviors). While these two categories are conceptually distinct, they are not empirically distinguishable and, thus, are described as a combined subtype.

Exploiting/corrupting includes the following:

485. Taken from APSAC Taskforce, *The Investigation and Determination* (2019), 3–5.

- (1) modeling, permitting, or encouraging antisocial behavior (e.g., prostitution, performance in pornography, criminal activities, substance abuse, violence to or corruption of others);
- (2) modeling, permitting, or encouraging betraying the trust of or being cruel to another person;
- (3) modeling, permitting, or encouraging developmentally inappropriate behavior (e.g., parentification, adultification, infantilization);
- (4) subjecting the observing child to belittling, degrading, and other forms of hostile or rejecting treatment of those in significant relationships with the child such as parents, siblings, and extended kin;
- (5) coercing the child's submission through extreme over-involvement, intrusiveness, or dominance, allowing little or no opportunity or support for child's views, feelings, and wishes; forcing the child to live the parent's dreams, manipulating or micromanaging the child's life (e.g., inducing guilt, fostering anxiety, threatening withdrawal of love, placing a child in a double bind in which the child is doomed to fail or disappoint, or disorienting the child by stating something is true (or false) when it patently is not);
- (6) restricting, interfering with, or directly undermining the child's development in cognitive, social, affective/emotional, physical, or cognitive/volitional (i.e., acting from emotion and thinking; choosing, exercising will) domains, including Caregiver Fabricated Illness also known as medical child abuse;
- (7) any other physical abuse, physical neglect, or sexual abuse that also involves exploiting/corrupting the child (such as incest and sexual grooming of the child).

EMOTIONAL UNRESPONSIVENESS (ignoring) embodies caregiver acts that ignore the child's attempts and needs to interact (failing to express affection, caring, and love for the child) and showing little or no emotion in interactions with the child. It includes the following:

- (1) being detached and uninvolved;
- (2) interacting only when absolutely necessary;
- (3) failing to express warmth, affection, caring, and love for the child;
- (4) being emotionally detached and inattentive to the child's needs to be safe and secure, such as failing to detect a child's victimization by others or failing to attend to the child's basic needs;
- (5) any other physical abuse, physical neglect, or sexual abuse that also involves emotional unresponsiveness.

ISOLATING embodies caregiver acts that consistently and unreasonably deny the child opportunities to meet needs for interacting/communicating with peers or adults inside or outside the home. Isolating includes the following:

- (1) confining the child or placing unreasonable limitations on the child's freedom of movement within his or her environment;
- (2) placing unreasonable limitations or restrictions on social interactions with family members, peers, or adults in the community;²
- (3) any other physical abuse, physical neglect, or sexual abuse that also involves isolating the child, such as preventing the child from social interaction with peers because of the poor physical condition or interpersonal climate of the home.

MENTAL HEALTH, MEDICAL, AND EDUCATIONAL NEGLECT embodies caregiver acts that ignore, refuse to allow, or fail to provide the necessary treatment for the mental health, medical, and educational problems or needs of the child. This includes the following:

- (1) ignoring the need for, failing, or refusing to allow or provide treatment for serious emotional/behavioral problems or needs of the child;
- (2) ignoring the need for, failing, or refusing to allow or provide treatment for serious physical health problems or needs of the child;

- (3) ignoring the need for, failing, or refusing or allow or provide treatment for services for serious educational problems or needs of the child;
- (4) any other physical abuse, physical neglect, or sexual abuse that also involve mental health, medical, or educational neglect of the child.

Note 1: Please see cautionary note on page 1 of this document for information on appropriate use of these definitions.

Note 2: Caregiver abandonment of a child is one of the most severe forms of PM. While it is specifically identified as a type of terrorizing in this document, it also embodies significant components of emotional unresponsiveness, spurning, and isolating.

APPENDIX 5: APSAC 2025—DEFINITION

Figure 1. Child Psychological Maltreatment Definition⁴⁸⁶

OVERARCHING DEFINITION

Psychological maltreatment refers to caregiver behaviors toward or involving a child that cause or have a strong potential to cause serious harm to a child's emotional, cognitive, social, interpersonal, or physical well-being or development. Psychological maltreatment could reflect a single caregiver act or omission or could reflect repeated caregiver behaviors.

Caregiver refers to any adult responsible for attending to the needs of a child as defined by the system using these definitions.

OPERATIONALIZED DEFINITION

There are two components to the operational definition: Criterion A, which refers to the acts of the caregiver, and Criterion B, which refers to the harm or potential harm to the child.

CRITERION A: Non-accidental act or acts by caregiver (excluding physically and sexually abusive acts) and omissions (excluding physical neglect). **The following seven categories of caregiver behaviors are possible examples and are not intended as an exhaustive list.** Acts/omissions that are not listed but are similarly (potentially or actually) harmful are also eligible.²

1. Psychological neglect

- a. Caregiver uninvolved
- b. Caregiver unresponsive to child's bids for a response
- c. Caregiver shows egregious lack of affection

2. Spurning

- a. Caregiver hostile to child
- b. Caregiver derogates, denigrates, belittles, insults, humiliates the child
- c. Caregiver singles child out for worse treatment than siblings/Scapegoating
- d. Caregiver rejects child

3. Developmentally inappropriate interactions

- a. Imposing or fostering developmentally inappropriate standards on the child, including infantilization and adultification (e.g., parentification)

4. Inappropriate responses to perceived misbehavior/discipline

- a. Excessively intense or frequent discipline (regarding corporal punishment, see footnote³)
- b. Confining/binding
- c. Compelling the child to inflict pain on him-/herself

486. Taken from APSAC Taskforce, *The Investigation and Determination* (2025), 6–9.

- d. Placing unreasonable limitations or restrictions on child's social interactions
- e. Preventing a child from necessities (e.g., sleep, rest, food, light, water, access to the toilet)

5. Terrorizing/Exposing child to potentially traumatic experiences

- a. Exposing child to potentially traumatizing interparental violence; deliberate parental self-harm; recognizably dangerous situations
- b. Threatening violence against or abandonment of the child
- c. Threatening or perpetrating violence against a child's loved ones, pets, or objects (including domestic violence).
- d. Terrorizing child through nonviolent actions or threats

6. Exploiting

- a. Caregiver actively exposing the child to belittling, degrading, and other forms of hostile or rejecting treatment of those in significant relationships with the child
- b. Munchausen by proxy (see *APSAC Practice Guidelines Munchausen by Proxy: Clinical and Case Management Guidance*)
- c. Grooming for sexual abuse or exploitation (see *APSAC Practice Guidelines Forensic Mental Health Evaluations When Child Maltreatment Is At Issue* and *Forensic Interviewing of Children*)

7. Corruption/Failures to promote socialization

- a. Encouraging antisocial behavior

CRITERION B: Significant impact on the child involving any of the following:

1. Actual psychological harm,⁴ including any of the following:

- a. Significant disruption of the child's physical, emotional, cognitive⁵, or social development created or exacerbated by the caregiver's act/omission (or pattern of acts/omissions)
- b. Significant psychological distress (e.g., major depressive disorder, anxiety disorders, disruptive behavior disorders, substance abuse disorders, or other psychiatric disorders, at or near diagnostic thresholds) related to the caregiver's act(s)/omission(s)
- c. Stress-related somatic symptoms related to or exacerbated by the caregiver's act(s)/omissions(s) that significantly interfere with normal functioning
- d. More than inconsequential fear reaction related to the caregiver's act(s)/omission(s)

2. Reasonable potential for harm

- a. The act/omission (or pattern of acts/omissions) carries a reasonable potential for significant disruption of the child's physical, emotional, cognitive or social development
- b. The act/omission (or pattern of acts/omissions) creates reasonable potential for the development of a psychiatric disorder (at or near diagnostic thresholds) related to, or exacerbated by, the act(s). The child's level of functioning and the risk and resilience factors present should be taken into consideration.

KEY WORD/PHRASES OPERATIONALIZED: Below are expanded definitions of key words and phrases.

Egregious: Egregious acts show striking disregard for child's well-being. As such, they are not merely examples of inadvisable or deficient parenting, but must clearly fall below the lower bounds of normal parenting.

Threatening: Verbal or nonverbal acts perceived by victim or witness as signifying that victim's physical integrity was at risk at the time or would be in the future.

Significant disruption: Given the child’s developmental level or trajectory evident before alleged maltreatment, child’s current development/functioning is substantially worse than would have been expected.

Stress-related somatic symptoms: Some victims show impact through physical, rather than psychological, symptoms. Stress-related somatic symptoms are physical problems that are caused by or worsened by stressful incidents. Such somatic symptoms can include, but are not limited to, aches and pains, migraine, gastrointestinal problems, or other stress-related physical ailments.

More than inconsequential fear reaction: The child must demonstrate both

(A) Fear (verbalized or displayed) of bodily injury to self or others AND

(B) At least one of the following four signs of fear or anxiety lasting at least 48 hours:

(1) Persistent intrusive recollections of the incident, including recollections as evidenced in the child’s play

(2) Marked negative reactions to cues related to incident, as evidenced by avoidance of cues; subjective or overt distress to cues; or physiological hyperarousal to cues (NOTE: Perpetrator can be a cue)

(3) Acting or feeling as if incident is recurring

(4) Marked symptoms of anxiety such as difficulty falling or staying asleep, irritability or outbursts of anger, difficulty concentrating, hypervigilance (i.e., acting overly sensitive to sounds and sights in the environment; scanning the environment expecting danger; feeling keyed up and on edge), or exaggerated startle response.

² The acts identified here as illustrative exemplars were selected to represent caregiver acts/behaviors included in previous APSAC Guidelines (see Appendix),⁴⁸⁷ the Maltreatment Classification System, FAIR, and Glaser’s conceptual system for psychological maltreatment [11]. Emphasis was given to acts that could be reliably assessed as to their occurrence and were of value in “above the line/below the threshold” decisions. Inclusions are not exhaustive of categories or types falling within categories of acts/behaviors.

³ Corporal punishment, even when intended as discipline, includes psychological maltreatment in forms such as fear induction, rejection, humiliation and threat-based compliance.

⁴ Advances are continuously being made in revealing the nature of harm associated with and due to psychological maltreatment; these should be factored into application of this model as they become available. Section 5, “Effects of Psychological Maltreatment,” illuminates this reality.

⁵ Includes academic functioning.

487. This is the 2019 edition. Consult this edition in Appendix 4.

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