IRON KIDS
TO
IRON ADULTS

For years, researchers have wondered why some children, who grow up in dysfunctional homes, become successful while their sibling goes down in flames.

Research in the 1950s demonstrated that at least one criterion for success in these children's lives was that they had a supportive adult who believed in them and could show them another reality different from the dysfunction of their daily life.

In fact, by the 1960s, a play was written by Paul Zindel called, The Effect of Gamma Rays on Man-in-the-Moon Marigolds. It was the story of a science teacher and one of his students, an adolescent girl in a dysfunctional home.

One day, the teacher suggests that she enter the science fair. She takes some marigold seeds to the hospital and has them radiated with gamma rays, and then plants them next to some marigold seeds that have not been radiated. The results are startling.

The radiated seeds are deformed and ugly, while the others are healthy and beautiful. The girl wins first prize for her science project! And it changes her life. She sees what she can be even though her family never seems to change.

The research demonstrated the importance of having positive role models. Big Brother was founded in the sixties to meet this need, and later, Boys and Girls clubs were formed.

May I suggest that another factor is crucial in developing an iron kid? I was working with one of these iron kids that had grown up. She shared with me that she was raised by a single parent who hit her every day of her life. If she wasn't spanked, she was slapped, pinched, or punched.

One day, when she was about eight or nine years old, she remembers her mother yelling at her for something she had not done. Mother was wearing a big ring and backhanded her, hitting her in the mouth, splitting her lip, and breaking a tooth. She knew that she had not done what her mother accused her of, and "Suddenly it was very clear to me, this is not about me. Mother has a problem."

Most children take abuse personally. "If I were better, more loveable, prettier, or quieter, then my mother/dad would love me and not hurt me, and they wouldn't fight/get divorced."

The child decides what kind of a person they are and what kind of a world they live in. And so, the victim is born.

> *"I get beaten because there is something in me that deserves to be beaten; it can't be the person who is hurting me who has the problem, so it must be me. I feel guilty, I don't know what I've done, but I just feel guilty. People I love and care about will use and abuse me because I need to be punished. If there is no one to punish me, I will punish myself."*

The problem really starts when the child grows up and still holds onto these victim beliefs. As an adult, this results in relationship problems from battered wife syndrome to not speaking up in a restaurant when the waiter brings you the wrong order.

These victims unconsciously play games with themselves and others. It is never their fault or entirely their fault, and "That is just the way I am." They play the "if only" game, but all the time, somehow believing that, at some level, there is something intrinsically wrong with them. To be able to hold these beliefs, the "victim" has to start with the but and because.

"The reason I drink is **because**. . .."
"I didn't want to make a fuss **because**. . .."
"I can't leave the abusive relationship **because**. . .."
"I would get a good job/education **but**. . .."
"I would have reported it to the police **but.** . .."
"I can't lose weight **because**. . .."
"I need to keep a low profile and not rock the boat **because**. . .."

In almost all cases, as a child, you learned that nothing good would come of standing up for yourself. And, as a child, that was the truth.

BUT that is not why you don't stand up for yourself now! For a few, the insight comes when, as a child, you recognize that "This is not my problem. Mother has the problem!"

If you don't get this insight as a child, then there are two options you will have as an adult. First, you can go through your life as a victim or decide that the people who mistreated you have the problem and their mistreatment of you says NOTHING about you. This doesn't mean you continue to roll over and play the victim role. In

fact, just the opposite. Now is the time to stand up and be assertive. “That is not acceptable! You are not to treat me that way again!”

This is easier said than done. There are several ways to block yourself from remaking your beliefs from childhood. One way is to start listening to your lies. Listen for all the times you use, I would do such and such **but**… or the reason I can’t is **because**. . ..

One of the excuses/lies that is often used is fear or anxiety. “I couldn’t get up before a group of people because I am too afraid.” Fear has never stopped someone from doing something they really wanted to do. For example, what would be your answer if I said, “I will give you 10 million dollars to get up in front of that group of people and speak to them?”

People with anxiety often see the world as a dangerous and unsafe place for them. The problem is not that the world is a dangerous place; it is that the victim does not see themself as capable of handling whatever happens in the world.

Long ago, I have stopped trying to convince clients that the world is a safe place. The questions are: Are you capable of dealing with whatever comes? What if your mate dies or leaves? Are you capable of creating another relationship as good or better? What if you should lose your job? Or one of your children dies? (The world is what the world is; sometimes, it is safe, and at other times it is not so safe.) The question is, are you capable?

The second question is, “Do you really make a difference in your life and the lives of those you love?” This is about you having personal power. “I deserve to have good service when I go to a restaurant and have a right to expect and demand it.” “I have a right to say when I’m not treated right, ‘That is not acceptable!’” Here, I am talking about being assertive, not being aggressive.

If you did not become an Iron Kid, it is not too late to become an Iron Adult.

Myron Doc Downing PhD

Specializing in Building Relationships, Alleviating Depression,
Anger Management & Dealing with Anxiety Disorders
DocDPhD.com
DocDowning103@gmail.com