

A Children's Bible on Childhood Trauma and Psychology

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As a child develops, they go through many developmental stages from birth and through adulthood. Many things can affect a child's mental development including Environmental, genetic, and cultural factors. It's difficult for many children to explain how they are feeling and what they are going through. That is why a lot of children begin to cling to ideas to escape the reality of a situation, and it can lead to many aggressive outbursts because the child does not understand what is going on. Many of the children in Lydia Millet's *A Children's Bible* show signs of childhood trauma because of the circumstances that they are under throughout the novel. The Importance of understanding a child's trauma and psychological development is an important factor to consider because it would allow any adult to have a further understanding of what this child may be going through internally, and it can also help the child itself understand and learn how to process the emotions that they are feeling.

Child Psychology is the study of the subconscious and conscious development. Psychologists observe how a child interacts with their parents, themselves, and the world to help process and understand their mental development (WWMG). Any parent would want their child to have a healthy development, but it is not always clear if a child's behavior is a symptom of a normal stage of development or an abnormality. Childhood is a very influential

time in a person's life. Events that happen in the early stages of life can have a direct impact on the way a person feels and behaves as an adult. Even though there isn't a complete backstory for each of the characters, there is an example from the novel that shows how something that happened between a child and its parents that happened when they were young has affected them as they've grown up. In *A Children's Bible*, The narrator of the novel, Eve, tells the story of the first time she began to "not trust" her parents anymore. In this scene of the novel, Eve explains to the readers that when she was younger she was with her parents during a protest, and she asked them what was going on. She explains how her parents did not tell her, and that is why she does not trust them. Though this may be a smaller instance, if Eve began to notice through the rest of her childhood that her parents were trying to keep her in a shell throughout her entire life, she might have felt alone in the process of growing up and might've had to figure things out by herself without any support. Throughout the novel Eve is very protective over her younger brother Jack, one of the reasons for this may be because of the relationship she had with her parents. Many times, when children or anyone goes through an experience in their childhood they often experience projection onto others. In this case, Eve might be projecting how she feels onto her younger brother and that is why over the years she's become very protective over him. Eve could not want Jack to place that trust as she did onto their parents so that he won't get hurt in the future.

According to the National Survey of Children's health, nearly 35 million U.S children have experienced one or more types of childhood trauma. What is even more concerning is that nearly a third of the youth aged 12-17 have experienced two or more types of childhood trauma that are likely to affect their physical and mental health as they become adults (Sarah Peterson). According to the National Child Traumatic Stress Network, a traumatic event is defined as a frightening, dangerous, or violent event that poses a threat to a child's life. Any traumatic experience can initiate strong emotions and physical reactions that can continue to affect the child long after the event may have occurred. Many children feel terror and helplessness, along with physical reactions such as heart-pounding and throwing up. If a traumatic event occurs when the child is at a younger age, oftentimes they don't fully understand what happened, or what they are feeling. This becomes uncomfortable to them because they may have never felt this way before. Many children tend to act out or throw fits more often because they may not understand how to explain how they are feeling, or what they are going through. Many times when a child goes through a traumatic event, their brain may go through the process of denial. Many times when this happens, the children's brain begins to focus on other things and also creates an alternate universe for the child to focus on, rather than the traumatic event. A great example from the novel that represents how the children may be going through some form of denial, is the fact that they begin to compare what is going around them as scenes from the bible. Readers mostly see this in Jack since he

was the first child to notice the similarities between the climate change issues around them to the bible stories. All of the children from the bible begin to also play along with the fact that the things from the bible are repeating right in front of them. An example of this is when the children, most specifically Jack begin to connect the dots between the bible and the climate change situations around them. Throughout the novel, the children begin to believe that what happened in the bible's history is repeating right in front of them. While there were some physical similarities, the “hyperfocus” that occurred with the children became almost “fun and games” that would distract them from what was going on around them. Between the fact that the children were not only taking care of each other, taking care of their parents, but also dealing with the weather and natural disasters around them, who wouldn't want to escape from reality to get away from it? Since the children of the bible are so young, repressing their emotions and feelings on the events that are happening around them are common. Many people of all ages may repress their feelings, but it becomes dangerous the longer the mind does it because releasing those feelings will eventually help someone to heal and move on.

Children who suffer from child traumatic stress often develop reactions that persist in their daily lives even after the events that happened. That is why parents who have had a lot of traumatic experiences during childhood may be more likely to have kids who have behavioral issues. Often when a parent has experienced something traumatic and didn't heal from it correctly it gets passed down to their children because it was unresolved, and many normalized

in their life. The childhood experiences that have been linked to what is known as “Toxic Stress”, lead to many physical and mental problems that often continue from one generation to the next. However, the exact effect of a parent’s trauma on their children’s behavioral and emotional health still is not fully understood. When parents have at least four different adverse childhood experiences, their kids are more likely to have twice the amount of hyperactivity and four times more emotional and mental health problems than children of parents who do not (Lisa Rapaport, Reuters Health). Dr. Adam Schickedanz, a pediatrics researcher, states that “This demonstrates one way in which all of us carry our histories with us...”. In *A Children’s Bible*, the relationship between the children and the parents is very strange. In the novel, it is seen that the children are mostly taking care of themselves, while the parents are off doing their own thing. Many of the children in the novel are young, and usually, you would see parents paying more attention to their younger children. But in this novel, they do not. One specific instance of this from the novel is when young sisters were fighting over a doll. Both of the girls were alone arguing with each other without any of the parents’ insight. One hit the other over the head with a rock and she didn’t think it was wrong because, in the end, she got the doll. This could be a sign that they were trying to catch their parents’ attention, and that could be why the girls acted out in that way. Many times, if a parent seems distant from their children because their parents were also distant from them. They might not know how to deal with their emotional distress themselves. There are many other examples throughout the novel

where it would make sense if the reason why to parents seemed as if they didn't care about the well being of the child, and there are many more examples where the children may be "acting out", not necessarily on purpose, but really because they are struggling themselves and might not understand how to talk about it or how to feel about it.

Toxic family dynamics come in many forms, and they can take a toll on a child's development in both visible, and invisible ways. Some of the characteristics of toxic family dynamics include; having depressed or emotionally blank parents, having controlling parents, and having to step up as "little adults" (Toxic Family Dynamics). Complex PTSD is often seen when a child is found in a toxic family situation. Complex PTSD is described as chronic childhood trauma that is usually invisible by nature. It is usually easy to recognize if a child has been physically or sexually abused, but when it comes to emotional abuse or deficient parents, it is harder to point that out. Unfortunately, when it comes down to it, psychological injuries caused by emotional abandonment are often invisible and unacknowledged. This leaves children to feel confused and assumes that their experiences with their family are not valid. "Children who experience this type of trauma show a disrupted ability to show their emotions, behaviors, and attention, and these symptoms can often extend into adulthood..." (APA,2007). Throughout the entire novel, we can see how the family dynamics between all of the children and their parents is not the healthiest environment for any child to grow apart from. We see signs of the children becoming "little adults", even though most of the children

are in their teen years, the author does not show how long their life has been this way with their parents. Evidence of the parents neglecting their children is seen throughout the novel. There is a scene from the novel where the children are talking about how their parents are getting high and having sex, while the children are dealing with things like a flooded house, and trying to keep everyone warm in the nighttime. This is just one of the many examples from the novel where the parents are neglecting their parental duties. This counts as child neglect because the parents have given up their responsibilities not only as parents but also as adults. In these situations, the roles have been reversed and the children have become adults, they help take care of the house, and each other while the parents live in their world. There is no evidence from the novel that the parents have always been this way, but we can only assume that this has been going on for many years before the world was “coming to an end”.

With all of the heatwaves, wildfires, and floods that have happened this past year, more climate change issues are just around the corner. The United Nations Children's Fund reported that “half of the world's 2.2 billion children are at an “extremely high risk” from the impacts of climate change.” Surprisingly, there haven't been many articles written about the mental health consequences of climate change for children. Climate change has already been seen to affect the psychological development of children worldwide. Many children all over the world have experienced some kind of traumatic natural disaster due to climate change already, and it has affected their mental health because many of them have lost their homes,

their schools, and family members because of things like flooding, tsunamis, hurricanes, and tornadoes. In *A Children's Bible* Lydia Millet has described many natural disasters throughout the novel. One major one was the big flood. This flood may have affected the children not only because they had to deal with it themselves, but because of how quickly they had to act upon it. Many children wouldn't know what to do if their house began to flood, but the children's flight or fight response kicked in and helped them be able to deal with what was going on. Not only would dealing with the flood affect their mental health, but dealing with multiple climate change issues themselves at a young age could affect their mental health because readers could assume that many of them may have not known what was going on, or what climate change was. New changes in the world can be very harmful to a child's mental health and their environment. Especially since the children were already on their own for the most part, dealing with too much change would have not been too good for them.

In Lydia Millet's novel, readers see many examples of how the Children's psychological health and development could have been affected in multiple different ways. The psychological development and health of every child are extremely fragile. A Lot of the time the traumas that we experience as children often affect us as adults. While on the surface the children may have seemed to be not affected by their parent's behavior, once readers dig beyond that surface, it becomes more clear how a lot of the children's psychological problems would not exist if it wasn't for their parents' behavior. Other than the behavior of the parents,

the environmental factors of climate change also played a part in the children's mental health.

While we may not know the many reasons for the “hyperfocus” on the biblical stories, readers could assume that both neglect, childhood traumas, and climate change play a big role in it.

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