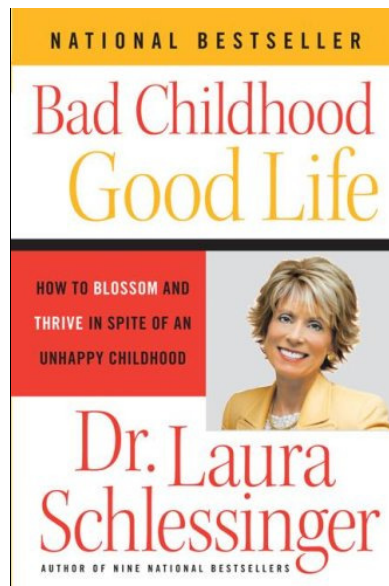


Bad Childhood Good Life

How to Blossom and Thrive in Spite of an
Unhappy Childhood



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■ The Big Idea

Your life may be compounded with the pain of “yesterday,” mixed with the disappointments and frustrations of “today.” Many try to survive each day using alcohol, work, promiscuity, drugs, and other compulsive behaviors to drown out the inner noise of hurt, anger, and despair. At some point though, it has to become clear that these attempts to avoid pain paradoxically bring even more pain and problems.

Those who have successfully overcome victimhood force themselves in directions that they know are healthy, in spite of tremendous doubts and fears that pull them back.

You should neither be satisfied with being a victim, nor

with being a survivor. You should always aim to be a conqueror.

There is an extraordinary quality of spirit that leads one to aspire to conquering rather than surviving. Discover that spirit in yourself.

Why You Need This Book

This book will help you accept the truth of the assault on your psyche, understand your unique coping style and how it impacts your daily thoughts and actions, and guide you into a life of more peace and happiness.

TO BE OR NOT TO BE... A VICTIM

The obvious question is, “What makes some people hold onto being a victim while others choose to improve their lives?” The answer is control. When you are a perpetual victim, the past is in control of your present. When you are a conqueror, the present is controlled by your choices, in spite of the pain and pull of your past.

Inspiring, isn't it? Yet it is so difficult for some people to make up their minds and follow through, to become conquerors. Why? There are at least nine reasons, all having to do with an emotional attachment to certain kinds of crutches. These emotional attachments become bad habits.

1. **Identity.** It is true that many of those venues have helped people feel safe to admit to painful truths of their childhood, have supported those with the grit and commitment to move forward with their lives, and have given many folks resources for help. However, it is also true that there is a sublime status given to those who have suffered, as well as a never-ending wellspring of compassion, understanding, affection – and attention – that is hard to give up.
2. **Rewards.** Indulging in the miserable demands attention and sympathy. Most folks have good hearts and want nothing more than to relieve more of their pain. Too many of these well-meaning folks sacrifice too much of

- their lives and energy to doing that in spite of evidence that it just isn't working. Yet they feel guilty to give it up. These relationships are painfully one-sided, because the "sufferer" is perpetually needy and therefore unavailable for reciprocation.
3. **Routine.** Let's face it, the familiar, even when it is unproductive or ugly, is "comfortable." Yes, even pain can be comfortable. At least you know what to expect and, you have developed ways of not being too overwhelmed by the painful but known.
 4. **Revenge.** It was also startling to see how often they would get revenge on the non-abusive, "good" parent who didn't protect them. This is done by hurting the "good" parent the way they as children had been abused by the "bad" parent. They might also do the same toward siblings who are doing better in their own lives.
 5. **Dependency.** Many adults who were starved for affection, attention, and approval as children often burden others with a feeling of responsibility for their happiness.
 6. **Excuses.** So many people have lapsed into the "abuse excuse" in accepting the misbehaviors of others as well as their own. In order to feed that monster, it seemed that just about everything people felt or did was linked to some childhood trauma.
 7. **Avoid challenges.** Nobody expects much of suffering people. In fact, it seems cruel to demand accountability or responsibility from people who are mired in historical pain and misery.
 8. **Center of the universe.** Let's be honest: when your early life is basically one threat after another to your sanity or physical self, it's hard not to "live in your feelings." Unfortunately, that can get to be a way of life that precludes growth and joy, which generally come from attention to others than yourself.
 9. **Change is scary/hard.** It takes patience, courage, and perseverance to stay with the healthier and more positive program. It is a lifelong battle. Some people, sadly, hug the security of the familiar and rue change.

MOVING TOWARD THE GOOD LIFE

There are at least ten qualities that make it possible to liberate you from victimhood, and change your life from victim to victor.

1. **A look in the mirror.** Mirrors don't lie. Remember when the evil stepmother of Snow White asked, "Mirror, mirror on the wall, who is the fairest of them all."? It ruined her day, but she got the truth. And so will you. It might ruin your day at first, but the truth, as they always say, will indeed set you free
2. **Enduring the pain.** Don't wait for the pain to go away – it never will. However, you can challenge it with quality moments, experiences, and relationships. The pain will eventually have so many wonderful interruptions that it will become more readily tolerated and a less powerful force in your life. Enduring is liberating.
3. **Acceptance.** It takes more moxie to adapt to reality (or accept it) than to avoid reality. The dynamic will change dramatically, and in a healthier direction, without the need for some volatile confrontation or dramatic severing of the relationship.
4. **Letting go.** This means not altering your bad thoughts, memories, and feelings from your Bad Childhood to squeeze out any joy you could enjoy in a Good Life.
5. **Replacing bad habits.** The core of growth and change is to risk challenging the negative perceptions from your childhood, behave "as if" you were valuable, and risk failure and rejection to prove the "as if" true!
6. **Reach out.** The bottom line is that you have to be willing to let people in to see you, really know you, advise you, support you, and even remind you when you're off track.
7. **Spirituality.** Spirituality is about opening outward. No, it doesn't erase the past; neither will it heal all your wounds. Living for something or someone outside of yourself is the primary means by which we all find purpose and value in our lives.

8. **Perspective.** Experiences of perspective are those that take you off your personal victim island and put you in the world with the rest of humankind. Perspective means that you can without denial or whitewashing your past or your difficult or dangerous family members, pick out those things that are valuable or benevolent.
9. **Hobbies.** Distractions are good and hobbies are an opportunity to move your mind away from somber issues into an arena of creativity, constructive activity, positive growth and change, discovery and new knowledge.
10. **Attitude.** The attitudes that you feed on will be the attitudes that will remain with you.

CLOSURE VERSUS RESILIENCE

Resilience implies that you are:

- *Motivated to make things better;*
- *Willing to form trusting relationships,*
- *Going to identify and recognize the life situations that trigger emotional crises echoing your bad childhood and make efforts to control your reactions, ultimately regaining control of your feelings, instead of being a slave to them, and*
- *Changing your distorted ways of looking at people and situations by giving the people in today the benefit of the doubt and by a commitment to communication.*

Resilience means to adapt (conform more appropriately to today's experiences and challenges) and tolerate (allow for frustrations without lashing out at life, others, or yourself) life on its current terms, rather than through the prism of yesterday's miseries and miserable people. You can decide to be resilient.

THE GOOD JOURNEY

How do you start this Good Journey of good choices? While there isn't one narrow, specific "to do" list, many listeners shared how they went about it and brought up a number of appropriate concepts, concerns, and advice.

1. **Writing a journal.** In doing so, you can learn a lot about your immediate emotional (over)reactions and (mis)interpretations of the words and action of others. Furthermore, you can discern which of your thoughts and actions were appropriate to the circumstances, and which were obviously right out of the past and not appropriate, useful, realistic, or constructive in the here and now.
2. **Historical perspective.** Make going over your past of what you have learned, not just about what you have suffered. This is the perspective that is beneficial. This subtle change of focus brings a picture of what you have become versus what you've endured. Ultimately, it is your strengths that will pull you through. Feed them so that they will have the strength to overcome your weaknesses.
3. **Self-evaluation.** Discover what you're good at, celebrate and nurture. Know what you're not good at, admit to and search for role models and help to repair or change. Don't worry so much about people thinking less of you; when you ask them for help they will see you as brave – at least, the decent people will.
4. **Pick your human environment.** Be more in charge of the people you surround yourself with and invest yourself in. Choose groups and individuals who will help you be and do your best, not wallow in negativity. Only hang around people who for the most part – nobody's perfect – live the kind of life to which you aspire. Surround yourself with good people, even if they are not your family.
5. **Choose to be good.** Try to really spend time being aware of what you are being in the lives of everyone you interact with, from your teacher to the store clerk to the guy who puts gas in your car. You life is not just all about you – it is about everyone you touch.

6. **Give others the benefit of the doubt.** The pure act of not assuming ill will is a relief, is probably statistically correct, and gives the other person wiggle room to correct their position. If you give that benefit of the doubt and find out that it wasn't due, that's fine too. You were decent and they weren't. The difference is clear, and then you can decide what your response is going to be with that person now and forever.
7. **Disable your replay button.** The more you repeat that history in your mind, in a "therapy" group, or with anyone who will listen, the more you make your whole being about that, and only that. The more we go over the same path, the deeper the track we create – until it becomes almost impossible to find any way out.
8. **Embrace values, morals, ethics, and religion.** The common thread through the thousands of stories about divine intervention and connectedness is a feeling of being loved in spite of experiences or misbehaviors, a recognition of support from decent people, and a format or blueprint for creating a better life.
9. **Tolerating the discomfort.** You will also have to endure changing your own behaviors with almost everybody significant in your life once you realize that many of your actions were reactions to your own private pain and fears, and are not necessarily appropriate to today.
10. **Gunfight at the OK Corral?** Peace comes with a price. If you're not willing to pay it, you won't have it. Facing up implies that you take responsibility for what you are doing to your life now. Confrontations imply that they take responsibility for what you are doing to your life now.
11. **Compassionate benevolence.** The idea here is to assess your family member's place in the annoying-evil continuum, and then, once you decide they are on the annoying end, to change your behavior toward them from angry and resistant to understanding and compassionate.
12. **Living for something outside yourself.** Real happiness is a product of the fulfillment of your obligations and responsibilities to others; anything is simply called "fun."

13. Emotions are not truth. This means you have to be willing to communicate, ask the question, get the facts, dig for understanding, and be open to truth. You are best to start this communication from a “benefit of the doubt” point of view. If your worst fears are confirmed, then you can go to war! If your worst fears are not confirmed, you lost little time in bringing serenity into your life.

CONCLUSION

You can have a Good Life no matter how Bad your Childhood was. It may not be a perfect life. You may never have all aspects of your life filled with serenity or the level of success that might have been yours had you had the chance to pick different parents.

Your profound fears of intimacy may preclude you from becoming close to one person, so you might give of yourself by participating in civic programs, religious missions, and so forth.

It might just be that engaging in activities and relationships that are more comfortable, related to but not quite the ultimate goal, still may eventually get you there – slowly, indirectly, but surely.

You have to define for yourself what a Good Life means to you personally.

A good life is not about feeling good all the time. It is always about having everything. A fireman rushing into a burning building to save a child is not feeling good about it... he’s scared and worried for that child, his family and his very life. Nonetheless, he runs in because a he knows that good life comes from meaning something to someone.

Be the fireman.

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