

Cale

Hi Eddie,

My son's psychologist has just emailed me the link for your site and I am so glad he did. I am a single parent with 5 young sons and am at wits end with one of my sons, the eldest. Life is very difficult, I am exhausted both mentally and emotionally and to the point where I feel like a failure. I am very tolerant and have a lot of patience but I do not know how much longer that will last, the bouts of abuse towards me is absolutely breaking my heart.

So much of what you said made sense and I was somewhat relieved to know that I'm not alone in this. I suppose I should give you a brief outline about Cale, I say brief because in his eleven short years of life he has a massive history. To include everything would mean I would sit for the next year writing a novel for you to read, quite literally.

Cale was born with a severe congenital heart condition requiring immediate medical intervention and open heart surgery. Over the next nine years he had 5 more open heart surgeries, many tests and invasive procedures as well as medications. As he got older, there was a short period after each surgery or procedure where he would display some anger, however it wouldn't last long.

Skipping forward to 2011..... A series of traumatic events occurred in a very short period of time for Cale. His great grandparents live with us and in 2011 his beloved Poppy passed away (this was also my birthday and for about 2 weeks I hit a point where I couldn't cope). Then Cale was admitted to hospital due to an infection causing his body to kill his red blood cells. From then until early 2012 his life was a series of hospital admissions and pain. Two days before Easter we were sent to Perth for him to have another cardiac catheterisation. Cale was very upset at this time because it was the first Easter without pop and we were 1000km from home. The results we were given were heart breaking, Cale was dying. We could take him home and enjoy the time we had left or perform a surgery that he probably wouldn't survive. He did survive. It was a success.

It was November 2012 when Cale started terrible screaming episodes. Then it escalated to breaking things/kicking and hitting walls and finally has escalated to the point that we are at now, when he can't get his own way he physically and verbally targets me. He does it to his brothers a lot also but I'm the prime focus.

Whatever he doesn't want to do when told to, erupts in a massive yelling episode and within minutes he lays into me. This goes from slapping, pinching, punching and kicking me to biting and using objects to hit me. I have to keep the other boys safe, but due to doctors concerns (he is on warfarin to thin the blood) I cannot simply lock him in his bedroom, this means I am the barricade between him and the rest of the house. I can sit for up to 4 hours in his doorway while he slaps, pinches, punches, kicks and bites me, if there is anything in his room that he can lift, he will use it as a weapon on me. If I move, allowing him into the rest of the house he will get anything he can (including knives) to use on me or his brothers. He has picked up his 2-yr-old

brother and thrown him against a wall. He pinches and bites my 2-yr-old and hits him if I do not barricade him in his room, he also lays into his 5 yr-old brother in much the same manner. With his 9 year-old brother, Cale waits until he is asleep then lays into him also. He eventually gets to a point where he does a total flip and then gets overly affectionate. He clings to me cuddling me, kissing me and telling me how much he loves me and how sorry he is and he will never do it again, by this point I'm so totally exhausted from him that I just want to be away from him for a few minutes (yes as a mother it's terrible to say). He, at that point, insists that I make him do it, it's my own fault and I cause him to hit and hurt me. Two questions I'm sure you'd be thinking, first, what makes him do it? It's simple, I tell him to go to bed. 8:30pm is bed time for all of them, Cale believes that it's an inappropriate bed time and I'm being unfair. After insisting he go to bed he gets angry and violent. School is the other set-off, if I insist he is to go to school then I cop it again. I've dropped back on the school bit, after speaking with his psychologist and school, it's not a fight worth having. If he chooses to go to school, he goes, if he chooses to stay home, then I don't reorganise my day around him. If he stays home then he is packed a lunch like the other boys, he is only allowed to eat whatever is in that lunchbox for the entire day. I remove the aerial from the TV and turn off the Internet, the idea in this is to make it as boring as possible so that school seems fun. It's worked so far. Three times now he has given in by 9:30am and walked himself off to school. (I leave at 8:30am, if he is not ready to go by then, then I refuse to make a special trip for him plus it's only around the corner, 5 minute walk) this has also come about because the school have said that they can't stop him running away, which he does quite often. If you peruse him he seems to panic and loses all road sense, just last week he was nearly hit by 2 cars as he ran randomly across 4 lanes of traffic. I cannot use the same method at bed time, I have four other little lemmings that follow suit, if I say 'ok I'm not fighting you on this' he sits on the couch on the lounge room, his 4 brothers then do the same because 'Cale does it and you don't make him go to bed'. My children all get irritable and over sensitive with lack of sleep.

The second question you probably have is how do I react to his violence against me? Easy, I don't. I just sit and defend myself by either crossing my arms in front of my face or gently push him off me. I will sometimes lead or carry him back to his bed, but I do not hit him back. I do not yell at him, it exhausts me faster and my tolerance drops. Last week was the first time I reacted, he was pinning me to a chair and pinching the inside of my arm between my wrist and elbow. I twisted my arm and pinched him back, in the same place, quickly. I didn't hold on as long as him and pinched him quickly two more times. He is unlike normal children. A slight pinch leaves a big bruise due to how thin his blood is. After a painful slap across my face and him saying 'see what you make me do' I went back to my barricade stance of ignoring mostly all the blows for another three and a half hours until I rang my mum's husband to pick him up, by then it was 1am. After that it was advised that I arrange for him to stay elsewhere for a week to give both him and I a break. This isn't an ideal arrangement to use a lot because there he has 3 adults and is the centre of attention; it always leads to an even bigger explosion when he comes home because all of a sudden he has to share adult attention again. Out of all my boys, Cale gets the most attention from me, both positive and negative. Cale and I both share a love of ancient

civilisations, we spend a lot of time together reading or googling this. However the minute I try to do anything at all with the other boys, Cale demands more time with me.

Cale's mind frame is 'I'm going to die anyway so why waste my time on school work and following rules'. Which is mostly true however no one can say how long he will live. There is a very real chance that he will in fact live to early adulthood.

I'm losing hope that this is ever going to turn around and I am going to be in an abusive relationship with my son until he eventually moves out. This is affecting my family badly, Nan says she is moving out, she can't take any more, my younger three sons' father is demanding I send the boys to live with him safe from the violence and I'm stuck trying my best but failing miserably.

I'm a private person, I don't ask for help, I don't like to and now I'm to the point where I have had to ask for help, before I crash and burn

I'm sorry that this email is so long, I didn't see the sense of telling half the story.

Thank you for your website and making me feel normal instead of a failure of a mother.

Follow-up e-mail just 2 months later:

I'm happy to update that we have virtually eliminated the violence and damage he was doing to both our home and siblings belongings. In the last month we have had only one episode that I would class extreme.

On the other hand, the decision was made to remove him from school and begin home schooling from next term with the aim of re enrolling Cale into mainstream school in term four or at latest the beginning of next year.

The pocket money system I've been working on has worked wonders. Out of 20 days this month he has managed to achieve \$16. Finally feeling in control, still a long way to go, many other things to tackle but so far so good.

Comment:

To me this shows that big problems don't necessarily have to have big solutions. I would never have expected that a child with Cale's huge burden of issues would respond so well and so quickly to more predictable consequences. Some workers would (understandably) feel overwhelmed by such a case and since we feel such sympathy for Cale many would be loath to suggest consequences.

Eddie Gallagher 2013