

Gregory Routt and Lily Anderson: *Adolescent Violence in the Home: Restorative Approaches to Building Healthy, Respectful Family Relationships*

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Adolescent Violence in the Home: Restorative Approaches to Building Healthy, Respectful Family Relationships, by Gregory Routt and Lily Anderson discusses a form of family violence that has been recognized as a major issue for decades but that has constantly been ignored by society. Routt and Anderson illustrate the elements of adolescent violence towards their parents, a form of abuse that is not often discussed. The adolescent period of life is a time of growth and development that can fluctuate often, and sometimes develop violent and abusive behaviors. Whether it is a result of poor parenting, traumatic life events, or mental disorders, adolescent violence in the home towards parents, siblings, and parental figures can cause severe emotional and physical distress in a family. Parents who are victims of abuse tend to keep the issue quiet, due to embarrassment, or they blame themselves for contributing to their child's violent characteristics. The authors emphasize the lack of attention that this form of family violence receives, and throughout the text offer specified intervention methods to try and remedy adolescent violence towards their parents. Routt and Anderson offer an eye-opening text that recognizes the severity of parental abuse by their children, and aims to inform readers about how to identify, accept, and solve this issue while restoring more effective familial relationships.

In chapter one, Routt and Anderson address the different types of pathways adolescents can take on the way to violent actions toward their parents, the reality and relevance of parental abuse, and its relationship with other types of family violence. There is a multitude of pathways

adolescents can take to result in physically and emotionally abusing their parents: social, environmental, and genetic factors all playing a part. Statistics collected to understand the extent to which parental abuse from adolescents occurs, prove to be unreliable, as they do not include abuse other than physical acts. They also fail to record many instances because parents often refuse to report out of embarrassment and fear of social disapproval. This makes it difficult to understand the true scope that this type of violence reaches. Even those who are familiar with family violence frequently fail to accept the relevance of adolescent violence towards parents, usually due to the fluctuation of behaviors present in developing adolescents. The authors emphasize that this kind of abuse is not like other domestic violence; it is its own entity. While it is similar to partner abuse in the fight for power, it is a different spectrum emotionally, socially, economically, and culturally. For many decades, studies failed to recognize the reality of adolescent violence towards parents but, particularly in the past 15 years, more evidence has provided more solid results that this form of violence even is international. Overall, this chapter provides the reader with a comprehensive understanding of the infrastructure of parental abuse from children.

The second chapter focuses on the role that physical abuse plays in this type of family violence. While physical violence can range from pinching to threats with deadly weapons, Routt and Anderson (2015, p. 18) simply define it as, "...any behavior that intended to physically hurt or harm that parent". It is illustrated that initial acts of violence from adolescents can result from a very wide variety of different social and environmental situations. Even though there have been very few cases where the violent adolescent actually kills their parents, or cause severe physical abuse that can result from domestic violence, it can lead the adolescent to face legal difficulties and

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permanently impact their intimate relationships. The authors help the reader understand the prevalence of parental abuse by illustrating the results from the *National Family Violence Survey*. In a study of 2143 families, the results showed that 2,500,000 parents were hit by their children, and 900,000 were victims of more intense violence (Rout and Anderson, 2015, p. 22). Unfortunately, even these astounding numbers are absent of many incidents that do not get reported. Many parents who are victims lose a sense of control, not knowing where to seek help in a society with lack of knowledge and acceptance of such an issue. The violent adolescent can often see this loss of power in their parents, leading them to initiate an even stronger fight for power. This loss of power is illustrated through a series of stages the adults experience: denial of the issue, taking responsibility for the violent behaviors, shock and surprise, protecting themselves, separation from the issue, avoidance, protecting siblings of the violent adolescent, calling the police, and, as a last resort, fighting back. The authors discuss the role that sibling abuse plays in this issue as well. While siblings can also be secondary targets of these violent adolescents, sometimes they are the primary targets and the parents are abused trying to protect their other children. The chapter makes clear that, while the issue at hand affects far more parents and children than most of society acknowledges, the severity of parental abuse by adolescents can result in damaging physical abuse to all members of the family.

In chapter three, Routt and Anderson focus on the violence of emotional abuse and how it can be just as destructive as physical abuse. Emotional abuse is something that is not as definitive as physical abuse; it includes a vast amount of words, phrases, actions, and tone of voice. Despite its range of possibilities, emotional abuse can be just as impactful as physical abuse. It can demean the parent to a point of dysfunction. The authors note the difficulty to reveal how relevant emotional abuse from adolescents is due to its difficulty to document and define. While the law recognizes some forms of verbal abuse as illegal, the most common form of illegal emotional abuse is property destruction. Even though it is a physical act, it is not physically harming the parent; rather it instills fear that they might be the next thing their child hits. The authors also note that emotional abuse enhances physical abuse and can make it more harmful. Another aspect of emotional abuse is that physical abuse often follows; the pairing of the two events can lead the parent to expect physical abuse with every emotional attack. Even though they are often associated, emotional abuse has its own definitions, such as an action harmful to the well-being of another, and psychological abuse refers more to manipulating others. Emotional abuse can also include body language and movements. Routt and Anderson also emphasize that

emotional abuse is not an isolated incident; it can be constant. In an attempt to demean their parents, adolescents use several different tactics: insults and humiliation, constant arguments, damage of property, criticizing, harassing, and accusations. Though these are the most common, secondary tactics include threats of harming themselves, financial abuse, and abuse to siblings. As can be imagined, the consistent attacks to their status as a parent and person can leave parents feeling anxious, disappointed, fearful, fatigued, incompetent, and angry.

Chapter four highlights the effects abuse has on the parents and the family of the violent adolescent. Routt and Anderson emphasize that there are no specific profiles for parents and families experiencing parental abuse from adolescents. But, it is clear that there is not one type of parent more prone to experiencing abuse from their children than another. This issue affects all different structures of families, and parents from different social, cultural, and economic backgrounds. Despite this generalization, mothers are often the primary targets of abuse from adolescents than are fathers. The authors explain that this is most likely due to the role that the mother plays in the family: they are more engaged in their child's behavior, the children have a deeper emotional attachment to the other and therefore expect more out of her, and mothers are more commonly abused by the father in partner violence instances. Parents who are emotionally and physically abused by their children experience a range of emotions as a result. They become fearful to be a parent, to set rules and guidelines for their children, and parent, as they desire. They avoid their children, as they are afraid to encounter more abuse with each interaction. They become angry and, in turn, lose perspective when reacting to the abuse. They feel powerless as a parent and have a sense that their child controls the household. The list goes on. Despite all these exhausting emotions, there are reasons why parents generally do not seek outside help, with most of those reasons being limits set by society. Societal expectations, such as the family being a private sphere of life not to be infringed by outside sources, prevent parents from seeking legal help. There are also beliefs about the role of parents, that they should always maintain control, and that permissive parents are responsible for volatile development of their children. With a lack of understanding guidelines, boundaries, and differences between right and wrong, violence exhibited during the adolescent period could result in unhealthy family relationships and have long-lasting effects on victims and offenders. With the balance between parents and children becoming chaotic, it can be difficult to restore more healthy family dynamics.

The fifth chapter discussed the role of the adolescent, and how to understand their development of violent behavior. Much like the general structure of parents and

families who can experience adolescent violence, adolescents who commit violent acts towards their parents are not limited to one race, social standing, environment, or personality. There is, however, a difference between gender; the authors illustrate that males are more likely to be perpetrators than are females, and their behavior is typically taken more seriously. Age is also a factor; parents report that they first see violent acts in their adolescents when they reach middle school. It is difficult to pinpoint the cause of violent behavior because it stems from a variety of different factors. Biological factors can include genetic predisposition to be impulsive and other similar behaviors, as well as enduring a harmful environment in the womb. Social factors such as socioeconomic status, neighborhoods, peers, cultural attitudes, and, of course, the media, can evoke violent behavior. The factor of gender presents that males are more prone to violence to fit the societal expectations of being masculine and powerful, but females are becoming more assertive in their determination to break the view of women as being passive. Violent media has been studied as a cause of violent behavior in adolescents extensively, and has been shown to desensitize adolescents from violence and even simulate violent actions in video games. Routt and Anderson emphasize the effect that domestic violence has on children, as they grow up they may resort to aggression because they saw one or both of their parents resort to it in times of conflict. Other factors such as harsh parenting, traumatic events, substance abuse, and clinical diagnoses can contribute to violent behavior. From a psychological aspect, theories like The Social Learning Theory, The Social Information Processing Theory, and schemas/scripts aim to explain violent behavior as a result of learning processes and how the brain develops to perceive and react to social cues. The development of violent behaviors in adolescents ultimately comes down to lack of empathy and an array of contributing factors that shape the way that they perceive violence as a means to an end.

Chapter six introduces the first model of intervention to help restore healthy familial relationships. When adolescents are abusive, their parents have difficulty trying to remedy their children's behavior; the behavior is either minimized or the method fails to improve the adolescent's behavior. The model discussed in this chapter focuses on making the adolescent feel accountable for their violence, as well as highlighting the importance of family safety. There are four parts to the working model that must be addressed to efficiently improve adolescents' behavior. The first is restorative processes, making the adolescent feel accountable and empathic for their actions. The second is emotional regulation, the focus of controlling emotions and how they affect behavior. The third is skill-based practices that work on communication and respect. Finally, there is a

cognitive behavior practice in which the adolescent works to redirect their internal processes. The main goal of this intervention model is to establish mutual respect among family members. Routt and Anderson illustrate that respect is the foundation of efficient decision-making and family interaction. In this model, parents and children have two different wheels: the abuse wheel and the respect wheel. The wheels aid both parties to clarify the clear-cut borders between respect and abuse. The intervention can be conducted in two different settings (individual or multi-family sessions), whichever best suits the family. Before all this is conducted, the family must first have assessment to determine what would be best for them. For this particular intervention, many prerequisites must be met, including the requirement that the adolescent be the primary aggressor in the family. If the parents are the ones heavily contributing to their child's behavior, a different model of intervention may be more appropriate. Next, if the safety of the family is a concern, immediate assistance may be required to protect the family. Finally, the authors note that the juvenile justice system can play an important role promoting change in violent adolescents.

The seventh chapter focuses on the foundations for changes what is necessary to initiate and effective interventions in violent adolescents. First and foremost, establishing safety in the home is a priority. The importance of feeling safe in the home is essential to the well-being of everyone, especially the developing adolescent. The authors then state how consistent check-ins on the status of the family are crucial to maintain safety in the home. It is also crucial to ensure that the intervention is not increasing violence in the home; sometimes the adolescents misinterpret the words of the therapist and increase their violence in retaliation. Routt and Anderson emphasize the importance of safety in all aspects of the intervention. Safety in models of intervention comes first. The model must be minimizing violence, while increasing parental control; if one of the parties feels unsafe the intervention will likely fail. In group settings, it is important that all participants understand boundaries to communication and feel safe sharing their issues with other families. Group settings are also an opportune time to simulate real-life situations of abusive behavior, and the parent might feel safer dealing with it in a group than individually. Finally, safety in the home is repeated to illustrate its importance. The authors then describe red flags that could indicate the violent behavior of the adolescent returning or getting worse. If the adolescents and parents are able to identify these red flags, the behavior can be dealt with more quickly, more efficiently, and with more understanding. Finally, it is important for parents to have a plan of safety if things were to escalate unexpectedly. This is to ensure everyone's safety and avoid setbacks in the progress of intervention.

Chapter eight addresses what Routh and Anderson (2015, p. 126) describe as, "...one of the most successful approaches..." which turned out to be the restorative practice approach. This approach provides adolescents with instruments to help them embrace accountability for their actions and take responsibility for their harmful actions. Perhaps the most important element of restorative practices is engaging the adolescents by having the parents do things with them and restore their parent–child bond. The authors explain that restorative practices originate from restorative justice, and contain three essential parts to ensure success. First, respect must be mutual between all participating parties. It is important that everyone feels like they are being valued and heard. Second, collaborative problem solving must be used to ensure that all parties are working to achieve the goal in a way effective for everyone. Finally, a fair process must be used to make all parties feel like the treatment is fair and no one feels accused or blamed for issues. It is ideal for the offender to develop empathy for the victims to understand the extent of their actions and prevent them from abusing again. The authors note that restorative justice has not proven to be as successful as restorative practices because they fail to meet all the requirements stated above. Another way to engage adolescents to really committing to change is the use of effective social discipline windows. There are four types of windows. The punitive approach is successful in controlling adolescents, but lacks emotion and therefore fails to support the adolescent emotionally. The permissive approach tends to protect the adolescent from punishment with support, but lacks control. The neglectful approach provides little control and emotion leaving the offender feeling isolated. Finally, the restorative approach provides the appropriate balance of control and emotion to set boundaries for the adolescent. Another important aspect is to evoke guilt and empathy in the offender to prevent them from avoiding the issue by emotionally disengaging from the victims. Shame should not be used in this situation; it interferes with accountability and empathy. Adolescents who feel guilt and empathy more than shame for their actions show to be more motivated to change their behavior. Accountability should be the main focus, as it breaks consistent patterns of violence in adolescents. Routh and Anderson also provide examples of specific tools that adolescents can use to hold themselves accountable for their actions. Tools include restorative inquiry, where the adolescent puts themselves in the place of their victims, and empathy letters, where they write down how they may have caused their victims to feel. The restorative practice approach creates a structure and guidelines for victims and offenders to follow on the path to restoration.

Routh and Anderson present the pathway to non-violence for adolescents in chapter nine. It is important to

understand that changing behavior is a difficult process once it has been established, but behavioral change needs to be paired with reinforcements and support to show significant change. When developing a system of restoration for adolescents, it is essential to tailor each system to the teen and their social, environmental, and behavioral characteristics. Providing one system would be useless for the vast amount of variation in adolescents. It is also important to help abusive teens define abuse so that they understand what constitutes abuse, as sometimes they may not recognize their actions as abuse. It is also ideal to help the adolescents understand why they may use violence and the reasons behind it. Though the parents have these guidelines, barriers to successful communication can interfere and the remedy to these barriers is working with the adolescents rather than against them. The next fundamental step is to ensure that the adolescents understand the importance of respect and the role it plays in healthy relationships. After defining respect, adolescents must understand that respectful communication is the best means when they experience conflict with their parents. After the development of violent reactions to conflict, parents must help their adolescents develop a respectful set of social skills and help them practice those skills until they are instilled. Raising self-awareness can speed up the process of attaining respectful skill sets. Heightened self-awareness can be attained through understanding their thought process, feelings, and beliefs about themselves and their parents. By using self-talk, an inner voice helping adolescents to reason why and how something happened, self-awareness could be more easily achieved. It can also be useful to teach adolescents to use their feelings as information to see a problem within them, instead of projecting problems onto their parents. Putting feelings into words helps adolescents understand the reality of their feelings and can help them see the impact that their behaviors have on others. Once thoughts and feelings can be properly comprehended, adolescents can initiate behavior change and learn how to channel their emotions into healthier actions.

The final chapter illustrates the end-goal to the issue of adolescent violence toward their parents: re-establishing the leadership role of the parents in the family. The authors recognize the difficulty in controlling an adolescent who responds to parental control with violence, but offer a scope of parenting strategies that involve new methods and incorporate methods their adolescents learn in the interventions. There are three steps that parents must take to initiate the re-establishment of their leadership. Parents must first recognize their strengths as parents; after being degraded by their violent teens it is important to highlight the positive qualities they possess as a parent. After this has been accomplished, parents can then identify the issues that they have in their parenting. This allows them to reflect on

their parenting and identify possible room for improvement. Once the flaws have been identified, parents are then encouraged to make a behavioral change plan to correct these flaws and become better parents. Routh and Anderson then explain how parents can benefit from understanding how raising an abusive adolescent can affect their thoughts and feelings, therefore influencing their parenting. Parents often blame themselves for their abusive adolescent's behavior, which makes their parenting more permissive and guilt-ridden, only solidifying their children's behavior by excusing it. To attain their role as leaders in their families, these parents must change their thought processes and how they explain their adolescent's behavior. Changing negative thoughts to helpful ones can be a simple tool to improve their parenting methods. Unsuccessful attempts to regain leadership include avoidance of the issue and standing their ground authoritatively only leading to an exhausting battle for power. If the parents find themselves in a battle for power, they should disengage from the battle and reroute disrespectful behavior in their adolescents. If an incident of violence does occur, parents should return to restorative inquiry by communicating with their adolescents and helping them identify different ways to respond to conflict. The authors summarize the process of restoring leadership as a path full of patience, small steps, and an optimistic outlook.

In each chapter, Routh and Anderson help readers identify the main characteristics, remedies, and realities of adolescent violence towards their parents. It is important to understand that adolescent violence can happen to any family in any situation; there is no specific profile to fit the victims and offenders. Due to the wide variety of people it can affect, there is no one method of intervention to address this issue. The main point to recognize is that violence is a behavior. Behavioral change is the fastest, most efficient way to reduce violence and can be achieved through understanding feelings and emotions, appreciating the role of respect, and engaging in effective communication. While the parents, also the victims, in this situation may feel self-conscious in their role as a parents and their ability to effectively raise their children, they must embrace the situation and work with the adolescent to change behavior, restore leadership, and family safety.

Conflict of interest None.

Reference

- Routh, G., & Anderson, L. (2015). *Adolescent violence in the home: Restorative approaches to building healthy, respectful family relationships*. New York, NY: Routledge.