

## ***“I Need A B.R.E.A.K.!!!”***

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*Little Aaron comes home from his second grade class at school to an empty home. After letting himself in and finding the peanut butter and jelly sandwich his Mom left him, he settles into the couch for a little prime video gaming. Mom will be home in an hour or two, and until then he'll just do what he always does – wait and occupy himself with the video games or TV. That's just the way it is since Dad left. Mom has to work and he has to fend for himself. He doesn't usually get scared, except when Mom gets home after dark.*

*Sarah walks home from school with tears running down her cheeks. “The other sixth grade girls were so mean to me today. Why can't I just be one of the girls?” she thinks to herself. Sarah comes from a conservative Christian home, and she got a little lost in the conversation when the other girls started talking about boys. “It was just a silly question about what they were talking about”, she whispered to herself, “hardly a reason to make fun of me in front of everyone.”*

*Brandon's in fourth grade. He doesn't come home to an empty house, or have to worry about other kids not liking him. Brandon plays soccer, and he's really good at it. So good, in fact, that he plays for two teams. He practices four days a week after school, and has games on at least two other nights, or on the weekends. When he's not playing, he's usually going to a practice or game for his sister, Lindsey. And both of them attend the church midweek program – when it doesn't interfere with sports. Of course, the guitar lessons are important because he wants to play in a band soon, and his parents keep telling him to study hard because one day he'll need those good grades to get into a good school where he can keep playing soccer.*

Yikes!! I get frustrated even thinking about what some of our kids go through every day. Stress and pressure are nothing new to kids – every generation has had to deal with it in some form or another. But today's kids seem to face pressures that would make previous generations cringe! Peer pressure, broken families, media attack, technology overload, activity upon activity, education demands, and so much more. Today's kids are burdened like never before – and there's very little relief in sight!

Consider this example of how our world has changed: in the 1940's, the Fullerton Police Department did a study to find the most significant problems in the public high school. According to their study, the top problems were: talking in class, chewing gum, making noise, running in the halls, getting out of turn in line, improper clothing, and littering. Compare this list to the top problems our kids dealt with in the 1990's: drug abuse, alcohol abuse, pregnancy, suicide, rape, robbery, and assault. How do kids get to this point by the time they are in high school? I believe it has much to do with the stresses and pressure they face when they are in elementary school.

Our kids are targets, and there are assaults on their minds and emotions coming from every different direction. Just a few examples help us to understand what it must be like for most kids living in today's society:

- The strain of broken families is significant. With a divorce every 30 seconds in our country, and the rate higher among Christians than non-Christians, how can our kids not bear the burden of this tragedy? 1300 step-families are formed every day in our country, and 30% of today's families are single parent. Even under the best circumstances, this produces stresses on today's kids that is difficult to handle.
- The bombardment of the media brings a definite challenge to kids. Spike Lee said in the late nineties, "...the most powerful nations are not those that have nuclear bombs, but those that control the media. That's where the battle is being fought; that is how you control people's minds." Just a little research in this area unveils the truth that the media's agenda is not strictly harmless entertainment! As the children who spend nearly 8 hours a day taking in today's media in some form or another will attest, it is difficult assimilating what the media is teaching versus what we say God is teaching.
- The de-valuing of life has to be troubling to today's kids. The issues of abortion, euthanasia, suicide, and abuse all communicate our societies value of a human life. The thousands of violent crimes the average child watches on TV and in the movies each year communicates the cheapness of human life. How can they help but adopt that value system in their own thinking? And when they do, how unsettling that must be for these kids.

Examples could be given by the thousands. We all see what's happening around us to cause our kids to be stressed out kids. But what can we do about it? How can we help our own kids? How can we minister to the kids in our churches and communities? What can we teach parents and others who deal with today's kids? Let me propose that we help kids by following five simple principles to give kids a **B. R. E. A. K.:**

**B Be an example.** Before we can hope to influence our kids, we have to have our own act together. Perfectly? No, but well enough to be able to look in our kids' eyes and say "Do like I do and not just like I say." Kids are watching us – our own kids, kids at church, and any other kids that we are around. A frenetic life filled with the things of this world will transfer in some way – large or small – to the kids we influence. Sure, as adults, we all face our own stresses – that can't be helped sometimes. But we need to do what we can to minimize unnecessary stresses and, more importantly, learn to handle stress in a manner pleasing to God: "Be anxious (stressed!) for nothing..." as Philippians 4:4 states. This is the example that kids ought to see in us and, when they do, they will learn how to handle some of the pressures in their own life.

**R Relationships are a must – be available.** Do you remember the person who was most influential in your life as you were growing up? For many, it was our parents. For others, it may have been a teacher at school, a Sunday School teacher, or a family friend. Why did that person have so much influence over you? In most cases, it was the relationship that they had with you that allowed, or caused, the influence to happen. Today's kids respond to relationships just as kids have in generations past. In fact, today's kids are probably more responsive, because those relationships that they long for are so difficult to find in today's world. Sometimes, though, our own world prevents us from extending ourselves into real relationships with kids. We're too busy. We ourselves are too stressed. We feel inadequate to relate to some of today's kids.

There are many reasons. But one of the keys to ministry – in fact, what I believe to be one of the central keys to effective ministry – is relationships. ***Ministry happens best through relationships.***

Now, going back to the person who had a great influence over you, think about how that relationship formed. Most likely, that relationship involved spending time together, sharing his or her life with you, being interested in your life, being available to listen to you, and cheering you on in whatever arena you were in at the time. Guess what? Today's kids need the same thing. And we build relationships the same way. Yes, some of our kids might have a few more walls, and they might be a little higher and thicker. They may deal with a few more distractions, but they long for relationships as any kid at any time has. We, as the influencers, need to do what it takes to give ourselves to building relationships. Pressures and stresses in the lives of today's kids are so much more bearable when they have someone they know is there for them.

**E Educate yourself to the dangers facing today's kids.** Today's kids *do* face more stresses in life than most of us did. Do you know what they are? Do you know about the culture our kids enter into every day when they go to school? Are you aware of the agendas that the media and public education systems have? Are you aware, on a more personal level, of the home situation of little Johnny? Are you familiar with the simple and predictable patterns of growing up – those age level characteristics that are typical of all children? As we educate ourselves, we are far more capable of relating to and helping today's kids.

**A Ask questions.** We see commercials of parents “nagging” kids about where they are going, what they are going to be doing, who they will be with, and other “intrusive” questions. In reality, that's not a bad idea! No, we don't want to be a nag, and no, we don't want to be intrusive into the lives of kids in our ministry. But how will we know what our kids are facing if we don't ask? Questions of concern help us understand what a child needs. Questions of concern help us look through the eyes of a child to see the world as they see it. And questions of concern communicate that we really care for that child and what they are facing. Don't be afraid to ask appropriate questions of today's kids.

#### **Kids Under Stress!**

- 31% of kids age 9 to 12 say they “worry a lot”, and 47% of the same group suffer from insomnia.
- Adolescent suicide rates have increased dramatically in recent years, becoming the 5<sup>th</sup> leading cause of death among 5 – 14 year olds in the year 2000.
- All TV is educational, but what is it teaching? Violence is a way of life? Sex is acceptable under almost any circumstances? Or materialism is the way to go – it's all about me? Yes, these and other misguided principles are taught everyday through the airwaves, creating unnecessary pressures on our kids – who typically watch 4 – 6 hours a day, including 20,000 commercials per year!
- Accidents are the leading cause of adolescents deaths – stressed children are two and a half times more likely to have an accident.
- 42% of kids from kindergarten through 3<sup>rd</sup> grade are regularly left alone, and kids left alone are twice as likely to smoke, drink alcohol or experiment with drugs. In addition, kids left alone more often have more difficulty handling school assignments.
- One in seven kids report being bullied. Of these bullying incidents, intervention occurs in only 15%.

**K Keep praying.** In the end, it is our loving Savior who will do the work in our kids' lives, not you and me. Oswald Chambers once said that "Prayer does not *equip* us for the greater work, prayer *is* the greater work." Prayer ought to be our first line of defense and our ultimate weapon in dealing with the pressures and stresses facing today's kids. Let us pray fervently and without ceasing for our kids as they face the challenges of living in today's world.

We all have little Aaron's Sarah's and Brandon's all around us. All of them face challenges every day, and struggle to know how to deal with them. We as parents and ministers must take up the challenge to give our kids a **B. R. E. A. K.!**



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