

Am I Invisible? The Pain-Relieving Response to Being Rejected or Excluded

My fifth-grade daughter started a new extracurricular activity a few weeks ago. We're still learning the ropes and aren't quite sure how things run. On the first day, we walked up to two women who were waiting with their children for the activity to start. I politely asked them a question about protocol and explained we were new.

I was met with annoyed facial expressions and curt answers.

Following that response with an introduction seemed inappropriate so I turned to their children and introduced myself and my daughter to them. We talked with the children until the class began. The following week, I saw the women again in the waiting area.



"Hello," I said warmly. "How are you both doing today?" I received mumbled replies, and they immediately turned back to each other and continued talking. My daughter and I talked to each other which relieved the painful sense of feeling invisible.

Last week, as my daughter and I walked up to the activity, I saw the women in their usual spot. I felt a twinge of something I couldn't explain in my stomach. It was not a pleasant feeling – perhaps anxiety, embarrassment, awkwardness? Whatever it was, that feeling made me feel like not trying anymore. I stopped my daughter several feet away from the waiting area and suggested we watch some games going on.

That is when the best possible result that could happen from this experience occurred.

I said, "Remember this."

Remember this when you are in familiar territory and someone new walks up looking for guidance.

Remember this when you see someone on the outskirts anxiously holding her own hand.

Remember this when someone approaches you and asks a question – see the bravery behind the words.

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Remember this when you see someone stop trying – perhaps he's been rejected one too many times.

Remember this when you see someone being excluded or alienated – just one friendly person can relieve the painful sense of feeling invisible.

Remember the deepest desire of the human heart is to belong ... to be welcomed ... to know you are seen and worthy of kindness.

This week, as Avery and I drove up to her extracurricular activity, I felt a new feeling when I saw those women. As odd as it may sound, it was gratitude. I felt grateful they'd reminded me of one of life's highest lessons. Author Kari Kampakis beautifully describes the concept of using people's hurtful actions as opportunities for self-growth. She writes:

“Regardless of how anyone treats you, you stand to benefit. While some people teach you who you do want to be, others teach you who you don't want to be. And it's the people who teach you who you don't want to be that provide some of the most lasting and memorable lessons on social graces, human dignity, and the importance of acting with integrity.”



The unkind treatment I received became a means to gain awareness, compassion, and connection. When I shared my story of rejection on my Facebook page, there were hundreds of comments and private messages—some quite painful—confirming the need to belong is unmet for many people in our society. In addition to those who shared their painful stories of exclusion, there were people who shared helpful actions and roles they'd taken to be an includer and make others feel welcome.

I was quickly reminded of the specific need our family had when we moved to a new state three years ago. On one of our first trips to the grocery store, we passed my daughters' new school.

“I just hope I am not the only new kid in my class,” my older daughter said looking out the window. “I hope there is just one other new person.”

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After a long pause, she repeated, “Just one.”

That had been my solitary prayer in the months leading up to the move ... just one friend ... just one kind friend for each of my girls. One person can instantly make you feel unalone, invisible ... like you belong.

A few weeks later, my daughter met a girl at the neighborhood pool. They were the same age, going into the same grade, at the same school.

“This will be my first year there,” the girl said. “Maybe we’ll be in the same class.”

That’s when I saw the unmistakable look of relief on my daughter’s face.



One person can do that.

One person can take away months of angst in an instant.

That same week I had to take my car to the emissions station. It was a requirement in my new state. The woman working asked me if I had my new ID and registration.

“No,” I confessed. “That task is daunting to me because I am directionally challenged,” I laughed, but not really joking.

“Get a piece a paper,” she said. “I will give you directions to the place to go. It’s easy to get there and there’s never a line.” The woman proceeded to list off exactly what documents I would need. “They don’t mention all this on the website,” she added.

I looked down at the little note that revealed the ins and outs of an intimidating task, and I felt like I might cry. I could feel the goofiest smile on my face. As cars backed up behind us, it was no matter to woman. She wanted to make sure I had what I needed. And because of her, I was less scared to tackle this task. My angst was cut in half instantly. One person can do that.

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A few days later, I made a wrong turn after leaving the store. My daughters and I ended up in a parking lot of a busy strip mall. There was a young mother holding a sign, her three young children sitting in on the curb next to her.

"I lost my job. Any spare change would be appreciated," read my older daughter.

I pulled over and told my girls to grab some of the cereal, granola bars, and other snacks from our grocery bags. I got a little money from my purse. When the woman and I touched hands as I offered her the items, her eyes filled with tears. She said many people had driven past them, and we were the first to stop. The fact that we cared gave her hope.

One person can do that.

One person can give someone hope.

I know this, I absolutely know this, but how often I forget.

Life gets busy. Things get familiar. I get caught up in my own problems, etc.

I nearly forget what I have the power to do until one Tuesday afternoon when I take my daughter to an activity, and I am reminded. I approach two women hoping for kindness, but I am met with rudeness.

And when it happens a second time, I start to feel bitter, so I ask myself how I can turn this into goodness, into love? And that's when the words, "Remember this," come out of my mouth.

I passed on the critical reminder to others not expecting to be flooded with the pain and wisdom of hundreds who've stood where I stood.

One of the most powerful responses came from a beautiful writer named Alexandra Rosas. She wrote,

"You didn't know when you wrote that, but you were to be in my life today after I received the coldest shoulder when I greeted a group of women. You, I came home to you. You halved my pain and I halved yours: it's together for each other that we find strength to ask, learn, and never fold up and disappear."

It's together for each other that we find strength to ask, learn, and never fold up and disappear.

By Rachel Macy Stafford

http://community.today.com/parentingteam/post/am-i-invisible-the-pain-relieving-response-to-being-rejected-or-excluded_1518190386?cid=sm_fbn_pt

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If that's not life's highest lesson, I don't know what is.

Let me remember it now, especially now, when the world's collective pain is so deep, so wide, and so heavy.

But there is hope ...

Because what we can do individually to heal the world's collective pain is quite miraculous. We can half the pain by being one person's *person*.

With one invitation, we can take someone

From outsider to insider

From outcast to beloved member

From unknown neighbor to coffee companion

From wallflower to life-of-the-party

From shortened life expectancy to 80 years of joy.

That last line is no exaggeration.

Dr. Dean Ornish, the founder of the Preventive Medicine Research Institute, says this about the effects of loneliness: *"I am not aware of any other factor—not diet, not smoking, not exercise, not stress, not genetics, not drugs, not surgery—that has a greater impact on our incidence of illness, and chance of premature death."*

Never underestimate the power you hold as ONE PERSON to save the life of another.

"Come join us," you'll say with a smile.

And the recipient will sigh with relief ... angst gone instantly ... a world of pain cut in half.

One person can do that.



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Rachel Macy Stafford is the New York Times bestselling author of Hands Free Mama, Hands Free Life, and Only Love Today. Rachel, a certified special education teacher, recently released a free eBook called: The Positivity Remedy. The stories and small-step strategies Rachel shares in this book have the potential to soften your inner and outer voice, change your perspective, and heal broken bonds. The tools in this book provide what Rachel believes is most vital to creating a positive home and unified world, and that is hope, hope in who you already are and hope for who you can become. Click here to get The Positivity Remedy. For greater support and guidance, join Rachel for her new online course, SOUL SHIFT. Through short videos, small habit shifts, and inspiring intentions, Rachel will take you step-by-step through the process she used to become a present and joyful participant of her life. Enter your email address here to be notified when SOUL SHIFT registration opens in April at a discounted price. Please join Rachel and her supportive community, The Hands Free Revolution, for daily inspiration and community.