

Self-Assessment for Mothers

Little in your life is more precious to you than your children are. That's not to say that parenting is easy. It is as demanding as it is rewarding. Everyday stress, such as demanding schedules and the never-ending nature of housework, affects all parents' ability to engage well with the many challenges that they face. And when you're in an oppressive marriage, the attacks on your personhood are pervasive and unrelenting. On any given day, you hear controlling or cutting criticisms from your spouse—crushing words that may cause self-doubt or create unbearable tension.

The stresses that you deal with in your marriage are intense. It is likely that you don't have help from your spouse; even worse, he may be working against you and your parenting goals. All these factors can compound and can affect your parenting in ways that you might not even be aware of.

It will be helpful for you to identify the ways that your relationship with your children has been impacted by oppression. As you read these questions, I am hoping they will help you to reflect on your experience and see it clearly. It would be good to go through them slowly. If you answer "yes" to any questions, go back to them and think about how you might address what they have uncovered. Sometimes the answer will be "I do not know what to do," and that is understandable. Pray and seek guidance from someone who might be able to help you. Here is a basic assessment to give you insight into how living under oppression is affecting you and your parenting abilities.

Which of the Following Feels True of You?

- I am stressed out and worried all the time.
- I struggle with depression and feel that I do not have energy for my children.
- I feel isolated and like I am lacking support.
- I am physically exhausted and drained of energy.
- I have no confidence in my abilities as a parent.
- I am afraid for my and my children's safety.
- Sometimes I feel like I want to run away from life and my responsibilities.
- I use alcohol or drugs to cope.
- I do not know how to talk to my children about the abuse that they see.
- I have trouble concentrating or solving problems.
- I do not know how to address the problems that my children bring me about their dad.

How Does the Abuse Affect Your Parenting?

- My husband's treatment of me influences the way that my children think of me.
- I find that my children do not listen to me as a parent or obey my rules.
- My husband tells me that I am a bad mother.
- He spoils the children, so I must be the one to set limits and say no.
- He threatens to take the children from me or call Child Protective Services.
- He does not give me enough money to take care of the family.
- He is jealous of the attention I give to my children.
- I am worn out, so I am quick to get frustrated with my children.
- My husband says that if I don't do what he wants, he will hit or harm the children.
- I put pressure on my children to behave better so that they do not make their father upset.
- I find that my children speak to me in the same degrading way that my husband does.
- I share adult issues with my children, using them as emotional support.
- I feel the need to protect my children. I will punish them so that their dad does not unjustly discipline them.
- I schedule activities / play dates for my children to get them out of the house.
- My children believe that they need to protect me.

Do You Observe the Following Behaviors in your Oppressor's Parenting?

- He applies rules unfairly or inconsistently.
- He uses harsh discipline—sometimes even harsh physical punishment.
- He expects the children to act or understand things as if they were adults.
- He takes his frustrations out on them.
- He does not seem to know or care for his children.
- He engages with his children only when he is "in the mood."
- He is either too lax or too strict.
- He refuses to listen to my advice about how to be a better father.
- He prevents me from tending to our children's needs.
- He intimidates the children.
- He pumps the children for information about me.
- He treats the children as servants.
- He calls them names or belittles them.
- He undermines my parenting or shames me in front of my children.
- He uses Scripture in an oppressive and punitive way.
- He tries to alienate me from my children.

REFLECT

1. Being aware of how oppression has impacted your ability to parent is an essential step toward gaining wisdom. What have you learned from these questions? Ask the Lord to help guide your next steps.
2. In what ways is your heart heavy for your children? Who can you ask for help?
3. Reflect on Psalm 145:18-20:

The Lord is near to all who call on him,

to all who call on him in truth.

He fulfills the desire of those who fear him;

he also hears their cry and saves them.

The Lord preserves all who love him,

but all the wicked he will destroy.

The Lord's love for your children is even greater than yours is—let that be an encouragement to you.

Taken from *Is It Abuse?* by Darby Strickland, pg. 278-281.