What can kids do if mom or dad is a toxic person?

Dorothy Horton, PsyD, answers your questions in her latest Ask Doctor Dee column.

March 2, 2020 By Dorothy Horton

Q: What can kids do if mom or dad is a toxic person?

A: Realistically, if kids are minors, they're limited in how they can deal with a toxic parent. However, young children can talk to a trustworthy adult, such as a school counselor, teacher, religious leader or other family members and friends, about problems they're having at home.

For older children, this may mean ignoring a parent's negative comments or not trying to please them in the face of unreasonable demands for time or money.

For young adults who live at home, handling a dysfunctional parent may require they move out. Such individuals should set boundaries and not allow a parent to manipulate them with guilt or blame for their shortcomings.

Gradually, kids can learn to detach emotionally from toxic parents and not take their behavior personally or try to change them. Remember that parents are adults who have made certain decisions—for better or for worse—in their lives.

In addition, it's important to understand that some toxic relationships can't be repaired. But parents should be treated with respect and courtesy at all times.

If this means totally cutting off communication with mom or dad or spending less time in their company, this may definitely be better for a child's personal growth and mental health.

In all relationships, one's first obligation is to care for oneself.

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