

## Expression Without Words written by Barbara Proctor MA, LCPC

Statistics vary in number and ratio about childhood trauma and abuse. There are countless facts seen in the newspaper, on television ads, and charity campaigns. We know that child abuse happens and we know that this is not healthy for the growth and development of our future. And though these facts can be shocking, often they don't reflect our reality. Reality is this. Children are harmed throughout their lives by experiences, pains, physical consequences, bullying, abuse...or what we call traumas.

What trauma is for you may not be to them; and what is trauma for them, may not be for you. To define it, trauma is a bodily or mental injury. This lends hand to many interpretations and situations. The way that we perceive a situation can define whether it was a traumatic event or experience. Children view the world from different eyes and often express their concerns without words. Through play and art, a child can process, express, and identify with various emotional disturbances. Often times, the artwork that is on the refrigerator is much more than a couple scribbles on a piece of paper. It is thoughts, feelings, and understandings of how the world works. It is an accomplishment they worked hard on and something that encourages self esteem and personal acceptance.

So what can we do and how do we support our children with this speechless expression? Ask your child what they drew, don't guess. Say something like "tell me about your picture". Allow time for your child to tell you about the picture and don't interrupt. Ask questions like "who is this?" or "what is this over here." Put the cell phones down, turn off the television, and be in the moment while they talk to you. They are important and what they say matters. Be aware of your reactions and encourage their expression in artwork.

If you have concerns with a drawing or picture done by a child you know, please seek out professional guidance. It may be nothing, but then again, it may be something.