

Is Sesame Street ahead of the Curve in Addressing Children's Issues?

Written by Ginny Grimsley
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Overcoming Parental Challenges; Author, Entertainer &
Former Foster Child Offers Advice

Sesame Street recently addressed a topic that can be hard to talk about, even among adults, and directed it toward children. Alex is the newest character created for the program, introduced in an effort to relate to the 2.7 million children in the United States, younger than age 18, who have a parent in the country's prison system.

"Addressing social issues on a mass scale is always a challenge, and with publicly funded programs being slashed left in right due to the economic downturn, one could be reasonably concerned that underprivileged children are being left behind; fortunately, Alex serves as an example to which young children can relate," says Judy Colella, a musician and author who lived in foster care for part of her childhood. Her young-adult fantasy, "Overcomer – The Journey," is available through her website, www.themacdarachronicles.com.

"Children raised in disadvantaged homes are often shy, intimidated, afraid or angry and don't know how to reach out for help, even if it's just someone to talk to."

For guardians who find themselves in a challenging circumstance while raising a child, Colella offers advice for helping children overcome hardship:

- Heroes don't have to be sexy; they have to be available. You can be your child's hero, and

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the first step doesn't include a cape, or a multimillion-dollar contract with an NFL team or a starring role alongside Brad Pitt. You simply need to be there with a sympathetic ear. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 24 million children in America live without their biological father, which often contributes to poverty. But poor families aren't the only ones whose children suffer. Parents with executive, round-the-clock jobs are also often neglecting in their child's emotional support.

- Show children they are not destined to repeat the mistakes of their parent(s). It's a soft bias that often trickles into the minds of disadvantaged kids – that they are doomed to repeat the fate of their parents. This could mean imprisonment, drug addiction or general underachievement. Children are at the mercy of their inexperience, and the idea of an alternative path often isn't driven home to them. Teach your child the enlightenment of measureable results. A sport, a musical instrument or specific attention to school studies is a great way of showing change.

- Understand the power of our social nature. Human beings are hardwired to be social. Children with parents who are not emotionally available can be particularly sensitive to peer pressure and bullying. Be mindful of the influences in your child's life. Positive role models like coaches, teachers and other mentors often prove to be life-changing. If your son or daughter seeks the approval of friends who encourage deviancy and underachievement, it should come as no surprise when they run into trouble.

About Judy Colella

Judy Colella is a musician, singer and author of a young adult fantasy series about a boy from 6th century Ireland who finds himself in an abusive modern-day American foster home. As a child, Cian MacDara must travel across time and continents to fulfill his destiny. Judy, who lived in foster care as a child and was adopted by a loving family, says children and teenagers need to learn the power of the choices they make.