



Make It All Better

– Situation –

"Mom-mee! M-o-om-mee!" When my son's cries pierced the night, I'd dash to his room. His small body would tremble as he sat drenched in sweat, tangled in his Lion King sheets. Wrapping my arms around him, I would hold him in my lap, brushing back the hair from his face. "Calm down. You are safe. Mommy's here." The bad dream would retreat; at 2 a.m. my arms could bring comfort when the night had become too dark. When my daughter was a preschooler and a swollen sore throat brought tears to her cheeks, I would rock her, holding her head to my chest, "It will feel better soon. Mamma will hold you and it will be all better." Her tears would dry and she would fall asleep in my arms.

*Yesterday, as I scooped up my granddaughter, after she had slipped on a wet floor, I could feel her body relax as I stroked her back and she rested her head on my shoulder. "There. There. It's all better now." As I comforted her, I thought about "making it all better." **Making it all better** is an adult's task. Remembering back, I also realized that painful throats, slippery floors and scary dreams were only the beginning.*

– Solution –

Mama Bear

How can we *make it all better*? Fierce growls, bared teeth and several hundred pounds of infuriated mama bear sends a clear message. How can we mama and papa humans do as good a job of protecting our young?

Some dangers can be prevented; poisons put out of reach, sore throats and nightmares soothed, but what about the rest? What kind of vigilance does it take when the nightly news spatters blood across our dinner table conversations? How do we *make it all better*, create a safe harbor, become the port to turn to in any of life's storms?

The 'Big Apron'

Years ago, an instructor named Madeline Justus, told our class an earthquake story. She had been with a group of preschoolers when the quake occurred. She described reassuring the children and guiding them out of the shaking building to safety. Did she know that they would be safe? No. Was she scared? Yes.

"There are times when we adults must hold our big aprons wide," she said. That image stayed with me. There are times when children need shielding, when we stand on our wobbly grown-up legs with our knees knocking and do our best to hold that big apron wide.

Dr. Diane Levin gave a lecture recently on media violence and the early sexualization of children that recalled Ms. Justus' story. Dr. Levin described the adults children encounter in the colorful world of bouncing cartoon characters or eye-rolling television moppets, as falling into three categories; incompetent, in the way, or just plain idiots.

Where are the role models for adults who can be trusted; turned to in a crisis; relied upon; the ones who can *make it all better*? I thought of Ms. Justus' words and wondered, "Where are the *big aprons* out there?"

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Roslyn would love to hear stories of how you spread your *big apron*. Please e-mail her in care of *Child Care Information Exchange* magazine: info@ChildCareExchange.com.

Remember that moment in the *Sound of Music* when Captain Von Trapp and his new bride stand together, facing the soldiers sent to arrest him? Can you picture the invisible *big apron* the Captain and Maria held over the roof of their silent car as their children trembled beside them?

What kind of role models did children see with their afternoon cookies and milk today? Do we have our *big aprons* ready? Here are three 'P's' that might help us to *make it all better* — *protect*, *persist*, and *protest*.

Protect

When *all the other kids* get to watch R-rated videos or head to the cinema complex, lining up to see the latest car-crashing, gun-blazing box office hit — what do we do?

Some of us dust off our dinosaur scales and dig in our big toes, refusing to join the stampede, no matter what *all the other kids* get to do.

Protect means keeping safe. Limits protect. Popularity is not a parenting skill. Chances are *all the other kids*, evaporates into one or none, upon inquiry.

Persist

On the other hand, destroying all of the spinning wheels did not prevent *Sleeping Beauty* from getting her finger pricked. Even if we throw away every television in our kingdom, there are several next door. We go beyond *protect* when we *persist*.

Instead of turning videos and movies into forbidden fruit, some of us choose to grab our own bags of popcorn. We dip into the buttery morsels as glass shatters, tires screech, and bodies pile up on screen; and smile through the reassuring squeeze we offer when that small hand finds ours in the dark.

Three 'P's' to 'Make It All Better'

Protect:

means keeping safe — limits protect.

Persist:

means being there — available and present.

Protest:

means living values — actions matched to words.

"What did you think of that man using his gun to kill the other man?"

"What about that house getting bombed. Were you scared?"

"That was scary for me, too. But we are safe and I am right here."

And you were there. *Persist:* means being there — available and present.

Dr. Levin told another story, one of preschoolers lying beside their toppled block towers, playing dead — reenacting the evening news reports of America's Oklahoma City bombing. How could their teacher intervene? Should she forbid the children to play their grisly game? Would that *make it all better*? No.

This teacher recognized it was time to spread her *big apron*. She joined the children in their play, taking the role of a doctor, going around making the fallen children better again. Why? Because she was the adult and that is what we adults do — we *make it all better*.

Maybe in the real world we can only join our tears to those of the murdered children's mourners; but for those children watching the nightly news, trusting us, counting upon us — we are wise to *persist*, to be there, to keep our *big aprons* at the ready.

Protest

Adults make all kinds of choices. When buying a lunch box, nightgown, or backpack they think about the characters depicted; they struggle over movie selections; they trail through the toy aisles assessing what they see. Then they use their pocketbooks to voice their conclusions, affirm their values, and make the world *all better* — for *all children*.

Protest means living values. Actions matched to words. We want our children to think about and question what they see. They learn by watching what we do.

Some adults write to the friendly toy store, the friendly toy makers, or the friendly movie studios and TV stations. They tell them what they think of the big-breasted wrestling dolls for sale on aisle three or the winged cartoon character who makes mayhem look harmless over the Saturday morning corn flakes, or the lack of G-rated movies in this week's newspaper listings. Those voices get heard, especially when their numbers grow.

Protect — *Persist* — *Protest*. When bad things invade; whether a winter virus, movie mayhem or a real-life tragedy, we spread our arms, pull out our *big aprons* and *make it all better* — because that is our job. That is what adults do — even when the nightmares turn real.

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