

## From Past to Present

*When a traumatic babyhood rears its head on the playground*

My daughter from China came home from second grade one day, absolutely shattered (sobbing!) that no one had played with her at recess. She was a popular child with plenty of friends, and got along well with everyone in her class. When I questioned her, my daughter admitted that no one had been mean to her; it was simply that everyone happened to be busy doing things she wasn't particularly interested in, compounded by the absence of her best friend. I couldn't understand the degree of her "rejected" reaction (and she couldn't explain it) but I was aware that it was being provoked from something other than recess.

Shortly afterwards I listened to the CD, *"Warming the Stone Child: Myths and Stories About Abandonment and the Unmothered Child"* by Clarissa Pinkola Estes. The CD explained a concept Ms. Estes called "collapsing", and it was exactly right for what my daughter needed to understand about herself. That occasionally, when my daughter was feeling alone or rejected, she will flashback to those original deep, dark feelings of fear and abandonment. She will become overwhelmed with a flood of emotion, instead of shaking off a momentary dejection and moving on to find another activity or friend to play with.

***My daughter was collapsing under the weight of past baggage and bringing it to the present, at trauma triggers that automatically called up the big guns instead of the appropriate-sized guns.***

We listened to this "collapsing" part of the tape together one day while driving in the car, and afterwards I applied it to her recess experience. She got it immediately, was relieved, and took charge of integrating this knowledge into her awareness about herself. My daughter can circumvent most of her worst reactions if she understands what is happening is not "real"-- that the shadows of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) are rising up to engulf her, but that she is grounded in a safe here and now. It had been along time since she had had this kind of reaction about anything, and it made me realize that I still need to keep my radar up... that abandoned and "unmothered" babies need help to grow up to be very strong, in order to make their past work *for* them, instead of against them.

~ By Jean MacLeod

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