



Life Actually

By Kari Kampakis

If love is blind, let's put on glasses

This column is about love — parental love, to be specific. But before I dive in, I want to share a story.

It's about a girl I'll call Anna, a happily married, healthy adult. As a teenager, Anna had an eating disorder, and in her 20s her parents sent her to rehab. It was an intense journey, but over time she healed and eventually got a new lease on life.

Her story is not uncommon, but what makes it unique is *how* Anna got treatment. It wasn't her parents who forced the issue, or even Anna herself. While her parents were aware a problem existed, they weren't sure how to respond. Not until Anna's friends got involved were they moved to action.

Anna's friends had noticed her slipping into a dangerous place, so they banded together to confront her parents. They said they couldn't keep watching Anna do this to herself. Her illness was serious, and unless her parents did something, Anna would die.

Immediately Anna's parents sought help and turned her over to trained professionals. The intervention saved Anna's life.

When I think about this story, I'm struck by the courage of Anna's friends. At their age, I was relatively passive. I avoided controversy at all costs. I also was self-absorbed, and probably too clueless to have realized the urgency of this situation. In short, it's a good thing Anna's fate didn't rest in the hands of someone like me, because someone like me may have taken the path of least resistance, and hoped the problem would settle itself.

But problems like Anna's rarely settle themselves. They grow and grow until someone says, "Enough." And if you think it's parents who come to the rescue first, think again. In many cases parents are the worst enablers. We're often the last to see or admit an issue, despite any evidence.

This parenting truth is something widely known in counseling circles. As I've heard one psychologist explain it, eight out of 10 times when someone brings a troubled soul to her office, it's a friend or sibling, not a parent. It's not that we don't love our children. We do. But admitting our child has a problem is painful. It calls to question our parenting skills. And unless the proof is glaring, it's easier to leave that rock unturned than to pick it up and see what lurks beneath.

So we go on denying. And getting mad at those who raise concern. And ignoring warning signs

that call us to investigate. Even good parents can be oblivious because changes in our child are gradual. What's obvious to others isn't so obvious when we live under the same roof.

In addition, parents operate under high emotions. We love our kids madly and place them on pedestals, admiring them through rose-colored lenses. In this skewed reality, our ability to stand back objectively and see our children *as they truly are* can be hindered. It can make us easier to deceive and more likely to get defensive when criticism's raised.

The truth is, our kids aren't perfect. They're bound to disappoint or surprise us somehow. But if we can acknowledge this and become a student of their lives, we may pick up on details that raise a red flag. We can address an issue before it gets out of hand, asking ourselves hard questions like:

Is my child drinking? I know she hangs with a fast crowd, but I'm afraid to speak up because I want her to be popular. Am I shirking my responsibility as a parent by staying silent?

My child's teacher said she cheated. I chewed the teacher out, but I wonder if she's right. Should I probe deeper?

I hear my son's on drugs. Could that be why he's acting weird?

I'm told my daughter is the mean girl, but she says she's being bullied. I saw a hateful text message that she sent. Is there a side of her I don't know?

None of us want to fail as parents. Of all our life goals, raising good kids tops the list. But for our children to thrive, we must get real. We must love them madly but always be aware of blinders that hinder clarity.

If love is blind, let's put on glasses. Let's apply 20/20 vision to our family even when it hurts. Let's support parents who make the hard call to seek help for their child, because there is no shame in this. I have tremendous respect for parents who take this step. And while we can't control the outcome, we can find a little peace knowing we've tried our best.

Love is bold. Love is honest. Love puts long-term well being over short-term payoffs. Let us remember these truths with everyone we care about, most of all our children.

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