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Overcoming Your Environment

If you are lucky, when you reminisce on your childhood, you get happy good feelings. There is a good chance that would mean that you had a good childhood, that your parents were probably good to you and raised you right. Unfortunately, many people around the world do not get those same feelings. Many people remember their childhood being filled with constant abuse and negligence from their parents. And this can cause people to grow up in harsh environments and go through things no one should have to go through. It is sad to say that many children grow up with bad parents, parents who do not care for their children. This places many obstacles upon the child which they are forced to either overcome or get consumed by. There are many debates over which parenting style is best, but one thing remains true. A bad parenting style can harm a child’s growth and leave damaging effects which can stick with the child of rest of their lives. Love is what a child needs to mature and reciprocate that love to others.

Being a parent is a big responsibility and if one decides to become a parent, it is their responsibility to care for that child. Yet, many do not see it the same way. As we saw in *Menace II Society*, sometimes parents are the ones that introduce their children to certain lifestyles. In Caine’s case, “instead of keeping [him] out of trouble, [his parents] turned [him] on to it” (05:42). This lifestyle was essentially gangbanging, and it is not something a child should be exposed to. In *Precious*, instead of introducing her child to bad lifestyles, Precious’ mom constantly abuses her. The one person Precious was supposed to go to for help and confide in, is the one person in her life she hates. Her mom tells her that she should have aborted her. This kind of constant abuse can be so damaging to someone at a young age and have lasting effects. This kind of abuse does not even have to come from a parent. In *Moonlight*, Chiron is bullied by his classmates. He questions Juan about being a faggot to which Juan responds, “You can be gay, but you ain’t gotta let nobody call you no faggot” (33:53). Expressing your sexuality, especially in today’s society, is a serious issue. Many people have committed suicide because of this topic. So, it is safe to say that if not handled properly, a child can be seriously traumatized and broken just because of their sexuality. Chiron was also in a similar situation that as Caine. Both had parents who were involved with drugs. Caine’s parents introduced and encouraged him to get in that life. Chiron’s mother’s addiction subconsciously implanted the drug world life in his head. And that was just in *Moonlight*. Childhood ‘trauma can come from anyone about anything.

When childhood abuse and trauma go unchecked, they can have devastating effects. Countless research proves that we are who we are because of how we are raised. It can affect our education and our personal relationships. Emily Mitchell quotes “‘They learn to speak to themselves the way they have been spoken to — perpetuating negative feelings and becoming harshly self-critical’.” When you constantly hear someone say derogatory things to you, you start to believe it, especially at such a young age. We saw this when Chiron questioned being a faggot. This negative sense of self worth can prevent someone from the best they can be. It can really hold someone back. As we saw with Precious, she was 16 years old and could not even identify her letters. The constant abuse and neglect from her mother really took a toll on her and put her at a great disadvantage. Even Chiron indirectly admits that he was affected by his trauma. He tells his old friend “You the only man that’s ever touched me” (1:44:30). Chiron struggled with accepting his sexuality in a community of people who did not really accept being gay. While being in a community that does not accept gay people can cause someone to emotionally shutdown, what affects them more is their parents. Had Chiron’s mother been supportive of him, even just a little bit, Chiron could have grown up completely different. He turned to violence to protect himself and that violence grew inside him. It made him close himself up to people and not love. It is proven that “children who experience abuse or neglect are more likely to develop antisocial traits as they grow up, which can lead to criminal behavior in adulthood” (Welfare). Not only was Chiron emotionally closed off, but he also grew into a life of crime. He became a drug dealer and inadvertently continued the cycle which caused his mom to be a drug addict and abuse and neglect Chiron. When childhood trauma takes a hold in someone’s life, it can seriously dictate how they grow up and deal with that trauma.

Childhood trauma is something that, while damaging, is also fixable. It will not be easy but with the proper help, one can overcome it. We see that in *Menace II Society*, Caine falls into the same lifestyle as his parents. Had he had a proper support system, he could have overcome this lifestyle. Even Chiron fell victim to the lifestyle that caused his family problems. In Chiron’s case, his life may have been pushed in that direction by the justice system. A system meant to rehabilitate, only enforced this lifestyle. So not only was his mother at fault, so was the justice system. A child reacted with violence after constant verbal, physical, and emotional abuse, and instead of counseling him, this child was taken to juvenile detention. Chiron admitting that no other person has touched him shows that “Children who have experienced complex trauma often have difficulty identifying, expressing, and managing emotions” (Peterson). Unfortunately, Chiron was unable to overcome his childhood and became emotionally closed off and turned to a life of a drug dealer. Precious was lucky enough to have proper support in her life. She went from being a 16-year-old with no type or reading or comprehension skills to a 7/8 grade reading level, all within a few months. Precious also had two babies to take care of which greatly motivated her. Of the movies quoted, Precious arguably went through the most abuse and trauma. This just goes to show that with the proper support system, anyone can heal. Precious was fortunate enough to have a caring social worker and teacher. With this support system, she was motivated to change her life for herself and her kids. It is important to invest in proper support systems for children affected by childhood trauma. It may be the only way they can be saved. Some of these kids are not strong enough to get themselves out of these situations. But with a little bit of help, they can get there. It is our responsibility to help those who cannot help themselves.

We must take things one step at a time. The source of the problem is the abuse and neglect children face from those meant to love and protect them. We saw in *Menace II Society*, *Precious*, and *Moonlight* how these things can severely impact a child’s growth and development leading to bad life choices, being left behind educationally, and being emotionally closed off. These are all things that no child should ever succumb to. Unfortunately, many children around the world are born with parents who are not meant to be parents. These parents do everything wrong in raising their children. They abuse and neglect their children. This kind of abuse and neglect is extremely difficult to recover from, as we see Precious was the only one able to overcome it. And even then, Precious arguably struggled more than the others. She struggled more than others could have handled had they been placed in her situation. And she still barely managed to leave her old life in the past and move forward. These movies have shown us how not to parent. They aim to teach us to love and protect our youth. They teach us that even just a little bit of love can go a long way.

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