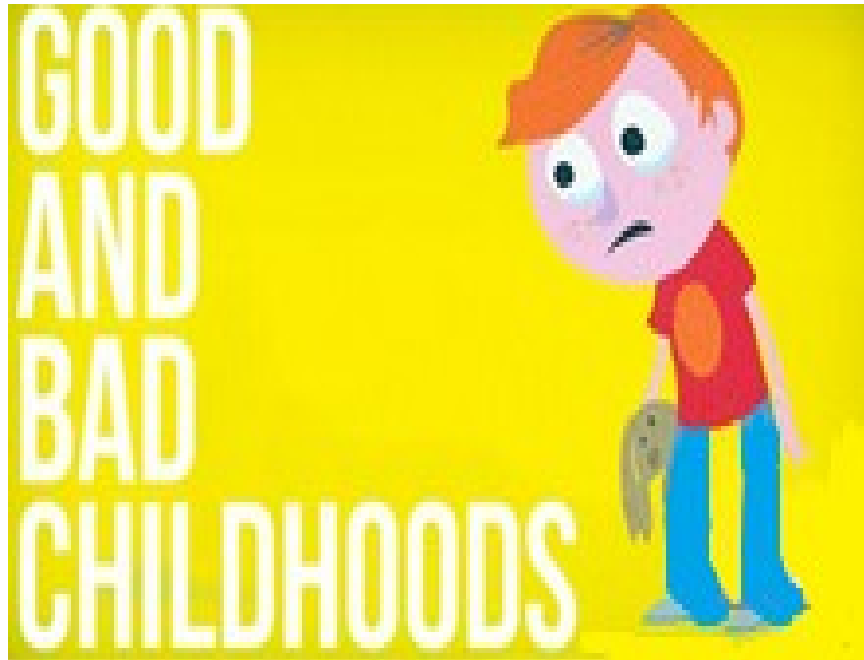


Good and Bad Childhoods



Let's imagine two kinds of childhood. The first, broadly, is the good kind. When you are upset, someone is on hand to soothe you. When you're furious, someone handles you calmly. When you need attention, someone is there for you. When you can't understand, someone explains. When you're messy someone resists shaming you. When you fail, you're not called a loser. When there's a problem, you get through it. In short, you deserve to exist. Whatever the value system of the competitive world out there inside you're of huge value, you are for as long as it takes the center of one or two kindly grown ups universe. Then broadly there's the challenging old plain bad childhood. When you cry, they call you spoiled. When you're difficult, they say it's attention seeking. When you don't succeed, they take it personally. When you're messy, they're disgusted. When you try to be strong, they're threatening. When you're weak and unimpressive, they belittle you. In short, it's a bit of a pity you're around. You don't quite deserve to exist. You're a burden and in the end really just a giant disappointment.

Good and Bad Childhoods

The first kind of childhood is just about the greatest gift anyone can receive. It's at the root of the chance to form satisfying relationships, to accept one's sexuality, to have ambition without perfectionism and to approach adversity with resilience. And likewise a bad sort of childhood is proper lasting trouble. It keeps undermining relationships, generates endless problems around sex, saps confidence, brings anxieties, self hatred and shame.

We don't yet know how completely to fix bad childhoods. They're a proper pain to have had, but here are one or two things to try very hard to keep in mind. Do everything you can to understand the craziness inside you. Be suspicious of many of your first intuitions and responses. Watch out for weird stuff you're gonna try to do to sabotage your chances of flourishing. Warn people around you in a gentle and alarming way about what you've been through. Invite them to feel sorry for you rather than just condemn you for being difficult. Try to get all the insights you can, from books, therapy and thinking. Accept that this is a legacy you're gonna be carrying around with you all your life.