

Building a Healing Home

Nathan Hough & Christy Hough

Almost two years ago a sibling group of three entered our home with broken spirits, significant developmental delays, and many intense fears. Over the next eighteen months we were challenged to create a home that would offer support and give tools to these children helping them move forward. During this process, we developed a new understanding of how our home needs to be a place of healing.

To begin the healing process, we became part student while learning all we could from our children about their lives and part detective as we uncovered the pain that was driving their behaviors. Early on, we would discipline behaviors without taking into consideration the hurt and pain our children were trying to express. Over time, we learned our children needed space to react in negative ways so they could express their pain the only way they knew how, while at the same time coming up with safety strategies and seeking to sooth the emotional pain.

After rages, many times we would play soothing music and rock our children while they resisted us by kicking and pushing us away. After the initial resistance, we found the kids would melt in and accept the comfort we were offering. Our children worked hard to create an environment that was full of chaos and destruction because this is what was comfortable. Some of these negative behaviors

included: putting feces on toothbrushes, dumping perfumes and makeup, and even spray-painting a vehicle. Once we learned to not react with intensity but seek to understand why they were so destructive, we saw a significant decrease in those negative behaviors. We started spending the majority of our time focusing on the positive things our children do to the point where our middle daughter often asks to talk about our "good stuff" from the day at supper.

Before entering our home, our son was nicknamed "terror monster" because he was very destructive. We worked to create a new

to her needs. We introduced our youngest child to a baby doll she named "Ms. Rosie." Ms. Rosie was initially hit, slapped, choked, dragged across the floor, and even thrown at people. We began asking about Ms. Rosie's well-being. Over time she began to recognize Ms. Rosie had needs that needed attending to, too. Gradually, we saw Ms. Rosie wrapped in blankets to be kept warm, offered other stuffed animals so she was not afraid or alone, and on occasion snuck into the bathtub for a good cleaning. Our middle child has developed affection for our other dog, Paddington, despite losing her

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identity focusing on his helpfulness around the house and his compassionate heart. As we began reinforcing this new identity, we began seeing less destructive behaviors. We then introduced a new family pet that became his companion and responsibility. Georgia, an Irish Setter, was adopted into our home and brought with her a sense of safety and purpose. After setting up her kennel in our son's room, we have seen his compassion continue to grow as he tends

first dog in a violent way. Over the course of time she slowly began to draw close to Paddy after initially wanting no connection. She now is connected with him and you can see compassion in the tender way in which she pets him and the kind words she speaks toward him. We have seen a significant softening in the hard exterior she feels she needs to maintain.

Another part of being a healing home is in understanding we alone cannot meet all

