



# Emotional Rescue

## How to find peace in a stressful world

Peace and harmony in a family isn't always plain-sailing, but with a bit of understanding, the love can flow, says Lesley Garner

**M**y mother taught me about love. I learned from her example: is there any other way to learn? My mother tells me how her idea of love was absorbed from her own father who, when she asked him how she could ever repay the love he had shown her, simply said, "Pass it on." And so, when it came to her own husband, her daughter, her granddaughters, she did.

Pass it on. This is the generous, love-makes-the-world-go-round attitude. It takes faith and patience, but it's one I believe in too. I don't expect my own children to tell me how wonderful I am (which is just as well). I am waiting for the day when, with luck, they will feel the same emotions, display the same tenderness and care towards their own children that I tried to show to them.

But sometimes this view of love fails. Don't feel ashamed if you are thinking, "But I can't stand my mother." Or, "But my father never showed me any love and my relations with him are really difficult." Or if you are thinking, "I know I ought to visit my parents but, frankly, we only end up arguing." Not everyone lives in a happy family. Sometimes love doesn't flow. It's blocked, and when it blocks, generations can suffer.

These blockages, often unobserved and not even conscious, can cause difficulties in family relationships to people far from the original source. If relations in your family are withholding, unloving, destructive, it may not be the immediate fault of your mother or father. The problem might lie further back in the way they were mothered or fathered. I learned this first and most vividly at a workshop on a therapeutic system called Orders Of Love or 'constellation work'.

The idea was originally developed by a German priest turned psychotherapist called Bert Hellinger who had worked in Africa and understood that the individual

is not separate, but part of a tribal or family system. Where something has gone wrong back down the line – death, disaster, trauma – the flow of love is turned off, but it might be the grandchildren, deprived of this flow, who suffer. An Orders Of Love workshop has participants acting out these family groups and coming to understand how, say, incapacitating grief on the part of a grandmother destroyed her ability to show love and led, via her unloved children, to the depression of a grandson she may never have met. The facilitator, as the family patterns become clear, can bring about a symbolic reconciliation between the surrogates in the drama and this reconciliation can heal old, hidden wounds.

A much more intense and prolonged healing of family wounds is offered by the Hoffman Process. I sometimes recommend this intensive eight-day course to readers of my *Telegraph* column, and to my surprise and delight, readers will write in, unprompted, and tell me they tried it and it changed their attitude to their family and to

themselves. This is not work you can do by yourself, by the way. It takes a multi-pronged approach of physical release, games, writing and role play to get below the surface.

The essence of both kinds of work is twofold. When I first did Orders of Love, I came away amazed at the revelation that we are not as individual as we think. We are more like cells in one body than like separate bodies. The task of growing up, of course, is to separate. But we can't separate while unfinished business and unexplored mysteries hold us back. This is where the Hoffman Process succeeds by making participants look deeply and exhaustively at their own patterns of behaviour and

those of their parents. Gradually, participants come to a deep understanding – and forgiveness – of what made their families the way they were and the impact this has had on them. And it liberates them.

The effect of both therapies is to increase understanding, not in an intellectual way but an understanding of the heart. Where families with unresolved issues rage at each other and hurl blame, or withdraw and cut themselves off, participants who have done this kind of work can understand and forgive.

"Everyone is guilty, no one is to blame," is a Hoffman mantra. We are all the way we are because of what was done to us but understanding that means, sometimes for the first time in our lives, we can see that our parents are only human too. Our new understanding frees us to love them again. So my grandfather wasn't quite right. Sometimes, when we have reached emotional maturity, it's possible to pass the love right back.

For more information on Orders Of Love workshops, go to [hellinger.co.uk](http://hellinger.co.uk). For the Hoffman Process, go to [hoffmaninstitute.co.uk](http://hoffmaninstitute.co.uk)

"Sometimes love doesn't flow. It's blocked, and when it blocks, generations can suffer"

Learn to share the love and you'll reap the rewards

