

What Does Circumcision Teach?

This is a hard question to answer, especially for fathers who were circumcised themselves. For some fathers it means having to admit that they are missing something, and this hurts. It means realizing that when they were helpless infants, something was taken from them against their will; even more painful can be the realization that their own loving parents allowed it. So, to cover this pain, some fathers insist that they are "fine," their parents were right, and continue the trauma. Perhaps a better solution would be to help a father to heal from his own suffering rather than perpetuate this practice.

Many people believe that humans, especially infants and children, are always learning; but what someone teaches and what the observer learns can be two very different things indeed. The lesson given is not nearly as important as the lesson absorbed. The reasons given for circumcising may very well have strong lessons. Here is a list of some of the common reasons; it is by no means extensive.

"Cleanliness" – Perhaps another way of saying this is "I don't think you're smart enough to keep your body clean, so I had to cut part of it off." Or, "Your body is dirty and disgusting and I cannot accept it." To think about this rationally, it does seem rather silly. There aren't any other body parts we'd amputate to avoid washing. Women have to deal with menstruation which is very messy, but they manage to do it with intact genitals. And keeping a natural penis clean is actually very simple; wash it like a finger. When the child is old enough, he will pull back the foreskin and rinse his penis in clean water while bathing or showering. It does not take inordinate amounts of extra effort on anyone's part. Keeping an open wound in the diaper clean, well, that's a different story. Changing the diapers of circumcised boys, even after the wound has healed, is still a detailed job. Feces can get stuck along the lip where the circumcision took place and require extra attention cleaning. Dirty diapers of intact boys only require cleaning under the penis, never inside the foreskin.

"Look like dad (or other person)" – In other words can't this be interpreted as, "You have to be like so-and-so to be accepted; you cannot be your own person.?" Often times, a circumcised father insists that his son look like him, yet most men cannot describe what their father's penis looks like. This seems to indicate that the "matching penis" necessity is for the father's comfort and not the child's security. If son had a different nose than father, it would be a rare family that would bring the newborn to a plastic surgeon to make infant's nose resemble the fathers – yet there are many more noses in family photos than penises. If a son asks why he looks different, most of the time he is references size and hair and no circumcision will change that. If it really is important for a father to have the same style of penis as his child, the father can actually restore what was taken. Along the same lines, brothers, cousins, and friends do not need matching genitals either. If parents did the best they could with what they had the first time around, but have since learned and grown, it is acceptable for them not to make the same mistake twice.

"The Locker room" – This can be heard as, "You have to be like everyone else to fit in" or "What you look like is of supreme importance." Our country prides itself on independence, being able to be individuals. Maybe this should start at birth. Circumcision rates are falling to a national rate of about 55%, less in some areas, more in others. Children will see both cut and intact penises in their life. If he asks, "Why do I look different?" wouldn't it be easier to reply, "Because you have everything you were born with; that other child's skin was cut.?" It is often taught or joked at, "If you friends all jumped off a cliff, would you follow?" Perhaps parents can take this concept into consideration when trying to make a decision about circumcision. We try to teach children that it doesn't matter what someone looks like, what matters is what's on the inside. This cosmetic surgery seems to imply that appearance is more important than a baby's comfort. Anyone who has seen a circumcision is aware of the baby's intense pain.

"Bible" – Many Christians feel that the Old Testament law of circumcision is still in effect today. The original practice involved only removing the foreskin that hung out over the glans so it was much less extreme than what is done today. The New Testament makes it known that Christ

fulfilled the Mosaic Law and circumcision is done away with in Him, much as animal sacrifice is no longer required. If today's practice of circumcision had anything to do with religion, then it would make sense for it to be done by religious personnel, not by a doctor in a hospital. After all, parents wouldn't take their child to their dentist's office to be baptized. Looking at the history of circumcision in the Western world, it's relatively new. It was promoted in the Lancet in 1860 to cure masturbation. Before that, it wasn't really done. If this were a religious rite, one might assume that it would have been constant through Christian history.

"It'll have to be done later"/ "Medical Reasons" – Does this not convey mistrust in the human body, "Your body is flawed and will fail eventually, so we might as well do this now."? Outside of the United States and a few other countries, circumcision for non-religious reasons is unheard of. Most of the world's men are intact and they are doing fine with it. No health organization in the entire world recommends routine infant circumcision, not one. Foreskins do not cause UTI's or cervical cancer or AIDS. Lack of education and general hygiene do. If, for some very rare reason, an intact adult needs to or chooses to be circumcised, there are some huge differences between his experience and that of a neonate. First and foremost, the adult can make the decision for himself; the baby has no say in what is being done to his body permanently. The adult will be properly numbed; the child will not have that benefit. The adult can take pain medications afterwards as needed; the infant's immature system can't tolerate that well. The adult eats at a table and eliminates in a toilet; the newborn nurses tummy-to-tummy causing pain and has to urinate and defecate on an open wound. The adult penis is full grown; the doctor has to guess what is "fore" skin and what is shaft skin for the tiny baby. The adult's foreskin can already retract; the baby's foreskin is adhered to the glans much the same way as a fingernail is glued to the bed, this adhesion has to be broken before the foreskin can be removed. The final question to ask is, if circumcision is too horrible for a full grown man to handle, how can it be ethically inflicted on a helpless, perfect newborn?

Realizing what circumcision is, a painful cosmetic penile reduction surgery, just the definition has implications. "I didn't care what pain you felt." "You were ugly and I had to have you changed before I could take you home." "I couldn't let you have something that I don't." "I didn't think that your feelings about your body were important." Perhaps these are the hardest possible lessons to swallow. For a person to come to terms with what was inflicted means fully understanding what was taken away. For some, this is too hard a task.

In all fairness to circumcised fathers, it may be that doctors didn't ask their parents before the procedure. A few decades ago, it was nearly unheard of for a common mortal to question the doings of the almighty doctor. Parents really didn't know. But you do.

Parents strive to do what's best for their child and some may think that circumcision is better in some way than leaving the baby's penis in its natural state. Please look at those reasons from the child's point of view. Try to leave out past personal pains and really use logic and love to make this decision. Please remember that if parents choose to circumcise, that decision cannot be undone. But if they decide to leave baby's body intact, then the choice remains his. Take time to ponder, pray, study, and meditate on this matter. Your child is counting on you.