



Hope for Brighter
Tomorrows

the mental health ministry of Kay Warren

When Your Child's Mental Health Is Affecting Your Marriage

By David Mandani, MATS, MSW, LCSW
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You used to be on the same team, but now it feels like you're standing on opposite sides of a problem neither of you asked for.

Some nights you're too tired to fight. Other nights, a disagreement about medication or discipline turns into a rift, and you both quietly grieve the loss of what your marriage used to be.

If your child is living with anxiety, depression, bipolar disorder, or another mental health condition, it places significant weight on your marriage. But understanding the sources of strain and how you can give yourselves grace in the midst of the struggle can make space for healing.

How the Strain Shows Up

The tension between you and your spouse tends to circle around three areas.

The first is discipline. You may disagree on how firm or flexible to be, especially when your child's behavior is hard to manage. Is this the illness talking, or does your child need a boundary right now? You and your spouse may see it differently, and that gap can widen fast.

The second is treatment. One of you may want to try an aggressive plan to diagnose and treat with talk therapy, medication, and other measures. The other may feel afraid of making the wrong call. When you can't agree on what your child needs, it's hard to feel like you're working together.

The third is boundaries. How much do you rearrange your life around your child's mental health condition? How much is too much? These are questions without clean answers, and they can put real distance between two people who love each other.

But underneath those disagreements, something deeper is usually going on. You're both exhausted. You're both scared. And instead of turning toward each other, the stress pushes you apart. You withdraw, or you snap, or you stop talking about anything that isn't the child.

What looks like conflict on the surface is often shared grief, fear, and fatigue that hasn't yet been expressed in a safe, connected way.

What If You Feel Guilty for Even Noticing?

You wouldn't be alone if you've caught yourself thinking, *"How can I worry about my struggling marriage when my child is the one who's suffering?"* That guilt makes sense. But it doesn't mean you're doing something wrong.

You are likely functioning far beyond what you were designed to carry. In many ways, you're operating like a small treatment team for your child, but without the training, the backup, or the shift changes that mental health professionals have. With limited emotional, physical, and financial resources, the level of care your child needs will naturally create strain on your marriage.

That strain is not a sign of failure. It's a reflection of how much you're carrying.

You and your spouse are doing the best you can with what you have, and that's a great place to start.

Small Steps That Can Help

Before conflict even starts, it helps to name what's actually adding to the pressure. Is it financial strain from treatment? Work stress? Lack of sleep? The constant physical and mental demands of caring for your child? Once you can see the weight more clearly, you can start to set it down in small ways.

Ask yourself: *What fills my gas tank?* For some, that's rest. For others, it's setting a limit, taking a walk, or spending time in Scripture. When you take care of yourself, you increase your capacity to show up for your spouse with patience and presence.

Even setting aside time each day to connect as a couple, not as co-caregivers, can make a real difference. Fifteen or twenty minutes where you're not talking about appointments, medications, or what happened at school. Just two people reminding each other: *We're still here. We're still us.*

When the Inner Critic Gets Loud

Stress has a way of turning up the volume on the voice inside your head that says you're not doing enough. The one that tells you your spouse isn't either.

Many of us grew up around critical voices. Over time, those voices became our own. And under the pressure of caring for a child with a mental health condition, that inner critic can become relentless. It leads couples to beat themselves up or turn on each other at the moment they most need compassion.

One way to quiet that voice is to ask a different question: *"How would Jesus speak to us right now?"*

Because Jesus doesn't stand over exhausted parents demanding an explanation. He sits with them. He is truthful, but he is also deeply compassionate. He meets you in the pain.

This shift allows couples to shift their internal message from guilt to truth. Instead of "We failed," you can say, "We haven't done everything perfectly, but perfection was never the requirement for love."

Instead of turning on each other, you can move toward each other by saying: "Together, we bring our child to Christ, not accusations against one another."

There Are People Who Understand

If your child's mental health is affecting your marriage, you and your spouse should know that what you're feeling is real. It's common, and it doesn't have to be the end of the story. Reaching out to a counselor or mental health professional who understands both family members and faith can be a meaningful next step.

And if you're looking for a community that understands the struggles of parenting in the midst of mental health conditions in children, Hope for Brighter Tomorrows was built by a mother who knows this pain firsthand. After losing her son Matthew to suicide in 2013, Kay Warren created a space for parents who needed a safe place to be honest, to grieve, and to find people who understand.

Whether you need help figuring out what's next or simply a place to be honest about what you're going through, we are here for you.

If your loved one is in immediate danger or you're concerned about their safety, contact the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline by calling or texting 988. If there is an emergency, call 911 and let the operator know your loved one is experiencing a mental health crisis.

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