

## CHILDREN OF CELEBRITIES LIKE TED KOPPEL HAVE UNIQUE NEEDS

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When I read recently of the death of the son of my former ABC News colleague Ted Koppel, I felt an all-too-familiar knot in my gut. Many of us who have often been in front of the camera – in TV news or Hollywood – and who have children recognize the feeling.

Yet we rarely speak of the terrible burden our children often carry because they have highly visible, sometimes celebrity parents.

How does a university freshman, trying to find his way in the world, respond when classmates say, “Hey, I saw your dad on the Pete Jennings show from Moscow last night,” often week after week? There is no built-in reality check that reminds our children it took us 25 years to become an ABC News Moscow bureau chief or an evening news anchor.

All that most of our children see is the affluence that comes with the job. Too often the parent’s visibility distorts a young person’s fragile sense of what is possible for them.

Children of famed parents can come to believe that the bar for them is impossibly high and assume they will never be able to accomplish on their own what their superstar parents achieved. Worse, a parent’s visibility can threaten to extinguish a child’s own dreams.

Too often, children of celebrities come to believe that the rules the rest of us have to obey do not apply to them. But their lives can be much harder, and they need to be taught as much.

Rarely is the celebrity’s troubled kid considered until after the fact.

Marie Osmond’s adopted son Michael Bryan thrice attempted suicide and sadly succeeded on the fourth try. That the newspaper photograph of a teary Ms. Osmond was splashed across the front page of the tabloids is a biting commentary on our obsession with celebrities and our failure to recognize how distorting and sometimes fatal this becomes for their children.

Rarely do children understand that what they see on the screen is all done with smoke and mirrors and Teleprompters – and is often devoid of reality.

Children of celebrities should be taught early that the fact that their parents are famous ultimately makes their lives more complicated, not easier. And regardless of whether that parent is on the evening news or in movies, it’s still only a job.

Obviously there are celebrity parents whose children never make it in the news and the parents are clearly doing a good job raising them. But there are enough incidents in the press to suggest many haven’t recognized their children’s unique needs.

Finally, celebrities might try reading the Icarus fable to their children at bedtime: It has a modern moral. When famous parents or their offspring fly too close to the bright lights and heat of celebritydom, they can find themselves tumbling helplessly and, sometimes fatally, back to earth.

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