



mindset

BY KAREN STEWART, MA

enlightened self-interest

It feels like our country is in the midst of a really bad divorce. Attacks, anger, and accusations fly, and rational discourse goes out the window. Everyone suffers and feels stuck. I know that the best way through an angry divorce is to focus on what is best for the children. If both parents put the children's needs first, chances are that they will be able to find their way to a settlement that will reflect their shared values and be good for everyone. I think the same path would work for our nation. If we could work together for what is best for our children, we could emerge with policies that will be good for all of us. I am thinking of a "culture of care." If we think of what we want for our own children, and ourselves, we will make decisions that will serve us well now and in the future.

The good news is that this is "enlightened self-interest." Enlightened self-interest is an ethical philosophy that states that "persons who act to further the interests of others (or the interests of the group or groups to which they belong), ultimately serve their own self-interest. Simply stated: an individual, group or even a commercial entity will do well by doing good." In contrast "...when most or all persons act according to their own myopic selfishness the group suffers loss as a result of conflict, decreased efficiency and productivity because of lack of cooperation and the increased expense each individual pays for the protection of their own interests." (*New Oxford American Dictionary*).

Acting out of care for future generations will be good for all of us.

We know from neuroscience, behavioral science, sociology, and medicine what is needed to help parents raise healthy children. While it certainly won't be easy to make life better for all of our children, all we need is the will to work together to find a way. Other countries far surpass us in regard to taking care of families. Canada gives new mothers a year of paid maternity leave, and most European countries give six months. In-home support to new mothers would provide needed encouragement and assistance to ease the transition during a very stressful time. Ensuring good nutrition and prenatal care is essential. We are one of the very few western nations that do not have universal health care coverage. In a culture of care, it would be impossible for our government to be considering health care plans that do not provide affordable health care coverage for everyone. Health care, nutrition, and safe housing are foundational for our families to be mentally and emotionally healthy.

We need a living minimum wage. No one should work full-time and live below the poverty line. The stress of poverty takes a heavy toll on families. All employees need to have paid time off for illness and vacation. Affordable good daycare, good schools, safe playgrounds, extra-curricular activities, and access to higher education should all be part of all children's lives.

Finally, we need a planet that will continue to support life as we know it. This is a critical time; if actions are not taken it may be too late to correct the harm we have done to the environment.

The mental and emotional health of our children and families should be our most important concern and working together to solve problems can bring us together as a nation. 🙏

Karen Stewart, MA, and David Stewart, PhD, are psychologists who work with individuals, couples, groups, and organizations in their Durham practice at 811 Ninth Street, Suite 220, in Durham. Reach them at (919) 286-5051. www.stewartpsychologists.com