

The Awakened Family: How to Raise Empowered, Resilient, and Conscious Children

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The Mandate of the Awakened Family

We awaken when we become aware of who we *truly* are.

Parents view their children as mirrors through which they are able to see how they themselves need to mature and develop. Instead of fixing what they see as faults in their children, these parents seek to work on themselves, raising their own levels of maturity and presence. The focus is always on the parent's awareness rather than the child's behavior. This is the core insight of the book.

Part One: A New Awakening

Chapter 1: Learning a New Way

It wasn't the first verbal scuffle my daughter and I had gotten into lately. When she turned twelve, she found herself experiencing a maelstrom of emotions that were difficult for her to understand. Like most mothers of girls this age, I frequently forgot to relate to her in a calm and caring manner, which is what preteens need, and became caught up in a tidal wave of emotion myself.

Over the years, I have come to understand that my ego, which often takes the form of a controlling, demanding, angry voice in my head, isn't who I really am. It isn't who any of us actually is. Rather, it's just a habit of reacting that leaps to life when triggered - an emotionally charged aspect of us that we can tame once we become aware of it.

The Roar of the Ego

This is so important to understand. When children aren't given the space to assert their authentic voice, but are drowned out by their roar of our parental agendas, they grow up anxious and depressed. Many of our young people are so deprived of our acceptance - of simply being *seen for who they are* - that they self-harm in a variety of ways. Getting drunk, taking drugs, engaging in inappropriate sexual relations, even cutting themselves - all of these are cries for our acceptance. They are manifestations of a deep yearning to be seen, validated, and known.

The Part Played by Your Past

Perhaps more than anything, becoming a parent offers us the opportunity to become aware of patterns established in childhood. Because of our children's closeness to us, they offer us a mirror of ourselves. Through them, we are brought face-to-face with what it must have felt like for us to be a child. This can be painful. What are we to do with this pain?

How Our Children Are Our Awakeners

Our children may be small and powerless in terms of living independent lives, but they are mighty in their potential to be our awakeners.

I like the term "awakeners." It transcends the usual cliches we use to reference our children - terms such as "friend," "ally," "partner," "muse." It speaks directly to our children's potential to enlighten us and raise our consciousness to new heights. When I began to notice how my daughter accomplished this, I was in awe.

A Shift of Focus

The conscious parenting approach is a true game changer. By shifting the focus away from the child and onto the parent's inner transformation, it holds the potential to awaken families in deep and fundamental ways. Integrating this shift of focus in our daily lives is far from easy for us as parents. As it turns the mirror on all the ways our reactions to our children are unhealthy, it challenges us to explore our unconscious inner workings and confront aspects of ourselves that lurk in the shadows. By not allowing us to rest on "how things were done in my childhood," we are forced to discover new ways to relate to our children, moment after moment, handcrafting our responses to match the child before us. This forces us to ask ourselves, "How can I use this moment with my child to learn more about myself?"

Jenna's response is typical of many parents. Focused on their children's acting out, they blindly react in the moment, with little thought to the driving force behind their reaction. Quite naturally, they often react

unconsciously, compounding the issue. Only when Jenna began to turn her attention to herself, focusing on her own internal landscape, did she realize how much she contributed to the chaos her child was experiencing. More important, she was empowered to create avenues for change.

Because conscious parenting is concerned with the actual roots of our acting out - and I do mean *our* acting out *as parents*, not so much our children's acting out - it avoids quick fixes and Band-Aids. Instead, we undergo transformation *as moms and dads*. Through the repeated act of self-confrontation, as our children reflect back to us all the ways in which we have yet to grow up, we develop into the truly amazing parents we have the ability to be - the kind of parents every child born into the world deserves.

Chapter 2: How the Culture Sets Up Parents to Fail

The Clash of Time Zones

Obsessed as we are with reaching goals and their golden promise of a "happy" future for our children, we constantly micromanage our youngsters' lives. As if the pressure to perform academically weren't enough, we press them to become involved in sports, social activities, dance, singing, or playing a musical instrument, among other endeavors such as hobbies and clubs, while at the same time the media and the Internet all demand their attention. Surrounded by activities, they grow up in a world focused on *doing*.

Why do we put so much stock in involving our children in all this busyness? Simply because we are afraid that they may somehow "miss out" and therefore not become what we hope for them to become - a success in the world as defined by society's standards. Or because we wish we had these opportunities as a child and want to make sure we give our children everything that we did not have.

When people are as busy chasing from one activity to another as so many of us are with our kids, what's happening in *this* moment begins to feel somehow inadequate, even undesirable or unacceptable - and therefore invalid. We become programmed to think that it's the *next* thing that counts, not what we're presently engaged in. Then we wonder why our children have such a hard time concentrating or practicing something for long.

In fact, were you to ask me what I believe to be the root of conflict between parents and children, I would tell you that it's a clash of time zones. Parents are oriented to the future, to getting to wherever they imagine themselves to be going. Children, on the other hand, when left to themselves inhabit the present. Most of the disconnection between parent and child comes down to this rupture between a life enjoyed moment by moment and a life that's focused on moving ahead.

What Children Really Need

"Do you see me?" This is the big question your child is asking every day. "Can you recognize me for who I am, different from your dreams and expectations for me, separate from your agenda for me?"

Chapter 3: The Invisible Triggers of Our Reactivity

The reality is that as long as we focus on changing our children - or anyone other than ourselves - we'll discover that it's akin to trying to empty the ocean with a teaspoon. Because this is how we believe parenting works, we mindlessly repeat the same actions over and over. But just as the waves of the ocean keep rolling in, so too our children's behavior continues to set us off again and again. The problem isn't the child's behavior, but why it sets us off. Unless we can examine why the behavior causes us to react negatively, we will never change the patterns of interaction between our children and us - and this is true of any close relationship.

Part Two: Our Parenting Myths

Chapter 4: Myth #1: *Parenting Is About the Child*

The Problem with Child-Centric Parenting

But what could be so bad about wanting to raise a child to excel?

Have you noticed how many of our children grow up feeling anxious these days? Modern kids are so anxiety-ridden that diagnosing and medicating even very young children has become normal.

In addition to anxiety, depression is rife among children today - not only among teens but even among children in elementary school. When our young people carry the burden of having to be a certain way in order to please their parents, they can't help but feel a high level of anxiety. Instead of being free to develop naturally and spontaneously in alignment with their authentic being, they invest their efforts in a struggle to win their parents' approval and thereby earn their love.

The Tyranny of "Too"

Listening to the radio one day, I heard about a parents who called the dean of admissions at a prestigious

university for advice on applying to the institution for their nine-year-old. Can you imagine the pressure this child must be feeling? Especially if the child later can't meet the parents' expectations. This may seem like an extreme case, but it's a window into the phenomenon of child-centric parenting that's currently wreaking havoc on the lives of many of our youngsters.

Many of the expectations we have of our children are unspoken. Despite what we don't put into words, children intuitively sense when we wish them to be other than they are - sense that we want them to fulfill *our* fantasies of who they will grow up to be and what they will accomplish. Yes, some children rise to this challenge and are successful. But for every child who does, there are a host of others who buckle under the pressure.

Dare to Raise Yourself First

Rather than turning our focus inward, we can't seem to help seeing our children as a project to fix and manage. They enter the room and we immediately judge their hair, their cleanliness, their shoes, or some other thing. They can be sitting quietly, busy with their work, and we barge into their space and begin micromanaging them and directing them. In our eyes we are being caring, whereas our children feel imposed on and intruded on.

How many times have you bombarded your child with questions as soon as they get in your car or come through the door after a long day of school? When they give you a monosyllabic response, you take it personally and feel rejected by them.

Chapter 5: Myth #2: *A Successful Child Is Ahead of the Curve*

How did fun and hobbies, which are so essential for the early developmental years, get turned into the pursuit of a profession? Why has childhood been reduced to a mad race to the front of the curve?

The Curve Shows Up Everywhere

Many parents are seduced by the notion that a child's worth is measured by their performance.

The Double-Edged Sword of "Reaching for One's Potential"

Each of us longs not only to be validated but also to be honored for who we are at this moment right now. When who we actually are feels unseen and unheard because we are constantly being compared with some external standard, such as someone else's notion of our potential, we feel frustrated and, if it continues, resentful. Our children especially feel hurt and diminished when we fail to see them for who they are. For this reason it's important for us to examine whether we impose our expectations on our children and, by doing so, take them out of the present moment and into a disconnected state of wanting to be someone other than who they are.

The "Unpotentialized" Child

Many parents are indignant when their child doesn't receive the red carpet treatment, but I always say, "Your child is fine being ordinary. It's your own sense of lack that needs them to be labeled extraordinary. They don't have this need - your ego does."

Chapter 6: Myth #3: *There Are Good Children and Bad Children*

Double Standards

When we focus on children's behavior as a measure of goodness or badness, we do them a huge disservice. Imagine a friend telling you that you forgot their birthday because you are thoughtless or were being mean to them. Or picture your spouse calling you "bad" and a "mess" because you were tired and took a nap before doing the dishes.

The fact is, we expect more of our children in terms of their behavior than we ever demand of ourselves, our spouse, or our friends.

Chapter 9: Myth #6: *Parenting Is About Raising a Happy Child*

What if dancing the waves of life, riding its ebb and flow, is the actual point of life, as opposed to the avoidance of these things? What if the art of living meaningfully lies in embracing both the peaks and the troughs? How different might your children's lives be if they learned from you how to immerse themselves in each experience that comes their way, so that they actually welcome the twists and turns, the times we feel hurt and the times we enjoy glory?

Part 3: Understanding Our Reactivity

Chapter 12: What's *Really* Behind Our Reactions

The Core of Our Fear

Fear of Conflict

Our children always manifest behaviours designed to wake us up.

Fear of Scarcity

When children are young, they are completely unaware of the concept of scarcity. They see abundance everywhere, so that the world is their playground. They love to explore their many interests, strengths, and talents. Because of this, they are accepting of their limitations. They realize that if they aren't good at one thing, there's plenty more they can enjoy. In fact, they experience no shame in admitting they aren't good at something until they learn this from us.

Part 4: Transformative Parenting Skills

Chapter 14: From Expectations to Engagement

It was evident that Emily associated having a good time with doing things for her children, equating "more" and "fancier" with happiness. So enmeshed was she in her idea of how a vacation should be that she didn't even stop to ask what her children wanted. Then, when they resisted her, she lashed out. Yet she had set herself up for their rebellion. The lesson is that at the root of every situation in which we are triggered lies an expectation that's entirely ours to own and not our children's to bear.

To have expectations of life, let alone other people such as our children, is to set ourselves up for failure and resentment. The nature of life is that it doesn't bring us what we expect a lot of the time, and people - with all of their whimsy, fickleness, and confusion - certainly don't. Yet unless we become solidly grounded in our own center, we will continue to expect things of people and be disappointed.

What's the Unmet Expectation?

Sara, a devoted mother to her two children, Max and Angelique, ages seven and nine, built a wonderful playroom for them. She loaded it with a zillion toys, myriad art supplies, and innumerable mind-stimulating activities. Despite the huge number of items she had purchased, to her credit every single one of them had its specific place on the wall-to-wall shelves she had installed all around the playroom.

Now, how do you suppose the room looked after a day's play? Well, of course, it was a disaster. With so many toys and games to choose from, the children jumped from one to another until the entire contents of the playroom lay in a huge pile on the floor. Since she is a highly organized person by nature, this drove Sara bananas, resulting in war over the playroom every single day. Same trigger each day, same reaction from Sara.

The Dance of Nonduality

Take an occasion when teens forget their homework folder and we decided this is "bad" behavior deserving some kind of punishment. When we admonish them and administer the punishment, do our children feel understood? Do they experience our interaction as constructive or affirming? Are they inspired, enthusiastic, and excited to have an opportunity to bring their folders on the next day?

When we don't look at situations in a polarized manner but instead take time to see the broader picture and put things in perspective, the way we address a child shifts dramatically. The focus is no longer on the child's Behavior as bad, but on understanding how a situation came about and finding helpful ways to avoid a repeat. Perhaps the child was talking to friends - which is a good thing because we want our children to enjoy friendships - and consequently forgot the folder. Do we focus only on the Forgotten folder, or can we celebrate the child's ability to socialize? Or perhaps the child was helping someone and ended up rushing out the door, only then remembering - too late - that they had forgotten their folder.

Why does this method of parenting make a huge difference to our children? Since it relieves them of living with a fear of failure, they feel secure, knowing their parents will see the many sides of every situation. Consequently they aren't afraid to take risks. They understand that their actions will be viewed as courageous, no matter what the outcome. Children Thrive when they are accepted and encouraged, whereas criticism and Punishment cause them to wilt inwardly and ultimately make even more mistakes instead of developing good self-management skills.

Chapter 15: From Mindless Reaction to Mindful Presence

The Abundance of the "As-Is"

The way to do this is to notice when your child *isn't* being disrespectful or defiant. Then you amplify this desirable behavior. For instance, when my daughter is calmly eating lunch, I seize the opportunity and say something like, "I love how peaceful you are right now. I feel so connected to you when we simply enjoy each

other's company like this." What we mustn't do at such a moment is compare the child's peacefulness with when they are arguing and being difficult - a trap parents easily fall into. Then the compliment turns into a backhanded sermon.

Over time, the more we highlight our children's respect and kindness, the more they will grow to be respectful and kind. By veering away from a focus on their negative behavior, which inevitably increases our own negativity, we simultaneously intensify the respect and kindness we show to our children.

Your Reaction Is Your Child's Trigger

Chapter 17: From Role to No-Role

To fulfill the role of a spiritual mentor requires detaching from the parenting Kool-Aid we have been ingesting. Instead of focusing on whether a child got all the problems correct on a test, we focus on how they feel about themselves when they don't. Instead of focusing on whether a child fits into a particular social clique, we focus on how they feel about themselves when they are alone. The spotlight shifts from the traditional markers of success to those that are ordinarily ignored by mainstream society. Our interest is in how loud they laugh, how deeply they feel, how fearlessly they love, and how unabashedly they weep.

Tapping Into the Guidance of the Universe

We would finally realize that heaven does indeed exist here on earth, and it's only our own unconsciousness that keeps us from enjoying its blissful reality.

Entering the No-Role Zone: Insights from Nature

Earth

Helping them become free of rigidity is fundamentally different from forcing them to behave a certain way.

The Power of the Antidote

Let's take the example of a child who doesn't want to have a shower and begins to scream at the very suggestion. It's quite probable that the parent as such a child raises their voice in an effort to reason with a child, then scolds when reasoning fails. The child hears the parent's anger, feels nervous, and starts to kick and scream even more. The parent becomes impatient and now yells full throttle. Throwing themselves on the floor, the child begins to hit the parent, who sees red and slaps the child's face.

What we are witnessing is a domino effect, apparently begun by the child's refusal to shower. But it isn't the child who topples the first domino - it's the parent's reaction. This is why children, especially the younger ones, can't affect a change in this situation. It's the parents who must do so. You see, the parent matched the child's energy throughout the encounter. The child raised their voice, and the parents followed suit. The child pitched a fit, and so did the parent, becoming almost hysterical. Instead of bringing calmness to the situation, the parent kept upping the ante, increasing the tension.

This is where we can learn from nature, occupying the energy of the opposite pole instead of feeding the reactivity of the child, decibel for decibel. In the case of the child who resists their shower out of anxiety, our approach should be to create the antidotal energy of playfulness and calm. For instance, one might either playfully transform their scream into a song and lead them into a game of bubbles in the water, or one might gently enter the water with them and soothe them with the soap and bubbles. If the child senses the slightest degree of anxiety within the parent, this will only serve to amplify their own. Instead, the child needs to sense the opposite pole - calm energy - within the parent in order to shift gears.

The Power of the Container

To be a container for our children's emotions is fundamentally different from overruling them from a position of power, resorting to a role by saying something like, "I'm your father. You will respect me!" Far from becoming domineering, we need to remain a peripheral observer of their emotional reactivity and not get sucked in. To this intent, when my daughter has big emotions, I remind myself she's simply overwhelmed with feeling right now. The still space at her center has become obscured by emotions that are manifestations of her core fear.

Creating Rooms of Light

Room for Curiosity

“You sound like you are really experiencing strong feelings. Would you share them with me?”

To force a child to see things our way if they aren't ready to do so is pointless.

Room for Creative Practice

- **Role Reversal**, in which the child acts as if they were us, and we act as if we were them. This allows a child to see things from our point of view. Just as important, we gain insight into where the child is coming from. This exercise promotes mutual understanding.

We tend to be so caught up in meting out punishments and threats that it doesn't occur to us that there may be an entirely different way to handle a situation - an approach that doesn't diminish the child's sense of self but emboldens it.

Chapter 18: From Emotions to Feelings

People often confuse emotions with feelings, as if the two were the same. I look at them as vastly different. Simply put, we react with an emotion when we are unable to handle our feelings. When we feel uncomfortable, we create a smokescreen of reactivity. For instance, we eat, drink, smoke, blame, guilt, have tantrums, and so on. These feel like feelings but are actually the avoidance of true feeling.

The truth is that feelings can be experienced only from a deep and silent place within us. They need to be cried about, walked with, touched, and even experienced as quivering and shaking. Feelings can be acknowledged only on a visceral, highly personal level. It's because most of us aren't trained to feel our feelings, really feel them, that we dump them onto our loved ones in the form of emotional reactions.

When we feel our feelings, we don't have time to engage and reactive emotions. We tuned in and allow the feelings to speak to us, wash over us, and transform us. Aware that we are under waves of feeling, we do the opposite of emoting. We hush up, become still, and allow the significance of the feelings to grow us.

If we are yelling at our kids to get in bed, we might ask ourselves, “What's my yelling about?” On the surface it may seem that the yelling is originating from fear that they won't get enough sleep, or that they are disobeying us. If we look deeper we may see that the reality is that we are tired and need some alone time in which to recuperate from a long day. In other words, the emotion is directed toward the child, whereas the feeling is that we need time for self-care. In this case, we might say in a calm voice, “I have had a long day and I'm tired. I have no energy left and need to rest. This is why I am beginning to sound impatient and can barely hold it together. Can you please help me out here? You need rest too.”

As our emotions less and less swallow us up, we discover that we are exponentially more than what our ego has imagined us to be. There are power and resources within nice beyond anything we have so far known.

Chapter 19: From Enmeshment to Autonomy

Developing Emotional Autonomy

In the smallest of ways, we communicate to our loved ones that we don't believe in them or don't trust them to be strong enough to figure things out for themselves. Even today, I have to constantly fight my instincts checking on my daughter with texts that say, “How are you?” or “How are you feeling?” I have to have faith in the closeness of our connection, knowing that if she has something to share, she will. I remind parents that when their child locks themselves in their room, they shouldn't barge in. The child is saying, “I need to be alone right now.” Parental respect for their autonomy demonstrates that we feel secure in our connection. Of course, if they need to begin homework or eat a meal, we can certainly enter their space, just not to connect out of our need.

Clients frequently say something like, “I'm so stupid, I can't believe I did that.” In response, I don't rush into change their thinking or push them to tell themselves they're smart and not to worry. Instead, I align with their perception of the situation, saying something like, “I know you feel stupid. This is a valid feeling because it says you want to do better. But remember that your feelings are just a state of mind and nothing to be scared of.” We then explore the feeling instead of being hijacked by fear of it.

With our children, the traditional approach is to contradict their negative talk by saying, “No you're not stupid. You're smart.” Does this type of response allay our children's worries and sense of inadequacy? On the contrary, it imposes our thoughts on them. What our children need most at such a moment isn't too suddenly feel smart, but to learn to process the feeling that they are “stupid.”

Chapter 20: From Judgment to Empathy

I explained to the children, “It's easy for us to judge Savannah's parents, and you're right that they shouldn't

have reacted so fiercely. But you have to understand that they were feeling helpless and didn't have a clue what to do. They weren't purposely being mean but were just caught in what seemed to them to be an impossible situation. When you become parents, you'll understand how they felt."

What Empathy Really Means

A mother tells me she empathizes with her daughter. "I understand what my child is going through," she insists. "I realize she's anxious, and I am trying to help her stop feeling so nervous." Is this really empathy? On the one hand, the mother proclaims that she understands what her daughter is experiencing, so it sounds like empathy. But then she turns around and declares, in effect, "I don't like what you are feeling. I want these feelings to disappear." No, this isn't empathy at all.

Our children pick up on this doublespeak and become confused about how they are supposed to feel. Most of us have made this mistake of thinking we are being empathetic when we really aren't. We think we understand when in fact we don't. This is why many kids yell at their parents, "You just don't understand me!" They are absolutely right. We don't get them.

Empathy is the ability to connect with what the other is feeling. This requires us to accept that it's okay for our child, partner, or friend to feel a certain way. Of course they do, since we are two distinct beings.

Acceptance has to be *real* acceptance. We detach from trying to get a child to do what we had hoped they would do. Riding the horse is no longer on our radar. The only thing that matters is that we are present with our child, alongside them, calm and accepting. We abandon our agenda entirely.

The approach I'm suggesting runs counter to the common approach of telling a child in a situation like this, "Don't be afraid." Instead of urging them to face their anxiety and conquer it, what I'm proposing assures the child, "Anxiety is normal, so don't worry about the fact that you are anxious. Treat it just like you do excitement or happiness. Just allow it to be, neither denying it nor resisting it." When we deny or resist it, anxiety turns rogue. Better to face it in its raw and natural state. Then, in its own time and way, it will diminish. Not because we have driven it away by force, but because we have grown out of it with grace.

Someone may reason, "This approach could be taken to mean it's okay for our children to quit." My response to this is that even more than a love of riding, it's Savannah's desire to explore her interests that's central, which holds true even if she decided to give up riding.

We claim that we want our children to be fearless so that they will participate fully in life. However, our obsession with the end result encourages fear in our children, handicapping them with anxiety that prevents them from trying their best. Our children sense when we don't care about their efforts, only their successes. This is why they disengage. Not because they are lazy, but because they are anxious about failing. Savannah wasn't being "difficult" when she wanted only Rosie. She was terrified that she would fail on another horse.

How to Empathically Address the Realities of Life

Once a child is able to accept their fear, there's a sense in which they make friends with it, which has a soothing effect. This is how we show empathy - not by feeling sorry for the child or trying to rescue them, but by helping them face their fear in a safe setting.

Chapter 21: From Discipline to Enlightened Boundaries

This is the most important lesson in this chapter: *All disciplinary issues with children occur because of a lack of discipline within the parent.* It's really the indiscipline of parents that we need to create interventions for, not the child!

Children need structure and predictability in their lives. The basic structure of a day needs to be set by the parent, and it should be tailored both to the particular needs of the child and to what serves the family as a whole. Within this framework, however, there must be a tremendous amount of room for spontaneity, unstructured play, and fun.

You Cannot Set A Boundary You Don't Have

My client Patricia, a mother of two aged five and seven, was having a hard time getting her children to sleep at night, often spending a few hours in their bedroom trying to coax them into slumber. Nighttime had turned nightmarish for the entire family. When I asked her to describe the routine to me, she said, "When I put Julie and Steven to bed, I promise to read them two stories and sing two songs from *The Wizard of Oz* because this is their favorite movie. No sooner do I do this than they are pushing the boundary and asking me to sing another song.

Then three songs become four, and before you know it I'm screaming at them, they are crying, and the whole experience turns into a nightmare."

I asked, "When you agreed to two stories and two songs, were you making this deal with a clear boundary in mind?"

"Absolutely!" she retorted. "But when they plead with me, I think to myself, 'Why don't I just give in?' They are so adorable, maybe I can do one more. Then I just can't say no to them without them freaking out."

It was clear that Patricia was unclear about the limits of her boundary. As with many parents, her boundary wasn't really a boundary at all. It was entirely fluid, but we need to accept that we cannot then turn the switch of fluidity off at any time we like, because naturally our children will react to this sudden turn of events.

"Your kids are doing exactly what they should do," I clarified. "They are enjoying themselves and asking for more enjoyment. They are right on track. They aren't being 'bad' by not stopping their enjoyment. It's you who are being ineffective because you aren't abiding by your own boundaries."

If our children could articulate their thoughts, they would say something like:

Hey, parent, can you get your act together and tell me what the deal is? One day it's yes, the next day it's no. What's the real limit here? Don't be swayed by my moods and tantrums. I'm only testing you to see if you know what you're talking about. Once I see that you know, I'll probably back down - though I may not do it without a fight, since I'm really trying to discover my limits. I actually hate fighting, so the clearer you are, the less I'll fight, I promise. Just don't be a dictator about it. Be kind and loving when setting a limit. Be patient with me as I learn it. Most of all, forgive me when I cross it.

What's the Higher Purpose of Your Boundary?

Notice that I didn't put hobbies and extracurricular achievements on the list. While these can certainly be life-enhancing, they aren't mandatory and therefore should be subject to the interest of the child more than to the whims of the parent. Use discretion concerning the lengths you are willing to go in order to institute boundaries of this kind.

Where Do Consequences and Punishment Fit In?

I challenged, "Is the use of force the right way or just the lazy way?"

The Power of Clear Limits and Boundaries

____ Before we delve into natural or logical consequences, it's important to focus on the antecedents of our children's behavior. The antecedents involve us and only us. They are directly linked to our ability to create coherent boundaries and maintain clear limits. Once we have decided to create a boundary and commit to it because we have deemed it to be in the best interest of the child, we need to go about setting the limit for this boundary in a compassionate manner that stays firmly rooted in the present reality. If we establish a boundary that allows for no more than 30 minutes of screen time before it's time to do homework, and our child violates this, it's important to hold the limit consistently, while at the same time showing empathy.

The Mechanics of Holding a Limit

I explained that pushback from our children is natural. Our tendency is to believe that our children shouldn't push back against our wishes. But for them to be discouraged from doing so could cause them to become compliant and docile. I often ask parents, "Why shouldn't your child push back? Isn't this a sign of a healthy psyche, intelligence, and courage? Why do you want your child to blindly follow your way? Shouldn't you try to give them reasons so they buy into what you expect of them? We don't want to raise children who don't think for themselves."

How we respond to pushback is the real issue. "Now comes the even harder part, the long-term commitment," I told Noah. "This is where you are tested to see how far you are willing to go to inculcate this behavior in your family, using the most conscious and loving manner possible. It's a matter of mastering the art of holding to your word. It's no easy thing to do because it means nothing else happens until the required action has been completed. When our children see there's absolutely no wiggle room, they fall in line. This is why they are more able to follow the rules at school than at home, since the conditions are firmly set in place and are applied

across the board, with no exceptions. This is how serious you are going to need to be in order for Joshua to pay attention. The older our kids get, the less seriously they take us because they've seen us sidelining our commitment for so long. So yes, you may need to sacrifice him doing well on a test or going to a baseball practice until he realizes you absolutely mean business."

What's Your Embodiment Quotient?

When children don't conform, we expect to be able to teach them life principles through verbal instructions and reprimands. This is no way to teach, because it violates how we optimally incorporate new Behavior. We learn best through absorption, which is a process of osmosis. In order for our children to absorb our ways, we need to embody our values and our own life in such a manner that our purpose spills from us with a Radiance that's hard to miss.

Some of us take the model citizen approach trying hard to say and do all the right things in front of our children. We soon find this difficult, if not impossible, to maintain over time. Since we aren't fully committed to our "good behavior," we tire of it. For example, we may talk about loving life, whereas our actual mode of living sends a different message. Instead of our children seeing us enjoying our days, including relishing our work as an enriching experience, what they see is how we complain about our job, procrastinate with our chores, and resent our commitments. It isn't what we say that registers with them. Instead, they notice our slouching shoulders, the Grimace lines around our face, and the stress in our voice. In other words, our non-verbal signals as a result of our own experience of Life are what they pick up on, and these tell whether life is something they should enjoy or resist.

Like many parents, Scott needed to understand that whatever we radiate our child will absorb. In this case, by radiating anxiety and anger, he was riling up the child instead of calming him down. Consequently Jeremy picked up the idea that bath time is stressful. This was what lay behind his reticence to take a bath.

Entering the Zone of Zero Hypocrisy

I sent that most children quit playing an instrument or engaging in a hobby not because they don't like it anymore but because an adult entered the equation and messed things up either by harping on the importance of practice or emphasizing the need for achievement.

Chapter 22: From the Battlefield to the Negotiation Table

In these and other ways, we can flow with our children's desires without feeling pressured to give in to their demands. By doing so, we teach them that they can manifest their desires provided that they are willing to put in the time, energy, and effort. It's crucial not to start lecturing about why a particular idea isn't a good one, let alone about how it's "selfish." Instead, the key is to support the desirous nature of our children.

When we probe a little, we're likely to discover that, at a deeper level, many of our children's wishes are actually a desire for a feeling of ownership, Happiness, joy, and connection. The approach of supporting our children and their desires instead of talking them out of them allows them to feel safe to express themselves and be honored for their fantasies. We don't have to indulge them, only provide the space for this exploration to take flight.

Ending Sibling Wars

"Once you are willing to make changes, it's imperative that you declare to yourself and your children that you will no longer be jumping in and rescuing them from each other. You will treat them both as equally responsible no matter what the circumstances. If both are involved, both are responsible."

Appendix - Thirty Daily Reminders to Build Consciousness

Enter Presence

Detach from the urge to ask your child a single question today. Simply observe and follow their lead.

Take a Spin

Spin everything into the positive today: If your child is distracted, say to them, "Wow, you have so much energy, huh?"