

Peaceful Parent, Happy Kids

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FOREWORD

- The parents who succeed seem to have a secret. They're more peaceful, calmer, but they also stay more connected—to their kids and to their own inner wisdom. They aren't just more patient—they seem more present and joyful with their children. This, of course, produces better-behaved kids—so there's less need to work at being patient through clenched teeth. When their kid accidentally mows down the flowers, they already remember that what's most important is how they're raising their children, not how beautiful or impressive their flower garden is.
- The battle, of course, is never actually between a parent and child. That is just the after-manifestation of a battle that is waged inside the parent. Giving our children the best of ourselves requires that we do some inner work.

INTRODUCTION: Secrets of Peaceful Parents

- Three big ideas.
 - **Regulating Yourself:** The truth is that managing our own emotions and actions is what allows us to feel peaceful as parents. Ultimately we can't control our children or the hand life deals us – but we can control our own actions. Parenting is an about what our child does, but about how we respond.
 - The Aha! Moment here is that an adult's peaceful presence has a more powerful influence on a child than yelling ever could.
 - **Fostering Connection:** children need to feel deeply connected to their parents or they don't feel entirely safe, and their brains don't work well to regulate their emotions and follow parental guidance
 - **Coaching, Not Controlling:**

PART ONE: REGULATING YOURSELF.

Chapter 1: peaceful parents raise happy kids

- Over and over, studies show that parents who respond with warm, respectful attunement to the unique needs of their individual child, setting limits supportively and coaching their child's emotions constructively, raise terrific kids. Sensible, but hard. As every parent knows, the hard part is managing our own emotional triggers so that we can make this reality even some of the time.
- A Child doesn't cause the anger or anxiety that hooks us into power struggles, that comes from our own fear and doubt.
- When we regulate our own emotions, our children learn to regulate their emotions.
- Mindfulness: Allowing an emotion to take hold and pass without acting on it
- Your child is fairly certain to act like a child, which means someone who is still learning, has different priorities than you do, and can't always manage her feelings or actions. Her childish

behavior is guaranteed, at times, to push your buttons. The problem is when we begin acting like a child, too.

- That's why your first responsibility in parenting is being mindful of your own interstate. Mindfulness is the op. cit. of losing your temper.
- **Seriously. Any time** your child pushes your buttons, he's showing you an unresolved issue from your own childhood.
- But every time you pay attention, he your inner pause button, and manage her stress, you're becoming more peaceful. And that's a gives your child a greater shot at happiness.
- Don't worry that you need to teach her a lesson about what she did wrong. She's getting one of the most important lessons shall ever learn: how to responsibly regulate big emotions.
- Remind yourself, "He's acting like a child because he IS a child. ...My child needs my love most when he least 'deserves' it.... He's asking for my help with his legitimate needs and feelings."
- Remember that "expressing" your anger to another person can reinforce and escalate it.
- Choose your battles. Every negative interaction with your child uses up valuable relationship capital. Focus on what matters, such as the way your child treats other humans. In the larger scheme of things, her jacket on the floor may drive you crazy, but it probably isn't worth putting your relationship bank account in the red.
- Children get upset often, because of their inexperience and cognitive immaturity. It's our ability to stay calm when they're upset that helps them develop the neutral pathways to calm themselves.
- Keep it simple. Your child needs you to witness her outpouring of emotion and let her know that she is still lovable, despite all these yucky feelings. Explanations, negotiations, remorse. Recriminations, advice, analysis of why she's so upset, or attempts to "comfort" her ("There, there, you don't have to cry. That's enough.") will all shut down this natural emotive process. Don't force her to express herself in words; she's doesn't have access to the rational brain when she's so upset. Of course. You want to "teach"-but that needs to wait. Your child can't learn until she's calm. You don't have to say it too much.
- Never walk away emotionally. Your child depends on you to hold the vision of her at her best. If she senses you're giving up on her, she'll give up on herself. Has she strayed? Go get her. But don't join her on the low road. Embrace her with your love and she'll rejoin you on the high road.
- It seems to me that the most important rule to raise terrific children are for us, not our children. We begin with taking responsibility for ourselves and end with connection as the ultimate rule.
- The most important parenting skill: Manage yourself. Take care of yourself so you aren't venting on your child. Intervene before your own feelings get out of hand. Keep your cup full. The more you care for yourself with compassion, the more love and compassion you'll have for your child. Remember that your child will do every single thing you do, whether that's yelling or making self-disparaging remarks about your body.
- Laughter releases the same tensions as tears.
- What you need to remember when times get hard: All misbehavior comes from basic needs that aren't met.

PART TWO FOSTERING CONNECTION

Chapter 2: the essential ingredient for peaceful parents, happy kids.

- And our children need to know that we take joy in them or they don't see themselves as worthy of love. In fact, your ability to enjoy your child may be the most important factor in his development.
- Study after study shows that the best protection for teens from the excesses of culture and the peer group is a close relationship with parents.
- **What's more, the fact** that a child can easily separate from his parents isn't necessarily a good thing. We wouldn't expect a four month-old to be independent; that would be an indicator of abnormal development. And remember our fifteen-month-old who doesn't look up when Mom leaves him in the Strange Situation? Is he actually more independent? No. The young toddlers who didn't seem to notice the parent leaving the room were not the children who grew up to be independent. They were the avoidant children who had given up on having their needs met, so they disguised their anxiety, even though their hearts were racing. These kids might head off to camp without a backward glance, but that easy separation from the parent might actually be a sign of a frayed attachment that will handicap them in their ability to form relationships with others.
- What makes a child independent? Roots and wings. Independence is rooted in secure attachment—knowing that Mom and Dad are there when needed. Once children know we're available if they want us, they can focus on their appropriate developmental tasks. Which include becoming more independent in handling their responsibilities. If they don't know if they can rely on Mom and Dad, children become preoccupied with trying to win attention and approval, and it gets in the way of mastering age-appropriate developmental tasks. If this affirmation isn't forthcoming from parents, kids become preoccupied with getting it from peers, often with ugly results.
- But if you spend weekdays apart and cram weekends with sports, screen time, and sleepovers, it's easy for your worlds to become increasingly distant. Now he's so self-sufficient, so peer-oriented, and so preoccupied with his various screens that it's possible to go a whole weekend and barely see your eight-year-old. You may not be able to see it yet, but your influence is already starting to wane. As your child begins to shape his behavior outside the home to the norms of schoolmates and media images.
- **Kids naturally turn to** the peer group for companionship and to media for clues about social "norms." The danger is when they don't feel firmly anchored to their parents as their North Star and begin to orient around their peer group or media values. If we don't cement a close connection before our children hit middle school, they turn elsewhere for bonding and guidance. Sadly, by the time we realize we're losing our child to the peer group, it's hard to get their attention.
- Develop family rituals that foster connection.
- Resist the impulse to say yes to one more play dates or you can get more done.
- Take your cues about independence from your child.
- Since becoming familiar with your work, I have started repeating back to my son what it is that he is saying or wanting. Whether I am willing to meet his desire or not, I know I am meeting a critical need to feel heard and validated.

- Grocery shopping, carpooling, and bath time matter at least as much as that big birthday party you planned for him.
- That's why all parents need to repeatedly reconnect with their children, just to repair the daily erosion created by life's normal separations and distractions.
- What's a baby self? Your child has been happily playing at childcare, but as soon as you show up, he has a meltdown. That's because he's been repressing his dependency needs so that he can function independently in a demanding environment. Your safe presence signals to him that he can relax and let down his guard. So his grown-up self (what we call his executive functioning) takes a much-needed break, and the baby self takes charge, whining, helpless, and acting out. This is not the time for guidance; he can't act his age right now. Scoop him up, give him that snuggle he needs, and get him out of there. Some little ones need to cry for a few minutes in your arms before they're ready for the car seat; preschoolers may revert to baby talk. Accept all this as proof of the age-appropriate solace your child finds in your company
- When she became defiant I simply went over to her and gave her a big hug and told her how much I love her, then repeated the request in a soft voice.
- If you're having a hard time getting your child out of the house on time, here's the secret. Reframe your idea of the morning routine. What if your main job were to connect emotionally? That way your child won't have a genuinely full cup.
- Every hour of sleep less than they need sets them back a year in access to brain function, meaning they acted year younger.
- Why is bedtime so hard for many families? Because the needs of parents and children clash. To parents, bedtime is the time they finally get to separate from their children and have a little time to themselves. To children, bedtime is the time they're forced to separate from their parents and lie in the dark by themselves. On top of that, children are exhausted and wound up, and parents are exhausted and fed up. No wonder it's the single most challenging time in most families.
- **Do whatever** you need to do to stay calm. Losing your temper at bedtime will just trigger more separation anxiety and make things harder.
- Don't start talking until you have your child's attention,
- When our child yells at us, "Stop talking," it's usually because:
 - She's embarrassed to tell you about what happened.
 - She's worried about how you'll respond.
 - The emotions feel so crummy to her that she doesn't want to feel them,

PART THREE COACHING NOT CONTROLLING.

- We respond to our child's behavior with force or threats to gain compliance ("Don't you speak to me that way, young lady!"), leaving her to figure out for herself how to learn self-management skills.

In Response to Child's:	Parents Tries to Control	Parent Coach
Inappropriate behavior	Works short-term when kids are young as long as parent is present.	Raises kids who want to "do right."
Anger	Forces kids to repress anger, which bursts out uncontrolled at other times.	Helps kids learn to manage anger.
Emotions	Child fends off emotion by becoming controlling, but lags in self-regulation.	Child develops Self-regulation and resilience.
Developing values	Child is motivated to avoid punishment, not by concern for others.	Child "follows" parents' teachings.
Developing life skills, from brushing teeth to doing homework	Parent nags child, essentially taking responsibility.	Parent provides child with support to enjoy becoming responsible for himself.
Developing self-motivation	Child resents pressure from parents.	Child feels empowered and motivated.

Chapter 3: raising a child who can manage himself: you motion coaching.

- It's certainly more convenient to shush or threaten an upset child than to help her process her emotions. Luckily, children who know from experience that their emotions will be heard learn to modulate them.
- **Most parents take their** job as teachers very seriously. We teach our children colors. Brushing teeth. Right from wrong. But sometimes we neglect two more important lessons all children need to know: how to manage their feelings (and therefore their behavior), and how to understand other people's feeling.
- Why are the toddler years such a challenge emotionally? Because job one for the toddler is asserting himself. Your toddler needs to feel that he has an impact on the world and some control over his experienced.
- Luckily, nature has designed babies and toddlers with a fail-safe to discharge the physiological residue of their fears and frustrations: tantrums. Toddlers don't enjoy tantrums; they would rather feel connected and cherished. But when their emotions are swamping them, their brain development isn't sufficient to maintain rational control. So their physiology helps them restore equilibrium by having a meltdown to release all those feelings and the accompanying biochemicals. As with soothing an infant, parents who patiently sit with their tantrumming toddler are helping him learn to self soothe and manage his emotions.
- After age 6, the brain confers much better impulse control. Because of this improved emotional control and the focus on school, many parents don't even notice the child's inner emotional struggles.
- I worried that this approach might spoil my kids or cause more misbehavior, but it helps them to want to act better. Last weekend, my four-year-old son started crying and screaming at me. I took a deep breath and resisted the urge to make him be respectful and to tell him to get over it (my past usual reaction). I held him on my lap and let him cry. I told him I understood and that it was hard not to be allowed to do things you want to do when you want to do them and that I bet he

would do that all day long when he got bigger. He cried for maybe one minute, got up, and said, “Okay, I’m done. Let’s go to the park!” In the past, these incidents would turn into major battles and end in my feeling exhausted and like a horrible parent

- You already know. Every time you say, “I know how you feel” or “looks like you had a hard day,” you’re being empathetic. Every time you rise above your own feelings to see things from a child’s point of view, that’s empathy. Your acceptance and understanding of what she feels helps him recognize and accept his own emotions.
- Permissiveness. You can (and should) set limits. The key is to acknowledge your child’s unhappiness about those limits.
- Probing. “Tell me how you feel” is not empathy. Empathy is sitting with what she’s showing you about her experience, not ripping off a scab to examine the wound.
- What kind of help? He needs his rage accepted with compassion. So he can get past it to the tears and fears underneath. He needs to show you how much he hurts, to know that you hear his suffering. Yes, he’ll get past these feelings, but first he needs to know he’s not bad for feeling such anger, and he needs your loving attention to experience all the fear, disappointment, or sadness under the anger. So he can move past it.
- Once children understand that their anger will be heard and responded to, they can express it more calmly, rather than defaulting to aggression. By contrast, kids who are given the message that anger is unacceptable or disrespectful try to repress it, which means the angry feelings go underground only to burst out unregulated by the conscious mind. Our attitude toward our child’s anger can therefore either help him learn to manage it or push him toward aggression
- **We figure out a way** to chauffeur the children to nine lessons a week, organize the vacation trip to Disney World, and throw a birthday party for a dozen five-year-olds. So why does a quiet story by candlelight seem impossible to manage? In truth, the story is more nourishing for our child’s soul.
- Luckily, children let us know when their needs aren’t being met. In fact, all “misbehavior” is an SOS from your child, alerting you to unmet needs or tangled feelings.
- The when we meet children’s deeper needs to be seen, appreciated, and connected, they’re happier and more cooperative, so they can manage their disappointment when we say no to the fleeting desires they think will make them happy. Those desires aren’t actually needs; their strategies to meet needs.
- The Bye-Bye Game. Kids in every culture of the world play separation games because the threat of losing parents is such a big fear for all children. “Let’s play Bye-Bye. ...I’m going out the door. If you miss me, yell the silliest word you can think of. And I’ll come back” Walk into the closet or bathroom, but don’t give your child a chance to miss you. Before you’re fully through the door, jump out again, yelling “Rhinoceros!” or any word that will make your child laugh. Hug and kiss her, and I say, “I missed you so much, I couldn’t leave.... Let’s try that again! Exaggerate your own separation anxiety to get your child laughing, and very gradually increase the amount of time you’re out of sight. Eventually, you can graduate to Hide-and-Seek.
- When your child goes through a stage of whining a lot. Remember that whining is an expression of powerlessness. Refusing to “hear” until they use a “big kid” voice further invalidates them. But you don’t really want to reward whining by “giving in” to what they’re asking for in that whiny voice. Either. Lawrence Cohen, in *Playful Parenting*-- my inspiration for many of these games, and the book I recommend most often to parents—suggests that you express confidence that your

child can use her “strong” voice and offer your assistance to help her find it by making it into a game: “Hey, where did your strong voice go? It was here a minute ago. I LOVE your strong voice! I’ll help you find it Help me look. Is it under the chair? No ...In the toy box? No... HEY! You found it!! That was your strong voice!! Yay! I love your strong voice! Now, tell me again what you need, in your strong voice.”

Chapter 4: raising a child who wants to behave.

- The executive summary? This is a tough one for many parents, so stick with me. If you want a cooperative, ethical, self-disciplined child whom you can trust to do the right thing, even as she becomes a teenager, you should never punish. No spanking, no time-outs, no yelling, no parent-contrived consequences. Really. No punishment of any kind. The word discipline actually means “to guide” but virtually everything we think of as discipline is punishment. And punishment erodes your relationship with your child, which destroys the only motivation she has to behave as you’d like.
- The dirty little secret about punishment is that it doesn’t work to teach children better behavior. In fact, studies show that punishment creates more bad behavior. Not just that children who behave badly get punished more, but that children who get punished more will behave badly more often over time. That’s because punishment teaches all the wrong lessons.
- Punishment actually keeps a child from taking responsibility, because it creates an external locus of control.
- Although discipline means “to guide,” in common usage it always seems to include an element of chastisement, or making the child ‘to change our words, so let’s move beyond “discipline,” which most of us associate with harsh teaching. Instead, let’s offer our child loving guidance.
- We punish our child instead of taking responsibility for our own anger and resorting ourselves to a state of calm.
- He’s busy, and he doesn’t understand why your agenda is important. No four-year-old would agree that brushing his teeth this minute is more important than finding his lost action figure.
- Many of our conflicts with school aged kids can be solved with more structure and more hands-on interaction. Pointing to the chart on the wall reminds your six-year-old that he has to brush his teeth and put his lunch in his backpack before it heads to school.
- A consistent daily routine of a snack and homework as soon as he gets home helps your seven-year-old learn to sit himself down to tackle an unpleasant task. Working with your eight-year-old every Saturday morning to pick up her room while you have a nice chat helps her solidify the habit.
- Authoritative. The final parenting style is the one that Baumrind’s research showed raises the best-adjusted kids. Her authoritative—as opposed to authoritarian—parents offer their children lots of love and support, like the permissive parents. But they also hold high expectations, like the authoritarian parents.
- Age-appropriate expectations, of course—they aren’t expecting a three-year-old to clean up her room by herself. But they may well be working with that three-year-old to help her clean up, over and over and over. So that by six she really can clean up her room herself. These parents are involved—even demanding. They expect family dinners, lots of discussion straight through high school, good grades, responsible behavior. But they also offer their children complete support to

learn how to achieve these expectations. Importantly, these parents aren't controlling like the authoritarian parents. They listen to the child's side of things. They make compromises, and they cede control where possible. Their kids, not surprisingly, stay close to them—they often describe one of their parents as the person they would most trust to talk to about a problem. These kids usually do well in school, and they're also the ones that teachers describe as responsible and well liked, simply nice kids who are a pleasure to have around.

- Limits with empathy. Asks the child whether he's surprised by the report card, what he thinks created this situation, and what he thinks he can do to learn the material and bring his grades up. Agrees on a plan with the child, one with a ton of limits and high expectations, because there's lost ground to make up. But this isn't just a boot camp. This parent is completely empathic with how hard this change will be for her son. What's more, she sees herself as partly responsible and an essential part of the remedial work. She lends him her calm hopefulness, so he can manage his anxiety as he climbs out of the hole he's dug for himself.
- Time out stone actually work to create better behavior.
- How? When you realize your child is approaching that dangerous overwrought place, suggest that the two of you take a time-in. Grab your cranky, belligerent little one and find yourselves a cozy corner. Snuggle up. Make it a game and laugh if you can. But if your child continues to act out those miserable feelings that are upsetting him recognize that the most healing thing you can offer him at the moment is a chance to cry and get those feelings off his chest. Set whatever limits are necessary as compassionately as you can: "I won't let you throw that cup, sweetie." When he bursts into tears. Welcome them and stay close. You'll find that your child is very different after a good cry. (See "Emotion-Coaching Your Child Through a Meltdown" in Chapter 3.)
- Are you wondering if that's rewarding "bad behavior" with attention? No more than you're rewarding hungry crankiness with food if you feed your hungry child. Kids need connection with us to get through their day, especially at difficult times. If you suddenly notice from your child's behavior that she needs some connection time to refuel emotionally.
- This works only if it's a natural consequence that the parent doesn't have anything to do with creating. Here's why. When parents use consequences for discipline, they aren't the natural result of the child's actions ("I forgot my lunch today, so I was hungry"). Instead, consequences for children are the threats they hear through their parents' clenched teeth: "If I have to stop this car and come back there, there will be CONSEQUENCES. In other words, consequence is just another word for punishment.
- And that's the biggest secret of setting limits. You can't really make anyone do anything. Your child complies with your requests because of the strong relationship of trust and affection between you. The other option, of course, is fear, which is an effective motivator in the moment. But because you have to keep escalating your threats, fear becomes less and less effective over time. Love, by contrast, becomes a more effective motivator over time.
- Any child in his right mind will test the limits. That's his job. He's pretty new on the planet, after all, and he's figuring out the rules. The most common reason that children test the limits is that they really want to find out where those limits are. Children need the security of knowing that someone more experienced and knowledgeable is looking out for them.

Chapter 5: raising a child who achieves with joy and self-esteem.

- The irony is that out of our desire to help our children succeed – and our own anxieties about whether we, and they, are good enough – we try to mold them using techniques that backfire and destroy the joy they take in developing their own mastery. We over stimulate, over assess, overprotected over schedule, all of which will talk more about in this chapter.
- The scaffolding we provide for our child is what allows him to build his own inner structure to become successful at a given behavior. It includes the following:
 - Routines and habits (“We always put things back in their place as soon as we’re done with them.”)
 - Expectations for behavior (“In our family, we think anything worth doing is worth doing well.”)
 - Modeling (“See, if you push it here, it opens!”)
 - A safe environment (babyproofing)
- Baby proof to minimize saying no
- Don’t rush to teach. Instead, let your child learn by experimenting.
- Never interrupt a happily engaged baby.