

# WORK & FAMILY LIFE

BALANCING JOB AND PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITIES

APRIL 2015

VOL. 30, NO. 4

*Practical solutions  
for family, workplace  
and health issues*

## WHAT'S INSIDE

### ELDER ISSUES

*Keeping the grandparent  
connection strong*

4

### PARENTING

*How to help our kids  
stay focused*

5

### ON THE JOB

*10 tips on giving  
helpful criticism*

6

### A HEALTHY YOU

*Yoga poses you can  
do on an airplane*

7

### INTERCHANGE

*Parenting skills can  
make you a better leader*

3

### RESEARCH REVIEW

*Brain science suggests  
smarter ways to study*

3

### WE RECOMMEND

*A new and loving way  
to think about discipline*

8

*Work & Family Life is  
distributed by companies and  
other organizations to their  
employees and clients. To see  
the online version, go to  
[workandfamilylife.com](http://workandfamilylife.com).*

E-mail: [workfam@aol.com](mailto:workfam@aol.com)  
Phone: (561) 818-3670



*Connecting with our children emotionally is the first step in effective discipline.*

## Discipline: it's all about connection

By Daniel J. Siegel, MD and Tina Payne Bryson, PhD

**D**id you know that the word “discipline” comes from the Latin *disciplina*, which means teaching, learning and giving instruction? So, from its inception in the English language, discipline has meant “to teach.”

These days, most parents associate punishment or consequences with the practice of discipline. But, instead, the goal should be for our kids to learn important skills—like improving their ability to control themselves, manage big, angry feelings and consider the impact of their behavior on others. Punishment might shut down a behavior in the short term, but teaching offers skills that last a lifetime.

### The goals of effective discipline

Effective discipline means we're not simply stopping a bad behavior or promoting a good one, we're also teaching skills and nurturing the connections in children's brains that will help them make better decisions and handle themselves well in the future.

A short-term goal is to get children to do the right thing. We don't want younger kids throwing toys in a restaurant

or older kids talking to us disrespectfully. Another goal is more long-term. It focuses on helping children develop self-control and a moral compass—so even when authority figures are not around, our kids will be thoughtful and conscientious. It's about helping children grow up and become responsible adults who can enjoy successful relationships and meaningful lives.

### Start with an emotional connection

Every child is different, of course, and no parenting approach or strategy will work every time. But one constant is that the first step in effective discipline is to connect with a child emotionally. Our relationship with our kids should be central to everything we do.

Disciplinary responses will change based on a child's age, temperament and stage of development, along with the context of the situation. But whether we're playing with children, talking with them or, yes, disciplining them, we want our kids to experience at a deep level the full force of our love and affection.

*Continued on page 2...*

## Discipline...

Continued from page 1...

Making this connection is not the same as being permissive. It doesn't mean letting children do whatever they want to do. In fact, it's just the opposite.

Part of giving kids what they need is offering them clear, consistent boundaries and creating a predictable structure in their lives—as well as having high expectations for them.

Children need repeated experiences to develop brain wiring that allows them to delay gratification, contain the urge to react aggressively toward others and deal flexibly with *not* getting their way.

The absence of limits and boundaries is actually stressful. So when we say no and set limits, we are helping children find safety and predictability in an otherwise chaotic world.

### How-to's on connecting

Before we teach, we need to connect with and comfort our kids. We do this by validating their feelings and showing them empathy. Here are some ways to calmly, lovingly connect with your child.

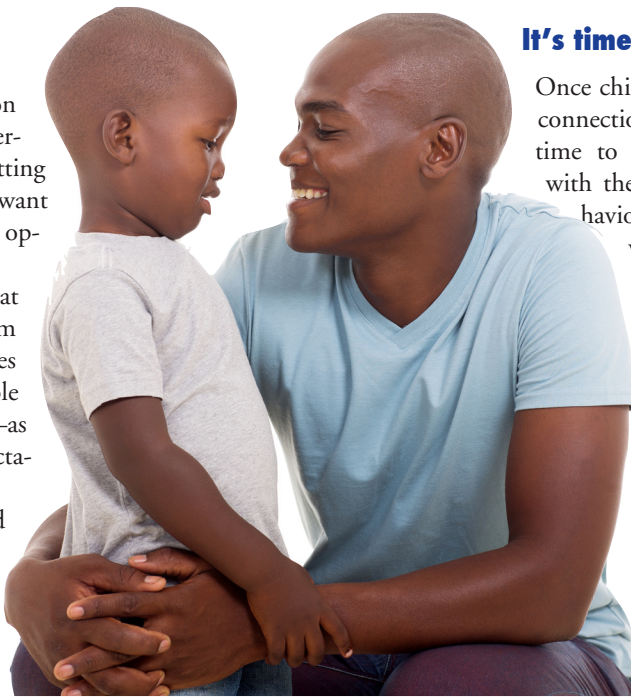
#### Turn down the “shark music.”

In other words, stay in the moment. Don't practice fear-based parenting. If you're responding to something in the past or worrying about what's going to happen in the future, you can miss what your kids need *right now*—and what they're actually communicating.

**Chase the why.** Instead of focusing only on behavior, look for what's behind the actions. Ask: *Why is my child acting this way? What is she or he communicating?*

**Think about the how.** What you say is important. But as important, if not more so, is *how* you say it.

**Communicate comfort.** Get below your child's eye level. Then give her or him a loving touch,



“Wow, I can imagine that felt a little scary for you.”

nod of the head or an understanding look. This alone can defuse a heated situation.

**Validate.** Even when you don't like a behavior, acknowledge and even embrace your child's feelings.

**Stop talking.** When kids' emotions are exploding, don't explain, lecture or try to talk them out of their feelings. Just listen and look for the meaning and the emotions your child is communicating.

**Reflect what you hear.** After you have listened, reflect back on what was said—and let your child know that you heard her or him.

### It's time to redirect

Once children have felt that connection with you, it's time to redirect—and talk with them about their behavior. After all, what we want is for our kids to gain insight into themselves, feel empathy for others and learn how to make things right when they make a mistake.

Here are some redirection strategies to have in your parenting tool kit. Choose the ones that make sense in

a variety of circumstances and according to your child's age, stage and temperament.

**Reduce words.** Address the issue, teach a lesson, and keep it brief. Long lectures don't make children at any age want to listen to you more. They're more likely to tune you out. Once you've addressed your child's behavior and feelings, move on.

**Embrace emotions.** Kids need to understand that there's nothing wrong with being angry or sad—or so frustrated they want to break something. But our message

should be, “You can feel whatever you feel—but you can't always do whatever you want to do.”

**Describe, don't preach.** You might say to an older child, “Those sound like pretty mean words you're saying to your brother.” This opens the door to cooperation better than a reprimand, “Stop talking to your brother like that.” Even young children know what is and is not acceptable behavior. Often, you just need to call attention to the behavior that you observed.

**Involve your child.** When kids are involved in the discipline process, they feel more respected and are more likely to buy into what you are promoting. Children can also come up with good ideas for solving a problem. Even young kids can be encouraged to reflect on their actions and on how to avoid the same problem in the future.

**Reframe a No into a conditional Yes.** For example, you might say, “There's a lot happening tomorrow. So, yes, let's invite Tim over—but let's do it on Friday, when you'll have more time to play.” This gives kids practice tolerating disappointment when things don't go their way.

**Emphasize the positive.** This is one of the best ways to deal with misbehavior. Instead of saying “No whining,” try “I like it when you talk in your normal voice.” Instead of “Stop messing around,” say “You're going to be late to school.” Emphasize what you want: “I need you to brush your teeth and find your backpack.”

**Be creative.** The next time you see trouble brewing, ask yourself, “Do I really want that drama?” If not, try playfulness. Be silly. Muster up the energy to be creative. Often, we can avoid an unpleasant interaction by simply taking a few seconds to come up with an idea that's fun and playful. ♦

—Adapted from the authors' new book *“No-Drama Discipline: The Whole-Brain Way to Calm the Chaos and Nurture Your Child's Developing Mind”* (Bantam). See We Recommend on page 8.

### Hopeful messages for difficult moments

**There's no magic wand.** We can't always “fix” things or even make things better when children are having a hard time. But we can stay calm and loving, be available when our kids do want us close, and talk about the situation when they are ready.

**Kids can benefit even when parents mess up.** Our very human responses can help children too. They see us model how to apologize. They experience that when there's conflict, situations can be mended and become good again. They can see that because we are not perfect, we don't expect them to be either.

**You can always reconnect.** Misunderstandings, arguments and breakdowns in communication can damage a relationship. The key is to repair any breach as quickly as possible—and it's our responsibility as parents to initiate this. When we reconnect with our kids, we model a crucial skill that will allow them to enjoy much more meaningful relationships as they grow up.

**It's never too late to make a positive change.** You can change the way you discipline at any age—yours or your child's. ♦



# Do parenting skills transfer to the workplace?

**Q**I've come to the conclusion that, if you've raised kids, you can manage just about anything that comes your way. Many of the skills I learned at home raising our three (now grown) children were directly transferable to my work as a supervisor on the job.

Just wondering if you've heard this from other parents.

—E.D., Bloomfield Hills

**A**Yes—and author Ann Crittenden, among others, has written about specific parenting skills that can inform one's work life. Here are some that she's come up with:

**MANAGING COMPLEXITY.** Parents learn to keep a lot of balls in the

air at one time with a steady hand. They learn to delegate, set priorities and not sweat the small stuff.

**INTERPERSONAL SKILLS.** Getting along with people (even when they act like two year olds) is something every parent learns to do. And it's an essential skill at the workplace. It involves learning to listen, treating people with respect, negotiating for win-win solutions and picking your battles. It also means being able to loosen up and lighten up sometimes, because creativity and playfulness often go hand-in-hand.

**HELPING PEOPLE GROW.** A big part of parenting is encouraging our kids to work hard, develop their

talents and become independent. This is a recipe for success on the job too. Both colleagues and parents need to give helpful criticism and positive reinforcement—and not rush in and take charge when somebody makes a mistake. Kids and workers can learn a lot from their mistakes.

**ENCOURAGING INTEGRITY.** We all want our kids (and coworkers) to be fair, honest, conscientious and caring. We want them to believe in the future, and this requires taking the long view. Rome wasn't built in a day. Kids don't grow up overnight. And everything important takes times—both at home and at the workplace. ♦



Ellen Galinsky, MS, Executive Editor of Work & Family Life, is President of the Families and Work Institute, a researcher on national and international studies, and author of more than 40 books and reports including "Mind in the Making" (HarperCollins).



Susan Ginsberg EdD, Editor & Publisher of Work & Family Life, was Associate Dean at Bank Street College. She is the author of "Family Wisdom: The 2000 Most Important Things Ever Said about Parenting, Children and Family Life" (Columbia University Press).

This is your column. We invite you to send questions about work and family life or tell us how you solved a problem that you think a lot of people face. Write: Dr. Susan Ginsberg, Work & Family Life, 305 Madison Avenue, Suite 1143, New York, NY 10165. E-mail: workfam@aol.com.

## RESEARCH REVIEW

# Brain science suggests smarter ways to study

**W**e've all had the experience of cramming for an exam. Then, when it was over, we forgot just about everything we studied. Cramming is not the best way to retain information, says science writer Benedict Carey in his new book *How We Learn: The Surprising Truth About When, Where, and Why It Happens*.

Carey's book looks at the new brain science in relation to memory and learning studies. Here are some of his suggestions:

**Change your study environment.** Move around from time to time. Find new scenery. Sitting in the same place and trying hard to concentrate does not leave a lot of brain energy for learning. Take periodic breaks. The brain wants movement and variation.

**Talk about what you're trying to learn.** Play the "teacher." Studies show that self-testing and writing down information on flashcards reinforces learning.

**Space out your learning periods.** Think of it as watering the lawn for shorter periods more often. Spaced study also adds "contextual cues." For example, you might hear a dog barking when you study at home or a barista steaming milk when you go over the mate-

rial again at a coffee shop. Cues embedded in different contexts will make your memory stronger.

**Review information a few days after studying it.** University of California, San Diego researchers found that this approach helped students retain historical events, vocabulary words and science definitions, in particular. So, if you have a test on Friday, study on Monday and review the material on

Thursday. If a test is a month away, study in one-week intervals. These reviews send signals to the brain that it needs to retain this information.

**Get enough sleep.** Carey calls sleep the "finisher on learning." Studies have shown that

the first half of the sleep cycle helps with retaining facts and the second half helps with math skills.

This suggests that students who have a language test the next day should go to bed early and review the material in the morning. Math students, on the other hand, should do their review before they go to bed, so their brain can process the information during sleep. ♦



## Tough decision? Ask a woman for her advice.

**N**euroscientists at universities in the U.S. and Europe say their studies have shown that men and women make decisions about risk in similar ways when conditions are normal and low-key. But when the pressure is on, they part ways, and women bring some unique strengths to their decision-making.

In a gambling game study at the University of Southern California, Dr. Mara Mather found that men took more risks when they were stressed. They focused on big wins, even when the odds were against them.

A University of Michigan study found that the closer women got to a stressful event, the better their decision-making became because they looked for smaller, surer successes.

In experiments at the University of Vienna, researchers found that women also became more attuned to others under stress and made more empathetic decisions. ♦

# Keeping the grandparent connection strong

By Susan Newman, PhD

**G**randparents, now is your chance to do the things you wish you had done with your children, didn't have the time to do or couldn't afford.

Whether or not you live near or with your grandchildren, every day can still be fertile ground for feeding their memory banks and building meaningful bonds.

You can provide hugs and love, attention, adventures and know-how—always keeping in mind that little things mean a lot, and that more often than not it's the small efforts that bring you closer.

Everything you do with a grandchild helps to grow the relationship, so take advantage of each opportunity. Here are some ideas to get you started, and you'll think of many more of your own.

► **Devise an affectionate, clever name for each grandchild.** Whether it's "Bella Blue" or "Zip-py Joe," its regular use will become part of family lore.

► **Have a trademark kiss, unique for each grandchild.** Two pecks on the tip of the nose, one peck on

each cheek or one long and two short kisses on the forehead.

► **Invent a silent symbol of your connection** to your grandchild: thumbs up, quiet clapping, peace sign, a wink or a gentle tug on an earlobe.

► **Start a book club.** Name it after your grandchild ("The Lindsay Rose Book Club") and send or give her or him a book once a month. Baby board books are a good way to start. Pick them up inexpensively at yard sales, used-book sellers and thrift stores.

► **Pass on their parents' toys.** Give grandchildren objects that once belonged to their parents such as a blanket, stuffed animal, high school letter sweater, trophy, books, a train set, dolls, baseball glove or photo album you may have saved.

► **Put your grandchild in charge.** For example, have him or her call



Young girls love getting one of their mom's old dolls.

to make reservations or to check movie schedules. Give your grandchild money to pay the check at a restaurant or buy tickets at a movie theatre.

► **Introduce your grandchild to something you enjoy** such as a new exercise routine. Better yet, design an exercise program set to music together.

► **Share your knowledge and skills.** Make gardening, cooking dinner, baking treats or doing a home repair at your house or theirs a frequent activity. Kids like being useful and responsible. It makes them feel special.

► **When you visit places** with grandchildren, buy a few extra postcards to mail after the trip to remind them of the fun things you saw and did.

► **Personalize cards** for birthdays, holidays and special achievements by snipping the child's

picture from an extra photo and attaching it to the card. Tech savvy grandparents can do this digitally, too.

## So far, but close

Because we're all so connected by digital technology, it's easier than ever to be involved in your grandchildren's lives. Grandparents can be actively engaged with grandkids of all ages. Whether your grandchild is a toddler or a teen, an infant or young adult, everything you do becomes one more connection.

► **Use a video communications program** like Skype so you can see and talk to grandkids via your computer. Ask older grandchildren or their parents to recom-

mend software that works best with your skills and theirs.

► **Know your older grandkids'** email addresses. "Friend" them on Facebook. Send or text brief notes now and then or a link to a web page that will interest them. With very young children, send messages to a parent who can read them aloud to the child.

► **Find out about upcoming events** or activities your grandchild is involved in to highlight in email. Call, text or email before a major event to wish your grandchild good luck.

► **Send newspaper and magazine articles or movie reviews** (or the online link) you think your grandchild would enjoy. ♦

—Adapted from the author's book "Little Things Mean a Lot: Creating Happy Memories with Your Grandchildren" (see [www.susan-newmanphd.com](http://www.susan-newmanphd.com)).

## Weekend fun with your grandkids

If you're spending a weekend or several days with your grandchild, some preplanning will help ensure a fun time for all. Let your grandchild's age and interests be your guide. Here's a short list to get you thinking:

**GIVE** grandchildren a space of their own: a cabinet, drawer or shelf with toys, art supplies, books and items they can reach without your assistance or permission.

**MAKE** one of your first activities a trip to the supermarket. Let your grandchild pick out a favorite cereal and snack foods. You might also select the ingredients for a batch of cookies or cupcakes you'll make together.

**KEEP** a special drawer or box of things you know your grandkids will like. On each visit, allow them to select one surprise from your special stash.

**PULL OUT** old books or toys that you may have saved for your grandchildren. The time has come to play with well-worn dolls, trucks and trains.

**DECIDE** together on a weekend project: assembling a jigsaw puzzle, making doll clothes or learning how to bake bread.

**PLAN** an outing that's appropriate to the season. Let your grandchild's interests and imagination be your guide. ♦



# How we can help our kids stay focused

By Dr. Ron Taffel

**W**e've become a nation of the attentionally challenged: children (and grownups) who just can't focus.

I'm not talking about attention deficit disorder. I'm talking about kids and adults with an ordinary attention span who are having difficulty focusing on everyday tasks.

## Why it's so important

Focus makes it possible for a child to be an integral part of what's going on at any given moment. It's one of the keys to academic success. It enables kids to listen to their teachers, take in new information, concentrate on something they care about, apply themselves and do their homework without getting distracted.

Focus also helps kids pick up the rules of socialization, conversation and games. If children can tune in, they'll know what's expected of them—and they can develop and sustain new interests.

## Parents can foster focus

To some degree, children are born with a particular focusing style. Even so, they can be taught to strengthen their concentration. Here are some suggestions:

■ **PROMOTE SELF-AWARENESS.** Kids need to pay attention to body signals that tell them when they're losing focus: fidgeting, feeling tired and daydreaming. When your eight year old starts yawning over homework, you might say, "You look like you're having trouble staying focused. Take a break and then you can start again."

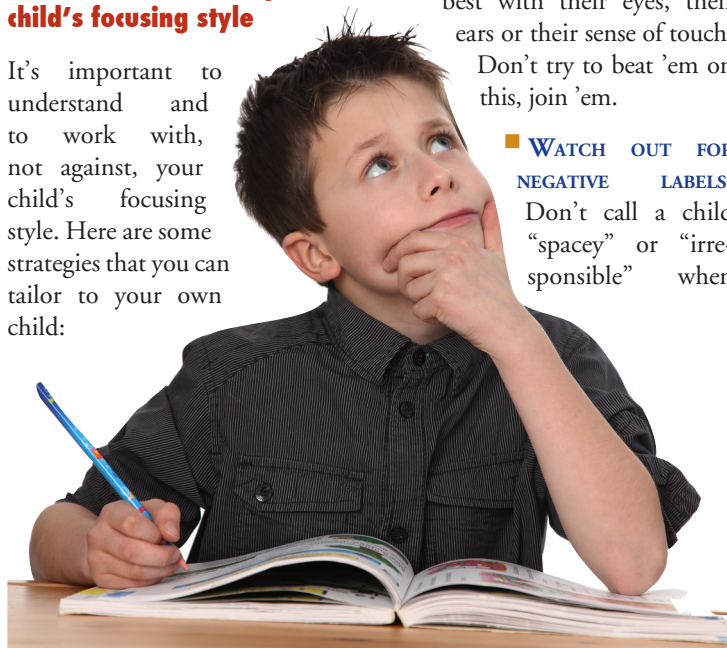
■ **ENCOURAGE CHILDREN TO USE SPECIFIC PHRASES** when they feel like they've lost focus—phrases that don't put the blame on anyone: "Oops, my mind wandered" or "I keep losing my place" or "I'm thinking about other things" or "I'm too tired to concentrate."

■ **SWITCH STRATEGIES TO REGAIN FOCUS.** Help your child prioritize and decide which task is most important. Break tasks down into smaller pieces and do a few at a time. Try relocating to another place or different conditions. (See *Research Review*.)

The ability to slow down and "edit" oneself is also critical. Ask: "Are you taking your time?" "Have you stopped to check your work?"

## Know and work with your child's focusing style

It's important to understand and to work with, not against, your child's focusing style. Here are some strategies that you can tailor to your own child:



*"I've been working for an hour. I think it's time for a snack."*

■ **LEARN THE SIGNS THAT INDICATE WHEN YOUR CHILD IS CAPABLE OF FOCUSING.** Typically, kids are least able to focus before they eat and during transitions—when they're

waking up, leaving the house or just getting home. Get to know what your child looks like when he or she is most attentive.

■ **GO WITH YOUR CHILD'S MODE OF FOCUSING.** Some kids focus better moving around, others sitting still. Some concentrate better when they're alone, others do better around a bunch of people.

■ **TUNE INTO YOUR CHILD'S FOCUSING CHANNELS.** Some kids process best with their eyes, their ears or their sense of touch. Don't try to beat 'em on this, join 'em.

■ **WATCH OUT FOR NEGATIVE LABELS.** Don't call a child "spacey" or "irresponsible" when

ing. The idea is to avoid battles. When you find yourself covering the same old territory, it's a pretty good bet that you're basing your reasoning on what you think your child usually does. Make room for kids to approach problems in new ways that are right for them.

■ **PRaise YOUR CHILD'S FOCUS** rather than his or her performance. If you really want kids to listen, start whispering to your spouse or friend: "Wow, Karen kept working on that puzzle. She didn't give up, even when it was hard for her."

■ **HELP YOUR CHILD SEE THE CONNECTION** between having focus and achieving results. Demonstrate perseverance in your own activities. Be aware of how scattered you might be. Do you read or eat with the television on? Rush about constantly? All this sends messages to your children.

■ **CREATE SUCCESS SCENARIOS.** Stack the deck for your child. Create situations that allow your child to work well. Take into account the circumstances that motivate your child and promote learning such as the type of project, time of day, your child's mood and interest. A small experience of success will lead to bigger successes. ♦

*—Adapted from the author's book "Nurturing Good Children Now" (St. Martin's Press).*

## A checklist for parents

It's important to look at what we do with and to our children that can impede their ability to focus. For example: Am I moving too fast? When your child seems to be losing focus, here are some more questions to ask:

- ▶ Am I complicating the task? Am I giving too many directions at once or not breaking a task into manageable pieces?
- ▶ Am I allowing too much stimulation, especially when there's homework to do (TV, computer, video games, phone time)?
- ▶ Do I interrupt my child's focus? Am I reminding my child of something else to do while she or he is putting toys away?
- ▶ Am I clear about what's most important? In the morning does my child need to get dressed first, before feeding the dog?
- ▶ Are my instructions too vague: "Be good at Grandma's" instead of "Say hello to everyone when we first get there"?
- ▶ Am I trying to do too many things at once that are diverting attention from my child? ♦

# 10 tips on giving criticism that's really helpful

By Deb Bright

Nobody likes criticism. Handled poorly, it can sting, breed resentment and even cause us to lose a friend or alienate a colleague at work. No wonder most of us try to avoid it.

But we need to learn from our mistakes, and the truth doesn't have to hurt. Criticism can enrich a relationship, whether you're on the giving or receiving end.

It's important to realize, too that criticism isn't always about correcting an attitude or behavior. It can encourage someone who's doing something well to do it even better. Helpful criticism can motivate people and be a learning tool.

Unlike praise, however, giving criticism implies the need to make a change in the way a person thinks or does something. So the exchange needs to be productive. Both givers and receivers share responsibility for making criticism informative, instructive and beneficial. Here are some suggestions:

**Think before you speak.** Be prepared, both in terms of what to criticize and how to express it. Remember, the only kind of criticism you want to engage in is criticism that will be perceived by a receiver as helpful.



*"Oh yes, that works much better now."*

**Consider levels of trust.** For a critical message to be accepted and not misunderstood, it's important—especially in a diverse workforce—to consider the trust factor. Where trust exists, people will assume the motive for a criticism is positive. If it's not there, bring up the topic of trust and try to weave it into the message before introducing the criticism.

**Know how best to approach someone.** Most of us expect a critical exchange to land somewhere along the spectrum of from "bothersome" to "painful." So it's normal to feel uncomfortable when you give criticism. But the goal should not be to

wait until you feel more comfortable. Rather, it is to be effective when you give the criticism. Employees expect to be criticized, especially by a boss. Their biggest complaint is how it's packaged.

## Clarify what actions are needed.

Don't assume that simply expressing a criticism will lead to a desired action. For example, if you say, "You need to be more organized"

or "You need to work faster" or "You need to keep me better informed," it can be a guessing game as to how someone should respond. Be clear about the correction you want to see happen.

**Show empathy.** Don't focus only on the problem at hand when you give criticism. Show some concern for the individual. If you know that someone worked hard to prepare a report for you, always acknowledge the effort.

**Talk about why the criticism has value.** Explain up front how the person receiving criticism will benefit when taking

the required action. This is more likely to get you commitment rather than mere compliance. Don't be a "just do it" criticizer.

**Stay on message.** What often happens during a criticism is that a smart receiver can introduce another issue that diverts the giver's focus. For example: a receiver may respond, "I hate it when you use that tone of voice with me," and the giver may take the bait, "What do you mean?" Keep your purpose clearly in focus.

**Be timely.** Don't procrastinate, thinking if you wait long enough, the situation will correct itself and the issue will somehow magically disappear.

**Vary the intensity.** Not all criticism is equal and of the same importance or urgency. If you become a "sky is falling" person or "prophet of doom," sooner or later almost nothing you suggest will be taken as very important.

**Provide specifics.** Be sure you have your facts straight before you criticize someone. Don't accuse a person without the evidence or assume that the facts will come out *after* you give your criticism. Accusations without facts are never helpful. ♦

—Adapted from the author's new book *"The Truth Doesn't Have to Hurt: How to Use Criticism to Strengthen Relationships, Improve Performance, and Promote Change"* (Amacom).

## What you say can strengthen a person's confidence, too

There's a lot more you can say and do a lot to keep a person's confidence from being rattled when you criticize him or her. Here are a few tried-and-true approaches:

- ▶ During the exchange, make it known that it's just a criticism and not a personal attack. Do this by simply saying outright, "I believe in you."
- ▶ After the criticism, give the person a similar task to perform. Actions are more powerful than words to convey your belief in the individual.
- ▶ Engage the person in a discussion about how best to correct the situation and move forward. It's another way to say, "I believe in you and respect what you have to say."

- ▶ Ask what obstacles or difficulties the person anticipates that would jeopardize his or her being successful. Address each concern by coming up with a workable plan the person accepts and believes in.
- ▶ To convey that the mistake made is a thing of the past, take notes during your talk. At the end, hold up the sheet of paper and ask, "Is there anything else we need to discuss about this situation?" If the person says "yes," it's a good thing you asked. Most likely, she or he will say "no." At that point, rip up the sheet of paper, throw it in a wastepaper basket and say "Let's move on from here." ♦



## Can my doctor charge extra for that?

**H**ealth insurance plans have reimbursement guidelines for covered services, such as office visits. Most plans also allow doctors to charge extra for certain nonmedical services such as administrative fees that are not covered.

Which of those extras can a doctor charge for? Here are some answers from Consumer Reports on Health.

**Copies of health records?** Yes. Federal law and laws in most states authorize doctors to charge a reasonable, cost-based fee for making copies. They may also charge for pulling up charts and filling out forms for physicals, family medical leave, returning to work, gym release and forms relating to disability.

**Telephone calls and email?** No, not as a rule. But if you call your doctor several months after a visit about an unrelated issue, she or he could charge you for that call as an independent covered service.

**Extra time on patient care?** No. Medicare and private insurers do not allow doctors to charge for extra time spent on patient care and research. They may not charge an additional fee for responding to requests from health insurance companies and other kinds of documentation.

**Not showing up for an appointment.** Yes. High no-show rates have prompted many insurance plans to allow doctors to charge a patient who fails to cancel a scheduled appointment within a specified period of time (usually 24 hours). ♦

## Yoga poses you can do on an airplane

**I**f you're flying in coach or on a no-frills airline, chances are good your seat will be a snug fit and the leg room nonexistent. That's why so many of us walk off planes feeling a bit creaky and stiff. Is there any way to avoid this?

Yoga teacher Cyndi Lee says yes, and she's come up with these airplane-friendly poses that can be done in a seat or in the aisle, without disturbing other passengers.

### For beginners

○ **Improve your circulation on a long flight by twisting from time to time in your seat.** Plant your feet on the floor and twist to the right. To deepen the twist, put your left hand on the outside of your right knee. Then switch sides. Be sure to include your head and neck.

○ **Try the ankle-to-knee pose if you can.** Put your ankle on top of the opposite knee. This is a stretch for most people. If you're flexible, you can deepen it by leaning forward a bit and pushing down with your forearms. Then switch legs. While you're in that position, flex and point your raised foot. Squeeze and spread your toes.

○ **Hug yourself.** You can do this either sitting or standing. Just wrap your arms around yourself



and squeeze. Try to touch your shoulder blades with your fingertips. Stretch your neck by pressing your right ear to your right shoulder. Repeat on the other side.

○ **Give yourself a shoulder stretch.** Don't try this in your seat—you'll need a little more "wing" space. Do it in the aisle when you take a bathroom break. Just raise your arms and reach behind your head, interlacing your fingers. Squeeze your shoulder

blades together. Look up and lift your chest. Raise your arms up and away from your back.

### For yoga practitioners

○ **Do the tree pose in the aisle,** but only if you can manage it without toppling. Or use the door of an unoccupied bathroom for balance. Place the sole of one foot against the inner thigh of your other leg and raise your arms to your chest or over your head. This will relieve lower back soreness.

○ **Try a variation of downward dog.** Stand and put your hands on the seat in front of you (when it's empty, of course). Step back and lean forward, bending in half.

○ **Modify the cat and cow poses.** Do them standing (preferably when other passengers are snoozing). Bend your knees and place your hands slightly above your knees. Alternate between rounding your spine like a dome (cat) and curving it like an arch (cow). Look down when you do the cat and up when you do the cow.

○ **Breathe deeply, whatever your pose.** Inhale and exhale for counts of 4, 5 or 6. This is calming. ♦

—Adapted from "The Getaway" column in *The New York Times*.

## Did you know that...

**Watercress is a powerhouse vegetable.** It scored a perfect 100 in a Centers for Disease Control study of the nutrient and fiber content of 47 fruits and vegetables. Its crisp, dark green leaves have a pungent, slightly bitter, peppery flavor, so it can add zest to salads, sandwiches, soups and sauces. You can even make it the primary green in a salad if you trim the thick stem. Also highly rated in the CDC study were chard, spinach, chicory, parsley, collards, beet greens and turnip greens.

**Frozen meals can be healthier than fast foods.** Research presented at a conference of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics found that study participants who ate frozen meals consumed fewer calories and less saturated fat per day than those who ate at fast-food restaurants. Frozen entrees also gave people more fiber, potassium, calcium and protein than fast-food meals.

**Eating nuts can help treat prediabetes.** A Spanish study published in the journal *Diabetes Care* showed that people with prediabetes who ate two ounces of pistachios a day showed improvements in their blood sugar and insulin levels and several metabolic risk factors linked to prediabetes, compared to those in a control group who had a similar diet with about the same number of calories but without pistachios. This particular study was sponsored by a pistachio trade group, and previous research has shown that other nuts have been found to produce similar beneficial effects. ♦

—Adapted from the University of California, Berkeley Wellness Letter and the Weill Cornell Medical College newsletter Women's Nutrition Connection.



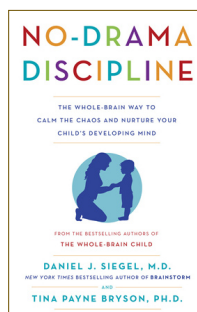
# A new and loving way to think about discipline

The authors of the new book *No-Drama Discipline* begin by asking parents to rethink what discipline really means. It's not really about punishment or control, they say, but about teaching and building skills—and doing so from a place of love, respect and emotional connection.

They say, “Essentially we want parents and caregivers to think of discipline as one of the most loving and nurturing things we can do for kids...if we want them to improve their ability to control themselves, respect others, participate in deep relationships and live moral and ethical lives.”

Discoveries about the brain give us deeper insights into the kids we care for, what they need and how to discipline in ways that foster optimal development.

Authors Daniel Siegel, MD and Tina Payne Bryson, PhD, who also wrote the bestseller *The Whole-Brain Child*, provide important facts about children's brain development. They explain what kind of discipline is most appropriate and constructive for kids at different ages and stages.



They debunk myths about discipline that persist. One, for example, is that it's all about a child's behavior. They say it should be more about the “Why” of a behavior—getting at the emotions or needs behind it.

They also question the effectiveness of time-outs. Time to calm down is important, they say, but time-outs often intensify the conflict. They argue that rather than being separated from parents, this is a time when children need their parents the most.

Consistency is important, but it can quickly become rigid. Kids can understand degrees of context and complexity, they say, and it's good to have that experience.

Complete with candid stories and playful illustrations, this terrific book shows you how to work with your child's developing mind, peacefully resolve conflicts and strengthen the resilience of everyone in the family.

*No-Drama Discipline: The Whole-Brain Way to Calm the Chaos and Nurture Your Child's Developing Mind* (Bantam) is available in bookstores and in Kindle and Audible editions. ♦

*Work & Family Life provides information and practical solutions to a wide range of family, job, and health issues. Our purpose is to help our readers reduce their stress and find pleasure and satisfaction in their many roles at work, at home, and in their communities.*

Editor & Publisher Susan Ginsberg, EdD      Executive Editor Ellen Galinsky      Editor Anne Perryman  
Contributing Editor Susan Newman, PhD      Contributing Editor for Elder Care Patricia Haines Dayan, ACSW      Account Executive Gail Darling

Editorial Office Dr. Susan Ginsberg (212) 557-3555      Email [workfam@aol.com](mailto:workfam@aol.com)      Website [www.workandfamilylife.com](http://www.workandfamilylife.com)  
Circulation and Customer Service Gail Darling, 433 Goldenwood Way, West Palm Beach, FL 33414      (561) 818-3670

*Work & Family Life is distributed by companies and other organizations to their employees and clients.*

*Call for prices on individual, bulk and online subscriptions. Copyright 2015 Work & Family Life*



# Trust-Based Relational Intervention® (TBRI®): Life Value Terms



**Life Value Terms** are scripts used in developing healthy relationships. Life Value Terms differ from Life Skills, in that they give caregivers and children *language* to use for understanding, communicating, and learning valuable skills. Essentially, Life Value Terms are the *language of a trauma-informed culture*. This language not only helps children develop a "voice" in an appropriate and respectful manner, but it also provides caregivers with tools for engaging children in healthy communication within relationships.

## "Gentle and Kind"

Due to sensory issues, violent histories, and fragile brain chemistries, many children from hard places are unaware when they are not being gentle. Using the term, "Gentle and Kind," "Be kind," or "Would you try that again more gently?" reminds children to soften their touch, their tones of voice, their facial expressions, and their attitudes.

## "Askin' or Tellin'"

When a child needs something from an adult but asks with a demand - even without the intent of disrespect - such as, "Give me that water bottle," the caregiver can playfully respond to the child with, "Are you askin' or tellin'?" Playfully responding this way nudges the child toward understanding the differences between respect and disrespect.

## "Using Words"

Behavior is the language of children's unmet needs. While it is important for caregivers to be detectives of the messages behind behaviors, prompting children to "use your words" teaches them to express their needs and feelings in a healthier way than by lashing out or withdrawing.

## "With Respect"

Simply saying, "Try that again with respect," or "Let's remember to treat our friends with respect" encourages children to be mindful and respectful in their tones of voice, facial expressions, words, and body language.

## "With Permission and Supervision"

It is imperative for children to learn that adults are in charge and responsible for keeping them safe. By responding, "With permission and supervision, you may..." when children ask to perform certain activities with supervision helps them learn to trust that adults will keep them safe, respond to their requests, and meet their needs.

## "Listen and Obey"

Children need to be encouraged and rewarded for listening and obeying directives from caregivers. If an adult gives a child a directive, and the child hesitates to follow through, the adult may say, "Listen and obey the first time, please." If a child follows the directive the first time given, the adult may say, "That was great listening and obeying the first time. Great job, buddy!"

## "Accepting 'No'"

When some children hear "no," they believe that their needs will never be met, and that they have no voice or value. Adults are encouraged to try giving more "yeses" than "nos" so children learn that they are heard and valued. When "no" is necessary, however, try praising children for accepting "no" before they realize the denied request. Example: "No, we cannot do that right now...(very quickly) Wow, good job accepting no!"

## Levels of Response™

Responses to challenging situations with children should be *Efficient*, meaning that the caregivers response should match the situation at hand. Over-responding to a relatively minor transgression can push a child into more severe behavior. The TBRI® Levels of Response™ outline what caregivers can do in various challenging situations with children.

### Levels of Response™

#### *Playful Engagement (Level 1)*

- Redirect the child without breaking stride.
- E.g., “Would you like to try it again with respect?” or “Are you askin’ or tellin’?” in a playful voice.
- Using playful engagement reduces misbehavior dramatically over time because it strengthens the relationship between the child and caregiver.

#### *Structured Engagement (Level 2)*

- Pause the situation and use a more regulated voice.
- Offer two choices – this provides a concrete, quick way to get children back on track.
- Use behavioral ‘re-dos’ to help children feel more successful. Walking through the motions of the *right* behavior is good for muscle memory.

#### *Calming Engagement (Level 3)*

- Allow the child to regulate with adult assistance.
- Use a time-in and keep the child close rather than sending him or her away (as in a traditional time-out). The time-in communicates that you are there for support and guidance.
- Work out a predetermined ‘quiet’ or ‘calm’ place adolescents can go when overwhelmed or if they prefer to be alone.

#### *Protective Engagement (Level 4)*

- Reserve use of this level for violence or aggression.
- Seek formal training that is accepted/recognized by state or facility.



## The IDEAL Response<sup>®</sup>

The IDEAL Response<sup>®</sup> is an acronym that represents characteristics for a helpful, appropriate response to challenging behavior.

### The IDEAL Response<sup>®</sup>

**I**mmEDIATE

**D**IRECT

**E**FFICIENT

**A**CTION-BASED

**L**eveled at the behavior, not the child

#### ***Immediate***

- Respond within 3 seconds
- Learning occurs best when behaviors are addressed immediately

#### ***Direct***

- Use techniques based on TBRI<sup>®</sup> *Engagement Strategies*
- For example, kneel to get on the child's level and use soft eye contact

#### ***Efficient***

- Use only the amount of intervention necessary to get behavior back on track
- Over-responding may drive children into worse behavior

#### ***Action-Based***

- Action-based learning is the most salient way to absorb knowledge.
- For example, guide children through a re-do

#### ***Leveled at the behavior, not the child***

- For children from "hard places", self-esteem is very fragile. Caregivers must make clear that children are not defined by their behavior (their behavior is not *who they are*).
- Correction should address the behavior at hand, *not* the child.

**Constructive Interventions with Attachment-Impaired Children****DO SAY:****Attunement and Empathy Statements:**

1. "Wow, you're really mad!"
2. "I can see how hard it is for you to listen."
3. "I know it upsets you when I say that."

**Protection and Control Statements:**

1. "I'm not going to let you do that."
2. "You need to do that in two minutes."
3. "You're not allowed to hurt anyone."
4. "I won't let anyone hurt you."

**To Encourage Real Feelings:**

1. "It's OK to cry, but tell me what's the matter."
2. "What do you need to be ready to go back to bed?"
3. "Can you tell me what's worrying (scaring, hurting) you?"

**To Promote Self-Esteem:**

1. "What you're saying is not clear. I know you can tell me what happened."
2. "I hear what you're saying, but what was your part in it?"
3. "You can make a better choice than that."

**DON'T SAY:****Shame Inducing Statements:**

1. "There's nothing to get mad about!"
2. "Why can't you listen?!"
3. "There you go, getting upset again!"

**Threats of Harm:**

1. "Don't you dare do that!"
2. "If you don't do that in two minutes, you're in trouble!"
3. "I'll show you how it feels!"
4. "Don't get yourself hurt!"

**To Discourage Real Feelings:**

1. "Stop being a cry-baby!"
2. "Go back to bed – there's nothing scary in there!"
3. "There's nothing to worry about."

**To Decrease Self-Esteem:**

1. "I can never believe you."
2. "You always have an excuse."
3. "You do this all the time."



## CHAPTER NINE

# Aggression

*"If you are patient in one moment of anger,  
you will escape a hundred days of sorrow."*

– Chinese Proverb

**W**e live in an increasingly aggressive society. Anger and aggression are everywhere – on the road, on the big screen, on the news, and yes, at little league games. Children also experience aggression on a daily basis—in the classroom, in the school cafeteria, in the home with siblings, and on the playground.

While many children, especially little boys, go through stages of being aggressive, they typically learn to channel and express the feelings behind this anger in more socially appropriate ways. But when this aggression goes beyond typical childhood behavior, it becomes exceptionally unsettling and extremely uncomfortable for parents and other members of a family. In many cases, it is downright scary. Children with trauma histories often exhibit aggressive behaviors which cannot be compared to other children's behaviors in their intensity, frequency, and duration.

One mother writes:

*It is the violence in my home that I wasn't prepared for. We adopted a cute little boy, two-and-one-half years old, with the most endearing little dimple that lights up his face when he smiles. But when he gets angry, he goes into an uncontrollable rage. It is as if he is possessed. He is violent beyond words. He turns into a wild animal – biting, hitting, kicking, and literally assaulting his family, especially me, his mother. I'm so scared...what is going to happen when he gets older? I'm terrified that he's going to really hurt someone. I never could have believed this kind of violence could be possible from such a small child. It is so unnerving.*

## Traditional View

The traditional view explains that children with trauma histories thrive on high levels of adrenaline.<sup>1</sup> Therapists point out that these children come from high levels of anger in their prior environments. Not only are these children

accustomed to the anger and turmoil, it is explained that these children are actually comforted by it.<sup>2</sup> The chaos is safe. The fear and instability is what they know best. It is the familiar. They also explain that anger is a way for these children to create externally what is going on internally.<sup>3</sup>

Anger is seen to be a friend to this child – a strong and powerful friend. Whenever the child is feeling weak, sad, or any other emotion that is painful to him, the child can call upon his anger to take control of the situation. He knows that people respond to anger by getting angry back. The child is then able to control the emotional states of the people around him.<sup>4</sup> Anger puts the other person (usually the parent) in a defensive mode – away from a place of love and nurturing. The traditional explanation further explains that this anger then creates emotional safety for the child, providing a wall of security to guard against vulnerability – yet another tool to keep the parents at arm’s length.<sup>5</sup>

One of the most popular parenting techniques recommended for parents is to use a paradoxical approach with a child who typically becomes angry and aggressive.<sup>6,7,8</sup> This keeps the parent in control and keeps the parent from being taken hostage to the child’s aggressive state, keeping the child from “winning” within the parent-child relationship. A classic example would be for a parent to tell his eight year-old child to turn off the television because it is dinnertime and that he may go ahead and have a tantrum. This double bind is necessary in order for the child to know that the parent is strong, persistent, and definitely in charge.<sup>9</sup> If the child has a tantrum, the child is doing what the parent instructed him to do. If the child refuses to have a tantrum, the parent wins because a tantrum has been avoided. Parents are told to predict the child’s behavior in order for the parent to stay in charge, which then allows the child to find a way out of his negative patterned behaviors.<sup>10</sup>

### **A New View**

Three foundational principles need to be understood to truly see what creates a child who looks “possessed” or acts like a “wild animal,” as described by the mother at the beginning of this chapter. First, a child’s aggressive behaviors arise from a state of stress. This stress is induced by the presence of fear. Second, this fear state presents itself as a mask of anger. We often become so threatened by the anger that we fail to understand that this feeling of anger originates and is driven from fear. And third, a child does not consciously act in an angry/fearful state. A child is not consciously driven to aggression in order to create disruption in relationships. Trauma impacts a child’s state level of memory, causing him to behave aggressively when in a state of stress or fear.

The true understanding of an aggressive child is found in brain research.



Research shows that a child's neurophysiological system is impacted by trauma; the amygdala becomes hypersensitive to threat. The over-sensitized amygdala becomes reactive based on stimulation through the child's sensory pathways, primarily through the sense of smell, vision, body language, temperature, and touch. Thus, when a child is prone to a hyperaroused state, he is literally hard-wired to go into a "super-charged" mode. Although initially starting out in a frozen state, within a millisecond, the child enters into a reactive state of fight; aggressive and defensive behaviors are then demonstrated. The child is not aggressive out of spite, meanness, or out of hate. Rather, the child is aggressive out of a survival state. The child is, in many instances, in a place of absolute terror.

As mom walks towards the child, the child's perception, in his hyperaroused state, becomes distorted and the child becomes overwhelmed in his thinking process. His mother, who two seconds ago was the apple of his eye, has now become a monster ready to attack him, or even kill him. So, the child, in his distorted fear state, attacks his mother, biting her, kicking her, spitting on her, and hitting her.

To add to this, the parent's immediate reaction to the child is that the child is not safe. The child has now become a threat to the parent. Yes, the cute little toddler with the adorable dimple has now become a threat within his very own home. In many cases, the state level memory quickly becomes activated within the parent, awakening the traumatic stress that the parent experienced in the past. In this condition, the parent's ability to be flexible and to determine what is truly a threat, to see the child's fear, and to remain calm is greatly diminished.

A parent's automatic reaction is to control this child in an attempt to secure the environment. It is important to note that the only time we seek to control is when we are in a fear state. The only time we seek to change someone else's behavior is when we ourselves feel threatened or scared. Thus, it is the parent's own fear state that is driving the controlling parental behaviors. The combination of the parent's fear state and the child's fear state then creates an environment filled with hate, chaos, and violence.

Aggression from a child of any age can be scary for a parent. But as little children become young adults, growing taller and stronger than their parents, it becomes terrifying for parents. Let us look at three scenarios of aggressive behaviors from three different developmental stages. These examples will show how a parent can respond to these behaviors in order to keep the scenarios from intensifying and igniting.

■  
*The only time we  
seek to change  
someone else's  
behavior is when  
we ourselves feel  
threatened or  
scared.*  
■

**Scenario 1:** Tina is a three year-old toddler who was removed from her biological mother at the age of nine months. Her biological mother was the victim of severe domestic violence throughout her pregnancy with Tina. Now at three, other parents secretly refer to Tina as “the terrorist of the playground.” She typically hits other children for no apparent reason, throws sand in their faces, and pushes them off the swings. Today, Tina is playing in the park with four other children. After thirty-minutes of play, Tina’s regulatory system has become taxed and she has moved into a state of dysregulation, unbeknownst to her foster mother. Suddenly, one of the children playing with Tina bumps into Tina. BOOM! Tina starts pushing and hitting the child. As Tina attacks, her aggression becomes more and more intense; her aggression escalates as the other child begins to fight back with Tina. Within a matter of seconds, Tina went from what looked like a calm state to an aggressive and hostile state.

Our first reaction would be to pull Tina out, put her in time-out for her behavior, and tell her that hitting is not nice. Yet, we have to begin to see these types of situations differently if we are to help Tina’s regulatory system develop appropriately. Recognizing first that peer interaction is a stress-inducing event, we can then see that Tina was beyond her stress tolerance. Her regulatory system was activated and ready to discharge the build up of energy at any moment. It would have been prudent of Tina’s foster mother to recognize that thirty minutes of play was too much for Tina, pulling Tina in with her for a “Time-In” prior to the incident. Tina could have sat with her foster mother for a few minutes, which would then have allowed Tina to shift back into a calm state, ready to return to safely playing with the other children.

In cases such as this where it was too late and Tina already became aggressive, her foster mother could help Tina understand that she was too stressed to play at that moment. Her foster mother could say, “Tina, you look so scared right now. Come sit with me, sweetheart. You’re okay...nobody is going to hurt you. I’m going to keep you safe.” Tina’s foster mother would then be addressing Tina at her state level of survival, calming her activated primal fear stored within the cells of Tina’s body. Tina’s foster mother would then have become Tina’s external hippocampus, allowing the body system to regulate and return to a state of calm. Later in the day, when both Tina and her foster mother are calm, the life lesson of teaching Tina that hitting is wrong could take place. Tina would more easily absorb this moral teaching when her body system is calm and regulated.

**Scenario 2:** Let us revisit the example given earlier when describing the traditional attachment parenting approach with the eight year old who was instructed to turn off the television. Mom says, “It’s time to eat dinner; please turn off the TV, Sam.” Sam, in turn, throws the remote control and yells, “I



hate you!” This type of immediate, explosive reaction indicates that Sam does not feel safe most of the time within his own home. He is living in a hyper-vigilant state and it only takes one simple directive from the parent for him to have a complete emotional meltdown. If mom were to react to Sam in a controlling manner, the chances are high that the situation would escalate into hitting, kicking, and yelling behaviors, as has been the pattern in the years previous.

Instead, mom has to recognize that Sam lives in a continual state of fear and in a continual state of alert, ready at a moment’s notice to attack. In this understanding, mom goes to Sam ten minutes before it is time to eat dinner. She sits down on the couch with him, puts her arm around him to physically engage him, and gently says, “Honey, in about five minutes we are going to have to turn off the TV. Okay?” No answer is necessary and mom should not expect an answer at this point. Sam, then, is given time to process the directive on his own.

Mom comes back five minutes later and says, “Honey, it is time to turn the TV off. I know you get really scared when it is time to turn off the TV because you are afraid we will never turn it back on again (that is Sam’s reality because stress causes confused and distorted thinking). When you get scared like this, you usually get really mad. Actually, you look really mad right now. I want you to tell me you’re mad. Really, tell me you’re angry you have to turn the TV off.” Mom is giving Sam permission to be angry because that is the only way he has known up to this point in his development to express himself. She is not telling him to get angry as a double bind as described earlier. She really wants to absorb his anger for him. She says it with passion, “Tell me you’re angry, son. I want to know how mad it makes you.” Mom is meeting Sam in his emotional place and giving him the space and safety to work through his dysregulation. When he says, “Yeah, I’m mad” with little affect, she says, “Yes, you’re mad. Tell me again louder, with more feeling, ‘I’m mad.’” Mom is helping Sam express himself verbally in order to help him discharge the build up of energy within his body system.

■  
***Aggressive children  
are seeking  
regulation and  
expressing this  
deep-seated need  
through their  
behaviors.***  
■

**Scenario 3:** Joshua is a 14 year-old child whose behavior has been increasing in its level of violence, especially since turning 13 a year ago. To date, Joshua’s parents have managed to restrain him during his violent rages in order to prevent serious injury. Joshua walks in the door after school, slams the door, throws his backpack on the floor, and flings his shoes off on the way

to his room. Dad interrupts this daily pilgrimage to his room by calmly saying, “Joshua, how was your day?” Joshua, in his dysregulated state replies, “It sucked. What’s it to you anyway?” Dad immediately shifts into a controlling mode, stands up to show his physical stature, deepens his voice, and says, “You’re not going to talk to me that way. Get over here, son!” Joshua quickly turns around, increases his stride towards his father, puts out his hands to aggressively push his father, and says, “I’ll talk to you any damn way I please.”

Dad has officially been triggered into a fear state. In order to relate to Joshua, though, dad has to first see that his own fear has been triggered. Dad has to realize when Joshua is in a state of arousal that the most effective way to help Joshua is to come down from his own arousal state and to understand where Joshua is emotionally. In this understanding, dad can then maintain his own regulation. It has been shown that the calmer amygdala has the ability to soothe the less regulated amygdala.

So, instead, after dad hears Joshua’s initial disrespectful response, dad takes a few deep breaths, which allow him to stay regulated and to stay in touch with Joshua’s emotional state. Dad then follows Joshua into his room and sits on the bed without saying a word. Words do not have to be communicated at this point. The essence is to create a relationship that will allow regulation to seep in without pouring fuel on the flame of dysregulation and aggression. Then, after a few minutes, dad says, “Son, I see you had a tough day today.” Joshua continues with the belligerent language and says, “You’re damn right! I hate my fucking school and my teachers are assholes.” Dad says, “Wow. I remember middle school. I remember how rough it was. What happened today, son?” Dad is relating through communication and he is meeting Joshua in Joshua’s dysregulated state. Dad keeps processing with Joshua and after awhile, gets up, walks to the doorway, and says, “Joshua, I’ll be in my office; come let me know if you need me for anything.”

Later that night, dad comes to Joshua, sits down and says, “Josh, this afternoon you were really nasty to me when you got home. I know you were upset, but that kind of language upsets me and I feel quite disrespected when you talk to me that way. How about next time you just say, ‘I had a bad day, Dad?’” This communication regarding Joshua’s unacceptable language occurs in a calm state, where Joshua is open to listening and open to making a commitment to do better next time. Dad was able to diffuse a potentially aggressive scene simply by understanding and relating to Joshua – meeting Joshua in his place of hyper-arousal.

Parents need to see anger as fear. This fear-dynamic can then be used in order to provide an environment conducive to not only change, but to healing. Aggressive children are seeking regulation and expressing this deep-seated need through their behaviors. They need to be given the

emotional space in order to work through their dysregulation. In many cases, while seeking regulation, they are actually unable to receive it from the parent, which typically gets the parent frustrated and triggered back into a fearful state. The parent needs to physically step back in order to reduce the threat and to allow the child the space he needs in order for the upper level thinking to become active. Parents need to realize that the aggression is not directed at them personally; it is aggression towards survival. Lastly, parents have to see their own fear reaction and be in touch with their own fears in order to respond to their child from a place of love, instead of reacting to their child from a state of fear (see Chapter 5).

### **Parenting Example: Aggression**

**Scenario:** Tommy is an adopted 16 year old with a history of rageful, aggressive, and threatening behaviors in the home. Since the age of twelve, he has become increasingly abusive and violent, threatening to hurt family members. Now he regularly works out in the gym and has become physically stronger. All attempts at having him placed in an inpatient program for anger management have failed. Suddenly one night, he gets into an argument with his older brother, flies into a rage, and breaks his brother's nose.

### **Traditional View**

Tommy is effectively holding this family hostage by his uncontrollable anger outbursts and combative behaviors. We have to realistically see that Tommy is demonstrating behaviors that are only warnings of things to come, perhaps even murdering somebody in the future. Punishing him only ignites his rages. He is refusing to go to therapy, so finding a counselor really is not an option. At this point, the family has only a few options in order to provide safety for the other family members. They can call the police and have Tommy arrested. They can continue to attempt to manage Tommy at home by taking a couple of proactive steps. The parents can sleep in shifts to ensure family safety from this child (which is actually a good idea for Tommy to know that someone is watching him all the time). The family, excluding Tommy, can take a self-defense course. Tommy should not be included in this self-defense course because that would be akin to giving Tommy another weapon to use against the family. Additionally, they can ask Tommy to leave the home, or they can ultimately turn Tommy over to the county foster care system.<sup>11</sup>



**New View**

The first step for this family is to realize the intense fear that has permeated into every interaction with every family member on a day-to-day basis. Family members are living out of the fear from the past, fearing and avoiding the present, and most certainly living in fear of the future. The parents need to realize that Tommy has been acting out aggressively from a primal state of fear, not anger. When they are able to see Tommy as a scared child, instead of an angry child, they will be able to relate to him and to help him get in touch with the fear driving his behaviors. The parents need to realize that early trauma has impacted Tommy's state level of memory and that Tommy is acting out of a survival mode. Tommy's regulatory system is insufficient to be around his older brother without an adult nearby to help regulate the interaction. The next time Tommy begins to shift into his aggressive state and yell aggressive threats, his parent needs to say to him, "Tommy, you must be really scared right now. By you telling me that you're going to kill me, that only means that you're really scared that someone might kill you." The parent then closes the door of the room, creating physical containment for Tommy, and the parent sits on the floor, lessening the perceived threat of the parent. After taking some deep breaths and getting in touch with his own fear, the parent then invites Tommy to express his emotions, "Tommy, tell me how scared you are right now. I'm not going anywhere...I'm right here with you. You're not in trouble and I'm not sending you away." The parent waits patiently for Tommy's next cue. The parent continues to stay with Tommy, not trying to force, change, or control Tommy. The parent continues to invite and relate to Tommy from a safe, non-threatening, love based place. Tommy will ultimately, even if it takes three or four hours – or even six hours – be able to safely discharge some of the bound up, fear-driven energy within his body.

*Quick Reference***AGGRESSION**

Remember that aggression:

- Arises from a state of stress.
- Is a fear-based behavior.
- Is not a conscious act to create chaos or harm.
- Occurs when the brain's amygdala becomes hyper-sensitive to threat.
- Easily puts the parent in a state of fear.
- Is a sign of a scared child, not an angry child.
- Is an act towards survival and is not directed at the parent.

When experiencing this behavior, recognize that your child needs you to:

- Relate to the fear within yourself that is triggered by the aggression.
- Understand that he is simply seeking regulation.
- Stay regulated in order to help in regulating him.
- Understand that he is not trying to create chaos because chaos really does not feel good.
- Pull him in for a "Time-In."
- Be aware that the only time we seek to control is when we are scared, so stay flexible.
- He is not pushing you away and, in fact, needs you more than ever during the aggressive behavior.

## CHAPTER TEN

## Defiance



*"A man's ethical behavior should be based effectually on sympathy, education, and social ties; no religious basis is necessary. Man would indeed be in a poor way if he had to be restrained by fear of punishment and hope of reward after death."*

— Albert Einstein

While every child has "ornery" moments, a child classified as defiant is a child who takes being ornery to the extraordinary. It is a child who takes autonomy to the extreme. Just like the skateboarder who simply uses his skateboard to skate down the sidewalk, and then switches to the extreme by flying off an eight-foot ledge and landing on a two-inch metal handrail. An attachment-challenged child is often seen to take defiance to this intensity. These children are often described as being extremely disobedient, exceedingly rebellious, overly insolent, and completely non-cooperative. They can demonstrate a refusal to being controlled by anybody and constantly test limits. Defiance is one of the classic symptoms on a child attachment checklist, usually being described as "oppositional, argumentative, defiant" and as a child with "extreme control problems."

The typical prognosis by professionals for children and adolescents who do not work out their defiant behavior in their youth is often grim, at best. Professionals in the field of mental health often tell parents that disruptive behavior disorders can lead to a lifetime of problems. The problems they list include social dysfunction, anti-social behavior, and poor adjustment. They further expand on this by explaining that not only will these children suffer within themselves, but their families, peers, and society as a whole will suffer.

Parents seeking help for dealing with their defiant child often find themselves in a more severe situation after following the advice of professionals. A mother describes her situation:

*We sought help for Joseph, our five year old, who was exceptionally defiant to even the simplest of requests. We sought the counsel of a behavioral analyst and used the intervention of 'Extinction.' We used this method when Joseph would refuse a request. We were instructed to stay focused only on the instruction given until Joseph conformed. He became completely oppositional and*



*outraged with this intervention. At times, it would take Joseph up to three hours to follow a simple instruction such as putting on his shoes when it was time to go to the store. His response using this method switched from being just defiant to aggressive. It was so severe that he smashed a window with his bare hands, charged me with a pair of scissors, and threw heavy objects at me, intending to hurt me. It is disheartening and frightening to be following the advice of a well-known professional and to see our home become so out-of-control.*

### **Traditional View**

Traditional professionals explain that the defiant behaviors from attachment-challenged children are an outward expression of the child's internal intolerance of having other people's limits placed upon them. These children are seen to be constantly testing, baiting, and pushing limits in an attempt to see what kind of a reaction they will receive from the adult in charge. Thus, parents are told that their child is in a constant battle for control of the environment.<sup>1</sup> Parents are given strict counseling to stay in control and to especially stay in control of their own emotions.<sup>2</sup> If the child manages to upset the parent, this puts the child back into control. In this view, it is crucial that parental anger be avoided.<sup>3</sup> Emphasis is placed on the perception that the child must do what is asked by the parent in order for an appropriate parent-child relationship to develop.<sup>4</sup>

The defiant behaviors in these children can be either outright refusals to comply by choice<sup>5</sup> or more covert in nature.<sup>6</sup> Traditionally the child who complies readily with a parental instruction, yet "mistakenly forgets" or does not properly complete the task, is seen as manipulative and passive-aggressive. Thus, even when appearing to comply, the child is actually non-compliant – always "off by a hair."<sup>7</sup> When Jenny is asked to put the dishes in the dishwasher and "inadvertently" leaves one spoon in the sink, she is giving a message to her parents that she is doing what they have asked, but that she is not really doing what they have asked. Thus, Jenny is seen in the traditional model as passive-aggressive, maintaining control, and keeping her parents on the peripheral.<sup>8</sup>

One traditional approach is to have children complete their chores "fast and snappy, right the first time, Mom and Dad's way."<sup>9</sup> If the child fails to comply in this manner, the response from the parent is to make a statement to the child that will make the child "think" in order to avoid control battles and to have the child become insightful. So when Jimmy is asked to mow the lawn prior to eating dinner and refuses or loses track of time, Mom can say to him, "Son, you are free to join your family for your next meal as long as

the lawn is mowed.” The idea of this approach is that Jimmy then learns that there are choices in the “real world” and that he will have the opportunity to make the right choice next time.<sup>10</sup>

### New View

As humans, we are a reactive species. When we experience an event that is unfamiliar to us, we will perceive that event as a threat until deemed otherwise. Our immediate reaction will almost always be that of a freeze reaction; we then determine whether to fight or flee – whether to enter into a hyper-aroused state or a hypo-aroused state. When applying this understanding to an oppositional-defiant child, it can be seen that the child is fundamentally a hypo-aroused child. A defiant child is essentially a scared child. A child in this hypo-aroused state, or shutdown state, has the potential for then moving swiftly into a hyper-aroused state, or aggressive state. Reflect on the example of Joseph, the five-year-old defiant child who was being forced through a behavioral technique to follow his parent’s directive. His mother described the situation as turning from defiance to aggression. While Joseph’s initial fear manifested itself into refusing behavior, this fear state was then fed with more fear by his mother’s reaction, quickly shifting Joseph into an aggressive, hyper-aroused state.

■  
***A defiant child  
is essentially a  
scared child.***  
■

For children with trauma histories, it can be *any* request from the parent that creates a feeling of threat. A parental request at any level (yes, simply being asked to take out the trash or simply to put on his shoes) can be one that shifts the child into a fear state due to perceiving the directive as a threat. Dependent on the history, this child may be actually terrified. In that moment, the child cannot determine whether the parent’s request is safe or not. He immediately goes into freeze mode, and then becomes defiant to the parent’s request. In that moment, the child has to be defiant. There is no other alternative.

The essence of defiance is fear. A child needs to be given emotional space and in many cases, physical space, to perceive that the request is not a threat. This is a traumatic stress issue. It is not an issue of the child working to control or manipulate the parent. It is not an issue of the child testing the limits or baiting the parent to see how he can make his parent become emotionally reactive. Defiance is a fundamental issue of feeling threatened and overwhelmed with fear.

After parents give a request, they need to step back and give the child space to process the fear. Giving children emotional space helps them to soothe and process their fear state, allowing them then to rationally interpret

the request as safe. This is only effective if the parent is truly calm. Parents have to recognize and acknowledge their own internal reactions to their child's defiant behaviors. Perhaps it is a reaction of feeling powerless, a feeling of being disrespected, or a feeling of fear of the child not developing an attachment to the parent. The parent needs to work to stay in a calm state in order to help the child then feel safe. Remember, the calmer amygdala has the ability to soothe the aroused amygdala.

There are several predictable areas of defiance for children with trauma histories. Some of these include transition, school-time, bath-time, bedtime, and homework. Let us take a look at each one of these particular areas with parenting examples to show how to help the child's fear state be reduced and eventually eliminated.

**Transition:** Adopted children and children in foster care often demonstrate defiance around the issue of transition. These children need us to recognize that transitional stress is the result of early childhood experiences. For the newborn adopted at birth, the very first transition was being placed from the arms of his birth mother to the arms of his adoptive mother. For the two-year old, it happened when the caseworker arrived at the biological

■  
***They are not  
 equipped to soothe  
 the overload of  
 stress that floods  
 their body-mind  
 systems at  
 nighttime.***  
 ■

home and the child was driven away, never to return home again. For the eight year old who was removed from the orphanage by his adoptive parents after living in the same orphanage since birth, transitional trauma occurred amongst strangers who communicated in a different language. These are all examples of trauma around transition.

The result is that these children in the above examples can have a negative association with any type of transition in the future. The child needs the parent to recognize and acknowledge that this is the fundamental dynamic behind the defiance.

Reflecting back on Joseph, the five-year old, Mom could address this by saying, "Joseph, honey, can you please put your shoes on? We need to go to the store." Joseph sits down on the floor, crosses his arms and says, "No." Mom needs to reflect on the origin of this defiance and defensive posture. Recognizing that he indeed has early trauma around transition, Mom sits down on the floor, puts her arm around Joseph and says, "It must be really scary to leave our home, even to go to the store. It is going to be okay, honey. I am not going to let anything separate us when we are gone. I love you and we will be coming right back home."

**School-time:** Many children, while not being out-right defiant like Joseph, demonstrate avoiding behaviors, or what appear to be more passive



aggressive behaviors. Julie, a twelve-year old, constantly cannot get ready on time for school. Her mother is at her breaking edge seeing Julie “paddycaking” around in the morning instead of being focused on the morning tasks at hand. Julie needs her mother to recognize that this “putzing” behavior is a reflection of the fear that is ignited every morning when even thinking about going to school. In Julie’s case, she was taken from school because of abuse in her home, never to return home to be with her biological mother again. Thus, Julie revisits the fear of going to school and never coming home every morning when thinking about getting on her school bus. Giving consequences for this behavior, telling Julie she needs to make better choices in the morning, or taking away privileges will not address the sheer terror driving her behavior.

**Bath-time:** Children’s case files throughout the United States are filled with stories of abuse that occurred in the bathroom of the child’s home. In the case of international adoptions, children have related horror stories of being forced to take cold showers while living in the orphanage. Thus, defiance around bath-time routine is exceptionally common. Defiance at bath-time is trauma induced. Addressing this behavior through smell-good charts, placing the child in a different room (such as the laundry room) to eat, or any other technique designed to have the child make a better choice at bath-time<sup>11</sup> disregards the unthinkable trauma that occurred in the child’s past.

After five years of battling it out with her daughter at bath-time, a mother relates the story of why bath-time was such a defiant time.

*Once I was able to accept her struggle with taking a shower, I calmly offered to be with her in the bathroom and to be present with her in case she needed me. After taking the first shower without a tantrum in five long years, my daughter was finally able to share this with me: ‘Mom, the guy who sexually molested me used to make me take a shower with him.’*

**Bedtime:** Bedtime fears for traumatized children go far beyond the “Boogie Man” in the closet. Again, nighttime trauma experiences are pervasive for adopted and foster care children. Very real fears stem from nights of being sexually abused by fathers or uncles living in the home. Very real fears stem from being terrified of making a single noise in the orphanage with twenty-five other children as the orphanage worker stood guard. Very real fears stem from being removed from home in the middle of the night by a caseworker due to abuse allegations. Children need their parents to acknowledge and recognize these nighttime fears. They are not equipped to soothe the overload of stress that floods their body-mind systems at nighttime. Bedtime hassles are

signs of stress overload, not of manipulation or defiance. Giving a child extra chores or a consequence for not adhering to a strict bed time<sup>12</sup> misses the opportunity for the parent to soothe and help the child in his healing process.

A father writes:

*Every night, night after night, my daughter would fiddle-faddle around at bedtime. She'd say she needed a drink of water. She'd aimlessly walk around the house. She'd always need one more thing from me. Then, when she did go to bed, she would always leave the hall light on. I had asked her at least fifty times to turn that light off. I was at my wits end until I realized that this behavior was simply a communication of something deeper. When I finally sat with her one night, calm and open to her process, I asked her what made it so difficult to go to bed at night. She said, 'I don't like the dark, daddy. It scares me that when I wake up in the morning you won't be here. I'm so scared you'll be dead.' Then I reflected on how her mother died three years ago from a brain hemorrhage in the middle of the night.*

**Homework:** Children with trauma histories often have immediate reactions to even the thought of doing homework. Parents need to recognize this as fear – not as defiance – in order to stop the cycle of negative repetitious conditioning. Forcing the child to sit and do his homework by giving him a choice of finishing the homework and then having playtime or making him sit until he decides he is “ready” is unproductive and creates more fear in the child for the next day. Saying that homework is 100 percent the child’s responsibility and having the attitude that each school grade is available to the child for as many times as needed<sup>13</sup> does not address the child’s inability to self-soothe when faced with fear.

Daniel Goleman, in his book *Emotional Intelligence*, explains that “students who are anxious, angry, or depressed don’t learn; people who are caught in these states do not take in information efficiently or deal with it well.”<sup>14</sup> So instead of pushing the child and forcing learning to happen, thereby creating negative repetitious conditioning and more fear, the parent’s new understanding is that the child simply cannot learn in this emotional state. The new view allows the parent to work to attend to the unconscious fear by saying, “I know that it really scares you to think about doing your homework. Everyday when it is time to do homework, you look like you’re in a total panic, sweetheart.” The parent’s responsibility is to help shift the child out of the state of fear by talking to the child and working to uncover the fear that is driving these resistant behaviors. Perhaps it is the expectation of being

perfect in order to be loved instead of being abandoned, as in the past. The child's unconscious is saying, "If I'm perfect, then I'm lovable. If I'm lovable, then I'm safe. If I'm safe, then I won't be hurt anymore. I've got to be perfect." This type of unconscious thought becomes so overwhelming and produces so much stress that the cognitive brain is unable to think logically. The child becomes so overwhelmed with the need to be perfect that the thinking brain literally becomes inaccessible. So, the parent says, "I love you and I'm here forever for you. Your homework does not determine your place in this family. Tell me how scary homework is for you."

### **Parenting Example: Defiance**

**Scenario:** Peter is a 14 year old who was hospitalized just last week for violently acting out and threatening to kill his younger brother. Dad comes home after an evening out to find chocolate syrup on the counter top and on the floor. He walks in and sees Peter watching TV and eating an ice cream sundae. Dad asks Peter to clean up his mess in the kitchen and Peter responds, "Man, I'm busy watching my show. You're always picking on me."

### **Traditional View**

Dad remembers that his therapist has stressed the importance of the child being respectful to the parent at all times, especially after being allowed back into the home from the hospital. Peter is clearly being disrespectful to his father. Dad also remembers that his goal as Peter's parent is not to stop his child's behavior in so much as it is to lower the negative impact on the parents' lives.<sup>15</sup> Thus, the best approach to such a disrespectful response from Peter would be to simply remove the one who is impacting the family negatively – Peter. Dad has an "on-call" respite caretaker, whom he then calls to pickup Peter immediately. When the respite worker arrives at the home twenty minutes later, Dad calmly and matter-of-factly tells Peter he will be going with Ms. Jane. Peter is given no explanation, and Dad knows he does not need to defend his parenting decision.<sup>16</sup> Peter leaves the home for two days and, when asked if he would like to return home, it is made clear that Peter will need to respect his father in order to be part of the family. This follows the basic belief of the traditional approach that being a part of a family makes a child feel good. Thus, the next time Peter is given a parental directive, he will be more inclined to make the right choice and respectfully respond to the directive.

**A New View**

First, Dad realizes that a fourteen year old who leaves syrup on the counter top and on the floor is not really a fourteen year old, but more of a five year old. Second, Dad takes a deep breath and considers his own stress that he is bringing into the interaction with his son (stress from work, stress from having to pay for the hospital stay, etc.). Third, Dad realizes that Peter was recently released from the hospital and is certainly hypersensitive to the threat of being returned to the hospital. Dad takes a few deep breaths, processes the dynamics listed above, and walks into the living room again. Dad puts his arm around Peter this time and says, "When you're through with your show, could you please come in the kitchen and clean up?" Dad gives Peter a loving one-armed hug and walks away from Peter. (Dad is giving Peter the physical and emotional space he needs to determine that Dad's request is safe and is not a threat.) At the first commercial, Peter gets up and walks into the kitchen, cleans up his mess, and goes back to finish his show. Dad thanks Peter for cleaning up and they both go to bed peacefully. The next morning, Dad and Peter are sitting at the kitchen table having breakfast. Dad senses that Peter is calm, so Dad initiates a conversation regarding Peter's first response the previous night. Dad says, "Peter, last night when I walked in and found the syrup all over the kitchen, it was frustrating for me. Then, when I asked you to clean it up, you were quite reactive to me. I know that it was scary going to that hospital last week, and you're scared you'll have to go back again, but I'd appreciate it if you could be more respectful to me. Okay, Son?" Peter lowers his head in shame for being disrespectful, and says, "Okay, Dad." Dad reassures Peter he is not going back to the hospital and reconnects with his son physically and emotionally to give him safety and comfort.



*Quick Reference***DEFIANCE**

Remember that defiance:

- Is grounded in fear – it is a fear reaction.
- Is preceded by a freeze response.
- Can move quickly to aggression if fed with more fear.
- Happens when a child perceives a request as a threat, even the simplest of requests.
- Is predictable in four areas for children with trauma histories:
  - transition
  - school-time
  - bath-time
  - bedtime

When discovering this behavior, recognize that your child needs you to:

- First be aware of your own reaction to the defiance.
- Step back and give him space to process the fear.
- Verbally acknowledge the fear to him in a loving way.
- Listen to the defiance and reflect upon this unconscious response.
- Link this defiance to his past experiences.
- Validate the trauma feeding the defiant fear-based reaction.
- Interrupt any negative repetitious conditioning.
- Understand that he cannot make logical choices in this fear state.
- Open up communication in order to express this fear with you.
- Teach the life lesson later when he is calm and more cognizant.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

# Hoarding and Gorging

*"The first duty of love is to listen."*

– Paul Johannes Tillich

**F**ood – what an interesting little word. It is a simple, quaint little word with quite complex applications. Not eating food can kill us, while eating certain foods can kill us, as well. We use food to meet our basic human needs, yet on the other end of the spectrum, food is much more to us than a basic ingredient to our survival. We use food to celebrate. We use food to decorate. We write about food. We animate food into cute cartoon characters. We cover billboards with pictures of food bigger than life. We dedicate entire television networks to food. We buy subscriptions to magazines devoted to food. We use food in religious ceremonies as symbols of sacrificial love. Fast food restaurants build playgrounds around serving food. Universities grant degrees in food. We build food museums. Megacorporations are created and built around food. Generations of farm families create entire family cultures around the growing of food. Marketing companies dress up food in bright colors and fancy packages. *And then our attachment-challenged child joins this bandwagon and uses food in ways we could never have imagined!*

It is typical for children with severe neglect and deep trauma histories to have issues around food. These food-related behaviors can include hoarding and gorging food. Many parents report that their child steals food from the kitchen or from school and stashes it in his bedroom. Other parents report children waking up in the middle of the night and going into the pantry, only to be found eating sugar, handful after handful. Parents often find candy wrappers stuffed behind the bed or in the child's closet – and not just one candy wrapper, but twenty or thirty wrappers, all wadded up in the corner.

A foster mother relates her story:

*One day I was cleaning my son's room and found thirty empty soda cans in his laundry basket, ten more soda cans in his drawers, and another ten or more cans under his bed. Down to the refrigerator in the garage I go, only to find that all the soda that was kept cold there for the entire family was gone – every single can was gone!*

### **Traditional View**

From the traditional view of the attachment-challenged child, eating and mealtime are seen as a control time for children. It is thought that these children use food as a direct point of conflict. They reject any semblance of appropriate eating behaviors in order to create conflict within the family system.<sup>1</sup> Mealtime is seen as a time to create this conflict, as mealtimes are a time for closeness and intimacy within the family. Thus, it is explained that attachment-challenged children do everything they can to be removed from this unspoken time of closeness.<sup>2</sup>

Children with attachment issues are viewed as controlling in the area of eating because providing food is a way for parents to provide nurturing at a very basic level for these children.<sup>3</sup> Nationally recognized attachment therapists have pointed out that many children go so far as to vomit at mealtime in order to avoid any nurturing from their parents.<sup>4</sup> Thus, these behaviors are viewed as a way for these children to reject this nurturing in order to stay in control and to stay in charge.

This traditional stance proposes that instead of receiving the nurturing from the parent, children hoard and gorge food to receive the nurturing – without the attachment figure present (as in the above example from the foster mother) – and they sneak behind closed doors and sneak around at night time to fulfill this natural need for comfort. These children are seen as eating in an attempt to fill a chronic emptiness inside<sup>5</sup> and it is explained they hoard sweet foods because this is the closest they can come to feeling loved.<sup>6</sup> The traditional view says that when the parent finds fifteen candy wrappers in the child's room, tucked away, it is a message from the child to the parent: "I need nurturing, but I'm not going to allow you to give it to me."

While it is recognized that food issues are impossible to control and may lead to more severe problems later on, traditional professionals recommend other control measures. Parents are told to put locks on their pantries and refrigerators in order to regain control of their homes and to establish authority.<sup>7</sup> Only healthy foods that parents approve of should be in the home. Alarms need to be installed on the door to the child's room to prevent him from leaving the room at night to eat. These measures are recommended in order to put the parent back into control and to create a home where the parent is in charge of providing the food. Thus, the "enemy within" loses his power and control.

### **A New View**

Children with food-related issues generally have trauma related to food in their histories. For a child who hoards, there is a strong likelihood that his

earliest experiences were formed around not having enough food to satisfy his hunger. And more importantly, he may not have had anyone to go through the step-by-step intimate process of feeding him. The act of feeding a baby or young child goes far beyond providing for a physical need. Feeding is a time of engagement with the child, a time of bonding with the child, and a time of providing reassurance and safety for the child. Feeding time for the baby and young child should be a time of relaxation when parents are patient with the child, not rushing the child, and being understanding of the child when he turns his head in his easily distracted existence. It is a time for parents to listen to the child's cues, not forcing the child to eat more than he needs to eat. This process is a vital time for parents and children to learn to communicate with one another from an emotional and intrinsic level.

Many children with trauma experiences did not have these important interactions in the early years of their lives. The result is that the child has had negative repetitious conditioning around food. This child has probably had little or no experience with a secure figure regulating his environment as it relates to food. This could also mean that the child woke up in the middle of the night without a parent there to comfort him. The only thing available was food and the child used the food to find comfort. Thus, when working with a child with hoarding and/or gorging behaviors, it is important to keep in mind that this child fundamentally had negative experiences where food was not always available. This child learned that soothing does not occur through relationships with adults but that soothing occurs in relationship to food. So, there were few, if any, positive experiences when he could cry and have someone feed him, or there were not enough times when he had access to enough food with a secure figure to feed him and nurture him with the food.

It is vital to recognize the impact these experiences have on the child's developing brain. A part of the brain, called the Supra Chiasmatic Nucleus, or SCN, sits inside the hypothalamus (the hypothalamus is responsible for clear thinking, decision making, and regulating the outpouring of stress from the amygdala). The SCN is a network of thousands of little nerve fibers that are essentially responsible for the body's circadian rhythms. These circadian responses include the heart rate, blood pressure, digestive responses, body temperature, sleep modulation, and hunger responses. Neglect will often leave the SCN suppressed due to the body constricting up onto itself, relying on itself instead of others. Thus, children in this scenario often come to rely on food for their source of regulation.

Relate the combination of stress and food to your own experiences. How do you react to food when you are overly stressed? You either overeat



or under-eat. Take this natural reaction and expand upon it with a child with a traumatic history. The child is going to have an exaggerated tendency to either over-eat or under-eat. When it comes to eating, a child with a trauma history may swing from either end of the spectrum on a day-to-day basis. When this child becomes overly stressed, by the end of the day he may shut down and not have eaten anything by dinnertime. Then, when he wakes up in the middle of the night, he gets up and he hoards food. Remember, all behavior arises from a state of stress. Thus, hoarding and gorging occur when a child is in a stress state. This is a child acting out of a fear-based/stressed place.

When the parent finds fifteen candy wrappers in the child's room, tucked away, it is a message from the child to the parent that says: *"My body is craving this candy because I am in a stressful state. My present stressful state shifts me back to a time when I was completely dysregulated, and it is the need for candy that represents my underdeveloped ability to self-soothe."* The child is not eating the candy to make his parents mad, and the child is not intentionally eating the candy as a passive-aggressive way to keep his parents at arm's length. The eating of the candy occurs from an unconscious state. When this child grabs for the candy, his unconscious state is already activated and in full response mode.

■  
**The child can then  
 begin the process  
 of seeking the par-  
 ent for regulation,  
 rather than the  
 food.**  
 ■

The parent should then respond to this act of eating candy in a way that addresses the underlying fear and stress. The parent will want to communicate this understanding to the child from a love-based place. *"Son, I know that when you get stressed out, the first thing you want to do is to go and eat. And, more than anything, you'll want to eat something sweet. Sweet food really helps you calm down."* It is essential that the parent understands and accepts from where this child's behaviors and actions are coming. When the parent can truly see that there is fear underneath this behavior, the parent is then equipped to help the child by responding in love, rather than reacting from fear with the need to address who is in control within the relationship. It is imperative that the child not be judged, chastised, or punished. Otherwise, the child will continue to sneak around behind the parent or at night to satisfy his bodily signals, without including the parent. The parent then communicates a plan of action for the child, offering to help the child when he is stressed out and hungry in the night. *"Son, when you get up in the middle of the night, come and let me know. Wake me up...it's okay. If you wake up and you're scared and stressed out,*

*I want to be able to help you.”*

The child can then begin the process of seeking the parent for regulation, rather than the food. Once the child has come and awakened the parent, the parent should sit with him and lay him back down in bed, helping the child soothe and return to a calm state. If the child still craves a snack, the parent should then understand that this need to eat might take several positive repetitious experiences before it subsides. The parent can then offer to have a snack with the child. It is strongly recommended that the parent actually feed the child, recreating the developmental experiences the child missed. This is not an opportunity for the parent to teach good nutritional habits, though. Sweets are a naturally occurring attachment food. We seek out sweet food when we are stressed. We do not naturally seek out vegetables when we are stressed – only if we are Richard Simmons! Sweet foods initiate the naturally occurring hormones, allowing us to regulate.

In addition to this core intervention, parents are encouraged to do the following:

1. The parent can tell the child a story about neglect. It can be any story that relates to the need for food in order to feel better. This type of story telling will relate to the child's unconscious drives and can be extremely powerful.
2. Throughout the day, the child should have access to plenty of snacks. These snacks should include foods that are naturally sweet: raisins, apples, granola bars, etc. There are many foods on the market that are sweet and fairly nutritious. The refrigerator and the pantry do not need to be locked. Some parents have given their child a “fanny pack” to put around his waist so the food is constantly with him, reassuring him in a tangible way that food will always be available.
3. Begin bottle-feeding your child...yes, begin bottle-feeding your twelve or even fourteen year-old. If a child needs it, regardless of his age, he will take the bottle. The simple gauge is this: if he does not need it, he will not be inclined to take it. Remember that if the child did not receive sufficient developmental nurturing, then he has a barrier in his development. Until the barrier is addressed, the other levels are going to continue to stagger. The bottle-feeding should only occur while the child is in the parent's arms.

When beginning these interventions, it is important to remember that reducing hoarding and gorging behaviors is a systematic process. The parent needs to remain patient. It is easy to revert to traditional shame-based and punitive approaches – the approaches which continue to deny children food

and deny children from receiving help at a core level. Many of the traditional approaches actually recreate the neglectful environments that created this behavior initially. With children from orphanages, these old approaches – locking up the kitchen, sending children to their rooms, and demanding that children ask permission to receive food – are essentially recreating the environments of the orphanages from where the behaviors stemmed.

If the child regresses and the parent finds the candy wrappers in the child's room, it is simply a sign that the child was out of his window of tolerance again and that the child was unable to have the awareness or the conscious ability to seek the parent first. It is also a sign that the child continues to fear the parent and continues to lack trust in the parent. It takes time; hence, when regression occurs, the parent needs to continue to stay in a place of love and needs to see this as an opportunity to create more trust and further offer regulation to the child. "Son, I can tell that you've been really stressed out." "Well, how do you know that, dad?" "I found twenty candy wrappers under your bed, and I know that the only time you hoard food like that is when you're really stressed out, feeling like nobody is really listening to you." In this example, the parent is able to respond to the child, not react. The parent is able to see the twenty candy wrappers as twenty flashing signals – as a gateway to communicate with the child. It is important to stay focused on the process of change, not the outcome and not the change itself. Slowly and systematically, the child will begin to reduce the need to hoard and gorge.

To continue with the story of the foster mother who found the fifty or more soda cans in her child's room, read how her response was one of mindfulness, understanding, and self-awareness. She writes:

*I breathe, reflect, and begin my attempt to relate. With every ounce of me, I attempt to relate as he looks right at me, swears he did not drink that soda and insists that someone else must have put those cans there to set him up. He begins cussing, screaming, and threatening. So, I sit down – way down – on the ground where he is towering over me. I am scared. I don't know what to do in that moment, but I trust in my process, and I reflect on the situation. I realize how disrespected I feel by him. I realize that I am feeling what I think is anger about him not being grateful enough. I decide to put my stuff in a can, put a lid on it and put it away and to go back to relating to him – right then and there. I work really hard to be fully present with him, to be mindful of all that he is and from where he has come. I force myself to picture this huge young man as a crying baby with no one there to meet his needs or to feed him. I ask him, "How much soda do you need*

*to feel fulfilled? Can I take you shopping right now, just you and me, and buy as many cases as you need? You can stack them in your room and you can have them all to yourself." I am trying so hard to be regulated, to be mindful, and to relate to his pain. He stops and, for the first time in the five or more years that I have known him, he sits down with me and tells me the story. The story is of bottles filled with nothing but soda, which he learned to fill by himself by the time he was two years old, while living by himself for days at a time. His mom had a lot of soda as he remembers and that was all he had during these days alone. He told me when he is sad now that he wants soda. I asked him if he had been sad so much of the time with us and he broke my heart (which I put back up on the shelf) when he told me, "Yes."*

### **Parenting Example: Hoarding and Gorging**

**Scenario:** Frankie, a nine year old, is sitting in the therapist's office with his aunt and uncle, with whom he lives. He is sitting on the couch between his aunt and uncle. His aunt begins to complain to the therapist: "Frankie is a thief around food. He doesn't eat much at the table, but afterwards he really puts it away behind our backs. He also stock-piles food like a pack rat in his room, rarely eating it, with most of it rotting in his bedroom."

### **Traditional View**

Frankie is exhibiting several controlling behaviors that need to be addressed. The first immediate issue is that Frankie cannot sit between his aunt and uncle and he will not be allowed to do this at home or in the therapist's office anymore. This positioning of himself is demonstrative of his need to triangulate, divide, and conquer the family members.<sup>8</sup> The therapist then gives the understanding to Frankie's aunt and uncle that food and mealtimes are being used to maintain his control in the home. Because his aunt has expressed on many occasions how important it is for them to have dinner together, Frankie has used this information to purposely disrupt what is important to his aunt – one more attempt at keeping them at arms length. The aunt and uncle are counseled to regain control in the home by implementing control measures, such as locks on the pantry and refrigerator. Frankie is to be allowed in the kitchen only with an adult present. All food is now to be dispersed by the adults<sup>9</sup> and Frankie is to be told and reassured, in a loving



manner, that there will be enough for him; he simply needs to ask them politely for it. They are also encouraged to feed sweets to Frankie, only by them and only on their terms. This will promote pleasurable feelings, which will result in a connection to the aunt and uncle.<sup>10</sup>

### A New View

Frankie's shift between refusing food to gorging and hoarding food is evidence of trauma around food. The therapist first points out that Frankie has a need to feel safe; hence, he has positioned himself in the room between the two safest people in his life, his aunt and his uncle. His aunt and uncle are encouraged to reassure Frankie in his efforts for safety by softly and tenderly placing an arm around him or placing a hand on his leg. The therapist then addresses the aunt's reactive language when describing Frankie's behavior. In talking, the aunt discloses that while growing up, her father, the primary breadwinner in the home, became terminally ill when she was nine-years old. Her family went from being a middle-class family to receiving food stamps. Food was a commodity in their home and was never wasted. The therapist helps the aunt relate her reaction to Frankie's behaviors to this past experience and helps her to see the correlation in her age at that time and Frankie's current age. The therapist then encourages the aunt and uncle to see Frankie's behavior as a response to stress. His aunt relates her story to Frankie and takes ownership of her reactive stance towards him. She apologizes and encourages Frankie: *"When you feel like stealing food, we want you to come to us. We are not going to punish you anymore. We understand you now. We are here to help you with these feelings. Please let us be here when you're feeling so upset."* A discussion opens up about how hard it is for Frankie to come to the table and eat. Frankie says that he has good memories of his family eating meals together prior to his mother "turning mean" (prior to her alcoholism). He misses his mother and coming to the table reminds him of the happy times with her. Frankie also relates the story about how his mother, after becoming addicted to alcohol, would be unable to get off the couch in order to fix him meals. The aunt and uncle continue to soothe Frankie throughout the session and promise to be open to his erratic eating patterns, in order to help him reduce his food-related responses.

*Quick Reference* **HOARDING AND GORGING**

Remember that hoarding and gorging:

- Stem from earlier experiences of not having enough food.
- Are an indication that the child did not have an adult to help regulate the food intake.
- Result from negative repetitious experiences around food.
- Happen when the child did not have an adult to nurture and soothe him during the feeding process.
- Result when the circadian rhythms are suppressed.
- Are exaggerated reactive food/stress responses we all naturally have.
- Occur when a child's ability to self-soothe is underdeveloped.

When discovering this behavior, recognize that your child needs you to:

- See this behavior as a sign that he was stressed.
- Approach him with an understanding that is not blame-based or negative.
- Offer to help him when he is feeling overwhelmed and desiring to hoard or gorge food.
- Offer safety through the removal of disciplinary actions.
- Bottle-feed him to revisit an interrupted developmental process.
- Provide him access to snacks throughout his day.
- Remain patient when he regresses.
- Know that he is not doing these behaviors intentionally.

## CHAPTER SIX

## Lying



*"Lying to ourselves is more deeply ingrained than lying to others."*

— Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoevsky

**“W**hat kind of people chronically lie?” The most common answers are: (a) car salesmen, (b) con men, (c) criminals, (d) adulterers, (e) thieves, and, yes, (f) lawyers. When our children lie to us, we fear they will grow-up to be dishonest adults. Within a millisecond of our child lying to us, we panic and envision a lifetime of our child lying to people, creating havoc in relationships, getting fired from jobs, and maybe even doing time in jail.

As parents, lying is a difficult behavior to address in our children for two primary reasons. First, lying is difficult because of the fear we project into the future for our child. We fear our child will not have a strong moral base as an adult, which will ultimately affect his relationships, his employment, and his overall ability to succeed in life. Second, lying is difficult because of our own discomfort from past experiences of people lying to us. When we as parents experience our child lying, it can be like getting swallowed up into a time machine and re-experiencing a painful lie of the past. Yet this time around, we experience the lie on the big screen in full technicolor. We experience the discomfort within ourselves, target our child as the cause of our discomfort, and immediately begin reacting in order to change our child’s behavior, unconsciously thinking: “If I can stop you from lying, I can stop my own discomfort.”

Recently, when a mother began discussing a situation involving her son with me during a small parenting workshop, she expressed pure frustration about her eight year old son’s lying behavior. With stern conviction, she stated, “My son has got to learn that lying is morally wrong. He needs to be taught a lesson now before he grows up. Lying is wrong and will not be tolerated in my home.” Do you hear the fear in those words? After supporting her reaction and validating her, I asked her, “Who lied to you as a child?” Such a deep-seated emotional reaction expressed in her words and her tone of voice was only stemming from a place of darkness within herself. It was stemming from an unprocessed and hurtful experience, or experiences, stored in her deepest level of memory. It was coming from her state level of memory. After the initial shock of my shifting

“the focus off of her son and onto her, she took a deep breath and said, “My father lied to me.” Encouraging her, I sat down on my stool and said, “How bad was it? Tell me more.” She replied, “I was about eight years old and the fighting between my mother and father had escalated into physical violence. My father sat all of us kids down in our formal dining room for dinner and emphatically stated, ‘We’re not getting a divorce.’” As tears welled up in her eyes, she said, “Three weeks later my father left our home, divorced my mother, and never stepped foot in our home again.” Emotional reactivity stems from unfinished business. The associational connection between her son being eight years old presently and her being eight years old previously was a prevalent aspect of her reactivity to her son’s lying behavior.

Attachment-challenged children commonly exhibit lying behaviors, and not only do they exhibit chronic lying, but they also often exhibit nonsense lying. This lying behavior can occur several times during a single day. Day after day of dealing with this type of lying behavior can drive even the most patient parent into rage-filled behaviors. First, let us look at how traditional therapists view this behavior and what advice they give to parents. Second, let us look at this behavior through the understanding of the Stress Model and what the application of this understanding would be for parents working to create a healing environment within their homes.

### **Traditional View**

Traditionally, attachment therapists view lying as a way for children with trauma histories to take control. Lying develops into a habitual strategy in order to gain power and control, and certainly as a way to avoid punishment.<sup>1</sup> It is viewed as a way for the child to distort the parent’s world and as a way to turn the parent’s world into utter confusion. Lying is seen as a way for the child to impose the chaos in his own brain onto someone else who he wants to hurt. It is seen as a way for the child to “test” the parent child relationship. By lying, the child is pushing the adoptive parents or the foster parents to their breaking point in order to see if they *really* mean that they are his parents always.

This view explains that attachment-challenged children do not trust and, therefore, react from a place of distrust in order to then gain the ability to trust. Lying is seen as a patterned behavior that needs to be reprogrammed through consequences and that parents need to “beat the child to the punch” in his lying behaviors. Some traditional views go as far as to say that these children are born liars.<sup>2</sup> Others create fear by describing lying as a “hallmark sign of anti-social children.”<sup>3</sup>



Traditional attachment therapists' recommendations based upon these interpretations of lying focus on the goal of not allowing the child to use the lie to control the parents. Advice is commonly given for parents to say, "I don't believe you" to the child after he tells a lie.<sup>4</sup> The explanation is that this statement diminishes the controlling effect the child is working to obtain through the lie. Parents are told to tell their child, "I can love you no matter what you have done or have had happen to you. How long do you think you need to keep up your lying behaviors until you figure that out?" Parents are also told to be one step ahead of the child by saying, "I want to talk to you and I know you don't tend to tell the truth when I ask you questions. So, I want you to know I expect you to come up with a really good lie to answer my question. Ready?" The goal of such statements is to put the child in conflict about his lying.<sup>5</sup>

Under this understanding of the attachment challenged child, parents are told that the child must not experience the parent angry or emotionally triggered by the child's lie. The advice is that the child needs to feel and experience emptiness as a result of his behavior. Negative consequences are also encouraged as a way for the lesson of lying to be experienced by the pain of a consequence. Attachment-challenged children are not viewed as children who can simply think through the pain they have caused others by their lying and, therefore, they need a negative consequence to actually experience the pain of their lying.<sup>6</sup>

### **A New View**

Research in the field of neuro-science has shown that children who have experienced trauma react to stress out of a state of fear, from an unconscious level, as deep as the state memory. The fear receptor in the brain becomes overly triggered and, in this stress state, the traumatized child's perception of the situation at hand becomes distorted and exceptionally fearful.

Children with trauma histories are living out of a primal state of survival. They literally lie from a place of life or death. Their survival is dependent on convincing you that they are telling the truth. In this distortion of their mind, the state level of memory drives them with the conviction that they must persist with this lie at all costs in order to survive.

Simple events throughout the child's day can cause intense fear reactions. It can be as simple as a child picking up a penny off of the floor belonging to someone else and lying about it. It can be as obvious as a child hitting his sister and denying it, even after the parent witnessed the behavior. It can be as absurd as lying about stealing a pencil off of the teacher's desk while standing in front of the teacher, holding the pencil in hand. This type of lying can be absolutely maddening for the parents (caretaker, teacher, etc). Parents soon

begin to question their own sanity when living with this type of behavior; the child's lying challenges their own reality.

In order to understand this lying behavior, we must first acknowledge that the child is simply reacting from a state of fear. It is critical that we acknowledge that when children with trauma histories are triggered into their stress and confronted in a lie, they will continue to reinforce the lie. Thus, the

■  
***It is vital for parents  
to identify their own  
reactions first.***  
■

awareness that the child's unconscious is saying, "I have to convince you I'm telling the truth because my life depends on it" is necessary in order for the parent to respond from a place of love, instead of a place of fear and punishment.

Thus, the ability for the parent to help the child depends on the parent's ability to avoid buying into the lie. This is an extremely difficult

task because lying is a threatening behavior. When our children lie to us, it causes a stress reaction in our brain – a stress reaction within our body-mind system. We then go into a hyperaroused state and say to the child, "Now, tell me the truth. You're lying to me. I've told you more than a hundred times not to lie to me." Yet, as soon as we do this, we have only fed into their fear and increased their determination to convince us of the lie. Parent and child then enter into a negative feedback loop, each driving more fear into the other.

So the question is then, "Can you as the parent ignore the lie?" If you immediately say, "No, I can't do this," recognize this as a rigid reaction. And then the question becomes, "Well, who lied to you?" Someone must have lied to you to have such a strong reaction. When your child lies to you, it puts you into an emotionally reactive state. Remember that emotional reactivity stems from our own unfinished business. Ask yourself, "Is this emotionally charged response stemming from something in my own history?"

It is vital for parents to identify their own reactions, first. Otherwise, the parents will not be in a calm place physiologically or emotionally to help their child. Scientific research shows that within an interaction between two people, the person with the calmer amygdala (the fear receptor in the brain) has the ability to soothe the one that is activated. (Refer to Chapters 1 through 4 for a review of this information). This translates to an understanding that the parent must be regulated in order to calm the child.

So it becomes critical with this understanding for the parents not to buy into the lie in order to maintain a calm state, a state that does not allow their own amygdala to get triggered. It is then that the parents are able to create a different physiological environment for their child. They can then work to help calm the child by embracing their child with a hug and calmly saying, "You're not going anywhere. Everything is going to be okay, sweetheart."

Doing this can have a dramatic impact on the child's state level of memory. By doing this, the parent is addressing the child's unconscious fear, while calming the child through the sensory pathways (sight, sound, and touch).

But you're saying by this point, "Okay, calm the stress...I get that. But what about the fact that my child is lying? How is he going to know that lying is wrong?" You are absolutely right; lying is wrong and the moral lesson of lying should be taught...it just cannot be taught in the heat of the moment due to the child's fear reactivity. Once the child is calm, and you're calm, perhaps in an hour or later in the day, this behavior can be addressed with the child. Yet, in order for the child to absorb and fully understand that lying is wrong, the child has to be out of his fear state. His cognitive thinking pathways have to be clear and open. These pathways are engaged and fully operational only when a child is in a state of love. Remember, stress causes confused and distorted thinking, so the child must be in a calm state in order to be receptive to the rationale of why it is hurtful to lie.

It is also important to recognize that stress suppresses short-term memory. Lecturing a child about lying during the stress of the moment will have little impact on the child's ability to remember not to lie in the future. Consequencing the child during the act of lying with statements such as, "Your TV privileges will be removed if you continue to lie to me" or "You're not getting dessert tonight if you don't fess up to lying to me," will only heighten the child's stress level, creating more confusion and distortion. These fear-based demands prolong and heighten the child's fear, preventing the child from being able to remember the life lesson the next time he is confronted with a stressful situation. He will not be able to remember that he received consequences for lying in the past. His short-term memory will not allow him to remember.

So the formula for lying behavior states:

"Ignore the lie, but don't ignore the child." The goal is to establish a dynamic that creates true regulation through the parent-child relationship. As the child experiences more and more positive responses from the parent, this regulating relationship between parent and child will permeate the state memory, lessening the reactivity of the child's stress response system. This will, in time, decrease the child's need to lie to the parent. It takes positive interactions and a positive environment to calm a child's reactive stress state. And it takes repetition of both the positive relationship and repetition of the positive environment to create long-term healing for the child.

■

***It takes positive  
interactions and a  
positive environment  
to calm a child's  
reactive stress state.***

■

### Parenting Example: Lying

**Scenario:** As the family is getting ready in the morning, Mom asks, “Suzie, did you feed the cat and give him fresh water?” Abruptly, Suzie says, “Yes.” Mom looks over at the cat’s bowl and sees that there is no food and sees that there is only a small amount of stale water in the bowl.

### Traditional View

Suzie is trying to control her mother at this point in the morning because earlier Suzie had asked her mother to make pancakes and her mother said no. Additionally, since her mother wouldn’t make her pancakes, Suzie is fearful that her mother does not really love her and Suzie is using the situation to test her mother. In order for Suzie’s lie to lose its effectiveness and ability to control the situation, Suzie’s mother needs to calmly say, “I know you’re lying because the food dish is empty. I love you always; it is up to you to decide when you are going to believe me and believe that I am your mother and that I will never leave you.” This absurd lie was a conscious choice on Suzie’s part and the parent must not emotionally react to the lie; otherwise, a reaction from Mom would empower Suzie, only reinforcing this type of controlling behavior.<sup>7</sup>

### A New View

Suzie is upset and stressed about the earlier interaction with her mother regarding the pancakes. Suzie’s state memory became activated and fear-based unconscious thoughts begin to surface: “If she won’t make me pancakes, how do I know that the next time I’m hungry, I’ll get fed? And if I don’t get fed, I’ll die. I’ve got to make sure I’m a good girl – that I’m perfect in order for my mom to take care of me.” Suzie’s immediate response of “yes” when asked about her morning chore did not have time to be processed in the cognitive mind. It was an automatic reaction from her state memory in order to ensure her survival. If she does exactly what her mother has asked her to do, if she is the perfect child, she’ll survive; she’ll be okay. Mom needs to respond to Suzie’s fear by holding her hand, placing Suzie in her lap, and saying, “Suzie, I love you. You’re going to be okay and nothing can stop me from taking care of you.” Later that day, when Suzie is calm, Mom can sit and talk to Suzie, touching or holding her gently. Mom can then say, “Suzie, it hurts me when you lie to me. Sometimes when we get scared, we lie to one another. I want you to know that I love you and you’re not going anywhere. I’m here to always take care of you. You can always tell me the truth, honey.”

*Quick Reference***LYING**

Remember that lying:

- Comes from a state of survival – the child must persist with the lie at all costs in order to survive.
- Easily creates a fear reaction in the parent.
- Is a fear-based behavior; a threatening reaction from the parent only feeds into the child's fear.

When finding your child in a lie, recognize that:

- Lying stems from a state of stress.
- The lying behavior is not directed at you personally.
- Your child is reacting from past trauma experiences.
- Your child already feels threatened, so confronting the lie will only heighten and create more threat.
- Your best response is to “ignore the lie, but not to ignore the child.”
- Your child cannot be taught the moral lesson of lying while in the act of lying.
- Your child's foundation is insecure and your child needs your help in building the parent/child relationship through a nonblaming, non-punitive environment.



## CHAPTER SEVEN

## Stealing



*"Ordinary riches can be stolen, real riches cannot. In your soul are infinitely precious things that cannot be taken from you."*

— Oscar Wilde

**S**tealing is a behavior that goes against our American culture of working hard for what we have. Stealing is counter to one of the foundational principles our country was built upon – that of private ownership. As Americans, we treasure the right to own property and the right to be respected for what we own. When a possession is stolen from us, we feel personally violated. And if something personal is stolen from us – right within our home by our very own child – it evokes a bodily/emotional response within us that goes beyond fingernails being scratched on a chalkboard.

Attachment-challenged children commonly exhibit stealing behaviors. These stealing behaviors can range from stealing from stores to stealing from teachers to stealing from family members, or all of the above. Many times, the items stolen have little or no meaning to the child, leaving parents perplexed as to why the child stole the items and how to handle the situation. The stealing can also happen several times, not only within one day, but repeatedly within an hour's time.

A mother of a child with a severe trauma history described a situation with her son to me. The child, Danny, was caught at school stealing pencils off of his teacher's desk. On this occasion, the child was taken to the principal's office, as this had been a perpetual behavior of this child. The child was regretful, made an apology to the teacher and principal, and spoke with his mother on the phone, admitting to the theft and pleading for her forgiveness. Upon returning Danny to his classroom, he then stole another item right off of the teacher's desk, not more than five minutes after being back in his classroom. The mother, with a perplexed look on her face, was beyond feeling frustrated, and was simply dumbfounded by her son's actions.

### Traditional View

Traditional attachment therapists view stealing as an effective tool for children because it puts parents into an intense level of frustration, thus putting the child in a "winning position."<sup>1</sup> Stealing is seen as a sign that the child cannot be trusted in the home or at school. Due to the fact that much of the

stealing is irrational and involves stealing of insignificant items, it is seen as a passive-aggressive technique for these children. These passive aggressive acts become a sure way for children to gain control and manipulate their parents and teachers.<sup>2</sup>

Stealing is thus seen as a way for the child to exhibit power and control over those in authority. In order to minimize this behavior, parents are given the advice to assume the child is guilty until proven innocent and to assume that the stealing behavior is the child's *modus operandi*. Parents can then take charge of the behavior by saying, "I don't believe you did not steal my calculator. You will have to pay for the calculator now and if it shows up later, I'll do everything to make it up to you then."<sup>3</sup> This type of consequencing is seen as essential to the parent staying in control and for the child to learn to develop respect towards other people's property. Parents are told that children who steal should not be permitted to borrow things from others and should not be allowed to accept "undeserved" gifts.<sup>4</sup> This keeps the parent one step ahead of the child, thus, preventing the child from claiming that the stolen item was given to him.

Stealing can also be interpreted as a way for children to fill the empty holes in their hearts.<sup>5</sup> Professionals further explain that this behavior develops when these children see other children happy, so they attempt to "steal" this happiness for themselves. Thus, they actually think they can rip off happiness to fill their chronic emptiness.<sup>6</sup>

### A New View

Children with trauma histories are typically poor self-regulators. Children who have grown-up in violent, punitive, neglectful, fearful environments, devoid of sufficient regulatory figures (parents who have been unavailable and unable to calm and pacify the child during times of stress), have regulatory systems that are ineffective at calming internal stressful states. Their regulatory development has been interrupted and has gone awry in its attempt to compensate for the lack of external calming – external calming from a parent figure that they are biologically designed to receive. In order to comprehend fully a child's "non-sense" stealing behaviors, the understanding and application of this insufficient regulatory system is critical.

If a child has difficulty regulating himself internally, the body will automatically seek to calm this stress externally. Thus, stealing is an external attempt at soothing an internal state of dysregulation, similar to other addictive behaviors such as smoking, alcoholism, and even eating chocolate. The body reacts at a physiological level when engaged in addictive behaviors, which enables the body to regulate for a moment of time. An identical reaction occurs when a child steals. There is an enormous chemical reaction that takes

place in the brain and body system that literally creates a rush or a release for the child, calming the child. For a hyper-aroused child, the act of stealing is similar to taking a suppressant, such as heroin. It calms the body down. For a hypo-aroused child, the act of stealing is similar to taking a stimulant, like cocaine. It gives the body a “rush” that puts the depressed and shutdown child into a state of alertness, which feels good for the child.

Stealing behavior can create the same rush for adults. A recent news story describes J. L. Hunter Rountree as America’s oldest known bank robber. Formerly a tycoon who founded a Texas machinery company, Rountree pulled his first heist at the age of 86. When asked why he robbed banks, he replied, “It’s fun. It feels good, awful good. It feels good for sometimes days, for sometimes hours.”<sup>7</sup>

Children with trauma histories typically steal items that offer no physical or material payoff; it is not about being afraid of getting caught. They are simply acting out to seek a physiologic payoff. Once Joey puts that box of paperclips in his pocket from the office supply store, an immediate payoff within the body system is received. Yet, once he steals, the rush or suppressant is completely worn off in 5 minutes. Then, Joey experiences even more stress than before, leading to a continual need to steal. The addictive behavior begins its vicious cycle. Joey begins to steal repetitively, and his system begins to be conditioned to believe that all he has to do is put that pencil or piece of candy in his pocket and everything will be okay. It becomes a brutal cycle of finding a moment of regulation, followed by returning to a state of dysregulation.

Children will steal in certain environments as a reaction to certain stimuli. Mom takes Billy, an eight-year-old adopted child, into the local Wal-Mart. As you have experienced yourself, Wal-Mart is an overwhelming and stimulating environment for even the most regulated adult; and we won’t even think about a Super Wal-Mart! For Billy, a child easily triggered into a stress reaction, just the thought of going to Wal-Mart pushes him into a dysregulated state. The responsible approach for Mom would be to help Billy understand what happens to him when he goes into this environment and to identify his unconscious drives through her verbal communication with him. So Mom says to her son prior to even leaving the house for the shopping trip, “Billy, when you get stressed out and you get scared, you have a tendency to stick things in your pocket that don’t belong to you. The reason you do this is because when you stick something in your pocket, it makes you feel good. What I need you to understand is that when you feel scared and stressed out, you can come to me and let me know. And secondly, when you stick things in your pocket that don’t belong to you, that really hurts and scares other people. When people have things stolen from them, they get angry – angry with

you. What I want you to know is that I understand that when you get scared or stressed out, you steal things. We are going to Wal-Mart today and when we get into the store, I'm going to keep you next to me to keep you safe."

In such a case, it is even recommended to simply practice with the child, whether a young child or a teenager. Practice talking with the child, then go into the store, creating containment with either the child in the basket or next to you, with the child holding your hand. (Yes, even holding hands with your teenagers because they will know at an unconscious level that they feel safer with you.) Simply go up and down the aisles, maybe buy a treat to eat, and then go home – no shopping list, no agenda, nothing to lose the focus of helping your child to feel safe in the store.

Doing this will begin the process of helping your child to develop the ability to regulate by himself. He needs you to come to him in a non-punitive, compassionate way, taking responsibility for helping him understand and change his behavior. He needs you to come to him in a non-blaming way in order for his regulatory system to be given the "fertilizer" it needs to grow and develop. Your child will be learning to regulate through the safe relationship you create with him. In turn, he will then expand his ability to self-regulate. The body's natural ability to regulate will be given the opportunity to reconnect and realign through the safety you provide for your child.

Once a child is calm and feels safe, the human regulatory system has been shown to develop in a rapid period of time and has been seen to "catch-up" to its developmental potential. Within two weeks to thirty days, you will see a reduction in this type of behavior through mindful practice, and calm communication, and responsible parenting that is free of blame and free of punishment – parenting that is beyond consequences, logic, and control.

If a child is stealing from the home, the child is communicating to the parents that she cannot handle the stress in the home. The child needs you to create safety and containment because she is beyond her ability to stop this behavior on her own. Close the doors to the bedrooms and keep your child in a contained space as close to you as possible all the time. You have essentially created a smaller area, which is less threatening, and she no longer has the run of the house. Remember that when you see improvements in her behavior, the reason she is not stealing is because she is staying more regulated with you. She is connecting with you at a physiologic level. Emotionally, she is feeling safer and she is no longer feeling threatened.

At school, the child needs the same kind of responsible joining from the teacher and school staff. Ms. Jones says, "Billy, I know when you get stressed and scared in class, you feel like stealing from my desk. I want you to know that everything is going to be all right and I'm here to help you. The next time you feel like going to my desk and putting something in your pocket, I want

you to let me know – just raise your hand and ask me to come over to your desk. You won't be punished, no time off of your recess, no infractions, no referrals. I just want to make sure you have someone to share your feelings with while in my classroom, so please let me help you."

### **Parenting Example: Stealing**

**Scenario:** Sam, a fifth grader, comes home for the third day in a row with items that do not belong to him. This time he brings home a blank videotape from the media center and ketchup packets from the lunchroom. The days prior, he brought items that were useless to him from his music teacher and art teacher, as well as items from the cafeteria.

### **Traditional View**

Sam is stealing items from outside of his regular classroom (music and art classes, the media center, and the cafeteria). Sam is using this behavior to set the tone for his need to control and for his complete disregard and disrespect for adults in this school. This stealing behavior is his attempt to control these unsuspecting teachers and to win in the power game between student and teacher. His mother needs to have a joint meeting with his music and art teachers, the librarian, the head cafeteria worker, and the principal, with Sam in attendance at this meeting. This meeting will demonstrate to Sam that all the adults are on the same team<sup>8</sup> and that his controlling behaviors and "tricks"<sup>9</sup> are futile. He will be reminded of all the past events to help him maintain more perspective of the present.<sup>10</sup> It will also be pointed out to him that he is out-numbered and out-powered, and needs to submit his control to those in charge.

### **A New View**

Sam is stealing outside of his classroom because he is reacting to the stress created from transitioning from one class to another. Additionally, his consistent stealing from the cafeteria is a sign that this environment is overly stimulating for him and that he is stressed in this environment. Sam takes these insignificant and useless items in an attempt to soothe his internal stress state. He has not attempted to hide them from his mother because he is not stealing to "see what he can get away with," but simply using external items to help him deal with his feelings of fear and overwhelm during the transitional times at school. His mother needs to have a joint meeting with his music and art



teachers, His mother needs to have a joint meeting with his music and art teachers, the librarian, the head cafeteria worker, and the principal, with Sam in attendance at this meeting. In this meeting, Sam will sit close to his mother, and she will explain to him in a soft voice that each of these people are here at the school to help him. She will explain that when he begins to feel overwhelmed and stressed when transitioning, he has people to talk with and that these school personnel will take a more active role in helping Sam make the transition. Each person at the meeting will encourage Sam and reassure him that he is safe at school and that he is going to be okay.

*Quick Reference***STEALING**

Remember that stealing:

- Is an external attempt to soothe an internal state.
- Is an addictive behavior.
- Becomes repetitive because of the internal payoff. Repetition changes the brain so the stealing becomes a conditioned response to a stress state.

When discovering your child has stolen, recognize that he needs you to:

- Keep him close to you in that environment; limit his space and create containment for him.
- Explain to him the dynamics of the stealing behavior; communicate to him about why he steals and that stealing makes him feel better.
- Explain to him you are not coming from a blame-based perspective, but that you are coming from a place of taking responsibility for him.
- Address the root mechanisms that lead to the behaviors and reach him in the deep emotional place that drives this behavior.
- Teach him how to communicate to you when he feels like stealing, saying, "I need to know how you feel when you go into a store. Help me to understand."