

may @ symbio

upcoming presentations

Yoga + Love and Limits for Your Toddler

Friday 21 May
3:30-5:00pm

Enjoy some healthy fun with yoga poses, playful movement and connection time for you and your toddler with It's Yoga, Kids. After the class we will present information on setting limits with toddlers in a way that creates structure and supports your child's emotional health and well being. There will be time for q&a to answer individual questions.

@ *It's Yoga, Kids*
569 Rucker Street, The Presidio
San Francisco CA

RSVP: training@itsyogakids.com
Fee: \$50

Emotionally Intelligent Discipline

Tuesday 25 May
7:00-9:00pm

In order for discipline to be truly effective, it has to help a child learn how to regulate and appropriately express emotions as well as control behavior. Because the goal of discipline is for a child to internalize a sense of appropriate vs. inappropriate behavior and ultimately moral action, discipline has to be relationally relevant. We will discuss effective ways to set limits, deliver emotionally supportive guidance and foster the development of a healthy sense of self in your child in the toddler and preschool years.

@ *GetzWell Pediatrics*
1701 Church Street
San Francisco CA

RSVP: reception@getzwell.com

GetzWell members:
\$20/person or \$30/couple
non-members:
\$40/person or \$60/couple

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photo by: www.lisafarrerphoto.com

Is talking things out with kids really so important?

Q: *A few months ago, my daughter's preschool teacher told me the word to describe my child is "spirited." She recommended a book for me to read and, sure enough, the description fit her to a T. Understanding her a bit better has certainly helped me be a better parent when things are going well; but I still need tools to use when things are not. These days, that's pretty often. Every time we have to leave the house, it's war. Giving her warning helps, but it doesn't make it anywhere close to easy. I know I am supposed to keep my cool but that's not so easy to do, especially when she takes it out on her super-mellow younger sister. I can plan an outing to her favorite places and still, getting her out of the house is like pulling teeth. This is just one example – but there are lots of struggles.*

In an attempt to help us all, I've read more books. The problem is one says "don't talk, just enforce a punishment," one says "never punish, never reward," another says I have to talk with her about everything. So, my first question is: why is there so much conflicting advice by "experts"? Really, some of the advice out there feels like it would be hard to do without being some kind of advanced spiritual being – I'm trying, but not there yet. If I go with my gut, talking with my daughter about her feelings and my reasons for making rules and for enforcing limits makes sense. However, when I try to explain something calmly to her when she's upset, she completely melts down. At this point I find it easier to try not to talk so much.

So, my main question is: Is talking things out really so important? And, if so, why? I am hoping you can help me validate my instincts – maybe that will give me the saintly patience I need to carry them out.

A: To speak to your first question: Although we'd say we are fortunate to have an abundance of quality literature on parenting available, it can be hard to distinguish between developmentally and psychologically sound theory from the latest fad based mostly on opinion. Even among sound sources, the downside of having such a broad menu of approaches and tactics to choose from is that it gets hard to sort through.

The most important thing to keep in mind when considering advice from books is that most books are written for children with a particular type of temperament. Although many (but not all) are presented as one-size-fits-all models for successfully fostering healthy kids and happy family life, most approaches that work well do so because they are suited to the particular children that they work well with, which, of course, makes them less well-suited to other children with very different temperaments. In addition, parents are part of the equation: some parents have an easier time being firm than others, some have an easier time being calm. If you are using an approach that depends on a relational quality that is not your strong suit, you may need to either invest some focused energy in your own support or modify the approach to some extent.

As for talking with children about discipline and emotions: yes, it really is very important. We'll tell you why we think so, but first, know that some of the reason your daughter is melting down may have to do with when you are trying to have these discussions with her.

The specifics of how and when to discuss emotions and behavior with a child are a great example of an issue that varies widely based upon the temperament of both a child and a parent. For some children, it's reassuring to have a parent provide a calm, but firm, explanation of the rules

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Understanding Your Child's Unique Temperament

Tuesday 15 June
7:30-9:00pm

Twins By The Bay
College Avenue Presbyterian Church
5951 College Avenue
Oakland CA
RSVP: www.twinsbythebay.org

TBB members (suggested donation):
\$10/person or \$15/couple
non-members: \$30 person/couple

along with empathy in times of conflict. Of course, this depends on a parent's ability to stay calm. For other kids, no matter how calm a parent is, it is simply over-stimulating to have someone talking to them when they are already distressed. If your daughter falls into the second camp, then the fewer-words/clear-boundaries approaches you've read about will give you a good model for how to deal with struggles in the moment. However, you'll still need to go back later and talk with her about what she felt, what you felt and what happened. It's important to do this so that she has a chance to consider the experience with a calm mind, rather than a frustrated one. Moreover, talking about struggles is an important component to building the emotional foundation for health.

Here's how that works: When you discipline your daughter, it is important that she understand she is not being disciplined for how she feels; she is being disciplined for how she acts. In other words, when your daughter starts to complain and drag her feet when it's time to leave the house, you want to be sure that you are not disciplining her for the fact that she's frustrating you. If you do discipline her, it should be because she has broken a rule in the course of avoiding leaving. If she throws something or shoves her sister, that is the offense. She knows such things are out of bounds and so it will only make sense to her for you to respond accordingly. Furthermore, at preschool age, she is capable of (at least most of the time) making a different choice in the face of the impulse to behave aggressively or provocatively. However, she is not capable of getting herself to feel like getting ready to leave.

If she struggles with transitions in general, she will struggle with them most of the time until she learns better how to help herself through them. This is a slow process that requires the opportunity for experimentation and data collection, and a sufficient level of emotional development to make sense of the results of her experiments. Until she is able to acquire the emotional maturity needed, transitions will be hard for her. It will only increase your frustration if you are expecting her to move smoothly through transitions in the way her mellower sister does. Of course, no matter how Buddha-like you become, you will be frustrated at times and your daughter is likely to sense this. If she feels that she is in trouble because you are frustrated, she will have the impossible job of not feeling distressed in order to keep you from being frustrated. The anxiety created by this bind will only amplify the anxiety she is feeling over the transition, which will lead to her acting out, or worse, to her internalizing the anxiety in the form of guilt and negative messages about herself.

However, if she understands that frustration is just a

feeling, and it's not the same as being in trouble, you both have room to feel your feelings and make the best choices you can in response to what you are feeling. The conversations you have about the struggles will be what help to develop this distinction. By talking about the difficult moments between you, you set a precedent for welcoming an awareness of discomfort rather than simply avoiding it.

If it sounds like you will be required to teach yourself new skills in order to teach them to your daughter, you are in good company. Our cultural values encourage us to work on managing emotional stimuli rather coping with our emotions: If something makes you happy, do more of it. If something makes you uncomfortable, modify it or avoid it. If you don't like your job, leave.

Of course, the ability to manage the external environment in this way is both a skill and a privilege; and we want the children we care about to have both as adults. However, as children, we're asking them to employ a different set of skills, one that most adults practice and model less frequently. When we expect a child to accept the fact that she can't have a sugary treat, watch one more video or play close to the street,

we are asking her to leverage the ability to accept frustration rather than alter its source. That's a tough thing to do. As children grow, parents expect to coach them about how to count to ten, throw a ball, keep their bodies safe, behave in public, succeed academically, manage money and behave morally. These are the things most parents were taught as children and so these are the things that are passed down. Missing from this canon are the complex and difficult operations involved in recognizing disappointment beneath anger, maintaining hope in the face of loss, managing frustration and accepting the inevitable small failures along the road to achievement. As such, many of us were not well-instructed on how to relate to our own feelings, and so we are left to pioneer a practice of explicitly instructing children on the acquisition of emotional skills.

The good news is that the very process of attending to and articulating what you need to work on, what you already do well and where you'd like to get to is the heart of building new competencies. In acknowledging your limits but affirming your ultimate expectations for yourself, you will give your daughter a good model for managing the agony of aspiration well enough to experience the fruits of determination.

Private Presentations

Private presentation for groups of eight or more can be arranged by appointment. For more details, email us at: symbio@symbiosf.com

Cover kids wanted!

We love photos of our young clients. If you have photos you are willing to share on our website or newsletter, please email them to us at: symbio@symbiosf.com

symbio

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