



OU ISRAEL PARENTING COLUMN

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Finding Connection in Chaos

As I write this article, postwar with Iran, I'm still trying to find the balance between imminent threat and normal life. These days don't give us much time to process. We're living in extremes and are expected to simply switch from high alert to normal, overnight. Obviously, our brains and bodies are not built that way. We're not wired to just "snap" out of things or turn off our sympathetic nervous system.

In order to help our children process during uncertain times, it's important to allow space for their emotions and confusion to come out. Although most people seem to go right back to normal life, there can be lingering stress and tension below the surface. Adults generally cope by finding things that give them comfort and calm. While this is also true for children, they really seek "connection".

Children crave connection, especially with their parents. It gives them context to their experience and validates their emotions. When children have outbursts or fits of anger, seemingly "out of the blue", the best thing to do is to be there with them. Being present with them, shows that we are not afraid of their big emotions such as pain, sadness, fear and anger. We are there to anchor them during their feelings of being overwhelmed. We don't have to run to solve

their frustrations, give solutions, or words of comfort. The parent should allow for those tough feelings to land. It can be helpful to make eye contact, nod, lean in and really listen. You can say something like "I'm happy you're sharing with me", "I hear you" or "would you like to tell me more?". Make sure to remove distractions such as cell phones. This sends the message that your child is worthy and what he has to say is important. When he finishes letting out all of his emotions and calms down, you can offer words of comfort or validation. When a child knows that his parent can sit with him in his pit of despair and confusion, it provides him with comfort.

"Doing nothing" is a powerful tool that is highly underrated. When you decide to sit quietly with your child, you are mastering emotional regulation, providing support and becoming a role model. During these very charged times "giving space for the chaos" actually allows for connection and resilience. ■

Michal Silverstein has a MS in educational psychology and counseling. She facilitates parenting workshops in and around Jerusalem and maintains a private practice.

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