



OU ISRAEL PARENTING COLUMN

Michal Silverstein, MS

How To Get Unstuck!

How do you break a bad cycle with your child? Everyone has those interactions with their child when suddenly something changes and the mood or conversation starts to spiral out of control. One minute you're having a great interaction with your child and the next minute everything has disintegrated. Sometimes you're not even sure what happened to cause the spiral.

When a parent stops to reflect, when this happens, many times they will see that there is some sort of pattern that occurs. It can be that the parent is triggered by something that the child says or does or the child was set off by the parent. What's clear is that there tends to be cycles parents and children get stuck in and are left feeling powerless to navigate.

I'd like to offer some suggestions to free yourself from these vicious cycles.

Firstly, when a situation arises and you feel

like oh no, here we go again, it's a sign to pay close attention.

1. Notice the cycle and pause.
Stop and observe the change in the mood. Take a breath in order to calm your system and step away if you feel overwhelmed. It's hard for a child to calm down when the parent is dysregulated.
2. Gather information and look for a trigger.
Ask yourself if this happens every time you discuss a certain topic or if it's always at a specific time of day. For example things always take a turn for the worse when your child gets home from school or before bedtime. Check if your child is hungry or tired? Or maybe you are. Ask yourself how you're feeling at that moment. Are you angry, resentful, sad or frustrated? Once you check in with your emotions you can explore how you usually respond. For example, every time I bring up this topic my child ignores me so I yell.
3. Change your response - The parent can now break the pattern and choose to respond differently. It helps to recognize that your child's "rude" behavior is usually a sign of internal stress. Once you learn to not take the defiance personally, you can focus on the things that trigger you. Change doesn't happen when you continue to do the same thing. Acknowledge your child's emotions and validate them before you correct their behavior. Respond in a brief statement of what you

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expect from your child instead of giving a long lecture.

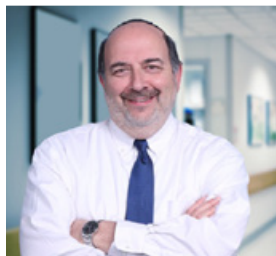
4. Now you can make space for repair and connection. Part of repairing the relationship is setting aside time to connect with your child and do something that they enjoy. Repairing the relationship outside of the conflict can lessen future clashes. It also helps when a parent can apologize when they've lost their temper. Try noticing and acknowledging good behavior and positive interactions. The process of change takes time and patience, often requiring a lot of effort and creativity from parents.

When a parent can shift from automatic, emotional reactions to intentional, calm responses, negative cycles can be broken, and new healthier dynamics can be built.

Be'hatzlaha ■

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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