

HyperHealing The Instant Gratification Powerhouse

Introducing “Instant Gratification” Child

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These chapters are presented from the perspective of a parent to child but can be easily adapted for an adult struggling with ADHD symptoms to use for him/herself.

After years of searching, failures and terrible advice, I have learned a few things about my kids with ADHD symptoms.

1. The problem does not reside within my child, but rather in the clash of her personality with her environment. Am I clashing with her?
2. I did not cause her challenges, but I can help her work them out.
3. If I do not fully understand her, how she processes, what she loves, what shuts her down, I cannot be the appropriate messenger to get my child on the right track.

In this chapter we will discuss the reason we became parents in the first place. We will then understand why much of the modern western approach to child-rearing runs counter to our real mission, and sets us on a collision course when trying to raise a child who needs a different rulebook.

It is one hard job to raise this child. Why did we volunteer for the job?

A couple of week ago I got an invitation to a baby naming. The invitation said, “please join us as we name our sweet joy-providing angel”. I was thrilled for the young couple, but just a little worried about the parents’ expectations. Let’s say joy-provider ruins their morning. She may decide to be difficult, make a mess often, embarrass her parents in public.

Kids have little life experience, poor manners, even worse hygiene, lots of charm and explosive potential. They are not born to give us joy, although we are filled with joy at their mere existence.

So, how did we get ourselves entangled in this parenting project? Are we mad?

Philosophers explain what we parents feel intuitively, that raising children is the most significant thing we ever do in this world.

“All animals reproduce” says Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, former Chief Rabbi of Great Britain, and leading theologian of our generation. “Humans alone need a reason to reproduce, a reason that connects us to some larger scheme of meaning. Those who deny that there is any such meaning rob us of any compelling reason to undergo the many sacrifices that having and raising children inevitably entail.”

Consider the child-raising process for a moment. The baby is born totally dependent, enchanting us with his pure and beautiful helplessness. As we grow with our child, we start to gain some skills such as loving consistently, self-control, reasoning, listening, perseverance, negotiating under pressure (kind of like a hostage negotiation), and the ability to give selflessly and build a meaningful relationship with this precious child. We commit for the long haul and grow and develop and become better people through

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the challenges of raising healthy, productive children. Our hard work and endurance lead to satisfaction and joy.

But we do not embark on the journey of parenting with a blank slate. We approach this tremendous task with tools and assumptions that are a combination of the environment in which we raise the child and our life experiences before parenting. If we can develop a deep understanding of our own motivations, and how they are molded and often derailed by western modernity's agenda for our parenting, we will have much greater insight into how we need to change to parent our child with ADHD symptoms.

We are often advised that along with hoping for our child's success and wellbeing, we are supposed to help our kids be happy and build their self-esteem. But this may be a trap. How did we come to adopt this 'keep your child comfortable and protect him from pain' notion? Explains Rabbi Sacks:

"It happened when big business discovered that children represent an immense potential market, not just for toys but also clothes, music, films, video games, soft drinks, junk food, the whole paraphernalia of street cool. So began the transformation of children into consumers..." (Sacks, 2004).

If a child is meant to be accommodated and protected; then discipline, discomfort, earning second place and any kind of effort or pain becomes taboo. Setting limits reduces her joy, so go easy on that too. As adults, when we reflect on our most joyful and life changing moments, were they not ALL rewards for fighting through challenge and discomfort, working hard, broadly expanding our comfort zone and working towards deeper meaning?

"Childhood needs its visions and aspirations." Continues Rabbi Sacks. "Joseph — the first person described in the Bible as a teenager — was the great dreamer of dreams. The young Moses, moved by the plight of his people, began the fight against injustice and slavery that was to become his life and legacy... When we are young, we want to change the world. *If that instinct is frustrated*, there is a danger that children will turn to drink, drugs, sex, danger, violence, anger and the many other pathologies of our age" (italics added)" (Sacks, 2004).

If we want our children to become active citizens, we have to induct them early into the habits of responsibility. They need the space to write their own chapter in the story we share, and they need to know that we trust them to do so — making mistakes along the way but learning from them...All we can do is to give them the chance to give — to others, to society and to the world that will one day be theirs (Sacks, 2004).

When we allow our children to grow up with responsibility and a dream, we allow them to fail and learn, succeed and grow and find their own meaning. Our job is not to shield them from discomfort; it is to be by their side as they find their voice and become unique, contributing members of society. Happiness and a strong self-esteem come from within, we can't infuse them by proxy. We must model responsibility and perseverance, guide our children lovingly with clear rules, discipline and positive feedback and create opportunities for our children to grow.

What happens when that beautiful child we dreamed of is too hard for us to raise? Do the above rules still apply? The doubt creeps in - maybe he is somehow defective? How do disillusioned depleted parents find the strength and faith to proceed?

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This “raising kids to reach great potential and meaning” notion is very romantic. We all get the whole “achievement and growth process” concept when watching the neighbors raise their perfect kids. What happens when Mr. touch-everything-bother-siblings-impossible-to-discipline-off-in-dreamland shows up? You know, the kid who is about to be diagnosed as ADHD?

The idealism dissipates. We feel exhausted and have no clue how to proceed. We punish, make all sorts of empty threats and bribe him to get moving with promises of exciting activities to follow all chores. And then we feel terrible for having expectations of our diagnosed child. We feel we should be more gentle, help her more, make life easier. We feel sorry for our poor struggling child. We hear from those around us: treat him sensitively, accommodate, don’t expect too much and certainly don’t punish, as he is not capable of fulfilling your expectations. Gentle whispers say keep *this* kid happy. Is this kid different?

When my husband and I met with the teacher of one of our sons, we were impressed with the grades the teacher showed us. Our boy seemed to be paying attention and his efforts were paying off. You could imagine our surprise when the teacher told us he was worried about our son. “You see”, he explained “your son has a really hard time focusing. It’s so hard for him! My heart goes out to him when I see how hard he must work to keep up with us”. What? Was the teacher complaining that our son was working too hard?

I was sure I had misunderstood the teacher. I asked, “When he works hard and really focuses, does he succeed?” Sure, ninety percent of the time, was the teacher’s reply. “I fail to see the problem dear teacher, why are you distraught that he is working hard and succeeding, isn’t that what kids are expected to do in school?” And then I understood... since my child had been diagnosed with ADHD, instead of expecting my son to exercise a weaker muscle and learn to concentrate like the rest of his friends, the teacher was trying to accommodate him and felt it inappropriate to expect him to sweat too much. For my part, I was thrilled that my healthy son figured out that if he really tries, he succeeds at focusing, and is rewarded with excellent grades.

It sure is lucky that our son didn’t catch on to his teacher’s attitude and cash in on the exaggerated sympathy. There are so many problems with this encounter. Why had the teacher lost faith in a kid who demonstrated that he could work hard? Why was it considered problematic for his student to exert too much effort?

Most of all, why do we buy the story that this child is less capable and needs accommodation?

1. We have been told by his teachers and doctors that due to his neurological disorder he is limited. His brain is wired differently. They add that it would be unfair and painful to put excess demands on him. We feel sorry for our child, so we turn him into a sorry child.
2. It is SO hard to raise him, we begin to believe their story in order to make sense of the situation. Our culture gives us a binary choice. Either the child is limited, or we are failing. While neither is true, we choose the former which somehow has more external support.
3. As good parents, we don’t want to force him to do something he can’t do, causing him to suffer. Remember the message, don’t allow him discomfort, never let him fail! He hears this message loud and clear and our collective low expectations become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

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None of this is true, he's not limited! One source of his ADHD symptoms is his "**Instant Gratification**" personality. Your child is an inventor, entrepreneur, artist, scientist, a builder, a high-tech guy or girl...

But also

- a procrastinator (when the activity is not engaging, the expectation is too big, or he is not sure where to start)
- transition phobic (when he is engaged in something awesome, and we are demanding that he shift to something less enticing. Example: getting her into the shower may require calling in the national guard, once she's under the steamy water she's having so much fun, singing her heart out, no one can get her out. I know this does not only happen in my house.)
- attention-demanding and energy-draining (there is nothing more gratifying than getting attention from mom and dad, even negative attention)
- a disorganized mess (cleaning and organizing requires engaging in the same boring activity daily, thereby developing new habits)
- a routine resistor (routines, like waking at the same time every morning, doing chores or homework or getting to bed on time, directly clash with novelty)
- highly impulsive (excitement is more important than caution, so caution is thrown to the wind)

An organized, compliant child would flourish in school and can assist a struggling friend get by. How well would the compliant child fare as an adult in a competitive job that demands a lot of out-of-the-box, creative thinking? An instant gratification personality type struggles in school, but in that same competitive job, she may persevere and teach her friend to be spontaneous and take risks. Both types must be raised to nurture their natural talents, develop their weaker ones and know when they should reach out for help and build a team.

We fail dismally when we try to raise "Instant Gratification" child as if he were "agreeable" kid. He's not! And that's good. Let's get to know him better through these two examples.

I'm reminded of the enormous final project my daughter was assigned as a high school art major. Since she had a dual major, she decided that the project was causing too much pressure, and after three years of art class she was going to drop the major.

"No way!" I said lovingly and rolled up my sleeves to help. We spent many long hours planning. There was some crying (read: full blown tantrums, door slamming and stair stomping included), anger and unfun hard work on her part. Finally, the project was complete, and it was beautiful. What an achievement. The glow on my daughter's face as she presented her project proudly at the exhibition is fixed in my memory. I asked her that evening how she felt. She replied (blessedly she agreed to talk to me), "I have never been so happy!"

Did I make her happy? Nope! I was the catalyst of much misery. If my goal was a happy/comfortable experience, or even shielding her from failure, I would never have pushed her to persevere. It would have thrilled her to drop art. What would she have missed? The entire process of tapping into her creativity, pushing herself to work hard, experiencing the deep joy of her own personal success, and the responsibility of completing the course.

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I followed Rabbi Sacks' sage advice that "Children grow to fill the space we create for them, and if it's big, they grow tall. But if we turn them into mini consumers, we rob them of the chance of greatness, and I've not yet met a child not capable of greatness if given the opportunity and encouragement" (Sacks, 2008).

I cherish the sweet email I got from a twenty-year-old client, about half a year after we concluded our work together. He didn't write much, he hated writing, but he attached a picture. It was his high school diploma. Two years after officially graduating high school he had finally handed in his last assignments and earned his degree. When we met two years earlier, he spent the first half hour of our meeting explaining that due to his ADHD, he could not finish his assignments and he was just fine with that. I asked him if he had a dream of what he would like to be one day. He shared that he would like to open a mountain rappelling company one day.

After we talked a little about what ADHD really was - a list of symptoms- and how everyone had challenges to overcome, I asked if he would like to consider tackling earning his diploma as the first step in fulfilling his dream. He was doubtful but open to the suggestion. We made a plan that involved a strict behavioral structure, short- and long-term goals, and positive feedback.

That diploma was indeed the first step in fulfilling his dream. Last I checked in, he now works for a rappelling company and continues to build his credentials to start his own business.

Both of these children were struggling with the desire for instant gratification. Had they been accommodated, they would have felt fantastic for a short while, but would have ached for the joy and satisfaction that achievement brings.

The majority of children who have difficulties with the world around them are not primarily hyperactive but are reacting to an environment that does not provide them with the necessary ingredients for their development. An understanding of these developmental needs can only be gained when we assess the total life-space of a child, which includes school, family and the child himself ... These children most often need people who they can trust, rather than drugs. (Minde, 1975, 130-1)

"Instant Gratification" child demands strong instant feedback all the time. Any strong response is rewarding. If we get excited about his newest invention, great. If he bothers his younger sister and she makes a crazy ear-numbing shriek, even more fantastic. How about if we jump in and yell at him, escort him to his room and hold the door closed. We nailed it! Best. Reward. Ever. The reason we struggle so much to discipline this child is because we are disciplining with too much energy, being too generous with the commodity he so craves.

In his personality temperament and character traits inventory (TCI) Cloninger (Cloninger, 1987; Cloninger et al., 1993) has described four temperamental traits:

- Harm Avoidance (HA)
- Reward Dependence (RD), and
- Persistence (P) and
- Novelty Seeking (NS)

Novelty seeking ("Instant Gratification") is a personality trait with a tendency to act, explore and respond to novelty and make impulsive decisions. He has extravagant approaches to reward cues, and rapidly

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losses his temper. He cannot tolerate monotony; he may be inconsistent in relationships due to lack of self-reflection. When frustrated, he quickly disengages.

A Novelty-Seeking person also has many advantages to her personality. She is excitable, curious, enthusiastic and engages quickly with new and unfamiliar stimuli, thereby expanding the likelihood that she will learn from her environment.

I prefer “Instant Gratification” but you can use “novelty seeking” if you feel it describes your child best. What’s crucial to understand is that our instant gratification, novelty seeking child is non-dysfunctional. In fact, his personality actually contributes to adaptive functioning. In this beautiful world of many varied personalities, “Instant Gratification” child adds his own strengths, thereby completing the picture.

Since our yelling or loud criticism is inadvertently rewarding our “Instant Gratification” kid and reinforcing his ability to get the negative feedback in a heartbeat, it’s time to STOP!

Easier said than done.

We parents are not flourishing, we are caught in a habit cycle that we are struggling to break. Jonny picks on his brother, parent yells, Jonny gets strong negative feedback and unconsciously registers that feedback as something he may want to try to trigger again. So Jonny goes right back at it, this time picking on his sister, we up the punishment. He cries, we cry.

Help! Seems Jonny is now in charge, and he is way too young for that responsibility! He makes TERRIBLE decisions; we can do much better than him. Instead, we cower in the corner hoping his explosion will simmer down quickly with as little collateral damage as possible. To handle ever-escalating tantrums, we desperately make up new rules as we collapse utterly defeated at the end of each day.

It’s time to take charge, to become that parent you dreamed of being. This will require some self-care. When the oxygen drops on an airplane, you put the mask on yourself first. Only when you can breathe do you quickly strap the mask on your little one. You deserve to be your best you, your family craves the emotional and mental skills you are about to develop.

Action Plan:

1. Get yourselves a glass of wine, find a peaceful (or at least not totally chaotic) spot and relax.
2. Remind yourself that this child is a gift from God, he is not disordered, he is healthy, and he needs your help. You are his environment.
3. Review in your mind or write down what is special about your child. Imagine her in your mind’s eye and see where she shines.
4. Know that you have not caused her struggles, you have been trying to figure out how to help her since the moment she was born. You are not the cause of her challenge, but you are the leader in the home and with your patience, curiosity and guidance she will do great.
5. Make a list of the instances where you and your child are too frequently butting heads. Go through the day, remember the moments when you wanted to run away or put him up for adoption.

The next chapter is just for you.

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If Mama Aint Happy, Aint Nobody Happy!

(This illustration is based on real live family experiences)

"MOM, I'm home! What's for dinner?" shouts Joey as he bursts through the door, hurling his backpack.

Mom starts to sweat, there is no good answer to this question, no way to predict Joey's response. One day "salmon and mashed potatoes" gets rewarded with a huge "that's my favorite!". Two days later the same response could lead to a full-blown hour-long tantrum and major property destruction.

Mom is terrified, bracing for the onslaught. Joey senses the terror, and lets it rip. Mom yells back. Let the games begin!

If we are going to discipline this child, we must make four very important decisions today.

- **Decide** to see our child as a healthy child who is capable of learning to behave like a civilized person.
- **Decide** to own our parenting role and see it as crucial and powerful, a role that may not be abandoned or outsourced.
- **Decide** to accept that raising children is a long and valuable process, that there are no shortcuts, and that our perseverance will help our child succeed and give us the most valuable life skills we can ever develop.
- **Decide** to realize that this child is a blessing to us, the very child God gifted us with. We and our children are a perfect match, and with all the glitches and bumps along the way, this is our journey together. There is no return or exchange policy because the one we got is the one we need. If we are raising our child but dreaming that he be more like the neighbor's kid, this process cannot work. Only when we embrace the gift we have, can we proceed.

If mom saw Joey as healthy and capable, would she let this behavior drag on indefinitely? Would she be understanding that Joey had a hard day and needs to let off steam? Would she run to pick up the backpack and put it in its place? Would she yell back? No way! Healthy, normal kids are not permitted to behave this way.

Why has mom backed away? What is she thinking? What are WE thinking when we nurture destructive behavior?

Mom and dad are not thinking... they have been triggered and have gone into automatic response mode. At this point, it is nearly impossible to pull back from the unhelpful response that follows.

Why is that? Let's understand the habit loop better so we can become deliberate effective parents.

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In this chapter we will:

- Focus on our response to our child's triggering behavior.
- Understand that we are not simply responding to the behavior, we are also grappling with our avalanche of emotions, feelings and experiences from the past.
- Examine what happens to us when we are triggered, and why our responses are not aligned with the presenting situation.
- See that due to the emotional overload, we stop using our thinking brain and drive our high-speed response car down a dangerous, emotionally charged, winding road, with no brakes.

When we become cognizant of our internal process, we can get the help we need to work out our stress and separate the behavior of the child in front of us from all the ghosts of the past. We only develop new communication habits when we respectfully and lovingly care for ourselves.

What is our Cue-Routine-Reward cycle? The first step towards respectfully repairing our own pain.

As a child, Michael Phelps was highly emotional and undisciplined. His coach, Bob Bowman, realized that although Michael had great physical potential, if he was going to compete and win swimming competitions, he would have to do some serious work on his mental preparation and stop acting impulsively. Michael's parents had recently divorced, and he was struggling under the weight of the separation. He had already been diagnosed as ADHD. Coach Bowman knew he had to replace the negative triggers coming from Michael's emotional load and causing outbursts and lack of focus, and replace them with new positive triggers. In this way he could help Michael develop a positive habit loop.

Every day after practice in the pool, Bowman sent Michael home with a "videotape" to watch. There was no video, it was a mental visualization exercise which was practiced twice daily. Phelps would imagine every move in the competition in slow motion repeatedly. He focused on his past successes and choices and dealt with any future challenges. He practiced so many times in his mind that when he stepped into the pool, and his coach called out "videotape" (his new positive trigger) he moved automatically.

When Phelps dived into the water at the 2008 summer Olympics, his goggles instantly filled with water. He was calm. He had already practiced swimming in the dark countless times in his "videotapes". When he broke through the water with his final powerful stroke, the cheers he heard were deafening. Upon removing his goggles, he discovered "WR"- world record- next to his name on the scoreboard. He had won another gold and demolished every previous swimming record, and he had done it blind!

Parenting successfully is as powerful an act as winning a gold medal at the Olympics. Parenting a kid with ADHD symptoms bumps the task up to swimming with water in our goggles. Water in the goggles throws us off course, we don't know how to do that! It's frightening and isolating, causing us to immediately escape to our least successful emotional responses; panic, anger, fear, resentment. Can we break through these, like the world swimming champion Phelps did? Only if we become aware of the possible triggers and play our own videotape.

We need to recognize and break our habit cycles and begin acting deliberately. Just like Phelps, we approach our most important job a little undisciplined, and highly emotional. Why are we so emotional despite our assumption that we are rational adults, ready for the job?

In case you suspected you were the only one regularly making emotional non-decisions, I'll put myself out there first.

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There are a lot of kids wandering around my house on a regular basis. They have all these needs like showering, eating, playing, constructing, eating some more, which leaves a constant trail of stuff all over the place. One would think I would just train my kids to clean up after themselves, case closed. But I have an old deep-seated need to getting things organized. And I'm also allergic to the chaos of mess. My stress caused by the mess is much greater than my need to teach the kids to tidy up after themselves.

Are they incapable of learning to clean, or have they made it just hard enough for me to get them mobilized so that I trade calm rational thought for emotionally triggered knee-jerk behavior and clean it all myself? My irrational response nurtures their messy habit and does not help them mature; it enhances my feeling that I can rely only on myself and increases my resentment; the feelings and habits become entrenched as we repeat the cycle over and over.

*Old voices are at play here. One says, let the kids play and enjoy, you'll have time to train them in responsibility later. The other says, the chaos is too deep and too large, I would rather return my mental state to "calm" than educate my child. The combination leads to spoiled kids, and an explosive resentful mother. I **know** better, I really do, but my emotions take over, my old voices drown out rational thought and yes, I am a bit emotional and undisciplined. We will pick this story up again later and unearth more triggers and hopefully better responses.*

What is the mechanism of action that causes us to circumvent our rational brain and respond so quickly and poorly to emotional triggers? How can we change it?

The first step to dismantling emotional barriers, is to identify them and then create rational, respectful discipline.

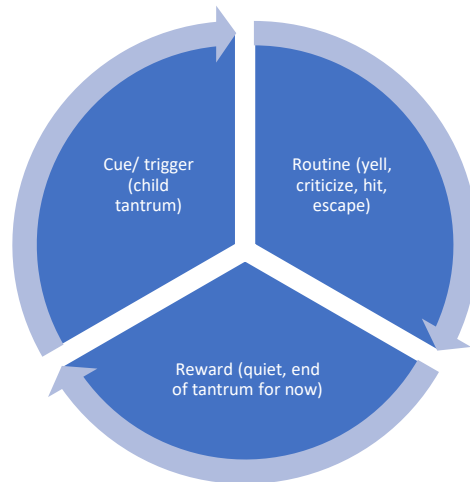
We have had ample time in our pre-parenting lives to create habits, good and bad. We have been triggered many times! Some of the triggers have been positive and built confidence. As an example, when creating "works of art" and being rewarded with many compliments about our diligent creative work, we learned to work even harder to get the same results again. The more positive feedback we received, the more we were motivated to work hard, and this attribute turned into a habit.

Other triggers such as making mistakes and being shamed could lead to avoiding bold behavior and fear of failure. Being treated aggressively could reduce our sense of self and confidence. Being compared to others could lead to a feeling of unworthiness or a need to constantly prove oneself. When our childhood experiences continually trigger these responses of fear, avoidance and other negative emotions, we develop unhealthy habits. When we become adults and our kids inadvertently step on the land mine of our old and sore emotion, we go directly into a habit loop. The old cringe or desire to attack or escape returns. Each of us has many triggers which lead to multiple and unexpected internal emotional voices.

Charles Duhigg, in his fantastic and highly recommended book, *The Power of Habit*, explains what the habit loop is, how we develop it, and how to reset our undesirable habits.

This is what a parent habit loop looks like:

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Our child tantrums, we have a need to return to quiet or control. The tantrum triggers in us an emotional and physical discomfort which demands resolution. That is the **cue**. There are rational responses to tantrums, as we will learn about in the next few chapters. Yelling, hitting and criticizing are not only the least effective choices, they are damaging. We would not choose them if we were thinking. But we are not, we have been triggered by the tantrum and the behavior must be eliminated NOW! (Are we panicked that the child is not normal? Are we terrified that it will never end? Do we lack a strategy and feel powerless? Was tantruming an inexcusable sin in our homes growing up?) Whatever the deep cause, we make a terrible choice and go into a **routine** which **rewards** us short-term by producing a startled, quiet child. But will he tantrum again? You bet!

As we get more “positive” results (temporary calm or quiet) from irrational responses, we develop a habit and suspend thought. The more we repeat a behavior, the stronger habit we create. Once something becomes a habit, our rational mind does not have to get involved for us to carry out the task. The next time the cue happens, we go directly into our routine and only afterwards hate ourselves for breaking every one of our parenting red lines. We can’t understand why we couldn’t just stop yelling, punishing and behaving so poorly.

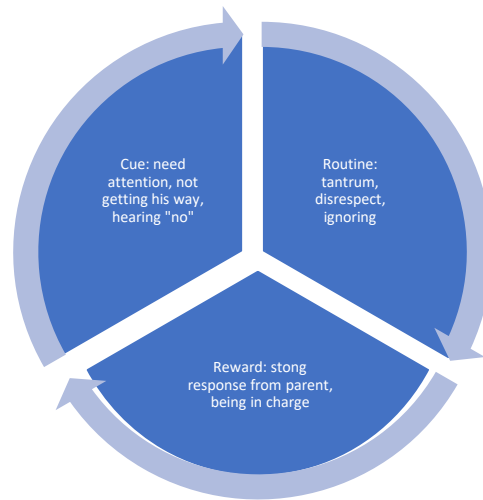
The cycle repeats itself. Our rational selves are no longer in charge because the behavior has been practiced and reinforced so many times.

We develop habit loops and our kids mimic us. Can we break out of the symbiotic emotional entanglement and build a new healthy attachment with our children?

Our kids are also developing habit loops. “Instant Gratification” child likes a lot of attention, wants things now, hates to hear “no” and would prefer you leave him alone when he’s having fun.

Here is the “Instant Gratification” child’s habit loop:

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We are intertwined.

Our child triggers us because of her need for a strong response (positive or negative- as long as it's strong), we are triggered by her outburst, we develop a need to de-escalate or punish, we respond vigorously, thereby rewarding her! And the cycle goes on and on and on.

Until...

We remember that we are the adults!

We must stop feeding into this toxic exchange. How is that done? By moving our unconscious habit loop back to the conscious and resetting it. Easier said than done, but it is possible. Do you know why? Because respecting our emotional overload and our stress and rebalancing ourselves is the best gift we will EVER give ourselves and our child. When we regain self-discipline and self-respect, we establish ourselves as the leaders in our home. When we separate our emotional process from that of our child's, our child can safely go back to being a child, knowing that he can no longer trigger a response in us, and being able to rely on us to set the tone.

How can we break unhealthy habit loops and replace them with new constructive ones?

Are you ever driving, and you find yourself in your driveway without being cognizant of how you got there? Do you remember how much effort it took to learn how to drive when you were sixteen? How is it that now driving is so simple, to the point that you are almost not aware that you are driving? Our minds create habit loops to free us up to work out more complex problems. In the case of Michael Phelps, the cue was "videotape" shouted by his coach as he entered the water. His reward was winning the competitions. He started with small wins and built up from there. If "videotape" was followed by success often enough, a craving was established to repeat the behavior and it became as natural as driving. We must find our own "videotape" trigger to replace the old triggers and form a new positive habit.

Follow these steps carefully to become aware of your habit loops and start to change them:

1. **Emotional Cue: Identify your emotions and write them down:** Do you have any alone time, just you and your thoughts? If not, create some. It helps to put your phone down, because the phone demands more attention from us than our kids do. During this quiet time, **meditate** on the www.hyperhealing.org info@hyperhealing.org

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interactions you have been having with your child, watch your most recent interactions on a “videotape”. Do the interactions go in circles? What triggers you? What emotion do you feel every time you get triggered? Is it despair? Humiliation? Disappointment in yourself or your child? Concern for his future? Anger? Do you feel unappreciated? Maybe you have no idea how to respond?

Understand that your emotional feeling launches you directly into a behavioral response, so identifying the emotion is key. Keep your personal story in mind as you travel inward. We carry all our old responses and triggers in a huge suitcase of emotions on our shoulders. We sometimes link our children’s behaviors to our pre-parent past, thereby exaggerating our response, and expressing rage that we cannot even understand. (For example, our child reminds us of a relative who was controlling or intimidating. Even a hint of those old feelings (a cue) can trigger a response just to escape the feeling that interaction imposed on us.)

Ask yourself why a behavior triggers you to feel a specific emotion and where that response comes from. Speak to a friend, spouse or therapist and trace your strong emotion back to its original trigger. Talk about your pain, confusion, rage, powerlessness or any other legitimate feeling you have had in response to past experiences. Not all experiences are from the distant past; even trouble with a boss can trigger emotional responses at home. Give yourself the time to examine how new situations are bridging you to the past. That may help you be less disappointed in yourself. Write down how you feel, name the most dominant emotions.

2. **Physical cue: Identify your physical response:** Every strong emotional feeling is accompanied by a physical response; we feel our stress in our body. Where do you feel yours? Nausea? Headache? Tight shoulders or chest? Get in touch with your body, feel the tightness. When we feel that physical discomfort, it will be a sign to us to pull back. The better you get in touch with your physical feeling, the faster you will be able to disengage.
3. **Routine:** **This is the automatic behavior following the trigger. We must visualize choosing a more productive response. What is your routine now?** While you watch yourself on the “videotape,” what is counterproductive about your response and what do you like? Are you listening well or are you blocked by panic? Are you complimentary to your child or are the loud voices of the criticism you have absorbed redirecting you? Do you take the time to play a game or read a book to her or do you have the urge to be constantly “productive” and process play time as wasted time? Do you share some laughs with him or is it all business? Celebrate your strengths and successes. Become aware of the automatic routines you slip into and their origin.
4. **Triggers to Routine:** **Feel your environment: what is contributing to your stress buildup?** Is it the baby crying? Are your kids treating each other unkindly? Is the house messy? Did the blatant disrespect bring you down? Have you spent any time by yourself today doing something you like or speaking to a friend who fills you with energy? Are you running on an empty emotional tank?

Review the scenario from today when you yelled at or threatened your child. What overwhelmed you? Were you hungry, tired or suffering from a headache? Could you not accept once again

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that you were stuck raising this kid and not the one heading for the Ivy Leagues? Study the pitfalls that may repeat themselves (think water in goggles). Be kind to yourself. If your emotional weight is too heavy, you will have no oxygen left for anyone else. Know that stress plus mess can lead anyone to shut down.

5. **Reward: The same triggers, a different response:** So far, we have identified the trigger and visualized it. We have examined our routine, seen what exacerbates it and what responses we have that we like. Now we must anticipate the stress and change the response. Visualize a response that will give you much more satisfaction than the previous more aggressive responses. How can you calm yourself down? You will now visualize yourself using your calm response repeatedly. For this to be successful, we must link our calm leadership behavior to an enjoyable outcome.

The following are a few calm-maintaining suggestions. Of course we each must find the reward that works best for us.

- Counting to ten or breathing generally don't work well because we tend to forget to do them when stressed. One mother gave me a different idea. She said she never yells, but she goes to the bathroom an awful lot. If you can anticipate the trigger, sometimes a quick exit to catch your breath is very valuable. Even a minute out of the storm could rescue you from a toxic response. This option is only available if you are not leaving a younger child to be the target of your frustrated child's behavior. Hanging an EXIT sign in the kitchen with an arrow to the escape room might help. If the kids ask about the new sign, explain that you sometimes need time to think or take a break and don't always remember that you need it, so the new sign is your reminder. Kids love to hear that their parent's work hard to be better, not just them.
- Prepare a joke, something that *really* tickles you. One father chose to say, "serenity now" (apparently from "Seinfeld", look it up, I hear it's funny). He would say it out loud each time his daughter triggered him with a disrespectful comment. (Just to calm you down dear parent, we will not be tolerating or nurturing disrespectful behavior, we will address that soon. The first step is becoming a leader.) Think of a funny situation, something that made you belly laugh and visualize it or repeat it to calm the building stress.
- Make a mantra. Some examples: "One moment of self-control will pay huge dividends"; "I am stronger than my need to yell"; "My calm is the biggest gift I can give my child"; "I love my calm response".
- Create something external as a reminder to remain calm. Put a stop sign on the fridge. Find a meaningful quote and write it down. Do you feel calm on the beach? Hang a picture of the beach in the kitchen (most of the tantrums go down in the kitchen in my experience).
- Here's my favorite (sorry fathers, this is only useful for the mothers): I like to visualize the challenge of childbirth and how bravely I battled each contraction. I knew that if I tightened

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every muscle the contraction would be more difficult. But if I gained control, I could focus on my calm muscle, and the contraction would end more easily. There is an end to every contraction, and to every temper tantrum. The only part that's in my control is my response.

- Get some help! If you feel that you will not manage to contain your frustration, ask someone in your home to say a previously agreed upon word or phrase that will remind you to disengage. Phelps needed his coach to get started. This can be a spouse, relative or friend. Be careful here; if you will feel criticized by the reminder it will not work. Only use this technique if you will see the intervention as helpful rather than critical.

6. The final step is **sharing** this process with a spouse, partner, friend or relative. Talk through your successes, and celebrate them, even the small ones. Every tiny choice that brings you closer to a calm leadership response is a great achievement. Get your frustrations out, not on your child but to a fellow parent who is probably dealing with similar issues. Visualize together in the evening, after a long day's interactions, the challenges and the achievements. Remind yourself daily that you are blessed and that you are raising a first-rate child. The more you practice in your mind, the more you reframe your reality.

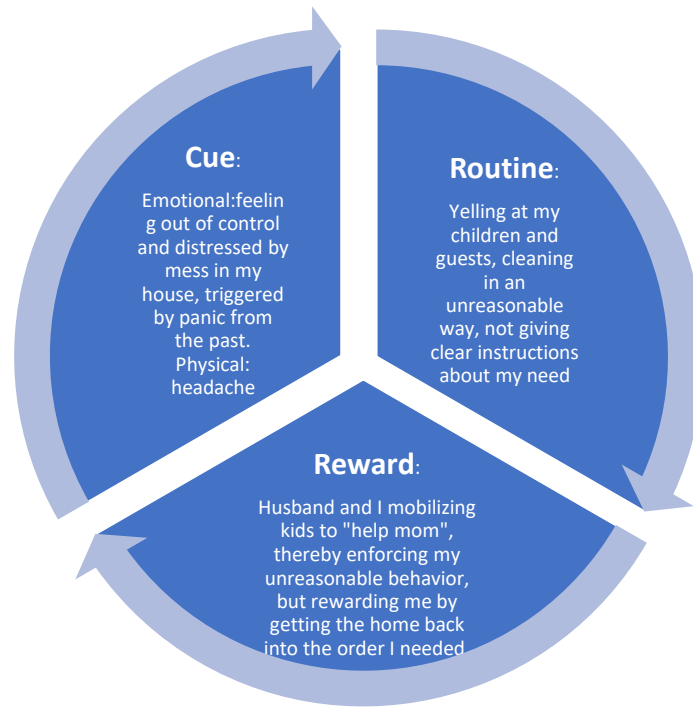
This next story is a continuation of the one I began at the start of the chapter. The theme is still mess. I'm making some progress.

I come from a big, beautiful family with five brothers and two sisters. We were a sociable bunch, so on a weekend afternoon each of us could easily have between two and five friends over. Do the math, that's a lot of mess. As the evening of these very enjoyable days approached, I would notice a creeping uneasy feeling in my stomach, knowing that as one of the older children, it would be my task to clean the chips from the food fight out of the carpet, collect the tinker toys that had been hurled between the two forts in the living room... You get the picture? Suddenly I was yelling at all the little kids to stop throwing, to clean up, to get out. Not pretty.

Fast forward a bunch of years. Now I'm blessed to be the mother of six beautiful children, also a sociable lot. They are welcome to invite friends to jump on the trampoline and enjoy kid fun on Saturday afternoons. I'm not a big yeller. Suddenly, I found myself shouting at the happy, messy kids to clean up, or I started frantically zipping around making a nuisance of myself, packing games away while they were playing. The house started getting back in order but I had triggered my husband and he started demanding that everyone get up and clean. It worked; the kids were mobilized! Some progress was made, I was not doing all the cleaning myself while acknowledging that the mess was too much for me. But I was still behaving poorly - yelling, giving mixed messages. There were no clear instructions to my children and little guests, and I was still completely out of touch with the deeper internal emotional panic and feeling that I was in some way being taken advantage of.

Here is my loop:

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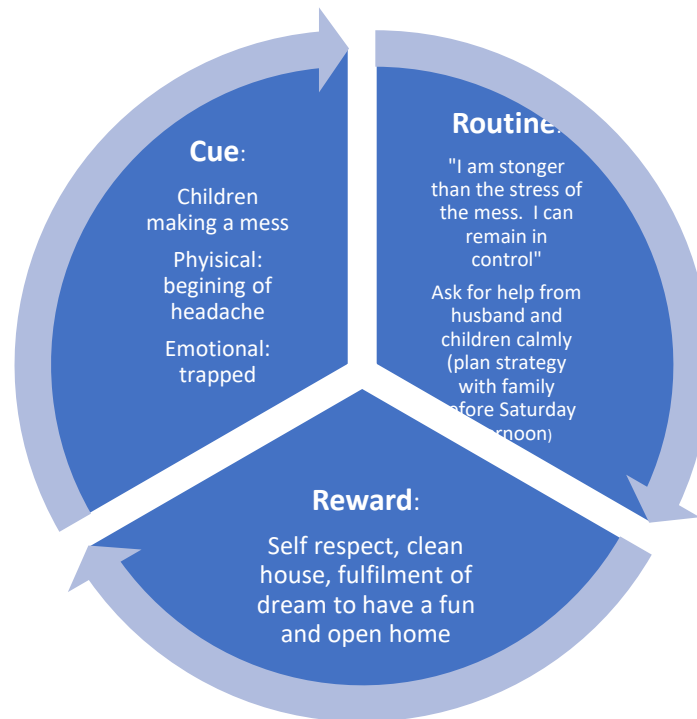


I was triggered, and the behavior that followed, the yelling and frantic cleaning, was rewarded by a clean house. What was the price? Total loss of control, disrespect for my children who had been permitted to invite friends over, and loss of a valuable process of teaching my children to be more responsible.

Now what? How can this be repaired?

Most often we either continue the pattern because we are so deep in the habit loop and are unaware that it is even happening, or we have no idea that we have the power to stop it. We may also lash out by not permitting guests to come play or decide that our behavior is so unjustified that we choose to cut out the yelling and instead suffer in silence. The suffering in silence option usually causes us significant pain, the price is too high. We deserve better! Below is an alternative cue-routine-reward habit that I committed to adopting.

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Now it's your turn.

What sends you into behavior patterns that make you feel disappointed in yourself? You deserve self-respect! You deserve to be the calm parent you dreamed you would be. Give yourself the gift of figuring out and changing your habit loop. Once you are rewarded frequently enough for your conscious choices, this behavior will become your new habit loop.

Identify your “engine”. What is the cause of your decision making process, yet lurks in your internal shadows and you are not aware of it? What do you hold as the highest value, and sacrifice other values to ensure this need is realized?

Identifying our engine is a technique I have used for years, developed over years in conversation with many clients. The concept of the “engine” emerged as I was talking with a young client. He had suffered some serious abuse and had redefined himself as a loser, someone who could do nothing right. I told him to imagine himself as a beautiful Ferrari - red, shiny, ready to tear up the road. Unfortunately, his sparkling Ferrari engine had been stolen (the abuse, neglect, false expectations, poor examples) and a Subaru engine was inserted in its place. Would the car hum? Would its driver experience the joy of the ride? Nothing would work, he would be spluttering at the side of the road. Should he blame himself for the car's breakdown? Never! The engine is there and hurting him. His job is to identify it, understand the damage it is doing, and replace this engine with the one that's just right for his magnificent self.

I will explain this process through a few examples:

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1. Shauna chose to be a stay-at-home mom, giving haircuts on the side. She has one small child. All she craves in life is an organized neat home, to take her little boy to the park in the afternoon and have a tasty gourmet dinner waiting for her husband when he comes home from work. But everything about how she runs her life contradicts these stated goals. The house is a mess, they never make it to the park, she comes late to every doctor's appointment, avoids booking haircut clients, and she and her husband often eat oatmeal for dinner. Why is she not even close to achieving her goals?

Shauna's engine is much louder and stronger than her stated desire and dream. After asking a few questions, we begin to get a picture of what is blocking her from her goal.

- ◆ Who do you view as the ideal person?
- ◆ What about that person do you so admire and see as a value above all others?
- ◆ What makes you secretly jealous of others?
- ◆ What would be a compliment you would love to get but would never ask for?

Here are a few of Shauna's responses:

- Her mother never stops, she does everything, and does it well. She hosts elegant dinner parties while working full time and keeping a sparkling home. She is involved in charity work and volunteers at the local church.
- Work never ends for her dad. No matter how much work he has put into a project there is always more to be done.
- Her parents are the "ideal" people. She admires their ability to keep going, using every moment of their lives in a productive way. She obviously feels jealous of people who are highly effective, getting things done all the time.
- What she actually craves deep in her heart is to be that efficient person, catching the dust as it falls, before it hits a gleaming surface in her home.

More questions for Shauna:

- ◆ Has this value you see in others been a blessing to them?
- ◆ What happens to you when you attempt to mimic the values you admire?

"My mother did not sit and play with us, she was always doing something. We had everything we needed and more, but not that calm time where there was no race, that we could just sit and enjoy time together. Time was a commodity, never to be wasted. Reading, watching a movie, going to the beach for a lazy afternoon were not permitted. My mother never relaxes, my father doesn't either."

"When I have somewhere to go, for some reason I suddenly have the urge to organize the refrigerator, to my husband's dismay. I can't even explain to him why I am shoving in so much and running late. In the afternoon I either race around cleaning up or collapse in disgust and do nothing. I don't play with my son, I don't go to the park, I don't make money, I read a novel. And I can't stand myself!"

What is Shauna's engine, her underlying need that frustrates her ability to set up her dream home and family? Her engine is her need to be productive. Productivity in itself is wonderful, but when it takes over

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as the sole need, all else fall away. She looks at her parents and says, “How did they pull it off?” They didn’t, but she can’t see that. They didn’t play with their kids, they didn’t enjoy any relaxation and they didn’t teach their kids responsibility because they were doing everything productively themselves. They were loving and kind and generous - very good parents -, which makes this confusing. Their chosen values contradict her deepest desire, but she is trapped in the need to mimic them.

Identifying an engine does not mean that we then reject our past, or the people we try to copy because of our admiration for them. We simply reflect on and thereby reduce the need to imitate them. We make it just one of our values and strike a healthy balance.

When someone is raised in a home in which productivity is the supreme value, but where the parents allow that child to observe passively and do not teach their child *how* to be productive, the child is doomed to fail. She has only two options: be very busy in an unsystematic and chaotic way or collapse. If she is already being busy, she must shove in everything, so she is as productive as possible. If she has a lazy afternoon, all is lost, and she may as well burn time. She will not replace the lack of productivity with a nice trip to the park, which would just confirm her laziness. So, the child doesn’t play, the mother is frustrated and distracted and neither knows why.

Once we identify the engine, we can see how it is harming us. We can get to the root of the desire and compare it to our chosen adult values. We then review scenarios and decisions from life today and see how this “engine” is directly harming every decision. We can understand our feelings of internal stress, disappointment or anger are a result of this “engine”. We can then begin the process of changing the habit loop.

2. Dan is a husband, father and on unemployment benefit because he can’t hold down a job. He suffers with bouts of depression, severe anxiety and listlessness. He is very disorganized, which is how he landed in my office to begin with. He loves his family, wants to get a good job and knows he is very intelligent and capable. During conversation, I shared with him that my friend was having brain surgery that day and I was very concerned. I expected him to wish my friend well, show an appropriate level of concern and move on. Something else truly surprising happened. Dan said, “You know, once the doctors thought I had a brain tumor. I suffered a lot, and I’m still suffering from headaches every day.”

Question for Dan:

- ◆ Who do you feel jealous of and why?
- ◆ What do you see as the greatest compliment but would never ask for it?
- ◆ How has suffering become an elevated ideal for you?
- ◆ How has suffering benefited you, who do you admire that thrives on victimhood?

Dan’s response was impressive in its honesty.

- ◆ He said he felt jealous that everyone felt sorry for this other person, and not him. He felt sad that the other person had “out suffered” him. His parents were cold and aloof but very attentive when he was ill. His mother demanded attention from her children because of her perceived constant suffering.

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- ◆ Dan's strongest desire is for others to see his suffering, pain and victimhood. People noticing that he was controlled by others and therefore had no choice but to fail was his engine.
- ◆ Dan held victimhood, weakness and suffering as the highest value. This value is shared by many people who were abused as children. Dan's father was physically and verbally abusive.
- ◆

How does the need to be a victim hamper success in every area of life? If a person feels valued only when he suffers, he must always be suffering. That means he may not allow himself to succeed as that would make him normative and even powerful. In a relationship he must be "wronged" often, leaving the spouse confused as to why she is always inadvertently hurting him. Children are treated to a heaped dose of "you are making life so hard for me", "do you know how hard I work, and you never appreciate me and my efforts!" Although he has a genuine desire to be healthy and strong and successful, his inner core says your only power is in your weakness. Make sure you are always in a sorry state.

Only when we found the engine, could he see clearly how the need to suffer and be a victim was taking over every area of his life. Now he must pay attention to the stress that mounts the minute someone suggests he is doing well or someone is suffering more than he is, or not enough people are paying attention to his pain, and then create a new healthy success- and relationship-oriented habit loop.

3. Jeff is an architect, but only in his fantasy world. He's actually a computer programmer who was supposed to be an architect. He was supposed to go to Harvard. He was surely smart and capable enough to attend an Ivy League school, but his fear of failure forced him into the very prestigious New York University. He is now a dad, a programmer and "just" a suburban husband. And he does suburban dad routine poorly. He blames his running late, messiness and inability to discipline his children consistently on his ADHD. What's the engine? It took a while to reveal.

Question for Jeff:

- ◆ What are you most ashamed of?
- ◆ What compliment do you so desire but would never ask for?
- ◆ Has this desire helped you or held you back?

Jeff's response:

- ◆ "My diploma from NYU", I was supposed to go to Harvard, I was supposed to be smart.
- ◆ My dream is to be told I'm special, I'm different, my life is exciting and mysterious.
- ◆ My need to be special, to be a successful architect, makes me allergic to my life, I can't tolerate mundane things like being a middle-class suburban husband. I shut down or run away from the boredom and imagine I am travelling and live an excited life.

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Jeff's engine was the need to be special and unique and he was medicating away the pain of regular, boring life. When he flees, the chaos that he leaves in his wake looks much like ADHD.

.Finding our old broken-down engine and replacing it with the shiny bright one that fits our Ferrari requires a journey back in time. We must also answer a few very direct questions as honestly as possible. Never feel shame in answering these questions. You are brave and care for yourself and your family so much that you are willing to look yourself in the eye and finally examine what has been holding you back for so long. You have not caused your own problems, nor did you invite them, but you can choose to examine and change them.

Here are the questions you can ask to direct you towards your engine:

1. What pattern continually repeats in your life, which you feel powerless to change?
2. What have you been blaming on others that may be coming from an old habit in you?
3. Do you need to be blamed by others so that you can hang on to a harmful behavior?
4. Who do you most admire, and for what attribute?
5. How does that attribute play out in the other person? Has it enhanced or hindered their life? Are you copying the behavior and is it doing the same for yours?
6. Who are you secretly jealous of? Why?
7. What compliment do you crave most (you work so hard, you are always put together, you do everything yourself...), but would either never ask anyone for, or feel ashamed if you do get it?

It's HARD to self-critique, let alone try to identify where our difficult responses come from and understand how to root them out. Since we are often dealing with childhood trauma or old patterns, we do not store the memories in our conscious mind, but rather shove them down and absorb them in our bodies. We function admirably for years with only some slight snags along the way.

When the kid shows up, she brings those old painful feelings right back to the surface in a complete jumble. Raising our children is the surest way to force us to get back in touch with ourselves (this is another reason our children are such a blessing to us). We face the choice of either grabbing this opportunity to dig up and heal the pain of the past, or continue to repeat our patterns. We are already a few steps ahead. When we understand that the problem behavior does not "live" inside our child or in ourselves, but in a toxic loop between us, we can begin to take responsibility.

Another very helpful way to identify and heal painful patterns is through somatic therapy. According to studies, our bodies hold on to past traumas which then reflect in our posture, reactions and body language. We may also experience physical pain, indigestion and other physical or emotional symptoms, triggered by old skeletons. EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing) and EFT (Emotionally Focused Therapy) are two therapies that I have seen produce very positive results. Talk therapy may be effective as well, but I recommend the other two for resolution of destructive repetitive patterns that are creating stress in your parenting and blocking your ability to parent with your complete self. We all need some help. Go get the help you need.

We must also learn to take care of ourselves:

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Here is a final yet vital piece of advice for us parents, on managing our stress for the sake of our own health, and that of our children. It comes from David J. Palmiter Jr., PhD, author of the 2011 book, *Working Parents, Thriving Families* (Sunrise River Press)

"... the research makes it clear that children are negatively affected by their parents' stress." Says Amy Novotney in her article, "Take care of yourself first," October 2012

"That's why modeling good stress management can make a very positive difference in children's behavior, as well as how they themselves cope with stress, psychologists say." Reports Novotney. She continues, "Palmiter recommends that parents make time for exercise, hobbies, maintaining their friendships and connecting with their partners. That may mean committing to spending regular time at the gym or making date night a priority."

"Investing in the relationship with their partner is one of the most giving things a parent can do," Palmiter says. "Single parents should establish and nurture meaningful connections in other contexts", continues Novotney. "A satisfying relationship with a colleague, neighbor, family member or friend can help to replenish one's energy for parenting challenges." (Novotney, 2012, p. 44).

Any worthwhile achievement takes time. We must enter the inner recesses of our subconscious to discover why our child's lack of success or struggles paralyze us and make us feel so inferior and out of control. Often it has less to do with her and more to do with our own mentality.

Action Plan:

1. Chart your habit loops, chart your child's loop, see how they interact with each other. Are you each responding to the other's needs? Is this creating an unhealthy cycle?
2. Make a plan to recreate your loop. This can be challenging. Speak it over with someone you trust, run through examples of your behavior. Practice your new loop. Imagine your trigger and how you feel and how you will choose to respond differently from now on. Put in your "videotape".
3. Spend time in the evening reviewing how you responded throughout the day. Congratulate yourself on any successes and strategize how you will improve on the responses that were less positive.
4. What is your "engine" and how is it hindering your relationship with your spouse or child? Answer the "engine" questions. Be honest, be kind to yourself. Get help from a professional if the process is too difficult.
5. How are you going to de-stress? Will it be a once a week coffee with a friend, date night, getting to the gym with a gym partner? These are not just nice suggestions; these are keys to your sanity and the health of your family. Make a choice and get started on it tomorrow morning.

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The Art of the Compliment

Amy comes in from a fun hour of swimming. She's tired, but she puts her swimming bag where it belongs anyway! Nice! There's only one problem: she leaves all her wet swimming paraphernalia in the bag, which is now closed into the hallway closet. Amy is super pleased with herself! And you? Are you imagining the mold developing on the soggy towel? Do you fear that this child will never figure out how to be fully responsible? Do you need to swoop in and save the situation?

Be honest!

The guests are on their way, and you are trying to get everything done before they all arrive. Stephen is sitting on the couch, completely absorbed in his video game, oblivious of you speeding back and forth, right in front of his nose at ninety miles per hour. "Stephen, get up and help!" you shout. He gets up! That was some quick listening. "Set the table quickly, sweetheart. The guests will be here soon!" He gets working. Result: No napkins, and the fork is on the right side of the plate. He must know by now that we always set the table with napkins, right? He is the main consumer of the napkins at every meal.

How are you doing now? "It's his ADHD. He never gets it right!" Perhaps? "Why can I NEVER depend on him? First he sits around, and then when he finally gets up, he can't finish the job?" Is that it?

In this chapter we will explore the power of compliments to help our children grow. First, we will understand why negative events have such an impact on us, and then we will discuss what types of positive experiences counteract the negative ones. Finally, we will look at how we parents can reduce the negative output and transform ourselves into positive parenting powerhouses.

You may be wondering when we get to the part where the kids stop acting out and making us nuts. Parents say to me, "Okay, I'll give compliments, I promise! But how do I get her to BEHAVE?" I hear you loud and clear. But we still have to take a deep dive into positive communication because there is one iron-clad rule about parenting an Instant Gratification kid that I would like to remind you of.

It goes like this: **this child wants our strong attention, and he will take it positively or negatively. Therefore, we must provide a positive environment for him so that we allow him to choose to behave well.** If we get triggered quickly by our child's misbehavior, he will misbehave again very soon, guaranteed. If we remain calm when he has an outrageous tantrum (but don't ignore it) and get super animated when he gets ready for school quickly, he can now choose to get our attention through his positive behavior. Right after we practice complimenting our kids, I promise we will move seamlessly into other discipline methods. I hope you are convinced that positive communication is not just a fluffy step, but vital to healthy discipline and our child's success.

Why do we respond to and remember negative situations much more than positive ones? Alina Tugend, in her insightful New York Times article "Praise Is Fleeting, but Brickbats We Recall," explains why we naturally notice, process, and remember negative experiences more than positives ones. "This is a general tendency for everyone." Tugend cites Clifford Nass, a professor of communication at Stanford University and author of *The Man Who Lied to His Laptop: What Machines Teach Us About Human Relationships*,

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“Some people do have a more positive outlook, but almost everyone remembers negative things more strongly and in more detail” (Penguin, 2012).

Why is that?

We handle different types of information in different areas of our brain, explains Professor Nass. We process negative thoughts and emotions more thoroughly than positive ones, and therefore they stick around in our minds longer and continue to upset us. When we have bad experiences, past or present, they create more discomfort. Thus, we remember them and re-experience them for a long time. This is human nature.

Think of a recent painful or demeaning experience and compare it to a compliment you just got. Which one drums up a stronger emotion? It isn't our fault that we process the negative more strongly. Not at all. We are hardwired that way, but we are capable of reversing it. Those who are “more attuned to bad things would have been more likely to survive threats and, consequently, would have increased the probability of passing along their genes,” the article states. “Survival requires urgent attention to possible bad outcomes but less urgent with regard to good ones.” Additionally, “We tend to see people who say negative things as smarter than those who are positive. Thus, we are more likely to give greater weight to critical reviews” (Tugend 2012).

A mother recently told me about an interaction between two of her children. The older sister said to her undoubtedly confident younger brother as he was singing with full emotion, “You know, you carry a tune well, but you don't have a great voice.” The mother reported that the next day while she was taking the young boy to a doctor's appointment, he commented, “Our whole family has good voices. It stinks that I'm the only one who has a bad voice.” Negative feedback is a quick and vicious process. It leaves no prisoners.

What kind of experiences counteract the power of the negative ones? In a fascinating study reported by Tugend, Teresa M. Amabile, professor of business administration and director of research at the Harvard Business School, asked two hundred and thirty-eight professionals, working on twenty-six different creative projects from different companies and industries, to fill out confidential daily diaries over several months. The participants were asked to answer questions based on a numeric scale and briefly describe one thing that stood out that day. “We found that of all the events that could make for a great day at work, the most important was making progress on meaningful work— even a small step forward,” said Professor Amabile, a coauthor of *The Progress Principle: Using Small Wins to Ignite Joy, Engagement, and Creativity at Work*. Furthermore, After analyzing some 12,000 diary entries, Professor Amabile found that the negative effect of a setback at work on happiness was more than twice as strong as the positive effect of an event that signaled progress. And the power of a setback to increase frustration is over three times as strong as the power of progress to decrease frustration (Harvard Business Review Press, 2011; italics added).

If parents knew this, how would it reshape their communication with their children? First, they would be more aware of the power of their choice of words. Also, they would direct their message towards praising

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meaningful achievements rather than throwing around meaningless compliments. Most importantly, they would not avoid criticism, but use it constructively and very sparingly.

Professor Roy Baumeister, in his book *Bad is Stronger Than Good* (Florida University Press, 1996), suggests a ratio of five good comments for every one bad. For most of us, the ratio is inverted. It is vital to flip the trend and begin flooding our children with “many good events” (Tugend 2012).

When I ask parents at our intake meeting about their communication with their children, most parents emphatically insist that they’re enthusiastic complimenters.

“What are five things about this child that you feel he’s fantastic at?” I enquire.

Dead silence.

Some stuttering. Because our feedback is so vital to the health of our children, we’ve got to get it right. There is one additional factor that makes learning the art of the compliment so pressing.

Rabbi Sacks explains in his 2014 essay “How to Praise”:

I discovered the transformative power of focused praise from one of the more remarkable people I ever met, the late Lena Rustin. Lena, who was a speech therapist, worked with stammering children. She believed that in order to help the young, struggling child she had to understand and treat the entire family and only then could she help heal the child. Why is that? The family creates an equilibrium and adjusts to the struggles of a particular family member. If there is to be improvement, everyone has to shift and understand their role in making a change.

Let’s apply this to our child with ADHD symptoms. We have all grown accustomed to his negative behavior. If he is to change his behavior, the entire family will have to readjust. “By and large, we tend to resist change,” continues Sacks (2014). But change we must. How can we create an environment that makes change manageable and unthreatening? Lena showed that the road to family change is through praise. She instructed the family members to catch one another doing well and lavish that member with a specific and grateful compliment. With this method, she was creating a new respect within the home, boosting everyone’s self-respect and self-confidence, and therefore allowing a safe space for change. Not only did the struggling child change, but the entire atmosphere became positive, allowing for all to shift their unhelpful habits.

Becoming a positive parenting powerhouse

Alan E. Kazdin, author of *The Kazdin Method for Parenting the Defiant Child*, an absolute must-read for all parents, takes us through the process of revamping our internal negativity-response mechanism. Go out and get the book. I will highlight my interpretation of the most relevant parts for our purposes. The examples and commentary are based on work I have done with my clients. Kazdin says **praise is “one of the strongest ways to influence your child’s actions”** (Kazdin 2009, 21). The way we communicate either reinforces negative behavior (like giving in to a tantrum or nagging request from a child) or builds positive momentum.

A mother once told me that she is very strict with her children until they start to nag. She was signaling to her kids that they could break her resolve through nagging, and this encouraged them to refine nagging

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to an art form. Why? Because they were being rewarded for nagging, and the results were always satisfying.

Can we turn this around?

Yes, and we must.

Earlier, we discussed responding calmly to triggering behavior. We calmed ourselves down. Yay us! We also inadvertently created an attention void. Our kids used to get ample negative feedback, but we have reduced the negative response. Now there is no response, which does not suit our Instant Gratification kid, or any child. Children need a strong response from us. No problem; we will replace anger and frustration with powerful compliments.

Let's follow the rules set out by Kazdin to become powerful communicators. Our goal is to give our Instant Gratification child strong and gratifying compliments and use those sweet words to replace the loud, angry feedback he has been demanding from us until now. He wants our attention, positive or negative. Once we establish a steady flow of compliments, he will be quite confident of receiving positive feedback from us. Therefore, he will start craving instant gratification for his good choices and will act accordingly.

Rule #1: Be enthusiastic! Guess why this is so important. Imagine yourself in an angry moment. Really see yourself crazy upset. How enthusiastic are you? When we get angry at our kid, there is no stopping us. We raise our voices, perspire, get right in his face, and he knows we meant it! When he does something praiseworthy, we say something bland like, "Good job. Keep it up!" If our kid is an instant gratification seeker, he will make a quick (unconscious) calculation and choose to elicit our scolding response. He gets more feedback that way. It's not fun for him to get yelled at; it is strictly a fulfillment of his internal need. We must completely reverse this process. Let's raise our voices with joy when she does something right and be bland when responding to negative behavior. We must smile, get close, speak louder, and say it like we mean it. Also, name the deed, "_____ was so respectful, responsible, kind, thoughtful . . ."

Let's catch our children being good.

I was presenting this method in a parent workshop several years ago. A woman raised her hand and said, "I can't do that." "What can't you do?" I asked. She replied, "I can't be enthusiastic. You don't understand, I'm Hungarian." I understand you, sister. I'm German. I get that it may feel unnatural to start overflowing with enthusiasm. Firstly, some of us may not have examples from childhood of this kind of communication. In addition, it may feel "fake," like we are putting on a show. We can be very genuine with our negative feedback, but when it comes to compliments, suddenly we get self-conscious; it just doesn't feel natural. We are used to noticing the negative. But we must do better, and we can. Despite the challenge, it's important to reset our communication. Start slowly. With a smile, raise your voice just a tad. Your child will do the rest.

Rule #2: Be specific. We are great at making long lists. "You came in and threw your backpack down. You didn't take out your sandwich, which will now get moldy. You demanded a treat and immediately started bothering your sister!!!!" Sound like anyone you know? Somehow, we expect our critical, never-ending barrage to magically create better behavior. It NEVER does. Our victim is not listening. Do we listen closely

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and take notes while we are being yelled at? If we truly want to educate our children to improve their behavior, we must use their behavior as an example. How can we ensure he will be able to repeat the behavior he just got complimented for? By complimenting very specifically. As you break a child's behavior down into smaller segments, you are giving him instructions. "You walked in, warmed my heart with your smile, (okay, now he knows that smiling when he comes in is a great way to start) and asked for a treat so respectfully (got it . . . respectfully asking is the right way to go)." We gave instructions, and now he can get the emotional candy next time. The more specific we are with our compliment, the more instructions we are giving for the future.

Rule #3: Say it right away. The closer a compliment follows a deed, the more a child links the two in his head. We are, of course, invited and encouraged to repeat it later. Tell Grandma! Tell Daddy when he gets home! But it is of utmost importance to say it right away.

Rule #4: Do not caboose (don't add a "but"; keep it pure)! If we want our child to hear our compliment and receive it and choose to behave well, we must never ever add "fixer-upper" critical comments! Never! They don't fix; they destroy. We must grant our child the respect he deserves for his positive behavior without highlighting what he could have done better. When we add a negative comment to the end of our enthusiastic compliment, he only hears the end. Perhaps our child did something well but did not do it perfectly. Our goal is not perfect; it is progress. Say she came home from the pool and remembered to put her pool bag in the closet, as in the example above. That's great! But . . . she forgot to take its contents out. We can either compliment what she did well and then we can close our mouths, or we could compliment what she did, and make sure to let her know that she also messed up. Now she feels like a loser and is less likely to put the bag away again.

I am often invited to give lectures in the evenings. That means I come home late—and tired! My dear husband gets the kids showered and to bed and gets the kitchen in order after dinner. One evening I came in particularly tired. I was thrilled to find the kitchen tidy and went directly to bed. My heart sank in the morning, though, when I noticed that my husband had indeed cleaned up the kitchen but had left the food out on the counter. I was upset! I worked hard on that dinner, but now it had to be thrown away. I had a choice. My husband had done great. The kids were happy, well-fed, well-rested, and the house was in order. I could focus on what was done well and then shut my mouth, or I could make sure he knew how upset I was about the food.

I wish I could report that I zipped my mouth. There is a lesson to be learned. Why did I feel the need to point out my husband's "failure"? I wanted to fix him (good luck with that, ladies) and make him more perfect, and I wanted to be sure it didn't happen again. How did I do? Poorly! By pointing out his failure after letting him know how great he did, I canceled the positive feeling. Who wants to keep trying when the person receiving a gift only notices the bad? Not only did my husband get a terrible feeling about his care for our children, but he also had less of a desire to work hard the next time I left the house in the evening.

Here is the key. Whatever your child did wrong, the same scenario will repeat itself soon enough. She will go to the pool; you will go out to work. She will come home from school; bath time will happen again tomorrow. Can you hang on to your "fixing" urge just until next time? Instead of extinguishing this

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compliment, you can remember the more challenging behaviors and give instructions next time. This way everyone wins. Your child/spouse will feel great about his success and has practiced a good behavior for which you are now rewarding him with a compliment, and now you are more aware of what needs strengthening next time.

Here's another example, because this is too important not to master. You prepare a beautiful meal for family and friends; the food is tasty and abundant. Everyone enjoys dinner. As you clean up, your friend says, "Avigail, that was such a great meal! Healthy, delicious, thanks so much! What was up with the dessert? Was that a new recipe? It was a little dry and bland." How do you feel? Frankly, I feel like saying, "You cook dinner next time and host my entire family! Are you such a great baker?" Is that fair? She said so many nice compliments. Yeah, I'm sure she did . . . I just don't remember them. I'm too focused on my dessert.

This is a learning process. If we want our children to learn from their own behavior, we must help them highlight the good, and strengthen the not-yet-good behavior through reminders, but not at the time of the compliment.

Rule #5: Reach out and touch. Touch is the glue to our compliment. Give a high five, a shoulder pat, a hug. It's all good. If the child is sensitive to touch, stand close or ask permission before touching. While we never want to touch aggressively when mad, we always want to infuse more warmth into our positive communication. A couple of warnings:

1. Don't lie: Never add a lie to a compliment! Sometimes we think that if we tell a child he is being so organized, he will become more organized. This trick does not work; our kid is smart. He will just trust us less and feel sad that he is not worthy of a real compliment. Be very honest. We cannot mold our children to the shape we wish them to be; we can encourage them in the good choices they chose to make.

2. Take it slow: Many kids are not used to compliments, especially enthusiastic ones. They have no experience of receiving them. They may be uncomfortable or embarrassed if you come on too strong. If she can't yet tolerate a compliment, instead of complimenting, just notice the behavior. "I noticed that you brought all your books home from school." That's it. Once she can handle being noticed for doing well, move on to full compliment mode, step by step.

3. Don't make him feel childish: Compliment according to your child's ability level, not below. We don't want to compliment a ten-year-old for getting dressed unless this is still a real challenge to him. Compliments are meant to help children reflect on their own good behavior; he will feel childish and foolish when we notice a behavior that he has been competent at for years.

4. Include your other children in the compliment if you can: Kids get jealous when they see a sibling being complimented. They hear you say, "Jorge, look how nicely you cleared your plate. That was so responsible. Now I will have much less cleaning up to do," and their immediate response is, "What about me! What, I didn't clear my plate? I clear my plate every day!" Our instinct as parents is to get annoyed at the child for not allowing his brother to get a compliment. We think, "Why does everything have to be about you all the time?" The uncomplimented child is expressing a raw emotion. It's best not to judge him but to help

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him through it. Try something like this. “Hey, Marco, did you notice what a good job Jorge did clearing his plate? Wasn’t that great? What can we say to him because we are so proud?” You have asked Marco to be your partner, so now he is included and has permission to enjoy his brother’s behavior instead of seeing it as a direct threat to his own honor.

5. Compliment progress: Only compliment progress and process, not ability. Remember the curse? We can help our children towards a growth mindset when they hear us specifically notice their hard work and effort, and how they are one step stronger than yesterday. Or, we can place a curse upon them by giving fixed mindset compliments such as how smart, funny, talented, or cute they are. Instead of, “You are so smart!” say, “You are working so hard!” Or “Your beautiful singing created such a happy environment” rather than “You have such a fantastic voice!”

6. Don’t over-compliment: It cheapens the compliment, and your child will instantly know that she doesn’t deserve it. Let her earn her compliment and then be proud. Don’t fabricate exaggerated behavior and then gush about it.

6. Don’t hand out candy wrappers without the candy inside: A vague “good job!” is a tease. Can your child understand what he has done well? Can he replicate it and receive another “candy” from you?

Mom really wanted her daughter to attend synagogue with her. Her daughter, fifteen years old and more inclined to sleep in on Saturday morning, begrudgingly agreed to come along. She rolled out of bed, got herself dressed, not in her Saturday best, but good enough, and grumbled all the way to synagogue. When they got there, instead of picking up a prayer book and joining the singing, the teenager found a comfortable seat and put her head down on the pew to continue her morning snooze.

Mom was humiliated! As they left the synagogue, Mom had a choice to make. She could either lecture her daughter about proper synagogue behavior; she could remain quiet; or she could remember what her goal was to begin with, and give her daughter a compliment. What? A compliment? Why would this behavior deserve a compliment? This process-oriented mom knew why. Her daughter could have stayed in bed, but she didn’t. Out of respect for her mother, she made this gesture. That’s fantastic. Not only that, but she attended prayers.

Okay, she didn’t pray, but she chose to bring herself to the right place at the right time. Good for her, a very good choice. If the goal is to get the daughter to join the family more often, Mom has exactly one choice. This is what she said: “My dear, thanks so much for respecting my request to come to prayers this morning. It made my day to have all my children together. It must have been hard to get up and come with us instead of sleeping in. Good for you. Excellent choice.” And with that, she planted a big kiss on her daughter’s cheek.

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You may be thinking, “That kid acted like a brat! Her mother asked her to come, and she couldn’t even have enough respect to keep her eyes open! How will this naive mother ever teach her daughter proper synagogue conduct!” If you were in the mindset of fixing all the wrongs, you would be correct. But we must be progress minded if we want our children to progress. If this daughter gets positive feedback, she will want it again. But, if you choose to fix it all and put her in her place, she will not be showing up again; end of process! Take a deep breath, and keep asking, “What’s my goal?”

Here’s the rub.

We are hardwired to notice the bad way before we lay our eyes on the good. When we enter a room, especially one filled with our children, we tend to scan it to stop dangerous or inappropriate behavior. It’s nice to suggest we make this big change, but is it doable? I know it is because I have seen fantastic parents embrace this positivity challenge and succeed.

I would like to add one more suggestion that I recommend parents follow when they rewire their communication network. We must make one conscious decision as we are about to engage in any interaction. We must decide to notice one good thing about the other person right away. A struggling teacher was in the habit of spending his day scanning the classroom to decide who deserved punishment, determined to change his approach. He resolved that following any instruction, he would now focus his attention for ten seconds on who got moving and obeyed, who had already placed their book on their desk, etc. After that he was free to catch the slackers. What happened was miraculous. After each instruction and ten seconds of compliments, there were fewer and fewer slackers. Let’s commit to ten seconds at the beginning of each observation or interaction, where we permit ourselves to see and comment only on the good.

Powerful compliments for the whole family

Here is one more great idea to help boost the positive, complimentary environment in your home. I have been doing this for years, and my family loves it. Get yourself a simple binder and place it on your kitchen counter, open with a pen in it. This will be your compliment book. You can call it anything you want. You will write compliments throughout the week for each member of the family. Write as many or as few as fit into your busy schedule—one a week per person, one a day; any amount is great. Not just any compliments will do for this book, though. Focus on compliments that indicate that a child (or adult) had to put some effort into the good deed they did.

For example, a child comes in from school with a piece of cake from a birthday party at school. He sees that his brother is already home and offers him half of his cake. Wow! That goes in the book. Or a child has a very hard time in math class, but she pushes herself to get the homework done anyway. These are the deeds that build our children. Making a decision to do something good, and then overcoming adversity and stepping out of our comfort zone to accomplish it is the recipe for greatness. I encourage parents to include themselves in the book so children can learn by example that anything worthwhile needs effort and choice. It’s imperative for them to know their parents’ process so they can imitate it.

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Dad went to the supermarket with a very incomplete shopping list, but when he tried to call Mom to get the rest of the list, she had turned her phone on silent by mistake. Dad decided not to get frustrated and instead to think about what his family usually needs from the supermarket. He also stayed calm when he realized he would probably have to run out again for the items he forgot. Go, Dad!

Choose a meal when the family will be together each week and read the compliments out loud. We like to cheer for each person being complimented with a fun little tune. Make sure to write an equal number of compliments about each child; they keep track. You know how kids love to tell on each other? If they have something juicy to tell, they get an even more satisfying response from the parent. I invite my children to tell on each other, but only nice things. When a child tells me something special her sibling did, I write it in the book, and write down who told me. Both kids get credit when the compliment is read out, the doer and the teller. This has dramatically reduced sibling rivalry and the constant parental judge and jury job. It has also turned complimenting one another into a natural process. Try it at home.

The first compliment goes to you, dear parent, for taking the time to learn a new strategy to raise your child better. The goal of changing your communication with your child is challenging but very worth your effort. Keep at it

Action Plan

1. Think of a few things your child does well consistently. x Write them down. x Think of something you do well often. Write that down too.
2. Plan to give a compliment at least once a day, but preferably three times a day. Some parents have a hard time finding something to compliment.
3. Don't manufacture compliments. x Catch your child doing something well and jump on the opportunity. If you are seeking, you will find it.
4. Focus on keeping negative feedback quiet and emotion free. x Infuse positive feedback with lots of emotion.
5. If you are struggling with the need to fix and can't find any positivity in your child's behavior, ask yourself, "What is my goal?" That will help you focus.
6. Practice complimenting yourself and other adults in your life. Compliments are contagious.
7. Go out and get that binder. x Leave it in a very visible place so you don't forget about it, and start your compliment book. x No one is too old, too young, or too much of a teenager not to enjoy a compliment.

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It's All About the Habit

Instant Gratification kid. We now know him well. We have learned to discipline him with kindness and love, building his strengths and respectfully reducing inappropriate behavior. We have broken our own unconscious behavior cycles, identified our curses, and stopped passing them forward. Now we will tackle outward behavior, social stress, and internal emotional triggers. Once we have solidified an intervention program at home, we will share it with our child's teacher.

It's also time to invite our child to be part of the program. He plays the leading role in his skill-gaining journey and therefore must get involved immediately. We waited this long because of our steadfast rule: **parents may not punish unless they have given their child the option to choose to behave well by using positive communication.**

Now our child has a choice. We are ninja moms and dads, and he is getting fantastic feedback in a supportive environment. Step up to the plate, dear child!

Instant Gratification kid is routine phobic, rule resistant, spontaneous (impulsive), and emotional. He stays up all night to read a book he can't put down; she is addicted to the screen and the constant stimulation it provides. He starts projects but rarely finishes them— they are no longer fun once he has to get into the details. She responds emotionally and without thinking through her response.

What is missing from a child's life that is fostering this difficult behavior?

Habits.

Forming habits is a lot of work. It requires repetitive behavior and consistent practice. Other kids may have figured out by now that they will have to get up every morning, that homework is an unpleasant yet necessary part of the afternoon, and that eating takes place at the table. Our little guy may understand these concepts in theory, but in practice, every day is packed full of possibilities, and these routines get in his way.

How do we help our child learn new habits?

In this chapter we will unpack the obstacles to habit formation and gain skills in guiding Instant Gratification kid towards the habits she needs in order to excel.

Has every chart you tried failed? We will create a behavior chart that is tailor-made for kids who don't like to be controlled. Then we will address the "chart resistant" kid as well. We will examine all the pitfalls in the program and help you be flexible and think on your toes.

Habit formation can be compared to forging a path in a thick jungle. Imagine you were challenged to traverse the jungle daily for a month. There are no paths. What would be the most strategic way to make this exercise more effective? You would want to cross the jungle every day in the same spot so that within a few days you begin to create a path. Once there is a path, the journey becomes simple and enjoyable. What if this jungle is so interesting—full of beautiful flowers, scents, and sounds—that everything draws

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you in? You must get across, but along the way you hop to the left because of a rustling in the bushes. Could it be a jackal? And then to the right, what a magnificent rare flower! At the end of thirty days, how does the jungle look? Have you left your mark? No, it looks much the same; there is still no path. Creating habits makes permanent changes in our brains (the jungle).

According to Michael Merzenich in *The Brain That Changes Itself* (Penguin Books, 2007), practicing a new habit under the right conditions can potentially change billions of the connections between the nerve cells in our neural pathways. Donald Hebb's landmark discovery in 1949, "Neurons that fire together wire together," revealed that the more the brain does a specific task, the stronger the neural network will be. Each time the behavior is repeated, the process becomes more efficient (Wiley, 69–74). If we repeat the same behavior daily for at least a month, we will create a new neural pathway in our brain. At that point, whatever we have practiced will become automatic, and simpler for us to do without too much thought.

But if instant gratification is our engine, we will have a hard time forming habits because we are continually distracted by all the novelty along the way. Waking up in the morning feels like a new chore every day because we have no pathway, no habit. Our kids are habit resistant because they are novelty seeking. Life is hard without habits. Our kid needs our help to get him focused on the jungle path so he will not be led astray by the beautiful distractions along the way. He must create habits because his world (and ours) revolves around routines and responsibility. He can do it; we must just work with his personality to get him there.

Why have most programs failed to help your child form habits?

1. The parent absorbs the full responsibility and pushes the uninterested child along. The parent wants to change the behavior more than the kid does. So, even though this program is meant to empower the child to form new habits, the parent is still too involved in making sure the kid succeeds.

To illustrate: (true story) A doctor declares that her patient is dangerously overweight and orders the patient to begin an exercise program. The patient can barely move, so the doctor introduces her patient to an exercise therapist. The patient lies on a bed while the therapist moves her hands and legs for her. The program helps the patient begin to build some muscle mass; everyone is pleased. But the minute the program is over, the patient goes right back to sitting all day and does not even consider exercising. Why? Because she never developed a habit; she remained passive while another person practiced the habit on her. We do that with our kids all the time. We expect them to do something every day, but then we carry them through it. Think about how we get a child dressed or walk him to the bathroom and place his toothbrush in his hand. The goal is not to get him up this morning (no matter how painful it is when he doesn't get up). The goal is that he eventually forms the habit of getting up independently. We must stop wanting him to succeed this morning but rather want him to take responsibility for himself every morning.

2. We want to improve everything right now. The programs we set up are too complex, and we are mightily impatient. We have big dreams—indeed, too big. Don't we all want to exercise, be more organized, spend more time with our spouse, be better at quality time with the kids, entertain guests more . . . We all have a long list of things that need improvement. If we try to tackle all of them at once, there will be no progress at all. We give up when we are overwhelmed. Let's not

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overwhelm our kids with too elaborate a program, but rather choose one behavior to tackle at a time.

3. We want to work on improvement all day so that our child really understands what to do. We assume that more is better. But we will drop out of the program with exhaustion and resentment way before our child has developed his shiny new habit. Less is better. An intervention program of one hour a day is more effective than a full-day program that can't be maintained.
4. We promise big prizes, which take too long to earn. Our child thrives on instant feedback, so waiting for a prize for two weeks will not work for him. He needs the option of getting rewarded quickly. We want to help him form a habit that is not natural for him. We must reward him in a way that will keep him treading on the same area of the jungle daily, so that he can form a pathway.

The program outlined in this book (adapted from one developed by Kazdin) is tailor-made for your child. Together we will do this right.

Follow these steps carefully.

1. Make a list of behaviors that your child frequently exhibits, which are impeding his social/emotional/behavioral development. This list can include not getting up in the morning, often skipping teeth brushing, picking on siblings, cursing, homework noncompliance (assuming she understands the assignment), afternoon tantrums, disorganization. List it all—don't hold back.
2. Choose one of the items on your list to implement as your first project. Helping a child create habits is a valuable process that takes time. We can't tackle all her challenges at once because we will overwhelm her and us.

My daughter's sixth grade teacher had the best of intentions. She wanted my child to get more organized, take out her books for every lesson, have a pencil handy, copy down her homework assignments, and actually do them. All worthy behaviors, I agreed. One day my daughter came home from school with an elegant chart. It was divided into seven lessons for five school days. My daughter could earn thirty-five points per day if she got a check for all five items in every class. Let's get to it! My daughter was motivated; the prize was good. The first week she racked up lots of points. The second week she waited for her teacher to give her the new chart, but it seems the teacher forgot. Two days passed, so I called to inquire about the chart. "No problem," said the teacher. "I will give it to her tomorrow." The chart never materialized. Why not? The teacher had overwhelmed herself; she could not keep up with the thirty-five points, with marking the chart in every lesson, and with providing a new chart each week. Everyone lost out.

We must be good to ourselves and begin by tackling only one behavior. We will choose only one part of the day to implement the program, not all day. The goal of this program is to help our child consistently repeat a behavior that he finds challenging (and boring) until it becomes a habit. There is more value in expecting improvement in fewer areas, and using the chart for less time per day, than shoving in lots of behaviors but collapsing under the weight of the demands on us. If a parent can't consistently pull off filling out the chart, the child cannot improve.

- Start with ten minutes of consistent follow-through.

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- Choose a routine you know you can consistently stick with, even if it's fifteen minutes or less a day.
- Choose a time to focus on the chart when you have the most time and energy.

3. Phrase the challenging behavior in positive terms. This is not just semantics. When we discussed punishment, we said that a child can't learn what is expected of him through a punishment; he can only learn to stop negative behavior. He learns to choose the right behavior when he is caught doing the right thing and complimented, or when we set up a deliberate positive behavior program. Since we are directing our child to choose the positive behavior, we must communicate this behavior in a positive way. Negative behavior Positive opposite behavior Not getting out of bed in the morning Waking up on time to get everything done calmly before leaving for school Fighting with siblings Treating siblings with respect and kindness Being messy and disorganized and not being responsible for her things Having a neat and clean room/ backpack/putting things where they belong

4. Take the behavior you chose to help your child develop and divide it into four steps, then set up the behavior chart. Extensive research has been done on working memory. Research has found that the working memory capacity of young adults is between three and five items (Cowan 2005). This means that if we want to set up a program that our child will succeed at, we should limit the steps required to no more than five. This way he can keep all his tasks in mind as he moves through the routine.

Let's think about this in adult terms for a moment. Say your kitchen is a complete mess, a likely scenario in most homes. The kids decided to make themselves an elaborate breakfast but did not clean up all the million ingredients and pots they took out. When you walk into the kitchen (after they already left for camp and you can't tell them to clean up), you are completely overwhelmed. Some of us are natural cleaners; we get straight to work. And then there are the rest of us. We start sending WhatsApps, calling a friend, basically anything to avoid the mess. It's just too large and too deep. If we add to the mess Instant Gratification personality, we are in for a disaster. We want it done already; the process is too long and involves too many steps.

How can Instant Gratification parent be helped through this torturous chore? By breaking it down into manageable steps. Start with just clearing the countertops. Can you do that? Sure, you do it ten times a day; no big deal. Now just the dishes. No problem. Can you sweep, but only sweep, right now? Setting our kids up for similar success is vital. Asking children to clean their room or the toys is a frustrating experience! Either they flat out ignore us, or they begin the chore but fizzle out quickly. Is the job too big?

Teach them a life skill of dividing any one task into four parts:

1. Putting away laundry: Make piles of underclothing, shirts, pants, hanging things, and then put each pile away one at a time.
2. Cleaning room: Lift items from floor, clear off bed, clear dresser, make bed.
3. Cleaning up toys: Games, stuffed animals, LEGO, trucks.

Once you have introduced the dividing skill:

1. Divide: Help your child divide the different laundry piles.

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2. Train: Get involved in the training by sitting with him and naming each category. This is the shirt pile. Here is the pants pile. Now we will make an underwear, undershirt, and socks pile, followed by hanging things, which will go in a separate pile.

3. Find a home for all the items (this skill is further explained on the following page).

4. Compliment him on putting his clothes away.

Remember to:

- Start by being very helpful and giving lots of instructions.
- Gradually become more hands-off and just give verbal cues.
- Finally, just observe and compliment.

The same system works for toys; assign the project, and help your child divide the chore into four categories. Be specific. Ask him to make groups and decide which one he would like to begin with.

Shedders

Are any of your kids shedders? A shedder is the term I use to describe kids (and adults) who drop things wherever they go. They walk in the house and their items just start to shed. One shoe near the front door, the other under the couch. A ponytail holder on the kitchen table. Backpack in the bathroom (yes, the bathroom!)

Why is she shedding? There are so many possible reasons; she has other more pressing things to do; the item in her hand is no longer useful or interesting; she has sensory overload and is trying to simplify. All this may be true, but it will do her no good to continue shedding. We can help a child break her shedding habit while we are doing room and-toy organization training. We call it the “find a home” skill. Find a Home When your child is making piles by dividing the chore in four, she will pick up things she has no idea where they belong. Together you will find a home for every item she has. Ponytail holders go in the drawer in the bathroom. Great, we found a home for them. Now, anytime a ponytail holder is lying around, instead of getting frustrated, say “find a home” and hand it to her. Backpacks always go on this shelf. Reward her each time she puts her belongings in their proper home, without being asked, with a very specific and enthusiastic compliment. Once she knows how to clean up and where to put everything, she has a very good chance of succeeding next time you ask her to tidy up.

Follow the same steps described earlier:

1. Divide: Help your child divide any cleaning or organizing chore into four segments.

2. Train: Get involved in the training by sitting with her and showing her how chores are divided and naming each category.

3. Find a home for all her items.

4. Compliment her on putting items in their home and use the term “find a home” as a trigger to remind her what you have practiced.

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Sometimes it's fun to use a timer when asking her to straighten up, to see if she can beat her previous record for cleaning up the toys.

This routine, when repeated often, will strengthen her brain and get your home in order in no time.

Failure to launch

Many people struggle when trying to get started on any task, whether it be cleaning up or sitting down to do homework or signing up for an extracurricular program. We often call that procrastination, a fairly "fixed" word.

What is really going on?

Either the person has not managed to organize the task in his head and is therefore overwhelmed by the enormity of it, or the first step seems insurmountable for an emotional reason (often fear of failure or fear of appearing incapable), and a person gets stuck. A child who labels himself a procrastinator may shut down completely, which gives him an excuse for not getting anything done. Procrastinating is less painful and a better escape route than investigating the reason for the blockage and trying to divide it meaningfully to make it achievable. When someone is procrastinating, we should be investigating why he is not doing what is expected rather than declaring who he is.

Kiara was a thirty-year-old mother of two. She was very frustrated with life, couldn't get her home in order, was always being rescued by her parents or husband, and hated her job. She did not believe she could ever be satisfied in life; everything felt bland. I asked her if she had an image of a dream job. She replied that she would love to give children horseback-riding therapy. And then she added that she had already taken a course in horseback-riding therapy and that every time she was near horses, she felt a small thrill. The obvious question was, if you are trained (but haven't yet practiced) and you get excited just thinking about the job, why not look for opportunities? She answered that she was just that person who doesn't get things started, that's why. Sound like a curse? Why did she define herself as that person?

As a child, she was not expected to do any household chores because her more capable sister did everything better. When she was young, this seemed like a dream to Kiara—she got to watch movies and play with friends while her sister cooked and baked. Fast-forward twenty years and Kiara got the message: she was the one who couldn't get things done—the curse of low expectations. Due to that toxic message (from truly loving and well-meaning parents who mistakenly felt they should shield their daughter from the pain of being less capable), she was now that person who couldn't get anything done, the lazy procrastinator. Now she didn't dare make that first phone call to the stable because she had already failed before she began.

Together we lifted the curse for just a minute. We decided that for just a fleeting moment she would not define herself but rather ask the question, "Why is this particular launch hard for me? Why am I not calling the stable?" We set one rule: The answer "I'm just that way" was forbidden. The new response became: "The owner of the stable intimidates me; I always have a feeling she doesn't like me." Now we were talking. By detecting what the blockage was, we could now identify the first manageable step in the process.

What did we learn?

- When we define ourselves as being a certain way, we short circuit any process.

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- When a person is “procrastinating,” it’s because there is a first step that feels insurmountable.
- Asking “why” and “what” questions about procrastination will allow the person to separate the process and understand why he is not progressing. Declaring “I am a procrastinator” shuts down the process. Saying “Why am I stuck here?” opens the possibility of succeeding.
- Once the blockage to beginning a process is unclogged, the first step can be clearly defined and executed. When the process begins, the person has a high chance of finishing it.

Setting up a behavior chart

We have practiced dividing. We will now put it into practice in a habit-formation chart.

Download a behavior chart from my website, www.hyperhealing.org.

I know some parents are allergic to charts; the minute they see a chart, they recoil. Are you one of those? If so, that’s quite all right. If the chart contradicts your entire personality, I will present another system following the chart segment. I encourage you to at least try the chart because it is simple and clear, progress can be followed, and most kids love the structure it provides.

Let’s take “getting up on time and getting ready for school” as an example. This is how we would divide it:

Getting out of bed at 7:00 a.m.

Brushing teeth and washing up by 7:15

Getting dressed by 7:45 Eating breakfast

being ready to leave by 8:00

This is just an example. Obviously, you would create the chart for the entire week. Also, you will tailor the chart for the needs of your child. If your child is struggling particularly with getting dressed, the chart would look more like this:

Getting up at 7:00

Putting on undergarments until 7:15

Putting on shirt, pants, and socks until 7:30

Putting on shoes that are waiting at the door

If your child is having trouble getting up, you may want to consider that he is not getting enough sleep, in which case the program would be more effective in the evening.

This is how it would look:

Shut off screens and other electronics by 7:00 p.m. (at least two hours before bed)

Shower and change into pajamas by 8:00

Brush teeth and read in bed (remember, no screens) until 9:00

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Lights out at 9:00

Adjust the expectations according to the age and ability of the child.

Don't skip steps!

If he is not yet ready to accomplish a goal, demanding that he comply will sink the program.

Here is another way to use the chart. The previous examples are more behavioral. We can also add an emotional element to the program by choosing behavior that involves other people. Another chart I have set up with much success is the "brotherly love" chart. This is for kids who fight in the afternoon when they come home from school. Here is how we would set it up:

Brothers getting along with each other 4:00–4:15

Brothers getting along with each other 4:15–4:30

Brothers getting along with each other 4:30–4:45

Brothers getting along with each other 4:45–5:00

Notice that we have divided this chart into segments of time instead of behaviors. Here are a few things to keep in mind:

1. First, if you are setting up a behavior/emotional chart, you, dear parent, must be up for the task. You will be checking on the kids every fifteen minutes for an hour, and this can be very demanding during a busy afternoon. If it's too much, reduce the time to half an hour; you will still be helping your child create a new habit and rewire his brain.
2. If one child is the instigator, make a chart only for her. If there are two or more children involved, make a group chart. The group behavior intervention program will require some sort of timer, which most of us have on our phones. A simple egg timer can also be used. You will then have to decide if the kids get points together or if each one gets points separately. Both are fine; it all depends on the dynamic in your home.
3. Finally, there are always emotional stressors causing unrest between siblings. Can we really chart away their fights? We can do some great work, but we will still have to address the emotional stress that is triggering the fights to begin with. Emotional intervention is discussed in chapter seven.

What behaviors can we chart? The rule is: any behavior that your child should be able to do on his own can be charted (keeping himself occupied in the afternoon, staying dry throughout the afternoon by age five, preparing her own food to take to school, cleaning his own room, being responsible for the dog, getting along with her siblings).

We must never accommodate! Our children will grow into the space we provide for them. We do them no favors when we continually take on the role of a one-person entertainment center, overflowing with ideas of how they can keep busy with friends, games, and projects. We are there to help our child generate ideas, and then set up a program where she gets to choose what she would like to do. Making a list of activities with her and then setting up an afternoon self-entertainment chart will empower her to fill her time successfully. Children are disadvantaged if parents ignore the messy room because they define their

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child as just “that messy kid.” Here’s our chance to let him prove to himself that he CAN be neat. There is no gentler and kinder way to guide him than by helping him develop a new skill.

Notice that in the chart I have included the time a child is meant to finish each task, as well as a description of the task. Keeping time is generally less compelling to an Instant Gratification person. Novelty is his driving force. Therefore, we must introduce him to the value of time by including it on the chart and intensively sticking to the clock during each routine. Keeping time is so important; our children suffer when they do not develop this muscle.

Practice!

We are setting our child up for success. Every day for at least the first week of the program, which will run for one month, you will either play a practice game with your child or have a short conversation with him. For example, if it’s an evening chart for a younger child (age four to seven), you can play a short make-believe game. Move the clock to evening time and have the child act out what is expected of him. Don’t practice during the hour set aside to implement the program; do that at another time during the day. What are we accomplishing? We are getting our child used to doing what he is expected to do, with our assistance and positive feedback. We are also troubleshooting with him. We will ask him what part of the chart is challenging for him and how he can make it simpler.

For example, if he is expected to get dressed by himself in the morning, we might discuss putting out clothing in the evening. If she is expected to keep herself entertained in the afternoon, we may suggest making a list of activities for her to choose from. We are also giving him the opportunity to reflect on his good behavior and plan for more. When practicing with older children, invite the child to have a short strategizing conversation instead of playing a simulation game. We can initiate the conversation in three different ways, alternating our style frequently: Discuss an occurrence from the day before that still needs improvement, and strategize ways of doing better. We are not preaching; this is a conversation. We must invite our child to be an active member and come up with ideas herself. Invent a scenario that could arise (child not wanting to shut off the phone at the agreed-upon time, not being tired when he gets into bed, not being able to control her emotional response to her sister) and work through steps of overcoming the challenge. Strategize how to be most efficient in earning points.

If the chart is strictly a behavior chart (going to bed, getting up, homework, keeping busy in the afternoon), one week of practice is enough. If the chart is an emotional/behavioral chart, two weeks or more would be very helpful, and in some cases, even more important than the behavior chart itself. During this conversation we will discuss the challenges of getting along from every angle. We will strategize about compromise, patience, letting go, how the child feels when fighting, and who she can turn to instead of hitting back. These conversations contribute dramatically to the success of the program.

Extra credit.

This gives the child a chance to develop his character in a repetitive and competitive way. We address the “how” question here; how is he doing his tasks? Is he dragging his feet, or is there a hop in his step? Is she cutting it to the very last second or trying to work on giving herself ample time? Is she angry all evening or participating with a smile? The more positively a child feels and behaves, the faster a habit will be formed. So, I add a “value,” such as doing your assignment with a smile, doing it quickly, etc. Choosing “doing it quickly” is very effective because then we can play “beat the clock.” If he gets to the breakfast

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table two minutes before the time written on the chart, he gets an extra point. You can decide if you want to give one point for the entire routine or one point for each successfully completed task. This part of the program is flexible

You may have been thinking all this time—how are we going to get this kid to do something he has consistently not done until now? It's all about the prize. The most valuable prize is the compliment. While your child is moving from task to task, she should be hearing soul-nourishing compliments from you loudly and enthusiastically. Go back and review *The Art of the Compliment* before setting up the chart.

As for other prizes—write a list. Begin with a five-point prize and move up from there. Come up with a few ideas in each category and invite your children to give their own ideas. Before we get to the examples, let's discuss the two types of possible prizes: an item or an experience.

In a study conducted at San Francisco University and published in *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, the researchers found that people enjoy greater long-term well-being from enjoyable life experiences rather than from purchasing expensive items. They also consider the experiences a better use of their money. The pleasure generated from the purchase of an expensive item fades quickly, but people hold on to the memory created by experiences for a long time (Pchelin and Howell 2004).

I was surprised to see how true this finding was. I had the opportunity to visit with a family from my community, who I did not know well, for an event they were hosting. When I walked into the home, I was thrilled to see what a beautiful home they had. It was so tastefully decorated, I could tell they had put a lot of money, effort, and thought into designing their home. I gave my neighbor a compliment on the beauty of his home. This was his response: "Oh, we are already bored of it!" Was the experience of building the home more enjoyable than having the home itself?

Therefore, when creating a prize chart, we must consider experiential and physical prizes. Here are a few prize examples:

1. 5-point prize: Getting an extra story at bedtime, a small chocolate bar, a dollar, a private walk with Mom
2. • 10-point prize: Choosing the dinner menu for tomorrow night, baking cookies, going out to the park with Dad, ice cream from the local grocery, getting baseball cards
3. • 20-point prize: Having a sleepover with a friend, sleeping at grandparents' house, going out to a café for a big dessert, buying a toy that the child has been wanting
4. • 40-point prize: Going to a movie with a parent or other relative, going to a sporting event or show, going out to dinner alone with a parent, purchasing a game. The following chart-making rules will set your child up for success:
5. • Have the prize available: Be sure you have the prizes you are offering available. If she chooses an outing as her prize, don't make your child wait too long before taking her out. The prize should directly follow the achievement, within reasonable limits.
6. • The points are like money: We are building habits in an Instant Gratification child, which means he gets to choose how he uses his points. If he would like to cash in right away and get a small prize for five points, that's great. If he wants to save his points for a few days and earn a bigger prize, he may do that as well. The points are his money; he should be allowed to "shop" when he chooses, although the store does not have to be open twenty-four-seven.

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7. • Do not punish by taking away points: Never use the chart to punish! Do not take points off the chart for any reason.
8. • Do not punish for a missed point: If a child misses a point, just put a line through that section and move on. The only consequence is missing the point.
9. • Don't beg your child to succeed: Remind once, and then let her carry the responsibility. If you stand there and coax and beg, you are preventing the creation of a habit.
10. • Stick to the chart; no points for anything else: Points are only given for the designated routine, nothing else. You may not offer a point for good behavior at a different time during the day. Stick to the program.
11. • Be prepared with many copies of the chart: Be sure to print out a pile of charts so you are always ready for the new week. When we are not prepared, we often miss a few days, and our program can fall apart.

How do we introduce the program?

1. Invite your child for a conversation and tell her that you want to begin a program with her to help her create a new habit. Your child is smart, so tell her how she can make her brain stronger with each habit she forms.
2. Talk to her about the habits she already has and how useful they are to her. Tell her about the big jungle that is her brain, and how she can make new habit paths.
3. Show her your prize menu, with open spaces for her ideas. If she suggests a prize, add it to the menu at the price (amount of points) you feel it is worth.
4. Once you have discussed the prizes, show her the chart and have your first practice session. Give her a point right away for practicing, along with a compliment.

If the program is not working, consider the following:

- Is my child capable of doing the tasks I have put on the chart? x Are the tasks too simple or too hard?
- Am I being consistent? x Am I complimenting each task while my child is doing it? x Am I filling in the chart as she moves through her routine? x Do I have a chart ready at the beginning of each week? x Is the chart hung somewhere where we can all see it? x Am I over-reminding or letting him lead? x Am I providing all the equipment my child needs to succeed, like a timer and watch? x Did I make a program that is too hard for me to maintain, and I am therefore dodging it and hoping my child doesn't remember it's there? A small, consistent program is far more valuable than an elaborate program that sucks the life out of the parent.
- Is the prize right? x Is he excited about the prizes? x Should I refresh the prizes, add more, make them exciting? x Am I providing the prizes as he earns them?
- Is the program getting monotonous?
- We must get to a month, so if it's starting to feel old, mix it up. Give an extra point for every two consecutive days your child gets all her points.

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- Add an extra challenge in the extra credit section.
- This is your chart; make it work for your child.

What do we do once the month is up? Your child is getting the concept: he is waking up on time and has left for school on time for a few weeks now. How do we continue? We have a few choices. We can either expand the routine we are working on; we can switch to a new routine (related to homework or the evening); or we can fade out the program.

We are reinforcing the progress from last month and expanding it. We do this for a child who has almost developed the new habit but can still use some more practice. If you feel your child is ready for a new routine, go for it. Continue to compliment the first routine, but he will now only get points for the new routine. Go down the list of behaviors that you would like your child to develop a habit for and choose your next project. If you feel your child has done great and does not need any more charts for now, transition out of the program by continuing to compliment the new habit; give points every two or three days, and then once a week, and then no points at all.

Will we be charting for the rest of their lives?

No, of course not.

The good news is that once your child has a new routine, the next routines are easier to learn. Habits are contagious. Your list of missing habits may be long now, but once your child begins to organize his mind and environment, he will start developing habits on his own. I recommend you take breaks, give yourself holidays and summers off, and break between projects. You will find that after a few months of charts, you may not need to make any more charts for a while. After your chart vacation, you can either make a refresher chart or challenge your child to reach even higher.

Creating a family habit

Every family has areas they need to strengthen when it comes to organization. In my family, it's the "Gimpel Double Exit" routine. We never leave the house once, ever! I can imagine the neighbors watching us pack all six kids in the car, strap the bags to the roof, shove in the dog, the picnic basket, and all other paraphernalia and drive down the street. By now they probably count to fifty, and as expected, we then come rumbling right back up the street. One kid jumps out frantically and runs back into the house to grab something really important that was forgotten—usually one shoe. Our smart neighbors only wave goodbye as we pull out the second time. I'm sure this routine gives the neighbors some comic relief, and that's important. But since we never get this right, we must create a better exit routine.

This involves observing what is most often forgotten and making ourselves a checklist. We could make an individual checklist for each member of the family or a family checklist. If we continually fall into the same trap, we must stop ourselves and ask what habit we have not yet developed and how, as a family, we can create a better routine. The more we pay attention, the more we can develop collective family habits and practice them every time the situation arises.

How can we create this family habit?

- First, pay attention to the negative family habits we have created.
- Next, brainstorm as a family about how we can improve.

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- Finally, plan and practice! Remind each other of how we planned to do it better each time.
- Don't forget to catch one another practicing the new habit and give a specific compliment.

Before we know it, the neighbors will have to find another endearing thing about the Gimpel family to be entertained by. (Maybe our habit of playing touch football on the front lawn at six thirty in the morning before the school buses arrive.)

Making a daily schedule

One final habit that most of us lack, but which is worth developing, is making a daily schedule. As we know, the instant gratification personality is genetic, so some parents are not great at keeping a daily schedule. Our kids need order and predictability, and we, too, would benefit from a more organized schedule. We will work on two models— one for parents and older teens, and the other for younger kids. Kids have a built-in schedule for school days, so we will be addressing the weekends and longer vacations.

Here's a great system for adults and older kids, with a little bit of help from our smartphones (more on those dangerous little screens later):

1. Choose a quiet time at night to write down all your responsibilities for the next day, and commit each responsibility to a time slot on Google calendar or another program you are using. Example: Shopping, 2:00–3:00. Kindergarten pickup, 3:15. Defrost chicken for dinner, 4:00.
2. Set an alarm on your phone to ring three times daily—in the morning, afternoon, and evening. When you hear the alarm, check your schedule and see if you are sticking with it.
3. If you are off course, don't panic; just readjust. Either remove the next activity on your schedule and reassign it to tomorrow or cut what you are doing short. If neither can be done, sweat it out; it's a great learning experience. Now you will get a better sense of how long things take and how much you can cram into a day. Readjust your expectations. Congratulate yourself on a lesson well learned. Self flagellation is prohibited.
4. Our day is dynamic; appointments get canceled, and new responsibilities pop up on a regular basis. As soon as you get a phone call, text, or WhatsApp informing you of a schedule change, freeze in place and go directly to your schedule. Add the new piece of information to your schedule right away. If you just received an email invitation to a wedding, stop! Enter it into your schedule right now.
5. When you check your schedule in the evening, congratulate yourself on a day well spent, move chores that you haven't completed to a different day, and once again commit them to specific time slots. 6. If you are working on a big project, divide the project into smaller parts and commit to a specific hour and length of time you can work on the project this week. Add it to your calendar.

The schedule board for younger children

And now, for your younger child . . . do you like to do arts and crafts? Good, because a little cutting and pasting will be involved here.

1. Get a pack of colored paper. Use one paper as the base, and cut three other colors into strips. (You can obviously create the chart on the computer as well, or download from my website, www.hyperhealing.org, but it's less fun.)

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2. Laminate the page.
3. Put a strip of Velcro on the center of each of the colored sections on the page.
4. Now take a picture of your child, laminate it, and cut it out. 5. Put a strip of the other side of the Velcro on the back of the picture.

You have created a schedule board. You can now use a whiteboard marker to divide any part of your child's day in four segments. Write down what you will be doing in each part of the day on a specific color, including the hours the color spans. It is useful to have the last segment of the chart be something the child enjoys doing. Have your child move herself along the schedule so she has a better grip on what she has done and what to expect. Invite her to write down or draw her own schedule as well. Hang the schedule board at a height that she can access and interact with. A great way to begin any day that does not offer its own built-in schedule is to plan a schedule together with your child. This activity makes her feel secure and in control and plants the seeds for future scheduling habits. It is also a way to teach your child flexibility.

If there is a change in the schedule, which happens all the time, you can walk her to the board, have her erase what you had written, and add the change. This way, she does not feel confused by the change and can learn to handle glitches calmly. In addition, if she is anticipating an activity she loves, while normally she would ask about it continually and even get hysterical that you are not providing it right now (Is it movie time yet? When are we watching the movie? But you SAID we were going to watch a movie today . . .), with the schedule board she can now see that the anticipated activity will take place when she advances to yellow, and she is now at blue. Moving along the board gives her the calm and confidence that the activity is on its way, and she is getting closer to it all the time.

A kindergarten teacher called to consult about Jane. Each morning, Jane would come into the classroom with a sweet smile, which would inevitably morph into a frown and then a tantrum. She would demand her cookies and juice all morning long. No matter how many times the teacher explained to Jane that cookies were given out at ten, Jane would not be consoled. The teacher showed Jane the beautiful daily schedule hung at eye level in the kindergarten, to no avail. I suggested that the teacher make an individual schedule board for Jane, dividing the morning into four segments, the last being cookies. Jane's picture was placed on the board, and she was expected to move herself through the morning. The teacher would say, "Jane, we are now at green. What will we be doing now? How many more colors will you travel until you get to cookies?" Jane calmed down. Because she was an Instant Gratification kid, she reset every morning. She assumed that today there would be an unpleasant surprise, everything would change, and all along, she had been terrified that the cookies would not arrive. Once she organized her time and clearly saw that her goal was in sight, she could enjoy the morning. She needed the schedule more than any other kid in the kindergarten. So do our kids.

The following are a few examples of how the schedule board can be used.

Example 1: Summer mornings 8:30–9:30 Waking up, washing up, and eating breakfast 9:30–10:00 Doing a morning chore 10:00–11:30 Going out to sprinkler park 11:30–12:30 Movie

Example 2: Dividing the time of a long car ride to help children behave calmly throughout the journey: 10:00–10:30 Leaving house 10:30–11:00 Half-an-hour drive 11:00–11:30 Half-an-hour drive 11:30–12:00 Half-an-hour drive As you move your child or children across the chart, reward them with the agreed-

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upon prize, plus compliment them for every half hour they behaved well. Be specific about what you will expect in the car, and let them know what their reward will be in advance. Have them think of ways to occupy themselves in the car. One reward idea is giving children a sum of money for each successful stretch of time in the car, which they can spend on a small toy or treat when you arrive at your destination.

The more we assist our children in approaching their day in a structured way, the more we will be helping them be calm, flexible, and organized. Begin when they are young, and they will develop the organization skill early.

To illustrate: We had been charting at home for some time, but still had not tackled the challenges inherent in packing lots of kids into the car. Each time we got in the car, the kids would begin to argue about who sat where. It was unpleasant, to say the least; it took all the joy out of the journey. One day I climbed into the car, and the kids were happily getting along. I thought I had sat in the wrong car; this could not be my family. But it was! My older son had internalized the chart concept and realized that anything that was not working out could be readjusted by creating clear structure. That is exactly what he did. He got out a pen and paper and made a seating rotation chart with the kids. He put the chart in the glove compartment without even mentioning it to me. From that fabulous moment on, the kids consulted with the chart every time they got in the car and sat in their assigned seats. They just needed someone to create order so they did not have to feel the stress of not knowing if or when they would get the coveted seat. Once they knew they would get there, they were calm and flexible and able to share the seat without fighting. I gave them the method, and they then taught me a thing or two.