

**Child Behavior: When nothing else works,
consider these 7 strategies:**

Parents are saying discipline, consequences, time out and sticker's don't work. Parents are presenting as more and more defeated when it comes to managing the behavior of their children. They have a long list of *tried that – didn't work* scenarios including many of the more popular parenting programs. What's up with that? Why does it seem near impossible to get kids to listen? What can parents do differently?

To know what to do differently, we first need to appreciate what's at play creating challenges out of children's behavior and undermining parental authority. This brief history of the world is needed – or at least a brief history of the past 70 years. It goes like this:

- 1950's: Intact two parent families with a primary breadwinner and a primary homemaker;
- 1960's: Women's Movement begins and gender equality begins to be examined publicly;
- 1970's: No-fault divorce appears in many jurisdictions, divorce rate begins to climb;
- 1980's: *Praise your kids* was the new mantra in parenting;
- 1990's: As the economy tanks and rebounds, good paying jobs go and more families require two income earners. At issues is latch key kids;
- 2000's: From computers in bedrooms, to video games to the introduction of the iPhone and then android operating system, technology consumes our attention and this generation;
- 2010's: Technology abounds and usage has increased throughout all age groups, right down to infants with strollers adapted to hold iPads and wristbands to count our every step. We tell children the world is a dangerous place and they need to stay electronically tethered to stay safe. We wonder why children generally are more anxious than ever before.

Consider the above from the experience of the child and it's impact on child development. Despite the good that is brought about from these changes, there are still unintended negative consequences.

Children have gone from having continuous access to a parent to marginally direct contact nowhere near the levels of the *good ol' days*. Now this is not to suggest that those olden days were necessarily good or bad, but that from a child's perspective they have less and less access to support, supervision and a parental role model for the transmission of morals and values. These days, even when we have proximity to each other, with both parent and child answering the pull of the smart phone, we are not really *with* each other.

We are less and less available to help them when they do fall, keep them directly safe from harm and simply enjoy each others company – all key to the child feeling safe, secure, loved and of value. To add, as we over praise and don't hold children as accountable as before, their sense of they can *do no wrong* grows. Bring in a mix of parental guilt for lack of availability assuaged with consumer purchases and we add indulged to the list of growing concerns. All at once we appear hyper-vigilant, yet remarkably disconnected.

We are so removed from our kids as a society and all due to social, economic and technological change that we don't realize the creeping disconnect that has infected child development. Society has shifted and children's mental health is the price. Our kids are more and more footloose and fancy free independent and without the real maturity to direct appropriate behavior over the wants of impulses driven by immediate satisfaction.

Parents, feeling embarrassed or shameful or guilty about their child's issues fear being blamed. Parents and teachers are pitted against each other as schools try to manage the fallout of all this in the classroom and parents seek to hold the educational system accountable to socialize their kids.

It's time to stop the madness, take a step back and recognize that these seismic shifts in society yield unintended consequences. We have a generation of rudderless disconnected kids. Of course in this context the usual parenting strategies become ineffective. To begin with, our children don't

recognize our authority and many harbor an unstated resentment for our lack of connection. It comes out as behavior. Thus when we seek to punish, take things away, badger and discipline, from the child's perspective we are only widening the disconnect and escalating the resentment.

Managing child behavior has and will always be determined by the quality of the relationship between the adult and the child. The degree to which we are connected to our children, provide directly for their sense of safety, security and love, we have greater influence and legitimacy in their lives. It is time to restore those connections. Bear in mind, it will seem a tad weird to the child for whom this may be a new experience given their upbringing in the past ten years, versus ours of some 30 years ago.

The parenting strategies to re-mediate child behavior and mental health concerns of this age and time are all about learning how to connect meaningfully as determined from an emotional and attachment perspective. Without going into the theory of this, consider these practices:

1. Turn off your technology when you walk through the door. Hunt your child down and give them a kiss hello before anything else.
2. Have technology free periods of the day/week with your child.
3. Count the number of times you have a meal with your child. Going back some 50 years, and out of 21 opportunities a week, the number back then would have been near 21. Whatever your count, consider how you can increase it.
4. Take your child's face gently and directly between your hands and tell your child outright, you love her/him. Do so daily.
5. Keep the tablet or smart phone out of the bedroom at least at bedtime. Buy an old fashioned alarm clock if needed.
6. Resist consumer purchases when begged by your child or if to assuage your guilt. Instead, spend time with your child when you feel triggered to make a purchase on their behalf.
7. When your child acts inappropriately, think less about the consequence you will levy and the fight to hold them accountable and think more about sharing a little disappointment and that you think they are better than that. Let your child know you love him or her but

that seeing the misdeed makes you feel sad. Do not come from a place of anger or hostility, but concern and love. Label your feelings so that your child may come to understand his or hers. Connect emotionally.

Of course we value our kids and want what is best for them. The issue isn't bad parents, but these societal shifts acting beyond our awareness. Societal changes have subtly interrupted parental availability, connection and influence. These 7 strategies are all about counter-balancing and reclaiming the parental role to enable connection. Parents can begin the process at home. The 7 strategies are a start.

As odd as it seems, your kids may find the change unsettling at first. They may try to resist. They are used to getting what they want, acting with limited accountability and believing they do not wrong. Those attitudes have been built in structurally through the fabric of societal change.

The challenge of parenting today is recognizing and working in the midst of that changing tide and not being driven off course by the resistance of the child who may not want to give up the trappings of an indulged lifestyle. It is as if the child needs to learn that good relationships and emotional connections really do feel better than stuff or things.

Finding ways such as suggested above is the antidote. Being connected to your kids through direct availability is key. With an intact and meaningful connection, parents may not even need many of the discipline strategies we used to talk about. We will have settled the dis-ease and underlying resentment affecting so many children today. We may just all feel better and be better as we get connected. Give it a try.

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