CALM PARENTING: HOW TO GET CONTROL WHEN YOUR CHILD IS MAKING YOU ANGRY
by Debbie Pincus, MS LMHC

Why is it so easy to go from “zero to 60” when our kids make us angry? There are many reasons, but I think it’s mainly because we allow ourselves to go to 60. And in a sense, when we get up to 60—when we react emotionally—we’re allowing the behavior of our kids to determine how we’ll behave rather than the other way around.

We do so many things automatically without even thinking about it. This is often because we believe that we need to get our kids under control, rather than taking a moment to stop and think and say, “Wait, let me get myself under control first before I respond.” The best way to prevent yourself from getting up to 60 is to recognize that you are going there—and what makes you go there. In fact, in my opinion, that is probably one of the most important things you can do as a parent.

When you try to manage your child’s behavior instead of your own anxiety, what you’re saying is, I’m out of control. I need you to change so that I can feel better.

Here’s a secret: when you get yourself under control, your kids will also usually calm down. Remember, calm is contagious—and so is anxiety. When we as parents are nervous or anxious, it’s been proven that it creates anxiety in our kids. I would even go so far as to say that being emotionally reactive is probably your greatest concern as a parent. Think of it this way: if you can’t get calm—if you can’t get to zero—then what you’re really doing is inadvertently creating the exact atmosphere you’re trying to avoid.

Here’s an example. Let’s say you’re teaching your child how to ride a bike. Your child is not getting it and is being whiny and cranky and talks back to you. You’re frustrated, annoyed, angry and disappointed, because inside you somehow feel responsible to teach him to learn how to ride this bike, and he just won’t listen. Now you’re starting to get agitated about it. You yell at your child because you’re up to 60. The end result is that your child will probably fall off the bike. Here’s why: he’s so filled with the anxiety that’s surrounding him that he can’t concentrate. He’s feeling pushed to do something and he reacts to it by failing. What can you do? Instead of snapping and reacting because you feel like you have to get your child to learn how to ride the bike, try turning it around and ask yourself, “How do I get myself to really be calm and how will that be helpful for my child to get to where he needs to be?” Remind yourself that you’re not responsible to get him to ride the bike, you’re responsible to get yourself to zero. From there, you can think about the most effective way to help him learn.
This is why I say that if we can’t calm down we’ll probably create exactly what we’re trying to avoid—failure. Think about someone you know who is calm and serene; their presence helps center everybody in the room. When you’re calm, that’s the effect it has on your child and your family. It will help your child descalate, learn how to soothe himself when he’s nervous or agitated, and will make him better able to do what he has to do in tense moments. And in that moment, he won’t have to fight against you, because you’ve effectively taken that push-pull—the power struggle—away by being calm when he pushes your buttons.

By the way, I understand that nobody wants to go to 60—no one likes to be upset. I think most parents’ goal is to get to zero, but often they just don’t know how to do it. The truth is, everybody has to find the best way to do that for themselves. (I have some ideas about how to do that that I will explain in a moment.) But ultimately, it’s about understanding how important it is not to lose it—and not giving yourself permission to do so. And there’s a good reason for this. When we hit the roof in front of our kids, what we’re really communicating is “There are no grown-ups at home.” We’re saying that we can’t manage our anxiety. And when you try to manage your child’s behavior instead of your own anxiety, what you’re saying is, “I’m out of control. I need you to change so that I can feel better.” So the goal is to acknowledge what’s going on, and to understand how important it is to get control—and to ultimately gain control of ourselves. The question you’re probably asking is, “Easy for you to say. How am I going to get there?” Here are some things I’ve found to be helpful for parents when I work with them.

1. **Make the commitment not to lose it.** Remind yourself that you’re going to try to stay in control from now on. Notice what sets you off—is it your child ignoring you? Or does backtalk drive you up the wall? It’s not always easy, and I think it’s hard for anyone to control their temper 100 percent of the time, but still, making that first promise to yourself is the beginning of calm—for your whole family.

2. **Expect that your child is going to push your buttons.** Usually we get upset when our kids are not doing what we want them to do. They’re not listening or they’re not complying. In our heads, we start worrying that we’re not doing a good job as parents. We worry that we don’t know what to do to get them under our control. Sometimes, we fast forward to the future and wonder if this is how they’re going to be the rest of their lives. In short, we go through all sorts of faulty thinking. And in doing that, our anxiety goes way up. I think the best solution is to prepare for your child to push your buttons and not take it personally. In a sense, your child is doing his job (being a kid who can’t yet solve his problems)—and your job is to remain calm so you can guide him.
3. **Realize what you aren’t responsible for.** There’s confusion for many parents as to what we’re really responsible for and what we’re not responsible for. And so if you feel responsible for things that really don’t belong in your “box”—things like him getting up on time or having his homework completed—it will result in frustration. They don’t belong in your box—they belong in your child’s box. If you always think you’re responsible for how things turn out, then you’re going to be on your child in a way that’s going to create more stress and reactivity. So you can say, “I’m responsible for helping you figure out how to solve the problem. But I’m not responsible for solving the problem for you.” If you feel like you’re responsible for solving your child’s problems, then he’s not going to feel like he has to solve them himself. You’re going to become more and more agitated and try harder and harder. You’re not responsible for getting your child to listen to you, but you are responsible for deciding how to respond to him when he doesn’t listen to you.

So already you’re going to be calmer with that kind of thinking. If you feel responsible for getting your child to listen, think about it—just how are you supposed to do that? How is anyone supposed to get another person to do something; how are we supposed to control what somebody else really does? Instead, decide to be responsible for how you want to deal with your child if he doesn’t listen. Think about the kind of consequences you want to hand out, based on what you can and can’t live with—your own bottom line. In the long run, standing up for yourself will help you be the leader your kids need.

4. **Prepare ahead of time.** Notice when the anxiety is high and try to prepare for it. You might observe that every day at five o’clock, your family’s nerves are on edge. Everyone is home from work or school, they’re hungry, and they’re decompressing. For many families, it’s just a terrible time of day; everybody’s anxiety is up and patience is at low ebb. Ask yourself, “How am I going to handle this when I know my teen is going to come screaming at me? What do I do when she asks to use the car when she knows I’m going to say no?” Prepare yourself. Say, “This time, I’m not getting into an argument with her. Nobody can make me do that. I’m not giving her permission to hit my buttons.” Your stance should be, “No matter how hard you try to pull me into a power struggle, it’s not going to happen.” Let yourself be guided by the way you want to see yourself as a parent versus your feeling of the moment.

5. **Ask yourself “What’s helped me in the past?”** Start thinking about what’s helped you to manage your anxiety in the past. What’s helped to soothe you through something that makes you uncomfortable? Usually the first thing is to just commit yourself to not saying anything when that feeling comes up inside of you. In your head, you can say something like, “I’m not saying anything; I’m going to step back; I’m going to take a deep breath.” Give yourself that moment to be able to do whatever it is you need to do to get calmer. I always have to walk out of the room. Sometimes I go into the bedroom or bathroom, but I leave the situation temporarily. Remember: there’s nothing wrong with that. You don’t have to react to your child.

6. **Take a breath.** Take a deep breath when you feel yourself escalating—and take a moment to think things through. There is a big difference between responding and reacting. When you respond, you’re actually taking some time to think about what you want to say. When you react, you’re just on autopilot. As much as possible, you want to respond thoughtfully to what your child is saying or doing. Make sure that you take that deep breath before you respond to your child because that moment will give you a chance to think about what you want to say.

Think of it this way: when we’re upset and trying to get our child to do what we want, we’re going to press harder. We’re going to try to control them more, to shape them up or talk some sense into them, so we yell harder. And we go from 20 to 40 and it keeps escalating. It might be the time of day. Perhaps your child has had a hard day and then we react to their mood. And then they respond in kind and it just escalates. The anxiety feeds on itself.
7. **Keep some slogans in your head.** Say something to yourself every time you feel your emotions rising. It can be anything from “Stop” or “Breathe” or “Slow down” to “Does it really matter?” or “Is this that important?” Whatever words will help you, take that moment and go through a list of priorities. I personally keep a mental picture handy to calm myself down: I think of a beautiful place in my mind that always calms and relaxes me. Try to come up with that mental picture for yourself. Working on that will increase your ability to be able to go there more automatically.

8. **Think about what you want your relationship to look like.** How do you want your relationship with your child to be some day? If the way things are now is not how you want your relationship to look in 25 years, start thinking about what you do want. Ask yourself, “Is how I’m responding to my child now going to help? Is that going to help me reach my goal?” This doesn’t mean that you should do what your child wants all the time—far from it. Standing by the rules of the house and giving consequences when your child acts out is all part of being an effective, loving parent. What it does mean is that you try to treat your child with respect—the way you want him to treat you. Keep that goal in your head. Ask yourself, “Will my response be worth it?” If your goal is to have a solid relationship with your child, will your reaction get you closer to that goal?

When your child is aggravating you, your thinking process at that moment is very important. The whole goal is really to be as objective as we can with what’s going on with ourselves and with our kids. Ask, “What’s my kid doing right now? What’s he trying to do? Is he reacting to tension in the house?” You don’t have to get him to listen, but you do have to understand what’s going on—and figure out how you’re going to respond to what’s going on. Then you can stay on track and not be pulled in a thousand different directions.

The thinking process itself helps us to calm down. As parents, what we’re really working toward is “What’s within my power to do to get myself calm?” So the less we can react, the better—and the more we think things through, the more positive the outcome will be. Thinking helps us to be calm and breathe; calm helps us to get to better thinking. Observing ourselves helps activate the thinking part of the brain and reduces the kind of “emotionality” that gets in the way of better thinking.

That’s really what we’re talking about here: responding thoughtfully rather than simply reacting. Someone once said, “Response comes from the word responsibility.” So it’s taking responsibility for how we want to act rather than having that knee-jerk reaction when our buttons are pushed. And if we can get our thinking out in front of our emotions, we’re going to do better as parents. And that’s really the goal.
Mrs. Hayes and Ms. Reingold

Building Better Study Skills

High Schoolers need good study skills to organize, review and remember information. Improving these skills can help students get better grades. Here are some study tips to share with your teen.

Focus on important ideas:

Encourage your teen to focus on what the teacher discusses and writes on the board. When reading at home, they should pay attention to the titles that divide each chapter. These titles help point out main ideas in the text. Also, have them look over past homework assignments.

Make study time count:

Setting aside study time every day is important. Most students remember more by reviewing in shorter, daily sessions. Your high schooler should divide big projects into small goals. Example: They could study one chapter a night for a week instead of all five chapters the night before a test.

Deal with distractions:

It’s natural for teen’s mind to wander while studying. Encourage your high schooler to control stray thoughts by quickly jotting them down and setting them aside until later. This helps clear their mind and puts the focus back on their work. They can review the thought after they finish studying.

When it comes to study techniques, It’s important for your teen to find methods that work and turn them into habits.

Using Pupilpath, guiding and encouraging your teen during their homework/study time is a great way to stay in tune with your child and their academic progress.
WEBSITES TO KNOW

McCown’s Website:
http://www.gaynormccownels.org

New York City Department of Education:
schools.nyc.gov
ARIS Parent Link
www.arisparentlink.org
School Food & Nutrition
http://www.opt-osfns.org/osfns/resources/menus

H1N1 virus:
http://schools.nyc.gov/Home/Spotlight/10/2209h1n1update.htm

Families of Developmentally Disabled Individuals.
http://www.ebulletin.us/index.htm

Connect With Kids
http://www.connectwithkids.com

Kid Health
http://kidshealth.org

School Library
http://library.nycenet.edu

Regents Prep from the NYS Dept. of Ed.
http://www.nysedregents.org

Pupil Path
www.pupilpath.com
November Events:
11/5-Election Day-Classes are not in session
11/8-PTA “Family Game Night” 6:45pm
11/11-Veterans Day- School is closed
11/13-8th grade Open House-7pm
11/19- School Leadership Team-4pm
11/19-PTA meeting -7pm
11/27-End of 2nd marking period
11/27-Hanukkah Begins
11/28 & 29-Thanksgiving Recess

REMEmBER OUR HEROES!!!!!

The Adventure Club will meet after school on Thursdays with Ms. Russo.
Upcoming events will be rock climbing on November 14th.
The Capital Plan Committee will meet on

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 6, 2013
6:00 pm - 8:30 pm

TWEED Courthouse
2nd Fl. Conf. Room
52 Chambers St
New York, NY 10007

This building is wheelchair accessible.

To review the capital improvement requests made last year and plan for this year's submission

The School Construction Authority (SCA) will present
A recap of the (old) 2010-2014 Capital Plan
The (new) Capital Plan for Fiscal Year 2015-2019

This meeting will focus on the needs of high schools in all boroughs and on the process for making capital plan requests; schools are encouraged to send representatives*

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Detailed agenda to follow

*N.B.: seating is limited. To confirm your reservation, pls. e-mail cchs@schools.nyc.gov