

7 PARENTING PROBLEMS

You Can Avoid

PUT-IT-INTO ACTION ADVICE
YOU CAN START USING RIGHT AWAY



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NEWSLETTERS

Avoiding Transition Time Tears



"But, Daddy, I don't want to go!"

Difficult parenting and teaching situations occur as we move from one event to another. Our children are involved and concentrating on an activity, then life gets in the way. It's bath time. It's bedtime. Preschool is over. Daycare is closing. It's time to get in the car. Resistance emerges. Tears start, and a dull throbbing begins behind our eyes.

Is there some way to make this easier?

I'm here to tell you, yes!

Here are a few tips to make transition times easier.

Give a five-minute warning

When it is five minutes before you need to move on to the next activity, simply tell your child that it's five minutes to the next event. Set a timer. Show on the clock how long that will be. Tell your child what they have time to do in those five minutes.

"In five minutes we need to leave for school. That gives you enough time to finish your toast and brush your teeth. I'll set the timer."

Show and tell

Some children do better with transitions if they have a picture. If your child is a strong visual learner take a few

pictures of an activity sequence to help your child be able to visualize what is going to happen.

“Jennifer, five minutes until bed time. When the timer goes off you’ll need to brush your teeth, put on your pajamas, and get into bed.”

Showing Jennifer a sequence of pictures of her brushing her teeth, in her pajamas and snuggled in bed can help make the going a little smoother.

Singing the story

If you meet resistance, sing the story of how to get from Point A to Point B. Pick a familiar song and change the lyrics a bit. Have fun and be silly. To “The Itsy Bitsy Spider”:

*Itsy Bitsy Tommy
Climbed into the car seat
Down came the seat and covered Tommy’s
feet
Out came the buckle and
clicked around his tummy,
And Itsy Bitsy Tommy was ready to go
again.*

Not perfect, but I hope you get the idea.

Hold your horses

My daughters went through a period where they would unbuckle their car seats after we were on our way. Click.

Click. They could both be out of their car seats in a jiff. Trying to use logic with a 12 and 30-month-old didn’t get my point across. I finally told them that our car would only run if they were buckled safe and sound in their car sets.

If I heard a click, I’d say, “Oh, no! The car is turning off!”

I’d steer into a parking lot, turn off the engine, and then wait for them to buckle. Sometimes I’d have to wait for 15 or 20 minutes. But in a week or so, I wasn’t dealing with my little mechanical engineers unbuckling.

Avoid transition headaches by:

- Giving your children a five-minute alert.
- Using pictures to tell the story of what is happening next.
- Using songs to help them understand what to do next.
- Giving yourself plenty of time.

Sometimes the slow road is the fastest.

Avoiding Morning Madness



Getting everyone out the door in the morning can feel like we've put in a full day's work before 7 am. We have to deal with the sleepyhead, the dawdler, the procrastinator, the inappropriate dresser and the forgetful space cadet.

Until we can let these characters have meaningful experiences they will continue to be difficult to get up and get going. Arranging for these meaningful experiences, though, can entail that rest of the family is thrown into uproar, as the natural consequences of certain behaviors can over-complicate our lives.

What is a parent to do? Here are some hints to help create a peaceful morning routine.

Do what you can the night before

Planning ahead the night before can help the morning go smoother.

- Have children lay out the clothes they will put on in the morning.
- Plan breakfast menus weekly and set the breakfast table after dinner.
- Have a spot for everyone's supplies, coats, shoes, backpacks, lunches, and set out what you can the night before.
- Make lunches the night before.
- Have the children learn to do whatever age appropriate tasks they can.

Have expectations

Consider no television, computer time or video games in the morning. Expect everyone to be dressed before breakfast. Expect everyone to be ready to go at a certain time and set a five or ten-minute timer to help get everyone headed in that that direction.

Get some skin in the game

Make your children responsible for certain tasks. Even a three-year-old can be expected to set the table with silverware, dishes and food, carry his or her dishes to the kitchen and place dishes into the dishwasher. If the jobs don't get done, then the children see that their contribution is important to the well-being of their family.

Create consequences

Decide what you will do when the morning routine heads down the wrong path, and tell your children what to expect as consequences. If the television is turned on before you brush your teeth, I'll turn it off. If you aren't dressed by the time we need to get in the car, I'll put your clothes in the car and you can get dressed at school. If you haven't eaten breakfast by a certain time, I'll put your food away.

Remember, whatever you say you'll do, do it without comment. Actions speak louder than words.

You'll probably only have to do these things once or twice before the dawdler or procrastinator learns to

change their ways. I've had several students appear at school in their pajamas after their parents talked to me about their dawdling. But usually only once.

Get enough sleep

Make sure that you, as well as the children, are well rested. Adults need on average 8 hours of sleep per night. Unfortunately, most adults get only around six hours of rest. The paradox is that when you go ahead and get that extra couple of hours of sleep, you'll find that you are more productive and alert, with the added benefit of being able to get the same amount of tasks done in less time.

Children need 10 to 14 hours of sleep per day depending on the age of the child. Have a bedtime schedule and enforce it so that all of your family members can start the day rested and ready to go.

Have a plan, have expectations, have consequences, give responsibility and get enough sleep so that your household can rise and shine.

Different Strokes for Different Folks



"But Sammy's mother lets them eat ice cream for breakfast."

One of our parenting and teaching challenges is to explain the rules, not only in our own homes and classrooms, but in those places where we have no control.

As our children's friends and relatives visit our homes, we'll hear the phrase, more than once, "But we don't do that at our house!"

The temptation may be to defend our position, or modify our stance to mollify the protesters.

All we have to remember, though, is that the rules we have in our family are the rules we have for our family. Other people in other places have different rules that meet their needs and desires. The simple statement, "These are our family rules", should help you hold firm in what may seem a storm of complaints.

Objections to your house rules are more about children broadening their perspective of the world, and experiencing another way of living. With their complaining children aren't asking you to change your rules as much as they are verbalizing the differences they see, and will need to incorporate into their lives. As children learn, here are some situations you may have to handle.

The Resistance

"We don't do that at our house!" needs to be interpreted as either the visiting child's call to do it his or her way, or a request for help in understanding how to do it your way.

Say, "Yes, the rules are different at our house. But when you are at our house you play by our rules."

Helping to clean up the kitchen or making your bed can look very different in a new place.

The Guilt Trip

"At Susie's house they always go to bed at midnight."

Be wary of those phrases that use always, never, and everyone. They are the major road signs on the guilt trip.

Don't feel that you have to defend your 7:30 bedtime. Simply agree that yes, they do it differently at Susie's house. But at our house we go to bed at 7:30 on school nights.

Differences acknowledged, rules restated, and back on the road again.

Reminders

We all forget the rules and friendly reminders are usually all that is needed to help a child change

behavior. If snacks are to be eaten at the kitchen table at grandmother's house, a quick question can ease the transition, "Do you remember where to eat snack at Grandma's?"

Questions work better at engaging the child in the process versus a recitation of the rules.

Changing the Rules

Sometimes we discover a new way of doing things that causes us to change.

We need to model flexibility in a way that doesn't seem capricious and arbitrary.

When we see a good idea that benefits our family, we need to be open to change. Perhaps we start to compost because of the Jones' down the street, and the rules for how we clean up after dinner change.

We need to model that when a better idea comes our way, we'll try it.

Celebrate Differences

Thank goodness not every place is the same. Toast the fact that there are many ways of living, eating, sleeping, playing, working, going to school, and on and on.

How unexciting and uneventful the world would be if everyone did everything the same way.

Celebrate similarities. People all over the world have similar needs and meet those needs based on the resources and culture available to them.

Shelter, food, clothes, furniture, transportation, and relationships will have similarities because all people have a need for affection, safety, nutrition, comfort and mobility.

Yes, the rules are different and I'm glad that someone, somewhere, get's to eat ice cream for breakfast.

But at our house we...



Want Versus Need



To live is to consume. The first definition of consume is “to eat, drink or ingest”. Consumption is about taking care of hunger and thirst. The second definition is “to buy”. The third is “to use up”.

Modern consuming is more about buying than eating or using things up. Advertising is a huge business to get us to purchase good and services, and advertising to children is big business, with estimates of over \$15 billion used yearly to advertise to children. The psychology of advertising plays into our core emotional systems and can make it difficult for us to differentiate between needs and wants.

The novelty of advertised items along with the subtle social attachment communicated make certain commercials irresistible. Realizing that our wants are about satisfying emotional needs can help us navigate the rough and tumble waters of “I-wanna”.

Think

Get your children thinking about needs and wants by asking questions. Many of the advertised items targeted to our children are foods or perhaps foodstuff is a better description. Ask what kinds of food do we need to stay healthy and have good energy. What kinds of foods should we avoid? Read aloud the labels of your child’s “gotta-have” cereals, sodas, or candy bars. Ask your child if each ingredient is something that we would want to put into our bodies to stay healthy and have high energy.

Compare

For children over age six, money talks. A \$5.00 box of cereal or use the \$5.00 for other kinds of food? Two boxes of cereal per week for a year. Is it how you want to spend \$520? How much oatmeal can you buy for that much money? What do you want to put in your body for optimum health?

Watch

Spend time watching television and other screen time activities to be aware of all the kinds of consumer messages your child is receiving. The average American child today is exposed to an estimated 40,000 television commercials a year—over 100 a day, according to an American Psychological Association Task report.

This same report recommended restrictions on advertising that targets children under the age of eight, based on research showing that children under this age are unable to critically comprehend televised advertising messages and are prone to accept advertiser messages as truthful, accurate and unbiased.

Help your children think, compare, and watch out for messages that create want. Help your children discover the difference between a want and a need, and you'll get through the rough waters of "I-wanna".



Preventing Tantrums



Benjamin Franklin coined the phrase, "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure," in regards to fire prevention. If you've ever experienced a full fledged tantrum, you see how this advice might apply to those combustible moments.

What we need is preventative parenting, the art of being able to say "yes" more often while gaining cooperation. Here are a few ideas to get everyone to "yes."

Plan Ahead

Think about the times that are most stressful for your child, and for you. What circumstances try everyone's patience?

Before you start an activity explain in broad strokes what is expected.

Off to see a friend and last time there was a ruckus when leaving? State your expectations for behavior before you leave your house.

"When we get ready to leave our friends' house, I'll give you a five-minute warning. Will that give you enough time to finish up and be able to leave happy?"

Plan to leave before hunger and tiredness contribute to an inability to control emotions.

Let your children plan with you. Sometimes it can be as simple as asking, "Help me think of how we can leave our friend's house today happy and with no one losing their temper."

Ask questions until you have a plan and perhaps a 'secret' signal to use at the friend's house if you need to talk in private.

Practice

Do a little dry run on how to leave a friend's house happily. Let your child act out both the parent and child roles as you do a bit of role playing.

Keep the Lines of Communication Open

Things change and the best-laid plans go awry. A secret signal can help you and your child move to a quiet place to discuss needs without tempers having to flare. You can use the sign. Your child can use it.

Do What You Say

Some families have the 30-minute goodbye, where everyone says good-bye, gets their coats on, and then proceeds to talk by the front door or car for another thirty minutes.

For a small child, one might understand why a tantrum might emerge in this situation.

When it's time to go...go!

If your child refuses, kindly take him by the hand and, go. Be prepared to kindly and calmly carry him to the car.

Say what you mean, and mean what you say.

Help With Language

Help your child learn to use language to problem solve.

The phrase "Would you be willing to help me come up with a plan to solve this problem?" can help your child learn to see another person's point of view and help you get to yes and cooperation.

With preventative parenting, if a tantrum does occur, you and your child will have some planning, practice and problem solving skills to help put out the fire.

Dealing With Meltdowns



Rage is one of the core emotional systems that kicks in when we feel like we are being physically or mentally restrained. Frustration is part of our core emotional system, as is anger. We have the ability to rage from birth as it acts as a type of energizer to get us to safety. Hold a baby's arms to his or her sides and you'll witness the rage system in full action.

When we see our children acting in frustration, anger and rage we need to see those behaviors as signals that there is a problem.

Anger is a strong response to environment. Because anger's strength is created by hormones and neurotransmitters flooding the brain, anger can take a while to subside, and many times is never forgotten. I'm sure most of us have incidents in our lives that even thinking about them briefly can still make us mad— increase our heart rate, raise our blood pressure and begin hyperventilation.

Because rage and anger can be difficult emotions to control, our cultural bias may communicate to our children that anger is wrong, bad, scary and dangerous, and is to be avoided. There are ways, though, to use our anger to our benefit.

Naming the Experience

When we see angry behavior, we can simply say to our children, "I see that you are angry." When we are angry we can also name the experience by stating, "I am feeling angry, frustrated, furious, etc." Many times just naming the emotion begins to calm our nervous system.

Have Expression Tools Handy

In my preschool classroom I had papers and bold tipped markers handy for the upset child. When a child entered the classroom unhappy, I'd sit the child down with the markers and a 24" x36" piece of paper. I'd tell the child to draw what he or she felt, and that we would talk when he or she finished.

Watching out of the corner of my eye (or using those proverbial eyes in the back of my head) I'd make note of the sequence of colors used. When the child came to me and said he or she was finished—this might take up to half an hour for a preschooler—I'd start to work on getting the story.

"Tell me about the yellow," I said and went through in sequence each color used. A story would emerge and I'd repeat each sentence as new information appeared. The child became calmer as he or she was heard.

Teach Some Language and Coping Skills

The adage of counting to ten is perhaps sound advice. Counting causes our thinking to shift to logical thinking versus emotional thinking. Upset? Count to ten or twenty before you do anything. If you're still angry try to leave and go to a quiet spot.

We used to play the "What If" game in our preschool class using some typical incidents that occur in a school setting. In a small group of around six children I'd ask, "What if Johnny took your swing on the playground? How would you feel? What would you do? What could you say?"

We'd practice using a phrase, "I feel (emotion) when you (action). I would like to (action). Would you please (action).

Or in this example—I feel angry when you take my swing. I would like to swing. Please give me back my swing.

We'd also talk about getting an adult to help if you couldn't solve your problems with words.

Being able to name emotions, to express emotions through coloring and drawing, and to have vocabulary to express emotions, wants and needs help calm the emotional part of our children's brains. These activities aid our children in feeling safe and being able to communicate, thus preventing and defusing meltdowns.

Dealing With Mealtime Messes



When our daughters were young dinnertime was perhaps only twenty minutes, and gradually grew to be an hour. Now that they are grown we enjoy long leisurely meals along with each other's conversation and company.

Dinners, though, started out as a big mess, and we have the pictures to prove it. Faces smeared with refried beans. Strawberry ice cream hair-do's. Here are some hints to go from messy meals to slow food dining. Remember, this is probably a ten-year plan, at least.

Spills happen

Be prepared for the spilled milk, the toppled plate, the spaghetti on the floor. Have cleaning supplies handy, and quietly without fanfare clean it up. We used waffle-weave kitchen towels as napkins for many years. They were handy, absorbent, and abundantly washable.

Think Small and Big

Consider using smaller glasses and cups for your children and fill them only halfway. Our kitchen was large enough to accommodate a child-sized table with chairs that the girls used for snack time as well as other activities. At a child-sized table children are better able to sit and maneuver utensils and food.

At the dinner table, think of how you can boost your child to table level easily using booster chairs or even specially designed chairs that they can climb in and out of independently. Consider how you might feel if you

had to eat in a chair with your feet dangling and your chin barely above the tabletop.

Use Indirect Preparation

Help your children develop skills away from the table that will help them. Show them how to clean up spills using water. Set up two bowls and let them spoon dried beans back and forth between the two bowls to practice handling a spoon. Buy a small pitcher and let them practice pouring dried beans and then liquids. Think about the skills they need to learn to be successful at the dinner table and focus on the steps necessary to get there.

Slow Down

Our adult movements are often too fast for our children to follow and imitate, which is how young children learn. Slow down. Once you sit down at the table, stay seated and try not to get up and down. Make your movements slower and more intentional. When you do, you'll see your children slowing down and having fewer mishaps at dinner. Practice the art of dinner conversation. Make sure the television is off. It is a huge distraction to learning dinnertime skills.

Savor the Experience

Imagine yourself around the table with the people you love most in the world. You are eating fabulous food on an ocean cruise.

But then every ten seconds someone says: Be careful.

Don't spill that. Finish your green beans. Drink your milk. Wipe your mouth. Sit up straight. Put your napkin on your lap. Sort of ruins the experience.

When you are at the table, enjoy. Enjoy the meal. Enjoy the people.

To teach manners, use indirect preparation by giving short lessons before or after dinner on how to use a napkin, how to sit up straight, how to be careful with your drink, and all those little nagging things we say to children at the dinner table.

Avoid mealtime messes by being prepared for the inevitable spills. Prepare your child's space with the right-sized utensils and furniture.

Slow down and model what it is to be an adult who enjoys eating and being with the people you love.

About Maren Schmidt



You'll find expert put-it-into-action advice in Maren's *Kids Talk* newsletters and workshops.

With *Kids Talk* you'll learn time-tested techniques based on proven child development principles that you can start using right away!

If our children could verbalize what they need from the adults in their lives, the advice in Maren's *Kids Talk* newsletters, workshops and books is what our children would want us to know and use.

Tap into Maren's experiences of working with children and families for over thirty years as she shares her insights as a parent, a Montessori teacher, Girl Scout leader, Sunday School teacher, Montessori school owner and administrator, parenting coach and workshop leader.

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