

HOW YOU WERE PARENTED

Your childhood influences how you perceive and respond to your child's behavior.

You may lead with judgment rather than curiosity, criticism instead of understanding and punishment instead of discussion. So without intentional effort, history tends to repeat itself.

You may see behavior as the measure of who your kids are rather than seeing behavior as a clue to what they might need.

Your earliest years are especially powerful. Your body was wiring how you thought about and responded to challenging situations, based on how your parents thought about and responded to you in those moments.

How do you talk to yourself when you are struggling?

Don't be so sensitive. I'm over reacting. I'm so dumb. I'm trying my best. I want to feel seen. These are all based on how your parents spoke to or treated you in your times of struggle.

In childhood your body is learning under what conditions you receive love, attention, understanding and affection and under what conditions you get rejected, punished and left alone.

The data it collects is critical to your survival. Attachment is the primary goal for children.

This impacts your development, because you do whatever gets you love and attention. Or you shut down and label bad any parts that get rejected, criticized or invalidated.

How your parents responded to you becomes how you respond to yourself and this sets the stage for how you respond to your children.

Especially when your child is dysregulated, they look at you for confirmation or validation. They're asking, Who am I right now? Am I a bad kid doing bad things or am I a good kid having a hard time?

They form their self image by your answer. If you want them to develop true self confidence and feel good about themselves, you need to reflect back that they are good inside, even when they struggle on the outside.

Kids respond to the version of themselves that you reflect back to them and act accordingly.

Am I lovable and good and desirable to be around?

Will I be seen and heard?

What can I expect of others when I am upset?

What can I expect of others when I am overwhelmed?

What can I expect of others when we disagree?

They take these answers to these questions and make generalizations about who they are allowed to be and how the world works.

They're totally dependent on us for survival and they know this, deep in their bodies, so they collect data on their environment and then wire themselves accordingly to maximize attachment and keep us as close as possible.

The way you respond to their needs, the range of emotions you acknowledge inside of them, how consistently you show up for them, whether or not you repair with them after tough moments, how grounded versus reactive you are, these behaviors all have ripple effects far beyond today.

If you want your kids to seek out relationships where they can balance dependence and independence, where they can feel close to others and still not lose themselves, where they can voice their needs and get support, then you have to put in the work now.

The safer and more secure a child feels with you and the wider the range of feelings they can feel within that relationship, the safer and more secure their adult relationships will be.

Responsiveness, warmth, predictability and repair when things feel bad set a child up to have a secure base. A child who sees a parent as a secure base feels a sense of safety in the world, a sense of someone will be there for me and comfort me if things go wrong. Which lets them feel capable of exploring, trying new things, taking risks, suffering failures and being vulnerable. The more they feel they can depend on a parent, the more independent they can be.

DYSREGULATION TURNS INTO ADAPTATION

Children interpret your interactions with them not as a reaction to the specific moment but as a message about who they should be.

When they say I hate my baby brother, send them back to the hospital. And you say, don't say that about your brother you love him. The lesson they learn isn't that their words were inappropriate. The lesson they learn is that jealousy and anger are dangerous emotions, ones they shouldn't have at all. This is why it's so critical to separate what a child does from who a child is.

You don't want them to hit, but you do want them to have the right to feel angry.

If you don't explicitly recognize the feelings underneath their behavior and show them that you love them even when they're acting out, they'll collapse behavior and feelings into one. They'll learn that attachment security depends on dismissing the feelings under the behaviors, leading to longer-term problematic relationship patterns.