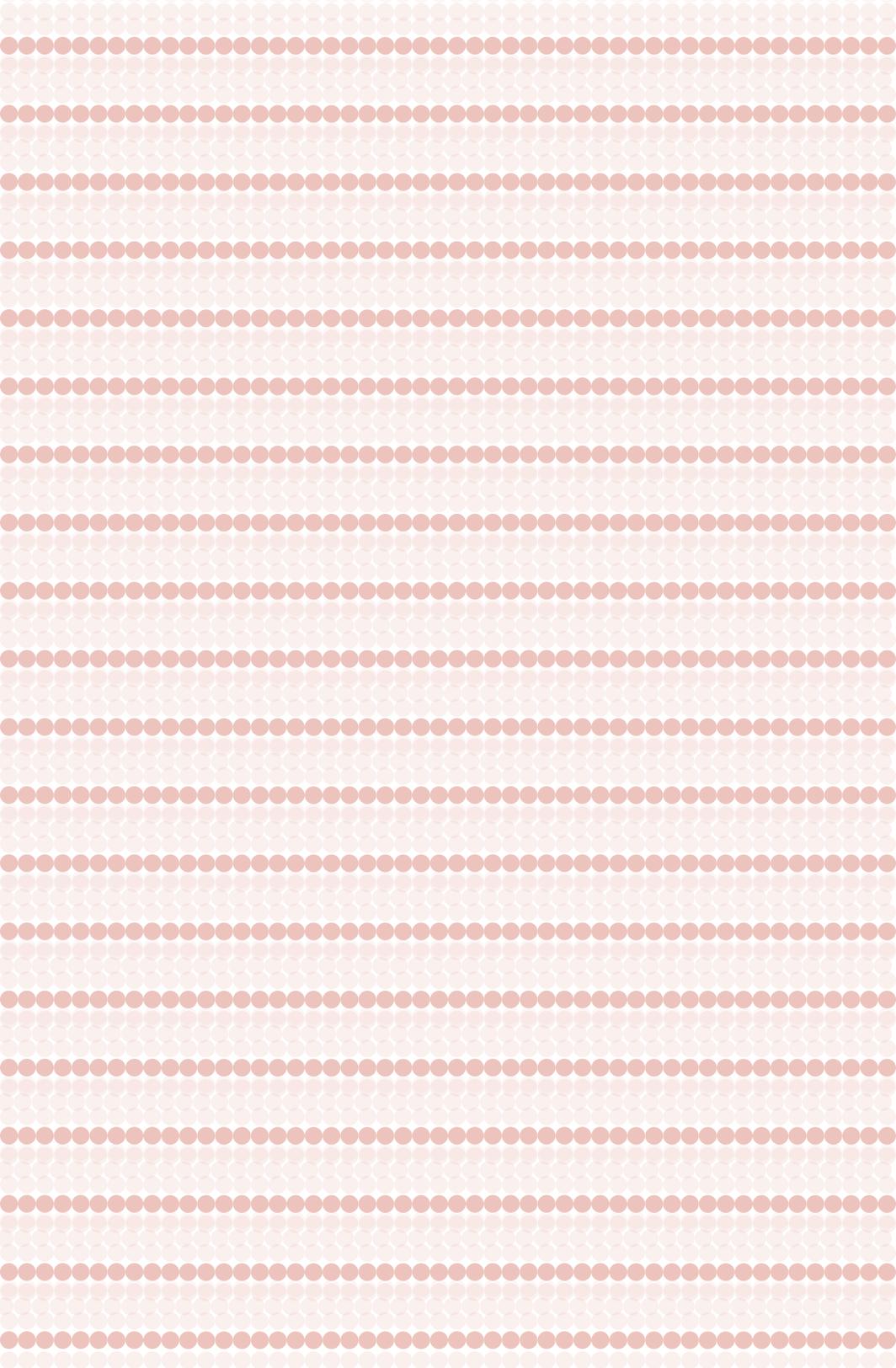


Navigating & Regulating
Children's Big Emotions



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DOCTOR'S NOTE

Navigating your child's emotions can be extremely challenging. It requires you not only to understand emotions in general but also to recognize how they play out individually in your child. We're honored that you've chosen to join us for this program so we can be a resource and support to you along the way. We're ready to help you have a more joyful and peaceful parenting experience.

The information used on our website and within this program is not intended to serve as medical advice and should never be substituted for face-to-face, personalized advice from a medical professional. All children and families are different. Remember to ask your child's pediatrician or behavioral health specialist for help regarding specific questions you have about your child's development, needs, and behavioral challenges as they arise.

We believe in you and your family.

You've got this, Mama!



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7 Ways to Parent with Intention

We are our kids' coaches. When you are a good coach, you think about where your players are going, not where they are now. You work with them toward the goals you share, and you consider it your role to teach and guide. We have to think about our parenting in the same goal-oriented way if we want to be successful.

Does that mean we just let our kids run wild, hurting others along the way with no accountability? Not at all. Does that mean we bend to every unhealthy request our kids make? Not in the least. Do we never get angry or upset? That's impossible. It does mean that we must relate to our children as fellow people who usually act out of feelings and needs, not spite.

It means:

1. We remember that, in 99 percent of cases, our children's behaviors do not constitute emergencies. There is almost always time to stop, calm down, and then move to action.
2. We reality check our deepest fears and disappointments. In those whirlwind moments of parenting, the fears that we've been storing down in the depths of our subconsciousness often spring up to the forefront of our minds. But while fears like, *My child doesn't have a bone of empathy in her body, or My kids will never love each other*, may seem real in the moment, they are hardly ever based in reality. Remember, aiming for perfectly behaved kids is unrealistic and unfair. We can't let our fears dictate our in-the-moment parenting responses.

3. We own our own emotions and model healthy ways to deal with the feelings that rise to the surface when we're triggered. It's perfectly okay to say to your child, "Mommy feels disappointed and angry right now. I need to take a second to calm down." In fact, when we consistently acknowledge what's going on for us inside and demonstrate how to deal with the raw feelings we have in nonviolent, non-harmful ways, we are showing our kids how they can do the same.

4. We teach kids to label their emotions. We point out that, "Jayda is frustrated she can't play with that toy right now," or, "Owen is sad he can't have an ice cream today," so our kids learn to recognize and articulate how they're feeling, a first step in dealing with those emotions.

5. We use authoritative parenting. That means we set firm limits and rules about what is okay and what is not. When our kids use an inappropriate method to express their emotions and meet their needs, we help them find an alternative solution. "We don't hit. Can you think of another option?"

6. We use time-outs sparingly and natural consequences wisely. Sometimes a time-out is necessary, but it doesn't have to be an angry, dragged-out power struggle. It can be a chance to help kids stop and get control of themselves. The same goes for consequences: they can be constructive. When we set a consequence for an action, we make it logical and realistic (like taking away a privilege or helping to clean up a mess that was made), not far-fetched or punitive ("That's it! No play dates for a month!").

7. We allow, whenever possible, our children to brainstorm their own solutions. "You'll need your hair brushed before we can leave. You want to keep playing right now. What should we do?"



Which of these seven principles are hardest for you to practice as a parent?

What additional information or support do you need?

Navigating Our Kids' Emotions Starts with Navigating Our Own

It's so much easier to attend to our children's needs, emotions, and challenges when we've attended to our own. The basics: sleep, a support network and a little grace, go a **long** way toward achieving that.

Just ask Carla Naumburg, author of *How to Stop Losing Your Sh*t With Your Kids*. In fact, she says these factors are essential for handling our kids' emotions in a way that feels controlled and is aligned with our values and goals. I couldn't agree more. (Daily movement, a simplified schedule, and an understanding of our own triggers helps, too!)



Are you building a village of support around you? Friends, family, medical professionals, or mental health professionals?

Are you cutting yourself some slack? (We'll talk more about this later on in the program.)



Overscheduling

Before we dive into strategies for addressing our kids' big emotions, we have to attend to the basics. It's difficult to emphasize just how important paying attention to each and every one of these factors is, but they form the foundation for creating happy, healthy children. So listen up, Mama!

When your life is too busy, your kids will be overwhelmed and more likely to have meltdowns and big emotions they have to work harder to handle. Let's look at how you're spending your time as a family now and how you can streamline your monthly activities to make room for what matters most to you.

Monthly Calendar Activity

Use the calendar on the following page to write out activities you and your family have planned for the next month and coordinate the activity type with the following colors:

"Have-to's"

IN RED

Obligatory or Stressful

"Want-to's"

IN BLUE

Relaxing + Enjoyable

"Flexible"

IN GREEN

Unscheduled

Assess the balance of **RED** and **BLUE**, of stressful and of relaxing. Are there **RED** activities you need to take away from your family calendar? Are there **BLUE** activities you need to schedule in?

When you look at the available time you have, are you happy with the way you're spending it?

MONTHLY CALENDAR ACTIVITY

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday



Sleep



Getting enough sleep on a regular basis contributes to improved emotional regulation and behavior but also to better attention, learning, memory, quality of life, and mental and physical health.

Make sure to turn off all screens thirty minutes before your child's bedtime, and don't let him have a television, computer, or other screen in his bedroom. Develop a consistent bedtime routine, including brushing his teeth, reading, and going to bed at the same time each night.

Amount of Sleep Recommended to Promote Optimal Health

AGE	RECOMMENDED SLEEP PER 24 HOURS
4-12 MONTHS	12-16 HOURS
1-2 YEARS	11-14 HOURS <i>(including naps!)</i>
3-5 YEARS	10-13 HOURS <i>(including naps!)</i>
6-12 YEARS	9-12 HOURS
13-18 YEARS	8-10 HOURS

YOUR TURN

How well-rested does your child seem to you?

Is he/she meeting the recommended sleep guidelines?

How can you promote better sleep for your family?

Are there any areas of sleep hygiene you need to attend to for your child so you can optimize sleep?



Exercise

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends all children have time for physical activity each day to help them prevent health issues like obesity, heart disease, and diabetes. Increased focus in school, improved sleep, diffused stress, and improved self-esteem are all additional benefits of consistent exercise.

Physical Activities by Age ¹

INFANTS	TODDLERS	PRESCHOOLERS
Tummy time while awake.	Neighborhood Walks or Free Outside Play	Tumbling, Throwing, & Catching
30+ Minutes Throughout Each Day	3+ Hours Throughout Each Day	3+ Hours Including 1 Hour of Moderate to Vigorous Activity
ELEMENTARY	MIDDLE SCHOOLERS	TEENAGERS
Free Play and Organized Sports Focused on Fun	Socialization Activities and Versatile Sports	Activities Encouraging Socialization and Healthy Competition
1 Hour Each Day Including 3 Days of Muscle + Bone Strengthening	1 Hour Each Day Including 3 Days of Muscle + Bone Strengthening	3+ Hours Including 1 Hour of Moderate to Vigorous Activity

YOUR TURN

What physical activities does your child like to do?

Is your child meeting the physical activity guidelines for his/her age?

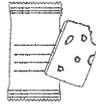
Are you or your child facing any barriers to meeting the guidelines?

What support, information, or resources do you need to increase your child's physical activity?



Food

Creating a healthy relationship with food promotes good nutrition and helps your child avoid behavioral challenges.



BABIES READY TO START SOLID FOODS

1. Offer Varied Foods From an Early Age: The AAP recommends starting solid foods at four to six months of age, closer to six months if possible. It also recommends waiting two to three days between introducing new foods to observe for allergic reactions. But, starting at six months, you can introduce virtually any food except honey and cups of cow's milk. (You have to wait until your child is one year old for those.)

There are, in other words, no “adult” flavors and “baby” flavors, just kid and baby consistencies. Why not offer pureed mushrooms, eggplant, artichokes, kale, or yams? In fact, the American Academy of Allergy, Asthma, and Immunology² now recommends even highly allergenic foods like shellfish, dairy, and eggs be introduced earlier rather than later. We know that food preferences start within the womb and that giving our children a wide variety of flavors and textures early on promotes a diverse palate and better nutrition in the long run.³

2. Don't Give Up Too Soon: An expression of disgust does not predict a lifelong dislike of a particular food. In fact, it can take multiple exposures before babies develop an affinity for a new flavor.

TODDLERS

1. Model Good Behavior: Your kids are listening to what you say, noticing how you treat other people, and yes, watching what you eat. That means that if you want them to eat more healthily, you might need to adjust what is on your plate. It won't work, for example, to order a cheeseburger and a soda for yourself every time you go out as a family if you want your kids to eventually do the opposite. When you eat healthy, high-quality foods, on the other hand, you signal to your children that healthy, high-quality foods are normal. Some studies suggest dads are especially important when it comes to setting a healthy eating example,⁴ but that doesn't mean you're off the hook, Mama.

2. Recognize the Responsibilities You and Your Child Each Bring to the Table: As a parent, your responsibility is to provide healthy options for your child at consistent intervals during the day. As a child, your responsibility is to choose how much of any given food you eat at any given time. If your child decides she doesn't want the green beans tonight? That's okay. Just don't offer a replacement food when she won't eat them and definitely don't use those beans as a reward for dessert. In *Fearless Feeding*, authors Jill Castle and Maryann Jacobsen talk about how critical it is to establish this kind of feeding relationship with our kids and how it's yet another way to use an authoritative approach in all areas of our parenting:

"Parents determine the what, when, and where of feeding, and children decide the whether and how much of eating. It's based on trust and choice: the child trusts that the parent will come through with reliable meals, the parent trusts that the child knows how much to eat — and the kid ultimately understands

that he has the choice to eat or not.”⁵

3. Remember That Today’s Food Choices Don’t Dictate Tomorrow’s: Most kids go through phases when they’re pickier about what they eat or less interested in food overall. Sometimes in a toddler’s mind, green equals a poisonous plant (or it just equals something new), which equals bad. Instead of creating power struggles at one isolated meal, take the long view: you are raising individuals who savor what they consume, who use it as fuel to drive their lives, and who have the freedom to enjoy it fully.

GRADE-SCHOOL AND OLDER CHILDREN

1. Follow the nutrition guidelines from the AAP for grade-school children to make sure they have their weekly nutrient intake covered. (See examples on page 30.)

2. Encourage your children whenever possible to help you with planning and preparing meals: Allowing young kids to contribute to family food preparation contributes to healthier eating overall. Pick a favorite cookbook or family-friendly cooking website, and work your way through it to avoid ruts. Use lazier days when you’re not working and they don’t have extracurricular activities to do a little meal prep — spending time mixing and mincing in the kitchen lets you bond together while setting up your family for a week of healthy eating.

3. Give older kids the responsibility of planning, purchasing, and preparing a full meal for the entire family once a week: Set them up for success by providing certain parameters like including a variety of food groups. Invite them to join you

in grocery shopping (either online or at the store). Then, have them choose a new recipe for the next week.

4. Grow a garden, even if it's a mini one: Kids who help grow and make their food have a richer experience with source ingredients and are often less picky. Even three-year-olds can help you garden. Let them taste the mint or cherry tomatoes directly from your backyard plants after you wash them. They can even help you decide which seeds to buy early in the season (creating more buy-in). If you don't have an outdoor space or room for a garden, consider a windowsill herb garden or simply take your kids to farmer's markets to expose them to where their food is coming from.

WEEKLY NUTRIENT INTAKE EXAMPLES ⁶

VEGETABLES:

3-5 servings per day. A serving may consist of 1 cup of raw leafy vegetables, 3/4 cup of vegetable juice, or 1/2 cup of other vegetables raw or cooked.

FRUITS:

2-4 servings per day. A serving may consist of 1/2 cup of sliced fruit, 3/4 cup of fruit juice, or a medium-size whole fruit, like an apple, banana, or pear.

BREAD, CEREAL, OR PASTA:

6-11 servings per day. Each serving should equal 1 slice of bread, 1/2 cup of rice or pasta, or 1 ounce of cereal.

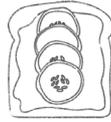
PROTEIN FOODS:

2-3 servings of 2-3 ounces of cooked lean meat, poultry, or fish per day. A serving in this group may also consist of 1/2 cup of cooked dry beans, one egg, or 2 tablespoons of peanut butter for each ounce of lean meat.

DAIRY PRODUCTS:

2-3 servings per day of 1 cup of low-fat milk or yogurt, or 1 1/2 ounces of natural cheese.

Involving Young Kids in Family Meal Prep



DELEGATE ACCORDING TO AGE AND SKILL LEVEL

Older kids might like setting the table or creating a beautiful fruit platter.

MEASURE PORTIONS & HELP WITH MIXING

Involve younger kids in chopping, peeling, and stirring with age-appropriate knives and child-sized whisks and spoons.

LET THEM LEARN CHOICES & RESPONSIBILITIES

Let your kids look through recipe books to choose side dishes or sauces on their own. Expect some mess but also expect some help cleaning up

ALLOW EXPERIMENTATION

Letting kids add a few extra ingredients to your planned recipe can literally spice things up for them, allowing kids to flex their scientific and culinary muscles.

STAY AWAY FROM REPETITION

Switch things up each time you cook. If one child always empties the dishwasher or always uses the mixer, food prep will be less interesting and kids won't have the advantage of learning multiple skills.

YOUR TURN

Does your child have a healthy relationship with food?

What support, information, or resources do you need to optimize your child's nutrition?

How can your child help you in the kitchen, in the garden, or with food preparation?

How can you make creating healthy meals and providing healthy snacks more efficient and more fun for your family?



Managing Screen Time and Minimizing Screen Use



WIN THE UPHILL BATTLE WITH TECH

For better or worse, we live in a digital world, and parents often struggle to find the balance between healthy and unhealthy exposure to digital devices. When used well, technology fosters creativity and flexibility. When overused, we get the cautionary tales we've all heard. Here's how to use technology to your family's advantage while minimizing negative effects on behavior.

- 1. Model Good Screen Behavior:** Kids do what they see. And that includes teenagers. If Mom and Dad are texting and scrolling all day, their kids will want to, too. Use them when you have to, but be intentional about putting away your devices when you don't really need them.
- 2. Deepen Your Connection with Your Kids:** In this modern world, we have to create space to connect more deeply with our kids. It's not going to happen on its own. Mealtimes, bedtimes, outings, vacations, holiday rituals — when we focus on using these moments as ways to build community and connection, we glean their true value. Connectedness helps with emotional regulation, self-soothing, and other skills that are lacking from our children's digital experience.

3. Learn to Value Negative Emotions and Failure: It's not our job to make sure our kids are always happy or even to make sure they're perfectly well-behaved. It is our job to make sure we teach them to trust they will be okay when happiness comes and goes. How do we do that? We let our kids be upset occasionally, we let them work through disappointments, we allow them to experience things not going their way early on so that, years down the road, they can handle life's curve-balls with more grace and perspective.

The other side to this is letting kids be bored now and then, letting them feel uncertain about how to fill their free time. The creativity and problem solving that happens in that space is crucial for developing the sort of coping skills that they will need throughout their adolescence when they are faced with a thousand poor or risky choices for filling their free time.

4. Limit Tech Use: Of course, letting our kids be bored — given that we could instantly take it away — means that their whining and pestering is what usually fills that space. And any good modern mommy has times when she caves just to get that moment of peace. That's where these American Academy of Pediatrics recommendations come in handy on the next page.



AAP Screen Time Recommendations ⁷



- Avoid digital-media use (except video chatting) in children younger than 18 to 24 months. If you want to introduce digital media, choose high-quality programming and use it together with your child. Avoid solo media use in this age group.
- Do not feel pressured to introduce technology early; interfaces are so intuitive that children will figure them out quickly once they start using them at home or in school.
- For children 2 to 5 years of age, limit screen use to one hour per day of high-quality programming. Watch it together, and help your children understand what they are seeing, and help them apply what they learn to the world around them.
- Avoid fast-paced programs (young children do not understand them as well), apps with lots of distracting content, and any violent content.
- Turn off televisions and other devices when not in use and avoid using media as the only way to calm your child. Although there are intermittent times (e.g., medical procedures, airplane flights) when media is useful as a soothing strategy, there is concern that repeated use of it as a calming strategy can lead to problems with setting limits and with children developing the ability to regulate their emotions. Ask your pediatrician for help if needed.

- Monitor children’s media content and what apps are used or downloaded. Test apps beforehand, play together, and ask your child what he thinks about the app.
- Keep bedrooms, mealtimes, and parent-child playtimes screen free. Parents can set a “Do not Disturb” option on their phones during these times.
- Turn off all screens at least one hour before bedtime, and remove devices from bedrooms before bed.



YOUR TURN

Is screen use a battle in your family?

What limits do you need to set for yourself or for your child to minimize non-educational screen use?

What alternative activities (educational/exploratory/play) does your child enjoy that do not involve screen time?

What support, resources, and information do you need to make a change in your family's relationship with screens?



Finding Your Own Parenting Style



WITH AMY STOEBER, PH.D.

When it comes to parenting, we all have our own approaches. But to understand what you're doing well and where you can improve, the experts have identified four primary parenting styles: authoritative, permissive, authoritarian, and neglectful.

	HIGH EXPECTATIONS FOR SELF-CONTROL	LOW EXPECTATIONS FOR SELF-CONTROL
HIGH SENSITIVITY	Authoritative: Respectful of Child's Opinions but Maintains Clear Boundaries	Permissive: Indulgent, Without Discipline
LOW SENSITIVITY	Authoritarian: Strict Disciplinarian	Neglectful: Emotionally Uninvolved and Doesn't Set Rules

Learn more about Dr. Amy [here](#).

Authoritative Parenting: An Evidence-Based Approach

- Parents who practice an authoritative parenting style with their children balance warmth and support with firm limits.
- Children raised with authoritative parenting are more likely to be resilient and less likely to engage in risky behaviors.
- Dr. Kenneth Ginsburg described this well-studied, effective approach in his book, *Building Resilience in Children and Teens*:

"This parent sets the tone and reasonable limits, expects good behavior, offers a lot of love, and encourages kids to make choices and be independent, but when it comes to the big issues, it's, 'Do as I say.'" ⁸



Authoritative Parents Focus on Resilience

When you're an authoritative parent, you parent according to your long-range goals for your children. Dr. Ginsburg describes this as having essentially seven parenting goals that help children become, "the thirty-five-year-olds we want them to be."⁹ Authoritative parents, he says, strive to help their children develop what he calls "The Seven C's of Resilience."

YOUR TURN

Which parenting style do you most often use?

How about your partner or other caregivers who are responsible for your child?

How well is your current parenting style working for you and your child?

What support, information, or resources do you need to develop a more evidence-based, authoritative parenting style if you don't already parent this way?

1

COMPETENCE

WHAT IS IT?

The ability to effectively handle various situations; acquired through experience.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Allows a child to trust his or her own judgments to make responsible choices and face difficult situations.

2

CONFIDENCE

WHAT IS IT?

A solid belief in one's own abilities.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Allows a child to face and cope with life's challenges.

3

CONNECTION

WHAT IS IT?

Close ties to family, friends, school, and community.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Allows a child to avoid seeking destructive alternatives to attention.

4

CHARACTER

WHAT IS IT?

A fundamental sense of right and wrong that allows children to stick to their own values and demonstrate a caring attitude toward others.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Enjoins a sense of self-worth and confidence.

5

CONTRIBUTION

WHAT IS IT?

An understanding that, as an individual, you can make the world a better place.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Gives a child a sense of purpose and motivates him to take actions and make choices that will improve the world.

6

COPING

WHAT IS IT?

The capacity to face and handle life challenges with a wide array of strategies.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

A child who learns to cope with stress is better prepared to overcome challenges.

7

CONTROL

WHAT IS IT?

An understanding that one can control the outcomes of one's own decisions.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

A child who sees control as an external force becomes passive and pessimistic. A child who sees control as an internal force becomes active and optimistic.

YOUR TURN

Which of the Seven C's is a natural strength for your child?

Which of the Seven C's could your child continue to work on?

What opportunities could you provide to strengthen your child's resilience in that area?

What barriers might keep you from focusing on that area of resilience for your child?



Spending Special Time with Our Kids



When we prioritize moments to intentionally focus on our relationships with our children, practicing Special Time is one of the best ways we can make the most of it.

Special Time can mean setting aside five to twenty minutes per day to remove distractions, get on the floor or sit at the table with our kids, and play. We let our kids lead us, refrain from using any judgment statements (good or bad), and spend time doing what they want to do.¹⁰ As opposed to a time out, when you intentionally remove your attention for bad behavior, it's a time in with your child, when you intentionally focus on your child and your child alone.

This doesn't have to be complicated. When your child is a baby, this may be as simple as you getting on your hands and knees next to his activity mat. When he's a toddler, it can literally mean playing with toys on the floor. Set a timer, turn your phone off — make this time only about you and your child. As your children get older, floor time can morph into mommy-son dates to the coffee shop or mommy-daughter dates to the pool. When we remove the distractions of the outside world and focus just on our children for discrete periods of time they can count on, we build a foundation of memories and mindfulness, ultimately building resilience and connection.

Special Time Ideas

PRESCHOOL KIDS

- > Coloring, Drawing, Painting
- > Trip to the Local Park
- > Backyard Picnic or Tea Party
- > Reading
- > Sidewalk Chalk
- > Vegetable Garden Planting
- > Pretend Beauty Shop
- > Water Play with Measuring Cups and Bowls
- > Indoor/Outdoor Scavenger Hunt

ELEMENTARY

- > Pottery Painting, Drawing, or Painting
- > Bike Ride Around the Neighborhood
- > Gardening
- > Sunset Watching or Stargazing
- > Board Games, Puzzles, or Card Games
- > Backyard Camping Trip with S'mores and a Tent
- > Daisy Chains at the Local Park
- > Baking and Cooking Together
- > Reading at Home or the Local Bookstore
- > Home Karaoke or Dance Party

PRE-ADOLESCENTS AND ADOLESCENTS

- > Coffee Shop Date
- > Breakfast, Lunch or Dinner Date
- > Drive to the Beach, Woods, or Lake for an Overnight or Day Trip
- > Local Hike or Run
- > Volunteer Together
- > Reading Together
- > Board Games/Card Games
- > Baking/Cooking Together
- > Online or In-Person Class Together

OTHER ACTIVITY IDEAS:



Parental Behaviors During Special Time ¹¹



SET YOUR TIMER FOR 5 TO 20 MINUTES AND:

- Turn off your phone and the TV.
- Have any siblings cared for by another person during floor time.
- Remove all distractions.
- Let your child lead during playtime — she is your playmate during this time.

DURING FLOOR TIME, AVOID THE FOLLOWING CRITICISMS:

- Don't say, "Stop crying!" for example.
- Unnecessary information questions.
- Don't ask things like, "Do you want to play with the train?"
- Tone-of-voice questions. Child: "I'm going to draw with purple."
You (don't say): "You're going to use purple?"
- Unnecessary commands. Don't say, "Draw me a house."

DURING FLOOR TIME, FOCUS ON:

- Specific praise. Say, "Good job putting the toys away!"
- Paraphrasing what your child tells you. Child: "I drew a tree."
You say: "Yes! You drew a big tree."
- Pointing out appropriate behavior. (Say, "You drew a train.")

YOUR TURN

What Special Time activities would your child like best?

When could you make space in your daily schedule for Special Time?

What are the barriers you face to making Special Time a regular part of your weekly routine?

What support, information, and resources do you need to make Special Time happen for your family?



Common Behavioral Challenges by Age



1-2 YEARS OLD

BEHAVIORAL CHALLENGES

- Biting, hitting, or pinching to express excitement or frustration.
- Learning cause and effect.
- Making sense of the world by exploring.

SOLUTIONS

- Childproof your home so your baby has a safe place to test things out and discover without interruptions.
- Teach her to express herself verbally versus acting out physically in anger or frustration.
- Be positive when she learns a new skill or realizes her actions cause something to happen.
- Offer toys that teach about size, shape, and color, like nesting toys, stacking blocks, and common kitchen containers.
- Distract and redirect whenever possible.
- Use the word “no” judiciously.
- Celebrate experiments and excitement as she discovers the world.

2-3 YEARS OLD

BEHAVIORAL CHALLENGES

- Realizing he is a separate individual from parents and caregivers.
- Likely to assert himself.
- Likely to communicate likes and dislikes.
- Wants to act independently.
- Still developing language skills to help express ideas, wants, and needs.
- Still learning to understand logic.
- Hard time with waiting and self-control.

SOLUTIONS

- Talk about their feelings.
- Offer ideas for how to manage strong emotions.
- Empathize.
- Use visual aids when he needs to wait or has to be patient (like a timer or a stop sign).
- Let him make as many age-appropriate choices as possible.
- Practice self-control by playing turn-taking games and using pretend play.



4-5 YEARS OLD

BEHAVIORAL CHALLENGES

- Increasing independence.
- Able to distinguish fantasy from make-believe.
- Wants to be like friends.
- Wants to please.
- Demanding at times yet cooperative at times.

SOLUTIONS

- Praise desirable behaviors and give less attention to undesirable actions.
- Be consistent with limit-setting and discipline from all caregivers.
- Stick to a regular sleep, activity, eating, and exercise schedule.
- Give choices whenever possible.
- Use a warm and loving but firm tone when redirection is needed.



YOUR TURN

Is your child facing any age-specific behavioral challenges now?

Are there other moms in your parenting village you can connect with who have similar age-specific behavioral challenges?

Does your child appear to be meeting developmental milestones appropriately?

What additional support, information, or resources do you need to address your child's development?



When You Want Your Child to Cooperate:



BABIES READY TO START SOLID FOODS

1. **Set the Mood:** Stop what you're doing and move to your child. Make and maintain eye contact when you're giving directions. Use a firm but warm tone of voice. Talk slowly and stay in control. Don't yell or whine yourself.

2. **Give Clear Directives:** Avoid vague instructions (e.g., "Be careful"). We can't assume that kids know that this means not to walk into the street. Be specific: "Do not walk out in the middle of the street." Use your child's name. Use as few words as possible: "Lisa, jumping on your bed is not allowed. Hop off." If your child does not respond, repeat the instruction again with a concrete negative consequence attached: "Hop off, or, you won't be able to watch your favorite show tonight."

Avoid Requests: Don't phrase instructions in the form of a question. For example, instead of asking, "Would you like to take your bath now?" say, "It's time to take your bath now," or "Go to your bath now."

3. **Give One Instruction at a Time:** Refrain from giving more than one instruction at a time (e.g., "Make your bed, clean your room, pick up your toys, and afterwards take out the trash"). Your child can't remember all of that at once and may become overwhelmed, making him less likely to cooperate.

4. Describe the Positive Consequence: Let your child know what good thing will happen when he follows your directions. (e.g., “After you pick up your dirty clothes, you can go outside and ride your bike.”)

5. Offer Choices When Possible: Giving kids choices gives them some control, which can minimize the possibility of a power struggle and make them more likely to comply overall. Provide two clear alternative choices that will fix the problem behavior he is exhibiting (e.g., jumping on the bed): “You can go outside and ride your bike or sit on your floor and play with Legos.”

6. Give Enough Time: Don’t rush it. Let your child have a moment to hear what you’re asking him to do and to respond to your request. Ask your child to think about it and make the right choice, then walk away. Walking away keeps you from standing over your child demanding instant reform. Any further attention to the problem behavior gives the behavior far more recognition than it deserves.

When Your Child is Whining, Complaining, or Having a Mild Tantrum:

1. Actively Ignore Negative Behaviors: Kids love attention and they will take negative attention from you over no attention all day, any day. When your child whines and you react by raising your voice, acting annoyed, lecturing, getting angry, or yelling, your child then has your negative attention and will likely repeat the behavior. Yelling can seem effective in the moment because it stops children from behaving right then, but it doesn’t stop them from repeating the behavior in the future.

Do you end up yelling or lecturing your child about the same problem behaviors over and over again? That means yelling is not working.

To decrease your child's mild negative behaviors (whining, complaining, or having mild tantrums), try instead to **actively ignore** them. Note: this should not be used with behaviors that may cause harm to your child or to someone else if they continue or increase (e.g., hitting).

2. Praise Positive Behaviors: Instead of paying attention to the negative behaviors, praise the positive behaviors you'd like to see when they occur (e.g., "Great job asking nicely," or "Nice work listening when I told you 'no.'")

Praise the desired behavior **immediately** after it occurs. Praise is more effective if it happens closer in time to the behavior.

Praise the desired behavior consistently — each and every time it occurs — when you're first trying to work on it. Once the behavior is established, you can praise it less often, but remember, praise for the positive behavior must always be greater and more consistent than attention to the negative behavior.

Praise the desired behavior using specific language, and avoid using negative add-ons. (e.g., Say, "Thank you for staying quiet while I was on the phone," not, "Thank you for staying quiet while I was on the phone. Why don't you do that all the time?") When you tack on a negative comment, you mistakenly focus on the problem behavior, which makes the praise less positive than it could otherwise be.

Praise the desired behavior as **enthusiastically** as possible. Children's negative behaviors often receive loud, exaggerated parental responses. Try to respond to positive behaviors with similarly loud and exaggerated displays of positive attention.

Focus on your child's **efforts** and **behaviors**. (e.g., "You worked hard on that homework. I'm proud of you.") Avoid using superlatives (e.g., "You're the best," or "You're the smartest"), and avoid praising physical characteristics (e.g., "You're the prettiest").

When Your Child Gets Emotionally Overwhelmed ("Flips Her Lid"):

We've all been there. You're on an outing. The kids are excited. Something goes awry and...your child just loses it. Usually in front of a lot of people. Whether you're experiencing a very public tantrum or the sort of soul-crushing regularity that accompanies childhood tantrums, the key to coming out the other side is something known as Emotion Coaching. Emotion Coaching was developed by Dr. John Gottman. It's a way to teach our kids how to navigate their feelings and develop problem-solving skills.

1. Emotion Coaching: Be aware of your child's emotion. Our children's behaviors are often a reflection of the way they're feeling, just like our behaviors as adults often are manifestations of our inner emotions. Sometimes it's easy to tell how our kids are truly feeling, but sometimes their true, tender emotions are masked by a more bristly outward shell. Recognize that when your child is acting angry or defiant, that may just be a surface emotion. There may be a deeper emotion to recognize like fear, sadness, loneliness, or disappointment.¹²

2. Recognize Your Child's Expression of Emotion as a Perfect Moment for Intimacy and Teaching: Though it's tempting to react to our children negatively when they have big emotions, to get flustered and frustrated by them, or to match their emotions with our own, consider a different approach. When our children show us their emotions, they are inviting us to teach them how to work through them and grow from them.

3. Listen with Empathy and Validate Your Child's Feelings. I'm going to make a heartfelt plea on this one: actually do it. It can be one of the most powerful steps. Like us, our kids are a mix of emotions and logic, but the logical part is waaaay underdeveloped compared to (most!) adults. You've gotta read the book, *The Whole-Brain Child*, for more on this. Seriously, it kinda changed my whole approach to those super intense meltdowns and, even worse, tantrums where you feel like they might have actually done a case study on your kid when they developed the plot for *Jekyll and Hyde*.

The point is, human beings have feelings, and even if they seem unfounded or silly to you, they are absolutely FOR REAL for your little love. The simple phrase, "I hear you," or "I understand you're disappointed," or "I know, honey," acknowledges that your child's feelings matter without compromising the limits you've set. Even better? Try, "You're feeling frustrated," or "The feeling you're having is called sadness." When our kids feel like they are understood and that we are leaning into their emotions, when they see we're not trying to save them from their emotions or ignore them, it allows our kids to listen to us when we offer solutions (or to problem-solve their own solutions to their predicaments).

4. Help Your Child Learn to Label Her Emotions With Words: As we validate our children's feelings and put words to their

emotions, they learn to do the same for themselves. This will not happen overnight. A two-year-old will generally not come up to you and say, "I feel tired and sad." She will instead scream at you when you don't get her yogurt squeezey right away and when she can't figure out how to pull her shoes on correctly. That's okay, Mama. You are planting seeds. Seeds that will grow into plants and blossom down the line. Sometimes you've got to just wait for all that validating, narrating, and labeling to pay off. (I promise it will!)

5. Help Your Child to Solve Problems or Deal with Upsetting Situations: Set Limits. For this one, you want to make sure you and your partner are on the same page about what is okay and what is not okay. (Try to do this in advance rather than in the moment.) In our house, we are clear about not letting one person's negative behavior ruin an experience for another person. For example, our kids need some time to cool off if it gets to the point where no one else can enjoy his/her meal, or we are being followed around by loud and constant whining. Note the cooling off period is not a punishment. Unless your child starts using physical aggression (hitting, punching, biting, pushing a plate of food off the table) or verbal aggression (saying they hate you, calling you names), your child should not be in trouble for whining/melting down. How would you feel if you were upset about something and someone told you, basically, to stop being so upset about it? Probably pretty resentful. Children do need to know, however, that they cannot ruin the rest of the family's current experience (dinner, movie night, walk down the street) with their behavior.

Offer a Break or Calm Down: If you get to the point where everyone needs to cool off you can say something simple like,

"If you want to continue whining/having a fit, you have the option to go in the other room and take a break/cool off. If you want to be in this room with everyone, you'll need to calm down."

Identify the Problem: Ask your child what she needs or is trying to make happen. "Are you trying to get my attention honey? What do you need? Did you want to have that book your sister was holding?"

Think of Ways to Solve the Problem: Let your kid take the lead here. You can offer suggestions but let her think of potential solutions, too. In my house, it goes like this, "Hmm, how can we solve this problem?" Sometimes, I need to help a little more: "Your sister is holding the book right now but what else could you play with? What did you do last time you wanted the book but your sister had it?" Sometimes, since she is still young, I go as far as to say, "Your sister is taking a turn with the book but you can do ____ or ____."

Evaluate the Outcomes: If you need to, help your child weigh the potential solutions but let your child be the one who chooses in the end. You can guide her by asking what the potential outcomes would be based on her options. (e.g., "What would happen if you tried that?") You can check out [The Gottman Institute](#) if you want to dive really deep into this.

Stick to Your Guns: If you are going to change your mind about giving into a whine/demand, it needs to happen **before** things escalate. The early stages of requests are the time to negotiate and use collaborative problem solving.¹³ Once the whine/demand is in full force, the worst thing you could do is

to give in. That just teaches our kids that we can be convinced, they just need to work a little harder and it will happen. It's okay to be flexible, and in fact I highly recommend it (especially with highly sensitive or explosive kids who can't regulate their emotions easily), but timing is everything on this.



When Your Child Crosses the Line: Hurts Someone or Something Else



USE EFFECTIVE TIME-OUTS

- Be positive about time-outs when you explain them to your child. Tell your child a time-out is designed to help kids remember a particular rule.
- Use dolls or role-play to show your child how time-out works.
- Start by using time-out for only one problem behavior or important rule (for example, no hitting others).
- Choose a boring place, free of distractions, for time-out.
- Each and every time (consistency is key) the problem behavior happens, call a time-out. Most importantly, do it in a calm, unemotional manner.
- Don't yell, raise your voice, or add extra comments when giving a time-out.
- Set a timer. A good rule of thumb is to implement a time-out lasting one minute per year of age (shorter is better for younger kids/overly active kids).
- Actively ignore your child during time-outs and take away all privileges. Remember, some attention (even if it's negative) is better than no attention to a child. If you need to, repeat a phrase like, "Not until you're done with your time-out."
- Don't lecture your child after the time-out.
- Wait one to two minutes after time-out is completed to give positive praise for positive behaviors your child is exhibiting in place of the previous negative behaviors.
- If your child refuses to do a time-out, increase the number of minutes or give choices for more severe consequences. For example, you can offer no TV that evening or taking away a favorite toy that night.

When You Feel Overwhelmed

As moms and as people, we have to make space for ourselves. I'm not only talking about devoting time to re-centering and creating self-care routines that allow us regular opportunities to reconnect with ourselves. I'm also talking about making space for our feelings, needs, and wants when our kids are acting out or having big emotions. When we feel overwhelmed by our kids' behaviors, we have to learn to treat ourselves like a best friend would. We have to practice mindful self-compassion.

"Self-compassion involves treating yourself the way you would treat a friend who is having a hard time — even if your friend blew it or is feeling inadequate, or is just facing a tough life challenge. Western culture places great emphasis on being kind to friends, family, and neighbors who are struggling. Not so when it comes to ourselves. Self-compassion is a practice in which we learn to be a good friend to ourselves when we need it most — to become an inner ally rather than an inner enemy." ¹⁴

- Kristen Neff, PhD, and Christopher Germer, PhD, The Mindful Self- Compassion Workbook, pg 10-11





The Core Elements of Mindful Self-Compassion Include:

1. **Self-Kindness:** “Rather than being harshly critical when we notice personal shortcomings, we are supportive and encouraging and aim to protect ourselves from harm. Instead of attacking and berating ourselves for being inadequate, we offer warmth and unconditional acceptance.”¹⁵
2. **Common Humanity:** “Self-compassion honors the unavoidable fact that life entails suffering, for everyone, without exception.”¹⁶
3. **Mindfulness:** “Mindfulness involves being aware of moment-to-moment experience in a clear and balanced manner. It means being open to the reality of the present moment, allowing all thoughts, emotions, and sensations to enter awareness without resistance or avoidance.”¹⁷

So, just how self-compassionate are you? You probably have a general idea, but it’s nice to have a quantitative evaluation as well. This way you can identify if and where you need to adjust your outlook.

- Kristen Neff, PhD, and Christopher Germer, PhD, *The Mindful Self- Compassion Workbook*, pg 10-11

Self-Compassion Scale

Used with permission from The Center for Mindful Self-Compassion ¹⁸

The following statements describe how you act toward yourself in difficult times. Read each statement before answering, and to the left of each item indicate how often you behave in the stated manner on a scale of 1 to 5.

ALMOST NEVER

ALMOST ALWAYS

1

2

3

4

5

- _____ I try to be understanding and patient toward those aspects of my personality I don't like.
- _____ When something painful happens, I try to take a balanced view of the situation.
- _____ I try to see my failings as part of the human condition.
- _____ When I am going through a very hard time, I give myself the caring and tenderness I need.
- _____ When something upsets me, I try to keep my emotions in balance.
- _____ When I feel inadequate in some way, I try to remind myself that feelings of inadequacy are shared by most people.

For the next set of items, use the following scale (notice the endpoints of the scale are reversed from those above):



- _____ When I fail at something important to me, I become consumed by feelings of inadequacy.
- _____ When I'm feeling down, I tend to feel like most other people are probably happier than I am.
- _____ When I fail at something, I tend to feel alone in my failure.
- _____ When I'm feeling down, I tend to obsess and fixate on everything that's wrong.
- _____ I'm disapproving and judgmental about my own flaws and inadequacies.
- _____ I'm intolerant and impatient of those aspects of my personality I don't like.

HOW TO SCORE YOUR TEST:

TOTAL (SUM OF ALL 12 ITEMS) _____

MEAN SCORE=TOTAL/12 _____

Average self-compassion scores tend to be around 3.0 on the 1-5 scale, so you can interpret your overall score accordingly. As a rough guide, a score of 1-2.5 for your overall self-compassion score indicates you are low in self-compassion, 2.5-3.5 indicates you are moderate, and 3.5-5.0 means you are high in self-compassion.

Practicing Mindful Self-Compassion When We're Overwhelmed by Our Kids



WITH KRISTEN GENZANO

with the Portland Center for Self-Compassion

In order to better co-regulate your emotions, it's mission-critical to acknowledge how difficult for you a moment or situation with your child is. As you regulate your emotions, you help your child to learn how to do the same.

To start a healthy practice, try the following:

1. Put your hands on your heart.
2. Say: "This is really hard."
3. Say: "What do I need right now?"
4. Give yourself the time to regulate your emotions before responding to your child.

If it's safe to do so, you may even need to take physical space away from your child. Tell your child you need a break and walk away. Return to handle the situation from a centered, intentional space.

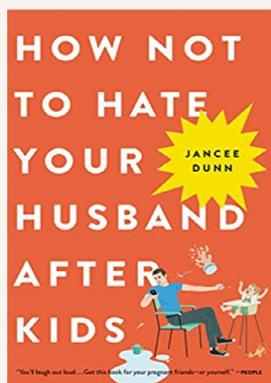
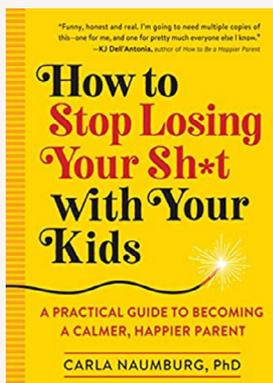
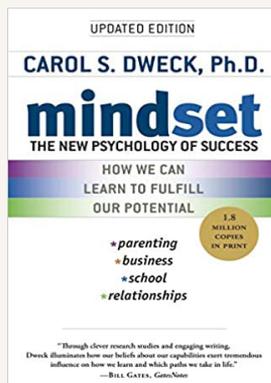
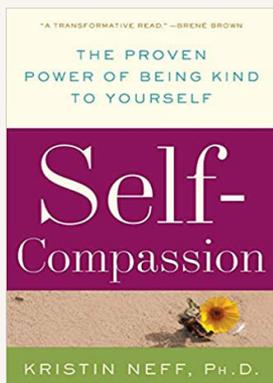
When we model healthy coping strategies and calm-downs for ourselves, our children learn from us over time.

Learn more about The Portland Center for Self-Compassion [here](#).

This list of books and websites is interactive! Click on the titles to view.

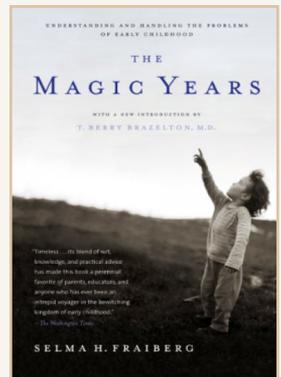
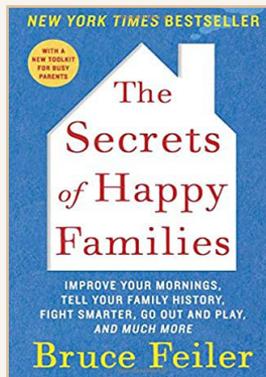
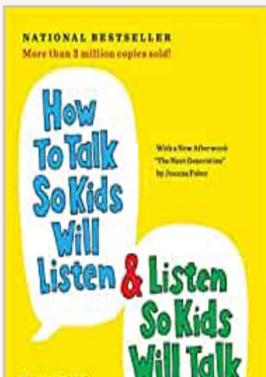
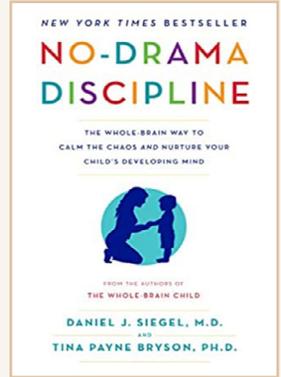
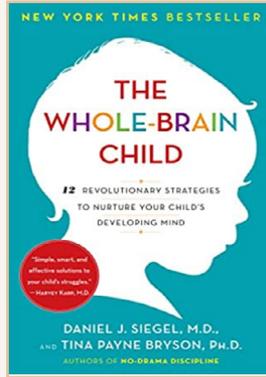
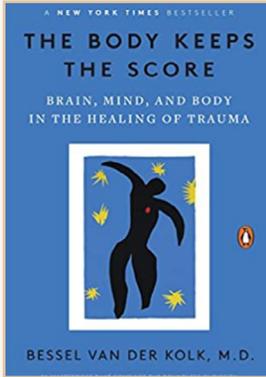
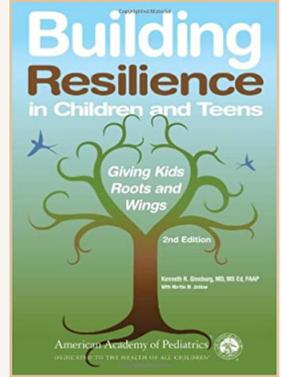
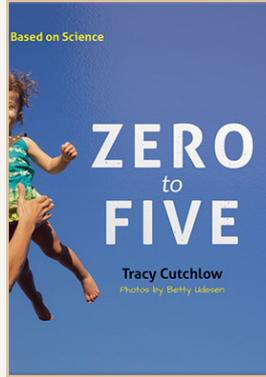
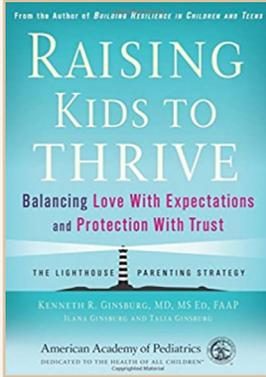
Taking Care of Mamas

BOOKS:

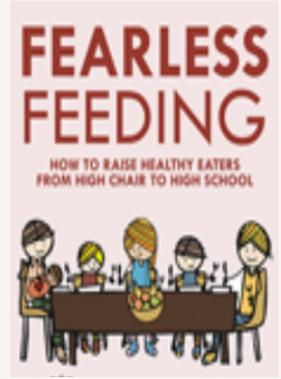
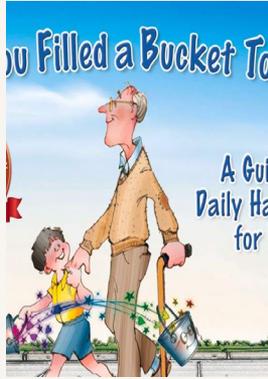
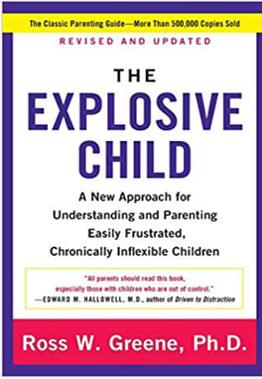


Taking Care of Kids

BOOKS:



RESOURCES



ONLINE:

[The Gottman Institute](#)

[Think Kids](#)

[Doctor Amy LLC](#)

[Common Sense Media](#)

[Fostering Resilience](#)

[Modern Mommy Doc](#)

[YoYoYogi Online](#)

[Alavita Nutrition](#)

[The Balanced Life Online Pilates](#)

[The Practical Sort](#)

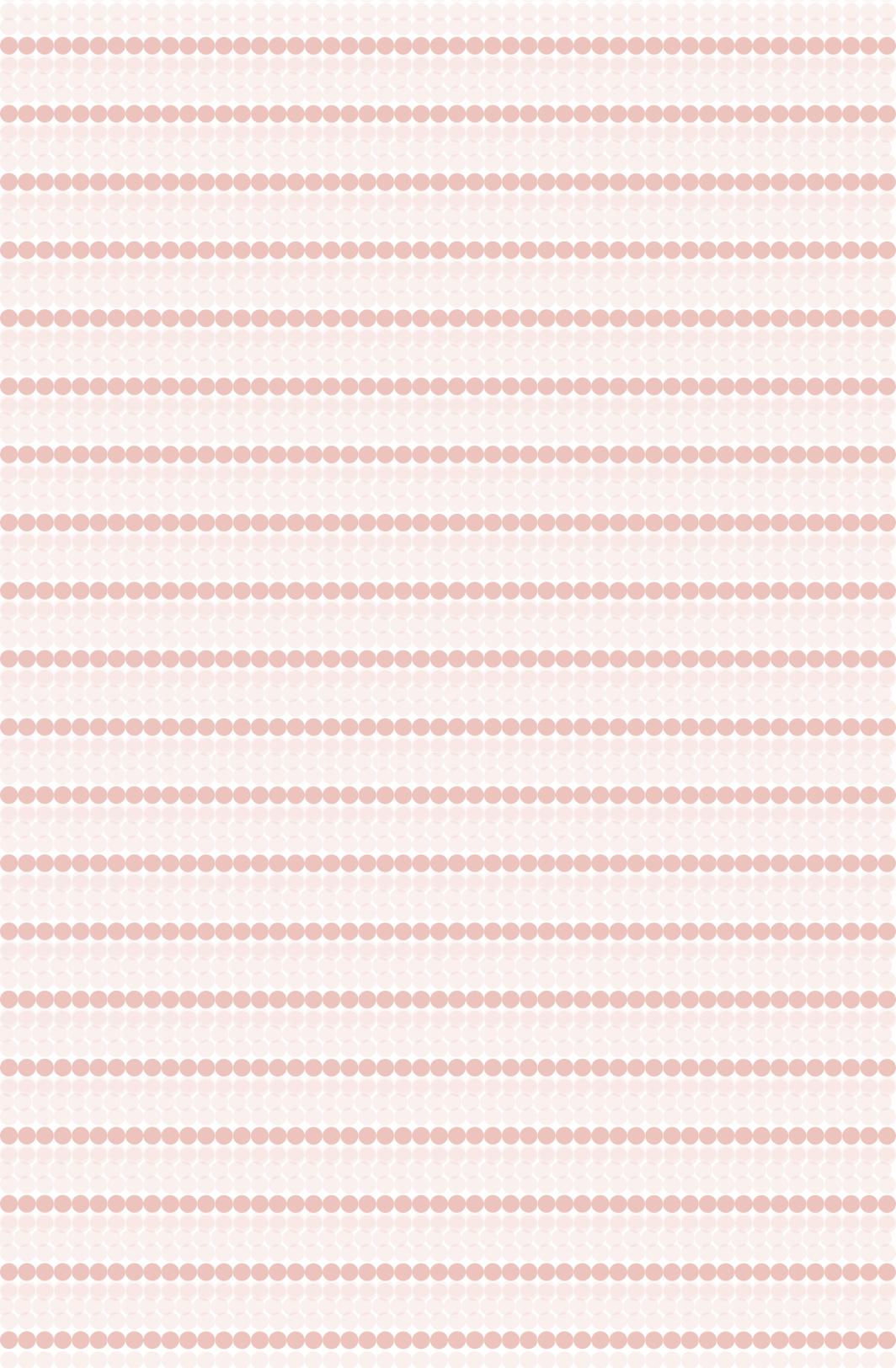
[Entropy Organized](#)

[The Center for Mindful Self-Compassion](#)

[Kristen Genzano Therapy](#)

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Doctor's Note

Thanks so much for joining us as we explored how to navigate and regulate children's big emotions. We'd love to know what you thought of this program — [send us an email](#) to share your thoughts. Your feedback means a lot to us!

We're in your corner, Mama!



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