

THE PRACTICE OF ACCEPTING "NO"



Acceptance is a struggle for many of us. We want to examine, complain, look for resources, try to find a quick fix, complain some more, lay awake worrying, find someone else to blame and then give up. When you have a challenging child it's very hard to slow down. It's hard to find this so-called "balance".

"Just think about it. If young children live in the present and adults spend most of their time in the past or in the future, we have abandoned our children to some degree."

Becky Bailey, I Love You Rituals

Sometimes everything we try to do to help our children actually moves us away from them. When it's hard to accept where our child is today, mindful parenting challenges us to take some deep breaths, look at what's around us, lean in, and choose to accept it. Accepting the struggle seems to lead us to better ideas and most of all better connection with our kids. When many of us feel discomfort, we run in the other direction. How do we change how we feel when we don't even know how we feel? We do everything in our power to avoid, to escape, to hide. We see a behavior and we want to control it, to change it. When we do this, we block ourselves off to both pain and joy. We forget to laugh when our kid does something hilarious, or console them when they are sad. Instead, we shut down. Parenting is hard and when we don't have the tools to do hard things, we get overwhelmed and we forget to live, to breath, to cry, and to laugh.



PRACTICING ACCEPTANCE

We have to learn to accept "no" so we can finally accept our child. Accepting "no" means:

No, my child isn't easy.

No, my child isn't typical.

No, my child isn't perfect.

No, my child isn't going to get better overnight.

No, my child can't solve all of his problems alone.

No, my child isn't well behaved in public.

No I'm not a perfect parent.

How can we expect our children to accept themselves when we are a tornado of chaos focusing all of our insecurities and stress onto them? Practice with me, "My child is on a healing journey just like I am. We are imperfect and I accept that fact. I will work to help my child, but I will not waste our time together constantly trying to fix him. I will stare into this beautiful face and remember that we are all doing the best we can with what we have. I will be here in this moment."

Once we accept "no" we can begin to accept "yes". We begin to see that our relationship can be a powerful tool of healing. We learn to accept our circumstances and most of all, we learn to accept our child. Acceptance doesn't mean we ignore the issue, it means we don't lose ourselves in it. It means we don't let the struggle overwhelm our love for our children.

We won't solve all of our problems today and even if we did it would be something different tomorrow. When we aren't entangled we can stay calm. Don't forget the idea of the "good enough parent" (Donald Winnicott, 1953). This parent isn't perfect, but he works to be attuned to his child's needs. He can't fix everything and that is okay. We can forgive ourselves and others for imperfections. When we do this we can truly help our child.

breathe in, lean in, accept, let go, repeat

When we learn to work through this process, the healing can begin.
