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A Reminder About Self-Regulation

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It's not unusual for us to have a few good weeks with our kids. No meltdowns. Everyone's relatively happy and content. And then, out of nowhere it seems like we're back to square one. *Really?! They are still struggling with this? I thought they had that behavior under control!* Then we sigh, accepting reality.

The brain goes through many phases of reorganization and restructuring until our kids reach 25 years old. (I hesitate to add that last part. Hang in there parents.) The good news: your kids will eventually have more consistent control over their behavior - even when they are tired, hungry or overstimulated.

The bad news: It takes time. If you've been working with your child, being curious, connected, and calm, and they are still struggling, it might not mean you're doing anything wrong. In fact, it might mean what you're noticing is self-regulation in progress. Here's an example:

I was digging through a random junk drawer when I finally found them. The colored pens I use to keep my schedule organized. I had been looking for them for days. I mentioned this casually to my kids, "Huh. Did you guys know these pens were in here?"

My daughter responds defensively, "I didn't do it!" I wasn't really upset, so I brushed her comment aside. But then, she stomped into the kitchen, started pulling the pens out of the drawer and slamming them onto the counter. When that was done, she burst out a scream and lunged at me, fists flying.

Inside, my anger spiked! I was shocked and triggered. This child has struggled with lying since she could talk. It was obvious that she hid the pens, but it wasn't a huge deal, why didn't she just admit it? Besides, shouldn't I be the one who was angry? She took my things and for some unknown reason hid them in a random kitchen drawer! In the .0025 seconds after her outburst, I mentally scrolled through at least 1,000 consequences for her actions.

But, I didn't act on my anger. Instead, I paused. I stood there silently. **It was amazing.** This is self-regulation at work. This is years of working on honesty. Anger management. Conflict resolution.

This is time and again (though not always perfectly) responding to her with empathy and connection during times of big emotions. Yes, her initial response was loud and aggressive. **But, let's not stop the story there!** Without any threat, bribe, punishment, or force from me, she made a different choice. She regulated her own big emotions. She was able to use the teaching we have worked on in the past to make a different decision. And, she trusted me enough to show big, real, sad tears.

Here's the thing... **Your kids are not always going to be able to self-regulate like you want them too.** As they get older, they will be able to choose a good choice over a not so good one, but it's going to take time (and maturity) for this to become second-nature. In the meantime, they need you to help them self-regulate. To be a strong, firm place in the midst of their emotional chaos.

In this moment, I didn't have to help my daughter regulate. But tomorrow (or later today) she may need my help again. This is a slow process, and sometimes, it's hard to see the big picture. But, when you finally step back enough to watch your child make a good choice based on their own internal compass...it's amazing. The anger, frustration, and desire to make them "pay" for their behavior is gone, and you suddenly see a child who is growing up.

Social Media: Our Kids Religion

I recently came across a very interesting article by Laura J Wellington, the CEO of THREAD MB. The article addresses so many issues that I know you are both interested and concerned about, as well. As the author of the book *Keeping Foster Children Safe Online*, and as one who speaks on this issue across the nation and globe, I found it most interesting and timely. Laura has given me permission to share it with you. Please find it below, and please find out more about Laura and THREAD MB [HERE](#). Now, let's look at what Laura wrote.....

I recently read that our children are spending over 9 hours a day engaged in social media and entertainment activities provided by their digital devices, and that falls outside of school and educational usage.

"Wow!" I thought to myself. Shortly after I read this, I heard a compelling talk which discussed the dearth of 'fueling oneself internally' existing across our nation today versus focusing, predominantly, on one's external-superficial development. That thought hasn't escaped me as a parent.

The latter seems to be running rampant among much of our youth, with very little 'fueling' happening outside of it presently. The result? Children remain mired in "surface living" and all that comes with - none of it good - which includes "falling into life" instead of being driven by a deeper, more meaningful purpose

So when my 9 year-old questioned when it was that he would be given a phone, it sent me into quite a quandary. The biggest question his question posed was, "Am I doing the stuff I needed to do for him in order to ensure that he can use this phone wisely?"

It's a loaded question, to say the least, especially when social media has become our children's religion and peer pressure exists in a larger way than ever before. Let's be frank. And that is dangerous. It's like giving a loaded gun to minors who have no idea how to handle it.

The gun is shiny. It offers a ton of power. The attraction is obvious but so is the pain and emptiness that follows when unattended children engage and fight the present-day superficial realities that leave them longing, cavernous, and on a tangent towards remaining "unfulfilled." Plus, our kids are naive. They can't handle any of the realities that come with such power. Most recent proof includes a little 5 year-old girl in the UK who chopped off half her hair at the command of a gruesome figure named Momo developed out of Japan by a sicko who thinks it is funny to motivate kids to perform horrific acts including killing their parents and themselves. Thankfully the child is relatively alright.

Parents? It isn't that they aren't "trying"! But in their efforts to care and stay "above water," they have less space to parent. The institutions that once kept families together are no longer attended or respected. And God has been tossed from our lives, replaced by the Youtuber who sets the tempo for disbelief or the teacher who's poor example reflects his/her own confusion or disappointment as opposed to rising PISA scores, which we so desperately need.

Ultimately, I truly had to turn inward to evaluate whether or not my child could handle a phone based upon what he wanted to use it for. I decided that he could -- my decision based upon the rules I would set forth with regards, the current fueling his dad and I are committed to doing for him, and the conversations we have and would continue to have with our son. That said, the question definitely made me think 'big picture', admittedly, hence this post !

There is no doubt that social media and digital entertainment have their good points when put in their proper places, but the better we are for them as a nation in their current state?

Just look around folks. The opioid epidemic is at an all-time high. A character deficiency is running wild across much of the United States. And our children are the first generation predicted to live shorter and less affluent lives than ourselves. Hmmm? Need you be a rocket scientist to understand the impact of our current progress? Hardly.

(Dr. John DeGarmo—The Foster Care Institute)