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Has Your Child Been Traumatized?: How to Know and What to Do to Promote Healing and Recovery.
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You Are the Key to Helping Your Child Heal

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If you read Chapters 1 and 2, you probably have a fairly clear idea of whether your child has suffered trauma from exposure to an adverse experience. You should also have some understanding of which risk and protective factors have contributed to how your child is feeling right now. A lot might be at work in your child's mind, and it's not always easy to sort out. But there is one core lesson in all this: a strong parent–child relationship is one of the most robust components in helping a child heal from trauma. This isn't just my own observation as a psychologist—it is backed by academic research. Building an even stronger relationship with your child in the aftermath of a potentially traumatic event will not only lay the foundation for healing but can also buffer your child from some of the ill effects of future traumas.

I want to acknowledge right up front, however, that building this relationship isn't always easy. Parents can be busy with work and other family obligations. Kids can be overwhelmed with school and extra-curricular activities. So many things in life can get in the way. That's why, after reviewing exactly how a close parent–child relationship can help a child heal, this chapter offers concrete, easy-to-implement relationship-building skills, including quality time, mentalizing, praise, active listening, and enjoyment. All of these skills will benefit any parent–child relationship but are essential to facilitating the healing process for a traumatized child.

The Importance of Attachment

One spring morning my husband decided to take our then eighteen-month-old daughter for a ride in a new red wagon she had just received as a gift. He was pulling her behind him, running across the yard in his old shoes with worn-out treads, and he slipped and fell. The wagon tipped over, and our toddler careened out of her ride and onto the grass, bumping her head. She cried out for Mama. I ran to her. But instead of reaching out to me for a kiss or hug, she urgently pointed to the grass, dropped to all fours, gently tapped her head against the ground, and gazed back at me. My preverbal sweetheart was trying to show me exactly what had happened. She did this a few more times, deeply wanting me to understand her scary experience. After I gave her some comfort and verbalized her experience, she settled down and let out a big sigh.

Jon Allen, a psychologist and mentor of mine, once shared this straightforward summary of what we know about coping: "The single best way we know to deal with emotional pain is to connect to others to whom we feel securely attached." For children, the most powerful attachment relationship is often with a primary caregiver—that means you. As a primary caregiver, you are uniquely positioned to help your child heal from a traumatic experience. You don't have to be exceptionally empathic or have any special skills as a therapist. You just have to foster a secure attachment relationship between yourself and your child.

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Attachment and Trauma

At its core, attachment is the emotional bond we share with another person. While this chapter will focus on the importance of the attachment bond between parent and child, it is important to note that we all have many attachments in our lives—to our spouses, close friends, even colleagues. We never outgrow the need for attachment

relationships; whenever we are in a painful place, the best medicine we have is connection to these relationships.

One study that illustrates the power of the attachment relationship measured how simply having your hand held by an attachment figure could help protect your brain against distress. In 2006, neuroscientist James Coan and his colleagues identified happily married couples, brought them into his lab, and, after a visit in which the couples were fully informed that the experiment would include minor electric shocks, proceeded to deliver mild electric shocks to the wife. The wives were assigned to one of three experimental conditions: in one group the wives were allowed to hold their husbands' hands throughout the shocks; the wives in another group could hold the hand of an anonymous male experimenter; and the wives in the third group were not offered any hand to hold. The results were straightforward: As you might have guessed, the women holding their husbands' hands fared the best, and their brains showed the least threat-activated response to impending shocks. The women without a hand to hold had the highest neural threat response. But it wasn't just about holding hands. Among the women paired with their spouses, the experimenters found that couples with higher reported marital relationship satisfaction had even less of a stress response than their slightly less satisfied peers. The bottom line: receiving comfort from and connection to our primary attachment figures bolsters our ability to tolerate distress.

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When it comes to traumatized children, they are undoubtedly experiencing more distress than a woman who participated in a study knowing she would be receiving electric shocks. More than ever, they need an available, reliable hand to hold. As reviewed in Chapter 1, after a potentially traumatic experience your child's understanding of herself and the world around her may be rocked. By standing with her and being available to her—extending your hand, so to speak—you are telling your child she is not alone in this confusing and scary time. She has a grounded, trusted figure to understand her, keep her safe, and see her through.

Specifically, secure attachment can help counter your child's trauma symptoms in these ways:

- Your child will not be alone in his distress, making the distress easier to manage.
- Your child will gain understanding and acceptance instead of being isolated and feeling shame.
- You can serve as a trusted authority figure who can help guide healing, lending support and inspiring hope.
- You can erect boundaries to help keep your child safe, preventing future traumatization and creating a sense of felt safety.

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But how do you get to that point where your child will reach out and take your outstretched hand? As I mentioned in Chapter 2, if you cared enough to buy a book about parenting a traumatized child, you are likely well on your way! Think back to when your child was an infant. If he cried, would you (or another primary caregiver) reliably go to his aid? Offer him a clean diaper, some milk, or just some good old-fashioned soothing? If so, wonderful. This is how a secure attachment relationship develops. Over days, weeks, and months of your responding in his cries for help, he has learned that he has someone who will reliably and consistently be available to him. Before his first birthday, he will have developed confidence in his relationship with his primary caregivers and will be more likely to reach out to them in his time of need.

Unfortunately, not every infant has the experience of a reliable caregiver. This can be due to a variety of different factors. Sometimes parents of newborns are overwhelmed by a needy older sibling, a demanding work schedule, or simply the stress of adjusting to life as a new parent. In this circumstance, an infant may sense that their needs will be met only if they make a giant fuss, getting purple in the face and shrieking at a high decibel level. This type of attachment style

could be labeled as *insecure*. This baby might be anxious or ambivalent about reaching out in response to their needs. Alternatively, a baby could also get the sense that caregivers get overwhelmed by their cries. Perhaps Mother suffers from perinatal depression or Father is terrified by all of his new responsibilities, checking out emotionally whenever the baby expresses distress. In a worst-case scenario, one parent might even become abusive to their child in response to the baby's cries. These babies may develop a different type of insecure attachment style, electing to "go it alone" rather than turn toward Mom or Dad after a scary experience. See the box on the next page for those cases in which trauma stems from abuse at the hands of one parent.

Relationship-Building Skills

So what to do if your child was never securely attached? Or if everything seemed to be going well in childhood, but you sense your teen is drifting away in early adolescence? Or perhaps you thought your child was securely attached prior to the potentially traumatic event but feel she is pushing you away now? Even though attachment styles do not change easily, through a variety of relationship-building skills you can foster a more secure attachment with your child, so she will feel empowered to reach her little hand out and meet you halfway when struggling with the distressing and painful thoughts and feelings that sometimes accompany an adverse experience.

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Quality Time

The first relationship-enhancing skill I always prescribe to parents of traumatized children is quality time.

Parents might not understand how they provide a sense of safety for their kids. For example, I have worked with many kids who suddenly develop a fear of the dark after a trauma, even if the original

When Trauma Involves an Attachment Figure

Trauma involving primary caregivers is less rare than you would think. Whether Mom is injured in a car crash, Dad suddenly gets diagnosed with an aggressive cancer, or one parent is abusive to another family member, these types of potentially traumatic experiences can sting the most. Especially in the youngest children, who are most dependent on their caregivers, the loss or threat of loss of a primary caregiver can be a huge disturbance to their attachment system. The good news? Research into attachment has consistently demonstrated that it takes only one secure attachment to a primary caregiver for a child to develop into a healthy, high-functioning adult. This attachment figure need not be Mom or Dad, but could be any biological relative, foster or adoptive parent, or a surrogate caregiver. As long as you are consistently available and reliable, your little one has all he needs.

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event was not related to the nighttime or darkness. The child will cope with that fear by barging into the parents' room in the middle of the night and asking to join them in bed or by insisting that a parent come back to sleep in the child's room. The real fear in these situations isn't the lack of light, but of being *alone* in the dark without the calming presence of a parent. The dark isn't so scary when Mom or Dad is there to snuggle.

No matter what the traumatic experience may have been, a child will probably feel overwhelmed, anxious, saddened, or stressed after a scary event. Intimate, quality time with you—whether it is a snuggle in bed or a quick walk around the block—can help alleviate some of the pangs of trauma. Of course, parents cannot provide quality time to their child 24/7—that's not the goal. Instead, incorporating quality time as part of the daily routine helps children internalize the sense that Mom or Dad is with them when they need it the most. Parents don't need to be there physically if kids can feel it emotionally. The challenge is in getting kids to that point.

What Is Quality Time?

Quality time can be almost anything.

Literally anything.

It can be doing a puzzle, watching sports, or in the case of my patient from the Introduction, playing mini-golf. The critical aspect of quality time isn't the activity—it's that the practice involves giving undivided attention to a single person. In the context of the family system, quality time can be spent between spouses, siblings, or parent and child. What sets quality time apart from other one-on-one time is that the parent and child should be connecting with each other in a way that is meaningful. The literature agrees: Research into parenting practices consistently shows that the quality of time, rather than the quantity, has the greatest impact on child development. Even watching television with your child can be quality time if you're both engaged with the show on the screen together—laughing at the same funny bits, speculating about what's going to happen next, and the like. If your child is watching but you're absorbed by your iPhone, your child naturally won't feel your presence or the shared experience.

The single greatest benefit of quality time is the deepening of the parent–child relationship, creating a strong attachment bond. In addition to promoting healing from an adverse event, a strong attachment bond between parent and child has numerous psychosocial benefits, including:

- Increased self-esteem
- Decreased vulnerability to child sexual abuse
- Decreased or delayed use of drugs and alcohol
- Improved academic achievement
- Improved social skills

As you will read in Chapters 4–10, children who have been exposed to adverse events may end up struggling with problems

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related to friendships, family relationships, schoolwork, and general well-being. Bolstering your child with a strong, secure attachment relationship might provide the child with armor against some of these negative effects.

A close attachment bond not only has benefits for psychosocial outcomes but also affects physical health later in life. Research has found that children who experience secure attachments to caregivers, warm parenting, and decreased parental conflict exhibit less secretion of stress hormones. As reviewed in Chapter 1, long-term activation of the body's stress hormones is associated with a number of poor outcomes, including social outcomes like struggling to complete schooling, an increased risk of crime and violence involvement, and increased use of alcohol and drugs, and health outcomes like greater susceptibility to heart disease, mental health disorders, and early death. But it's not all doom and gloom: think of a strong parent–child relationship as a vaccine against some of the ill effects of trauma. While you might not be able to prevent all of the physical, psychological, and social outcomes after an adverse event, you can provide your child with a good deal of protection that lessens the impact. How wonderful that something as simple as quality time in childhood can help lay the foundation for a healthy life.

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How Do You Make Time Together Quality *Time?*

So how do you actually have quality time with your child? The first step is to find an activity the child might feel excited about. On some days, when you both have a flexible schedule, quality time might look like a drive to the beach to play in the waves together. On other days, when you are both scrambling with work and school, it could be something as simple as walking the dog together. Take a few moments to consider some of the ideas below with your child or teen and try to identify a few activities that both of you might find engaging. Keep in mind that it does not matter what you and your child elect to do, so long as you are doing it together.

- Bake a cake
- Collaborate on a scrapbook
- Have side-by-side reading time
- Play a video game
- Go on a bike ride
- Garden
- Identify and collaborate on a home-improvement project of your child's choice
- Plan a future vacation
- Visit a botanical garden
- Practice yoga
- Play a board game
- Watch a movie
- Attend a sporting event
- Volunteer
- Go for a jog

Quality time is an intervention that may sound obvious, but many parents struggle to implement it. Perhaps this was easier when your child was very young, when your child was more agreeable, before

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What about Toddlers?

It may seem like more trouble than it's worth to try to lug your toddler to a botanical garden or to involve them in a baking experiment. Very young children—even up to age six—are often just as thrilled by a few minutes of one-on-one child-directed play with you. Put on some comfortable clothes, get on the floor with them, and let them lead you wherever their creativity takes them.

the siblings came along, or before you started taking on more responsibility at work. Although it may be hard to acknowledge, many parents go through periods of time when they don't particularly like spending one-on-one time with their child. This is perfectly normal and natural. At the same time, it is all the more important to find a way to make this time successful and enjoyable for you both.

I once worked with a single mother, Amy, who had two children in elementary school. The entire family was traumatized after her husband was arrested and convicted for sexual assault. Amy was a bright and capable woman who was doing her best to keep her family sane. While she had been a stay-at-home mother, her husband's incarceration meant she had to find a job after being out of work for a decade, all while balancing the everyday mental and physical load of single parenthood. This poor mom was completely drained. Whenever her kids would act out, whether getting into physical fights with each other or being disrespectful to her, she could feel the anger and resentment bubbling up inside of her. All she wanted, desperately, was some time alone—something that she no doubt needed! That's why, when I spoke to Amy about quality time as an intervention, she looked at me

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Beware of Overengagement

While we want parents to be engaged in their quality-time activity with their child, some parents may go too far and overwhelm their child. Picture a fed-up teenager constantly fielding questions from her mother about the plot of a new television show they are watching together. For parents tending toward overengagement, it might be helpful to envision yourself sitting on your hands. Use that imagery to try to refrain from peppering your child with too much personal involvement during quality time. Spending time together should feel like a nice hug, not a squeeze from a boa constrictor.

like I was instead suggesting she go for a swim with two particularly hungry great white sharks. However, after we looked at her schedule together, we found small ways she could spend time alone with each child, and she agreed to give it a try. Amy took up baking with her daughter, and they both quickly came to look forward to trying new recipes. The time immediately after school was reserved for her son—he and Amy would take their miniature poodle to the dog park, just the two of them. Weeks later she described feeling surprised by how much she enjoyed the quality time and how she noticed a decrease in the physical fights, parental disrespect, and other trauma symptoms since implementing the practice. With her family feeling more settled after enduring a traumatic experience, Amy even found more opportunities for some well-deserved time to herself.

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Mentalizing

Mentalizing is a fancy-sounding term for a simple concept that can deepen your relationship with your child. It refers to the process by which we think about and make sense of other people's mental states, as well as our own. It harks back to Descartes's "I think, therefore I am," and was even developed into its own therapeutic treatment by Drs. Anthony Bateman and Peter Fonagy (see more about mentalization-based treatment in Chapter 11). Overall, it's about being curious about what's going on in someone else's mind, as well as your own. For the purposes of this book, think of it as imagining what it might be like to be in your child's shoes, or a sort of cognitive practice of empathy. To understand your child's inner experience, let curiosity, respect, and compassion lead the way.

Many of us do this already, only to be waylaid when we encounter our own strong emotions or uncomfortable thoughts. Our child does something that frustrates us to no end, and it gets pretty hard to stay curious about *why* he might have done this thing that frustrated us. Feeling this type of frustration—or any other strong negative

emotion—shuts down our ability to mentalize. It's hard to be curious and think about another person's experience when we are stuck in our own experience.

The tricky thing about this is that the confusing, frustrating, infuriating behaviors of traumatized children frequently stem from their emotional distress. These are the moments they need their primary attachment figure the most—but at the same time, these are often moments when parents want to shut down or reprimand their child, rather than try to understand the child.

Yasmin, a junior at her local high school, is the star of her school's soccer team. Her parents have spent lots of time and money carting her to practices and games and making sure she has the best equipment, despite some financial struggles. The entire family is thrilled when they hear a college scout will be attending an end-of-season game and are initially shocked and furious when Yasmin doesn't show up. They learn from another parent in the stands that Yasmin's boyfriend had broken up with her just before the big game.

A nonmentalizing approach: After getting home, Yasmin's parents tear into her about how selfish and stupid she was for missing her shot with the college scout. They lecture her about how much they have sacrificed so that she could have this opportunity and how her future will be worse because of her shortsighted decision to skip the game. Yasmin refuses to make eye contact with her parents during this lecture, but they can see the tears rolling down her cheeks. She spends the next day locked in her room, refusing to eat or talk to anyone.

A mentalizing approach: After getting home, Yasmin's parents share what they have heard about the breakup and gently inquire if that's why she missed the game. Their tone is one of curiosity, rather than blame and anger, and they can imagine their daughter is feeling rejected and sad. Instead of feeling shut down, belittled, and blamed by her parents, Yasmin feels supported. She shares that actually she has been trying to break up with her boyfriend for months, but he has threatened to send a nude photo of her to the entire school if she does not stay with him. Though she has relented and stayed with him,

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the day of her big game he shared the photo with his friends. She says that she felt humiliated and ashamed and didn't know what to do. She also shares her worries that his friends would harass her from the stands and her belief that there was no way she could keep her head in the game with all of this stress, and she did not want to embarrass herself in front of the college scout. Yasmin and her parents spend that evening coming up with a plan for how to respond to his exploitation.

As demonstrated in Yasmin's story, when you mentalize your children, they are more likely to feel comfortable opening up to you, deepening your attachment relationship. It didn't matter that Yasmin's parents were initially wrong about what was going on in her mind; when they approached her with curiosity and compassion, she felt supported enough to share her true experience with them.

When your child does something that frustrates or confuses you, if you can approach him with the same curiosity and compassion rather than anger and blame, you will be sending the message that you want to understand him rather than punish him, making him more likely to open up and feel close to you. In addition to deepening the relationship, if your child is open with you about a potentially traumatic experience, you can help. In the vignette above, Yasmin likely didn't consider any type of recourse over the months that this boy was exploiting her. Now that her parents are in the loop, they can help her take action to protect herself and prevent further traumatization.

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Praise

Praise is a wonderful relationship-enhancing skill for a number of different reasons. First, praising a child properly for a specific behavior makes that behavior more likely to occur again. When you regularly praise your child for behaviors you like to see, they are more likely to become part of your child's behavioral repertoire. When your child is behaving in ways that are pleasing to you, you will enjoy your time together a lot more, and your child will pick up on that too.

So what does proper praise look like?

Picture your daughter playing with her younger brother in the family room. You notice her sharing her prized magnetic tiles with him. This would be a perfect opportunity to heap praise on your daughter. While a "Good girl!" would certainly be appreciated, the more specific and concrete you can be with your praise, the better. With this example, ideal praise might be "I love how you shared your tiles with your brother!" As your daughter continues to get this positive reinforcement from you, she will be more likely to share with her brother—especially in front of you, which will hopefully engender feelings of pride and closeness in both of you.

Praise is also a good relationship-deepening practice because it helps children feel good about themselves and creates the sense that they will feel good about themselves in the context of their relationship with you. Regular, specific praise tells them that they are doing a good job at home and that the people they depend on most approve of them.

Praise is included as an intervention in this chapter because of how it enhances the parent–child relationship. At the same time, after exposure to a potentially traumatic event, children's sense of themselves and the world can be shattered. Instead of feeling like their regular, competent selves, they may have suffered a drop in their self-esteem. Getting the consistent message that they're doing a good job on their specific tasks at home can go a long way in grounding them and helping them to feel good about themselves.

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Active Listening

Active listening is one of the first skills in a new therapist's playbook. Active listening is important because it lets the person you're listening to know that you are truly engaging with her, that you're paying attention to what she is saying, that you are understanding her. When a patient describes to me a terrifying ordeal that felt scary and overwhelming, I might reply, "It sounds like you were feeling terrified." This would help my patient feel understood and know that I'm paying

attention. It would also help the person feel more comfortable in continuing to share with me, thereby building our closeness.

While it would be great if you could regularly reflect your child's most vulnerable feelings back to them, children don't always share these types of emotions with parents. Active listening can also be practiced in less emotionally charged situations, while still having the same impact of enhancing the relationship. If your child shares with you that he wants to get his math homework done before walking the dog because he's feeling nervous about getting it done by a deadline, you could reflect this statement by saying, "I hear ya. That math work is stressing you out and you just want to get it off your plate."

For very young children, an ideal time to practice this new skill could be while you play together. If your little one describes taking her stuffed animals for a ride in the wagon, you might try something like "You're taking your bears and puppies for a ride around the room." This lets her know she is being understood and gives her a sense that Mom or Dad is paying attention.

A word of caution: Children of all ages can get annoyed if your reflections parrot them exactly. A helpful way to think about reflecting is trying to summarize or put what your child is saying in your own words. You're trying to let children know you hear them and you understand them, not trying to copy or mimic them, which would be annoying to any of us.

Another benefit of practicing active listening with your child is that the child will be able to let you know if you get it wrong. If you mishear or misinterpret something your child is saying and reflect back something the child didn't mean, he can then let you know that, helping you understand better.

Overall, active listening is a wonderful relationship-building skill because it helps children feel heard and paid attention to. This gives them the sense that they matter to you and that you are available for them. Though you'll likely be practicing active listening most in response to neutral stimuli like play time or math homework, they will develop the sense that their primary caregiver is both responsive and

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available, fostering that secure attachment that is invaluable to the traumatized child.

Additionally, a child who does want to open up to you about trauma-related thoughts or feelings will become more comfortable and less ambivalent about doing so with the general sense that in conversation you do a good job of listening to and understanding them.

Enjoyment

Contrary to what social media might lead some to believe, not every part of parenting is fun or enjoyable. From the sleepless newborn nights to toddler toilet training, from navigating the awkward beginnings of puberty in early adolescence to teenage power struggles, a lot of blood, sweat, and tears is involved in raising another human being. At the same time, there is a lot to love and relish. The key thing with enjoyment is letting your children see you loving to spend time with them. Instead of just savoring those moments after all your children are bathed and in bed and you finally have a couple minutes to yourself, try to show your enjoyment as you feel it throughout the day.

This practice most easily ties back to quality time—finding something that you both enjoy doing and doing it together. While doing it, verbalize your enjoyment. A simple "I love baking cookies with you" will go a long way (if it is sincere). Another way to demonstrate this could be if your family has a practice of sharing the highs and lows of the day around the dinner table. Make sure every now and then to identify the highlight of your day as something you did with your child.

Showing your enjoyment of your children communicates that you like them and that they in turn are likable. This will do wonders for both their self-esteem and your parent–child relationship.

Additionally, traumatized children are more likely to believe there is something wrong with them or they are deficient in some way. This harks back to our discussion of schemas in Chapter 1. If your child harbored the commonly held belief that "good things happen to good

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people, and bad things happen to bad people," experiencing a "bad" or distressing event might send the child the inaccurate message that she is a bad person. By demonstrating that your child is enjoyable (and worthy of your time, your understanding, and your praise), you will help buoy your child's self-esteem, setting her on the path of healing.

The *Don'ts* of Creating a Secure Attachment

While quality time, mentalizing, praise, reflections, and enjoyment will all help foster a secure attachment relationship with your child, there are several communication practices that can shut down the development of a good bond in its tracks.

Commands without Rationale

No one likes being told what to do. Whether toddler, teen, or adult, many of us bristle at direct commands, even if we wouldn't necessarily mind the task we are being commanded to do. Of course, sometimes our kids *do* need directives—they need to wear their seat belt in the car, for example—but that doesn't undo the fact that commands are unpleasant to receive. They can feel controlling and inspire resistance. One way to make them more tolerable? Pair every request with a rationale. "We wear our seat belts to keep ourselves safe in the car." Providing a reason appeals to your child's sense of logic and demonstrates that you respect him. Every parent remembers the "Why?" stage in toddlerhood. Whether you're parenting a toddler or a teen, indulge your child! Connect every directive with a reason.

And please, take "because I said so" out of your vocabulary. This does not count as a rationale.

If you can't think of a good reason for giving the command, that's probably a good indicator you don't need to be giving it.

A constant barrage of demands communicates to your child that

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you don't trust her to take care of herself or function in your family. This can be harmful to a traumatized child's already vulnerable self-esteem and push her further away from you. By cutting down on commands and issuing only directives that have good reasons behind them, you're giving your child more freedom and demonstrating that you trust her and value her buy-in.

Sarcasm

While the content of sarcasm might sound similar to praise (for example, "Nice one, genius!" after your child makes a silly error), the intent behind sarcasm is to mock or express your displeasure. Depending on how it's communicated, it's typically either aggressive or passive aggressive, and it doesn't feel good. Fittingly, one of the origins of the word *sarcasm* comes from the Greek *sarkazein*, meaning to "tear flesh."

In addition to making your child feel bad, it might devalue authentic praise you give your child, especially in younger children, because your words are so similar.

You may find sarcasm funny, but the bottom line is that it's not nice, and a child in a vulnerable position doesn't need any extra hits, especially from the one (or more) people who are always supposed to be on their side.

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Judging and Criticizing Your Child (Rather Than Focusing on Their Behaviors)

While everyone needs some feedback from time to time, it might be helpful to think of providing constructive feedback or guidance about children's behavior instead of critiquing them as people. When you're critical of your child, the child can internalize that something about him is bad or defective. If you instead focus on your child's behavior, it's easier for the child to take that less personally.

Picture this: Your son leaves a plate of pizza in his room, and you walk in and find it covered in flies. That behavior? Leaving pizza

uncovered for days? Gross. Surely in need of some feedback. But your son himself? Who knows why he left the pizza. This one action does not make him a gross person.

Much like the other *don'ts*, this could be another hit to a wobbly sense of self or fragile self-esteem following a potentially traumatic event.

Each of these *don'ts* creates distance, resentment, and distrust in the parent–child relationship and can undermine self-esteem. Aim to stay away from these as much as possible. If you notice yourself having a hard time breaking the sarcasm habit or refraining from "because I said so!" this might be an indication that you could benefit from therapy of your own.

These "don't" behaviors don't just appear in a vacuum. You likely learned them from somewhere, and they can be hard to unlearn.

To wrap it up . . .

Being a kid can sometimes feel like being an explorer on the high seas. Much of the world is a mystery, and you have little direct knowledge about what awaits you over the horizon. Every day brings new wonders. When the sky is bright and you have the wind in your sails, life can be an exhilarating joy. But when dark clouds start to gather and the seas turn rocky, suddenly the world becomes a terrifying place—here be monsters. That's when your little explorer heads for safe harbor—that's you. Parents serve as a child's safe and secure base, where they can feel protected amid almost any type of tempest. And it's all the more important for children to know you're there for them after they've survived one of life's storms. Building a secure attachment relationship—that is, one within which your child can feel confident that you will be both available and reliable in times of distress—is paramount to helping a child heal from trauma.

By using quality time, mentalizing, praise, active listening, and enjoyment, and staying away from sarcasm, commands without rationale, and personal criticism and judgment, you can help foster this type of relationship and help your child heal.

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