

## WHEN "GENTLE PARENTING" FAILS

Practical Strategies For Supporting Big Reactors

Claire Lerner, LCSW  
lernerchilddevelopment.com  
clerner92762@gmail.com

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

GENTLE PARENTING

Coined by Sarah Ockwell-Smith as an approach based on boundaries, empathy, understanding, and respect.



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## HOW THE MESSAGING OF "GENTLE PARENTING" HAS GOTTEN MISCONSTRUED

- You must always be engaged in loving, joyful connection with your children.
- If you stay calm, your child will calm.
- You must always process and go deep into your child's feelings.
- You must never want or need to take a break from your child; any separation when your child is in distress invalidates their feelings, is neglectful and abandoning.
- You must always follow your child's lead; you should not make decisions for your child; that's authoritarian.



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

"I AM A TOTAL FAILURE AT THIS 'GENTLE PARENTING' THING. MY CHILD REJECTS ANY AND ALL CALMING TOOLS. WHEN I SUGGEST SHE TAKE DEEP BELLY BREATHS, SHE SHOUTS BACK, 'STOP TELLING ME THAT!' WHEN I VALIDATE HER FEELINGS, SHE SHOUTS, 'I AM NOT ANGRY!' I DO ALL THE THINGS. I SHOW EMPATHY WHEN SHE'S HAVING A HARD TIME GETTING READY FOR SCHOOL, BUT SHE DOESN'T GET IT TOGETHER AND GET DRESSED, LIKE INSTAGRAM SAYS SHOULD MIRACULOUSLY HAPPEN. I READ ALL ABOUT 'SHARING YOUR CALM' BUT NO MATTER HOW CALM I AM, SHE RAGES. I FEAR THAT I AM TOTALLY SCREWING MY KID BECAUSE I DON'T SEEM TO BE ABLE TO BE A 'GENTLE PARENT.'"



---

---

---

---

---

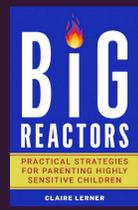
---

---

---

### GENTLE PARENTING WITH BIG REACTORS: THE TEMPERAMENT FACTOR

- Intense reactions to their experiences in the world, including sensory. Their brains never turn off.
- Tend to be more cautious and anxious
- Can be rigid and inflexible
- Lower frustration tolerance, hate being corrected, sore at losing, perfectionistic.



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

WHY "GENTLE PARENTING" STRATEGIES DON'T WORK WITH BIG REACTORS

- They often reject calming tools.
- They shut down or get more dysregulated when adults try to validate and talk about their emotions and experiences.
- They often need breaks/space to regulate.
- They need very clear limits and boundaries to learn to manage their big emotions and learn to be flexible.
- They need their adults to not enable their avoidance when they are uncomfortable.



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**GENTLE PARENTING BIG  
REACTORS**

**KEY MINDSHIFTS**



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---



**GENTLE PARENTING DOESN'T MEAN  
THAT YOUR CHILD IS GOING TO MAKE  
YOU FEEL LIKE YOU ARE BEING GENTLE**



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**MY CHILD IS NOT PURPOSEFULLY  
OVERREACTING**



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

MY CHILD NEEDS ME TO BE EMPATHETIC TO, BUT NOT TAKE ON, THEIR FEELINGS



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

MY CHILD'S RIGIDITY AND NEED FOR CONTROL IS A COPING MECHANISM. They are not a fascist dictator or sociopath (even though it can feel that way!)



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

MY CHILD IS STRATEGIC, NOT MANIPULATIVE



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

MY CHILD DOESN'T MEAN THE THINGS THEY SAY AND DO WHEN THEY ARE TRIGGERED.



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

ALL STRESS IS NOT EQUAL.  
(THINK: POSITIVE DISCOMFORT)



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

HAPPY CHILDREN AREN'T ALWAYS HAPPY  
(AKA LIMITS ARE LOVING)



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

YOUR JOB IS TO GIVE YOUR CHILD  
WHAT THEY NEED, NOT WHAT THEY  
WANT



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

LESS IS ALMOST ALWAYS MORE



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---



YOU CAN'T CONTROL THE  
CHILD.  
YOU CONTROL THE SITUATION



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**GENTLE PARENTING IN PRACTICE: FOUNDATIONS**



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**FOUNDATION:**  
How you respond has the power to minimize or escalate  
Which means...  
Know your triggers!



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**FOUNDATION**  
Your child needs you to be their rock.  
(Aka, why adult regulation is key)



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**FOUNDATION**

Identify what the child needs versus what they want.



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**FOUNDATION**

Make a plan for supporting (versus enabling) the child that you have the power to implement, that doesn't depend on the child's cooperation or agreement.



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**GENTLE PARENTING IN PRACTICE: KEY STEPS**



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

### STEP ONE

Accept and acknowledge all feelings.

Don't minimize or try to talk kids out of their feelings.



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

### STEP TWO

Clearly communicate the expectation or direction. Explain the "have-to."

Don't try to convince your child to like or agree with the rule/limit.

Acknowledge their displeasure.



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

### STEP THREE



Use the "Two Great Choices" to prevent the power struggle.



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**STEP FOUR**

Skip the Correction/Lecture.

Instead, guide the child to what's expected/desired.



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**STEP FIVE**

Provide Tools For Coping



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**STEP SIX**

Repair before reflection.



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

# CASES

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## GETTING THROUGH THE MORNING ROUTINE



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## AVOIDING CHANGE AND CHALLENGES



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

WHEN IT'S NEVER ENOUGH



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

AGGRESSION



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

CHILD OUT-OF-CONTROL  
WHEN OVERSTIMULATED



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

LOW FRUSTRATION  
TOLERANCE/SORE  
LOSING/PERFECTIONISM



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

ALLERGIC TO BEING  
CORRECTED



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

SELF-  
CONSCIOUSNESS



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

KEEP IN TOUCH!

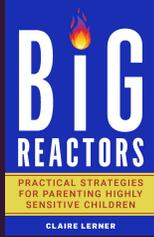
Learn about my services

**LCD Newsletter:** Free bi-monthly email that includes my most current blog and links to additional resources. This is the best way to keep abreast of my content.

**Book- Big Reactors:** Practical Strategies for Supporting Highly Sensitive Children.

**Book: Why Is My Child In Charge?**

Follow my blog



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---