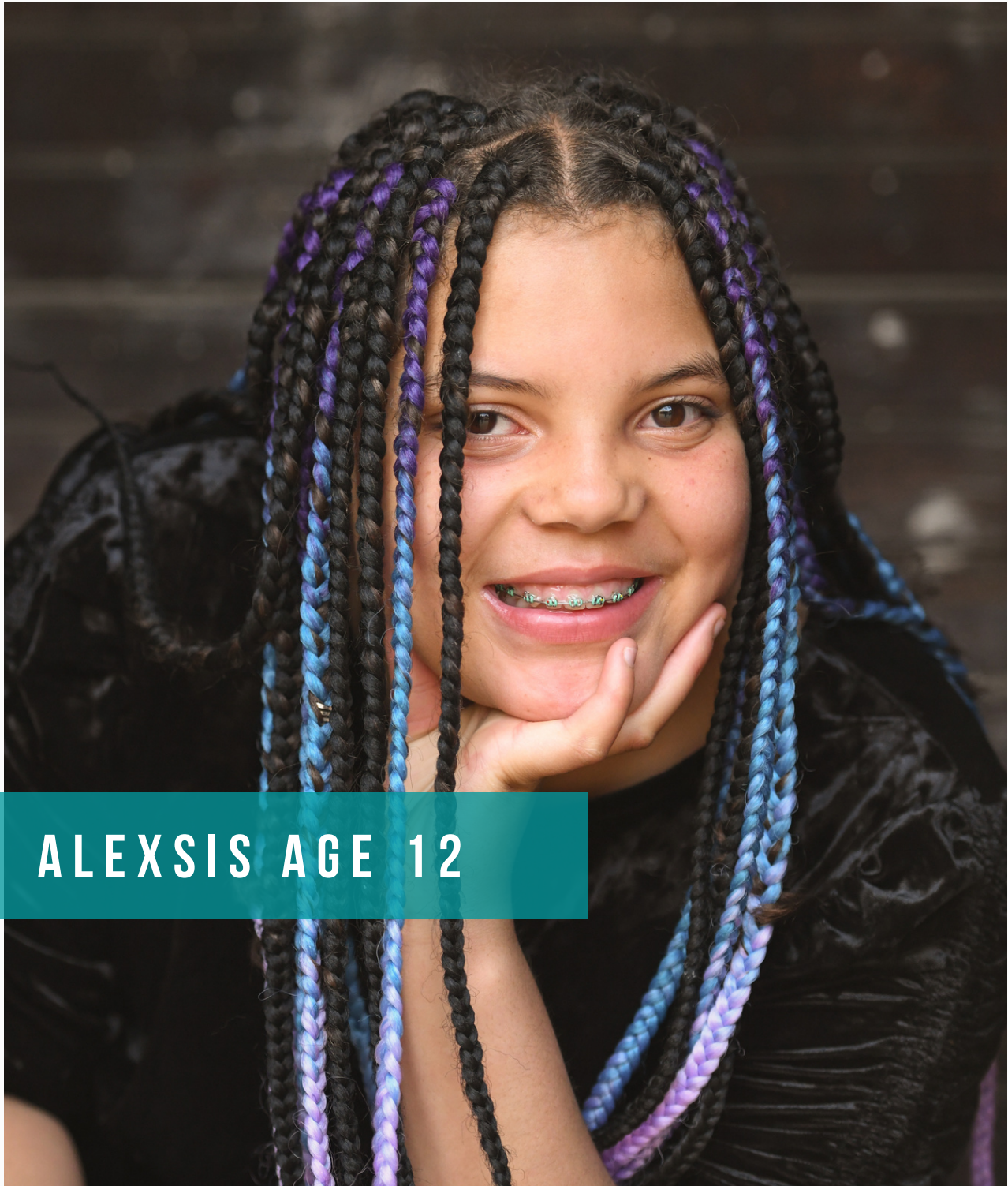


UTAH'S ADOPTION CONNECTION

CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES

FEBRUARY 2023 EDITION



ALEXSIS AGE 12

Photo by: Amber Schiavone,
Amber Schiavone Photography



JADE, AGE 12

Photo by: Bry Cox

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UTAH'S ADOPTION CONNECTION

CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES

In partnership with  RAISE the FUTURE



ON THE COVER, ALEXIS

Alexis-Valerie, who likes to go by "Missy," dreams of the day when she can add M.D. to the end of her name! For now, this girl fancies herself a dancer, and she loves spinning and twirling about the room. Playing basketball and riding her bike are two more ways Missy appreciates staying busy. Any car ride that ends up stopping at McDonald's is sure to be a hit for this girl. She also favors honey-roasted chicken. Missy can be caught inside painting or drawing when the clouds are out, with teal appearing in a large portion of her creations. She is a budding cook in the kitchen and is open to trying new things. Unicorns and horses are creatures that are near and dear to Missy's heart. Being invisible would be the only superpower that this girl hopes to possess. Missy gets along well with peers and is described as a great child with a lot to offer.

This bright and polite girl is in the fifth grade. Reading is one of her strengths, and her computer course is her best-liked class.

You are urged to inquire if you can provide Missy with the attention, support, guidance, and love she deserves. Missy's LDS faith is important to her, and she would like a family that can support her in this. She will need to maintain contact with her sister and brothers following placement. Financial assistance may be available for adoption-related services.

For families outside of Utah, only those families who have a completed home study are encouraged to inquire.

FEBRUARY 2023 EDITION

Kathy Searle, Editor

Lindsay Kaeding, Design Director

To submit articles or for a subscription, call 801-265-0444 or email kathy.searle@raisethefuture.org. This publication is funded by the State of Utah, Division of Child and Family Services. Raise the Future prepares and prints the newsletter and the Division of Child and Family Services mails the publication. The mailing list is kept confidential. One can be removed from the mailing list by emailing amyers@utah.gov.

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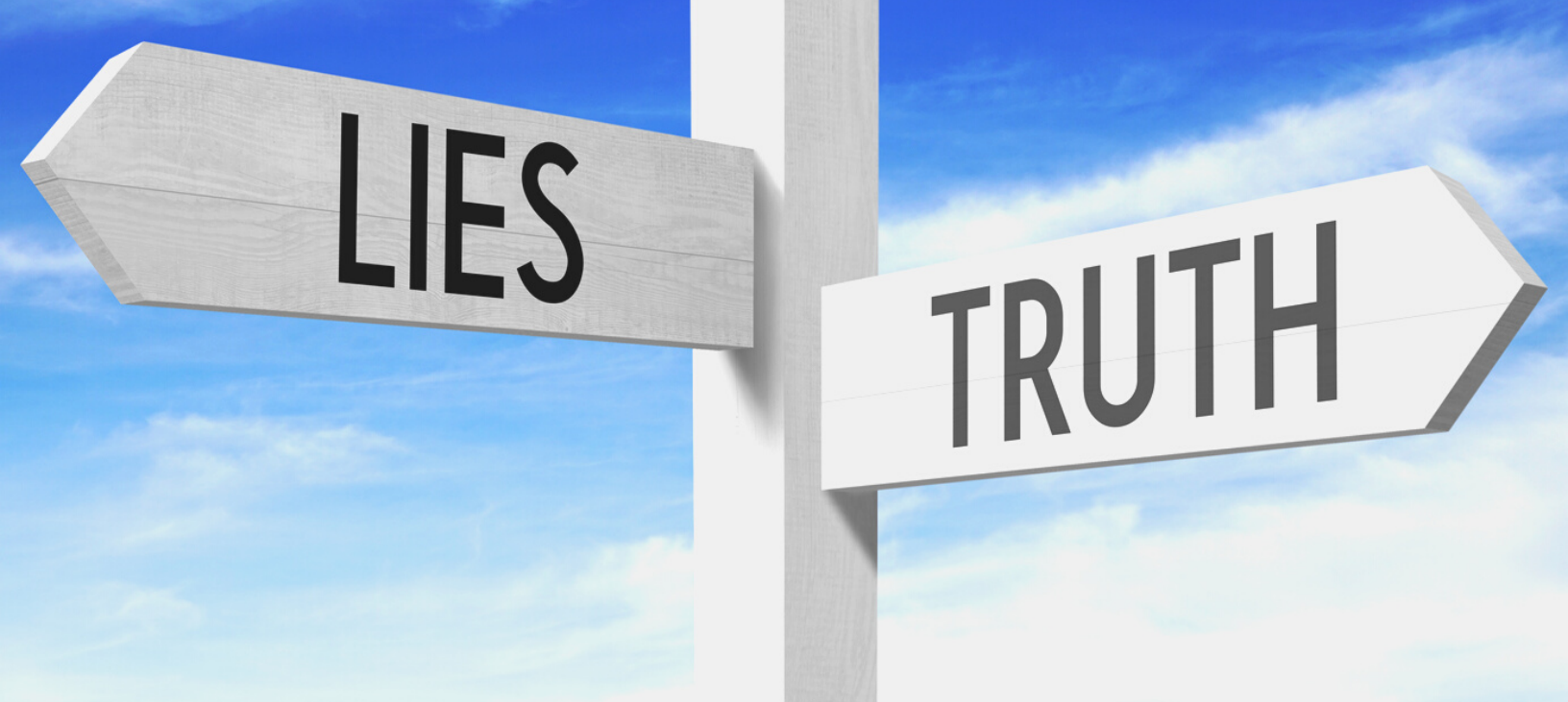
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Raising Me



The Truth About Lying: When Lying Seems as Natural as Breathing

BY CINDA MORGAN, LCSW

Few things are as disconcerting to parents as not knowing whether they can believe what their child says. When a child seems unable to sort out truth and untruth, or when lying seems to be a natural part of the child's interactions, parents may need to explore the developmental foundations of truth-telling and make a shift in how they relate to their child. This kind of lying is most often seen by foster and adoptive parents who were not part of the child's early development. It frequently occurs when some form of lying was a genuine survival skill for the child at some point.

How We Are Raised Influences Our View of Lying

Parents who have adopted a child should remember that they were raised in a different home, even for a few years and has come from a different culture. Culture significantly influences our view of lying. For example, in one interesting study, Chinese children gave negative scores when individuals told the truth about their own good deeds and positive scores when these individuals lied about their good deeds. Canadian children, on the other hand, did the opposite. These findings reveal the Chinese cultural emphasis on modesty and the Canadian cultural view (similar to the American view) of self-confidence.¹

Children's moral concept of lying varies depending on their upbringing—regardless of their ethnicity. It can be useful for parents to reflect on their own cultural influences around telling the truth and it can be especially valuable for foster and adoptive parents to reflect on this.

Shaky Foundations for Knowing Truth

Some major child development theorists believe that the foundation of truth-telling comes in the first years of life. Erik Erikson held that the first social/emotional task of a child is to determine if he can trust the world or not.² A young child's world is dictated by his parents and caregivers. In the first years of life, a child's needs—food, safety, physical warmth, and emotional comfort—can be met only by another person. When the care the child receives is consistent with his needs, he learns to trust. If the care is not consistent with his needs, he learns not to trust.

As a new therapist, I was asked to go on a crisis visit to see a severely burdened new mother. The child had not been well cared for—it appeared she had been in the same diaper for at least twenty-four hours and that she hadn't been fed for some time. As I assisted with the infant, I was saddened to see her open her mouth in distress as if crying, but no sound came out.

If an infant cries because she is hungry and no one comes, and she cries some more and still no one responds, she eventually stops crying and must formulate some kind of internal message in order to survive. It is believed that this is when she begins to tell herself her first lies: "I'm not hungry. I'm not wet or cold. I don't need anyone to comfort me." She distrusts her own senses, her own reality. If a young child lies to herself to preserve her sanity, a parent can expect that she will lie about anything at any time because she won't have the underpinnings to know what is true. For her, lying and truth-telling have no moral dimension. Surviving is all that matters.

Can I Love Someone I Don't Trust?

Some foster and adoptive parents may protest, saying they have taught their child to know right from wrong and the difference between truth-telling and lying, and he knows better. Their child may indeed be able to articulate what he has been taught, and at times he may act accordingly. But in the moment of perceived deep need, he may revert to his early survival skill of lying. Parents might recoil and say, "I can't have a relationship with someone I don't trust." The truth is, their child did exactly that—had a relationship with someone he couldn't trust. The question for the adoptive parents is, "Can he trust us when we say that we will be his forever family?" The child subconsciously asks, "Can I trust someone who doesn't understand me?" Therefore, foster and adoptive parents need to in turn ask themselves, "Can I love someone I don't understand?" One of the most healing messages a parent can give a child is "I can love you even when I don't trust you" or "You can't keep me from loving you even when you lie." It is also realistic to couple this message with "When you are dishonest, our relationship is not as comfortable and relaxed as I would like it to be." For a younger child, parents can say, "When you don't tell me what really happened, I don't know how to help."

Ways to Promote Truth-Telling

1. Don't Ask. The February issue of this newsletter suggested that parents avoid asking their child questions to which they already know the answer, such as, "Did the teacher give you a note for me to sign?" after receiving an email from the teacher. If a parent has a child who lies automatically, it is also wise to avoid asking a question if the parent doesn't know the answer. There's a good chance the child will lie, and asking will reinforce his habit of lying. Parents need to accept that they may never get the real story, resist the urge to become private detectives, and provide consequences based on what they believe is true and what will provide safety. Parents need to do the best they can regarding their child's lying behavior, but should not let it sidetrack them from building the relationship.

2. Playfully Predict Lying. Before discussing a situation with a child in which he is likely to lie, parents can good-naturedly say, "I'm going to talk to you about something and it might make you a bit nervous. So if you want to tell a lie, go ahead and tell a really good one." Using this approach eliminates lying as a tool for control, and giving a child permission to lie helps parents avoid getting their buttons pushed. There are three cautions when using this approach: parents' playfulness cannot contain any hint of sarcasm, the technique should not be overused, and it should not be used with young children who may be confused by it.

3. Identify the Deeper Need for Lying. Most behaviors, if not all, serve a purpose of some sort. Therefore, lying that appears to be purposeless may actually perform a service for the child, though she may not be aware of it. Lying may perform the following functions: 1) It allows the child some relief from her own chaos by transferring it to someone else, such as the parent; 2) it recreates a familiar, comfortable pattern for the child, such as being in trouble or being the "bad kid"; 3) when the child can't handle the chaos in herself, lying helps her see how the parent handles it; 4) it is a way for the child to feel powerful by controlling the parent's mood; 5) the child uses it to test the genuineness of her relationship with her parents; or 6) if the child is frightened or distrustful of close relationships, it may serve to push the parent away. When parents identify the child's need behind her lying and experiment with alternative ways of addressing that need, the child may no longer feel a reason to lie, and the lying may dissipate.

4. Create Internal Conflict in the Child. Although it is not true for every child, when some children perceive that lying upsets a parent more than them, their concern about lying diminishes. Therefore, the first way to create an internal conflict around the child's behavior is for the parent to detach emotionally from the child's lying. The child needs to have an emotional connection to the negative results of his behavior. When he is the one who suffers because of his lying, he will want to stop. This is not to say that an excessively punitive approach will achieve this goal. Different things will create an internal conflict for different children, since each child has different motivations and values different things. Ultimately, the child will stop lying when it no longer works for him—when it is not helping him get what he wants.

Regardless of whether the child can be trusted, each child needs to feel secure in the knowledge that they are safe, cared for, and loved.

How to Use: Real Stuff for Real People

When you live with a child who habitually lies, it can seem he lies continually. Actually, there are many instances every day in which he tells the truth. For example, when your child says, "I'm hungry," chances are he's telling the truth. Lavishly praise the behaviors you want to increase. Some neuroscientists believe this technique works because it creates a different neuro pathway in the child's brain—one that associates telling the truth with pleasure. Each time your child tells the truth about something, even if it is just a preference like "I like vanilla ice cream," reward him and say "That's real." The reward can be a tick mark, which can be redeemed for something meaningful to your child; a Skittle; or whatever you and your child agree upon. This approach may also help you create a new neuro pathway regarding your child—one that recognizes that he actually does not lie all the time.

Overcome Your Own Bad Habit. One way parents can show that they are an ally for their child rather than an adversary is to also make a commitment to change a bad habit. While the child is working on changing her habit of lying, the parent works on changing his own habit. This process not only allows parents to be empathetic with how hard it is to break a habit, but also provides an opportunity for parents to be open with their child about their own progress and relapses. This helps the child feel less like everyone is pointing a finger at her for being a "bad kid" and more like everyone else who also has flaws that need work.

1. Lee, K., Xu, F. (2001). Chinese and Canadian children's evaluation of lie- and truth-telling: *British Journal of Developmental Psychology*, 19, 525
2. Erickson, E. (1980) *Identity and the Life Cycle*. W.W. Norton & Company.
3. Hage, D. *Antecedents to Lying and Teaching the Truth*, <http://www.deborahhage.com/articles/lying>

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92-Year Old Shares Valuable Parenting Lesson

GENERATION MINDFUL, REPRINTED WITH PERMISSION

Near daily they came to see her.

I admired as they sat and visited, never missing a week, spreading out their schedules so that her days were never fully alone. About the time their visits ended, mine began, which meant I often heard their most peculiar goodbyes.

This 92-year-old woman who was consistently fashioned in lavender blouses and slacks was a resident in a skilled nursing facility in which I worked as an occupational therapist.

We were on opposite ends of life, mine just beginning and hers with thick, deep chapters. Beyond her wrinkles was wisdom. Behind her eyes, there was depth and an ageless soul.

One day she told me something that changed the way I loved myself, and it eventually became a guide for how my children would learn to love themselves, too.

Valuable Parenting Lesson

At the end of my shift and during one of our last visits, I wheeled her into her room and my eye moved past her to a framed picture. She followed my gaze and smiled. "This is a picture of me, much younger of course. Wasn't I a beauty? It's interesting when you become older. People look at you and forget that you were once young. They forget that there is a full life here - an accumulation of every age. The foolish ones remain blind and the wise ones listen."

And that's what I did. I listened.

I listened as she shared about running away from a hostile home at the mere age of fifteen.

I listened as she told me her love story, how she met the man of her dreams, and about their marriage.

I listened as she told me about her transition to motherhood and her vow to do things differently than were done to her.

She said, "When you were treated as I was treated as a child, you forget that you are worthy. You forget that you matter. When I became a mother, all that I knew was that my baby mattered and that I would spend every day telling her so. And I did."

Suddenly, it all made sense. As each of her current-day visits came to a close, she and her family always exchanged the same familiar words. "I love you and I love me too."

Her daughter.

Her son.

Her grandchildren.

Even her great and great-great-grandchildren.

They all said it to one another.

“I love you and I love me too,” she explained, “was something that I started without much thought. I would soothe my baby’s cries while rocking in our chair and say it. In the morning. Before bed. As she learned to crawl. To walk. As she grew ... until she was grown. It just became our thing. And, as you can see, each generation has passed it on.”

She shared that when she was little, she just wanted to know that someone loved her. Motherhood was her bridge. “Funny thing. While I started this little saying for my children, I benefited just as much. Piece by piece I came back to myself. It was like my body finally accepted the words one day, you know?”

Internalizing The Lesson

While Deloris is no longer with us, her words have never left me.

Fast forward several years and I too have rocked my baby in our chair and nuzzled him close to whisper, “I love you and I love me too.”

My son is now five and fluidly offers, “I love you and I love me too, mama.”

I never realized how one conversation could affect me so deeply. Deloris’ words have not only touched her lineage, they’ve touched mine.

Far too often, we become conditioned to self-abandon who we are. We fear we aren’t enough. It feels scary to set boundaries and take up space and shine our light. But each time I connected with my son in this way, I connected with myself too. It was like a remodel to my self-worth and self-image.

What a remarkable thing to model for our children. That loving ourselves and another is not mutually exclusive. That we can turn the verb inward. We can love someone and love ourselves. Both parties of the relationship are valuable. Loving isn’t just something we do. It is who we are. And this one little phrase has not only changed the child within me, but it has set a foundation for my sons.

Thank you, Deloris.

I am so glad that I listened.



Grandfamily Caregiver Tip Sheet: Self-Care



There are 2.6 million children in the US who are living in households headed by a grandparent, another relative, or close family friend without a parent present, occurring inside or outside of the child welfare system. These families, often referred to as “grandfamilies”, include approximately 30% of children in foster care being raised by grandparents or other relative caregivers.

Why Do Grandfamily Caregivers Need Self-Care?

When children come into the household, often unexpectedly, grandparents and other relative caregivers frequently put their own needs aside for the child they are raising. Many caregivers report being sleep deprived, having poor eating and exercising habits, not taking time to rest when they are sick, and not making medical appointments for themselves. Additionally, the COVID pandemic has brought additional stressors, feelings of isolation, and health concerns into the lives of grandparents. Self-care practices can help grandparents be the best caregivers they can be! Being exhausted and stressed all the time can lead to serious health issues and decrease your capacity as a caregiver. By taking some time to take care of yourself, you can protect your health, be an even better caregiver, and encourage healthy habits among your kids!

What is Self-Care?

Put simply, self-care is identifying your needs and actively taking steps to meet them in order to protect your personal well-being. When you care for yourself, you are also better able to care for others.



Challenges to Self-Care for Grandfamilies

- Did you know that more than one-third of adults aged 45 and older feel lonely, and nearly one-fourth of adults aged 65 and older are considered socially isolated?
- Grandfamilies disproportionately face barriers to self-care compared to traditional households. Grandparents and other older relative caregivers often live on fixed incomes, and many are forced to return to work to meet the additional costs of caring for a grandchild or multiple children. Difficulties include the cost of housing, food, transportation, respite and child care, and other financial barriers.

- After becoming caregivers for grandchildren or other relative kin, grandfamily caregivers often feel disconnected from their peers and sometimes struggle to maintain previous relationships.
- Many grandfamilies have faced trauma from losing loved ones, being exposed to substance use, experiences with a family member with an untreated mental illness, and involvement with the child welfare system, among other experiences. This increases the need for self-care practices, as trauma can lead to mental health problems and additional learning and behavioral difficulties in children.

Self-Care Tips for Grandparent Caregivers

Manage Your Stress Levels

- Stress can affect us all, so it's important to learn strategies to manage your stress. Self-care can help reduce your stress levels by learning to say no to things you cannot or do not want to do and recognizing when you are stretched too thin. Think about your physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual needs to identify tools that will help you reduce stress and focus on yourself.

Keep Up a Healthy Lifestyle

- Maintain a balanced diet, stay active, and get quality rest when possible. Accessing medical care when you need it and keeping up to date on vaccinations can also help you keep up a healthy lifestyle.

Take a Break

- Taking time to rest and relax is essential to avoid burnout and depression. Make sure you carve some "me" time out of your busy schedule and use it to really nurture yourself.
- Find respite where you can! Whether it's asking for a favor from a loved one to help out around the house or finding a sitter for a few hours to have some time to yourself, do not be afraid to ask for help if you're feeling overwhelmed.
- Download a wellness app to learn healthy strategies for maintaining self-care. Make a plan to practice at least one new type of self-care. Here are just a few examples of self-care to consider:

Examples of Self-Care

- Saying no to things you cannot or do not want to do
- Taking time off (or time to yourself) without feeling guilty
- Giving yourself space to grieve
- Going for a walk or run
- Sleeping regularly and for long enough
- Journaling
- Going to the doctor for regular check-ups
- Taking naps and eating well
- Attending a support group
- Reading a good book
- Meditation and/or prayer
- Buying yourself something special
- Going to dinner or another outing with a friend or loved one



When Angry Kids Lash Out: How to Defuse Explosive Reactions

BY WILLIAM DODSON, M.D., LF-APA, REPRINTED WITH PERMISSION FROM ADDITUDE

Emotional dysregulation is a defining characteristic of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), which explains why so many children and teens with ADHD are easily swept away by intense emotions — resulting in explosive, aggressive, sometimes frightening reactions that disrupt the entire family.

Reasoning with dysregulated, angry kids in the middle of a breakdown is practically impossible. The best approach in the moment is to stop the meltdown from escalating. But what matters most is what's done in between explosive reactions to reduce their severity and frequency over time.

Angry Kids: A Guide to De-escalating Meltdowns

Remain Calm

Children tend to mirror the behaviors they observe. Try to reflect to your child a sense of calm, cooperation, and control. Avoid fueling your child's explosive episode with shouts and flashes of anger. The following techniques also help defuse intense situations:

- Avoid big, quick gestures and movements that could startle your child.
- Join your child's eye level; avoid looking down at them.
- Maintain some physical distance (about two arms' lengths away), though it's OK if your child wants to close the distance.

Avoid Arguing

Your emotionally dysregulated child will likely try to suck you down an argument rabbit hole where they will defeat or deflect everything you say to get you as upset and overwhelmed as they are. Ultimately, arguments only move you away from the real issue at hand.

Step Away

Temporarily walk away from the situation, especially if your child's goal is to see you and other family members upset. Physically removing yourself helps avoid enabling or otherwise reinforcing your child's meltdowns. It sends the message that you and others in the family will not come to a screeching halt and bend to their demands. Use the following scripts as you walk away:

- “I see that you’ve lost control of yourself. I’ll be back in a few minutes to give you time to calm down.”
- “It looks like you’re overwhelmed right now. I’m going to give you a chance to go outside and calm down a few notches. I’ll be back in about 10 minutes and we can pick up from there.”
- “It must be very difficult to feel out of control right now. What would be helpful to you right now in getting this under control so that you can feel better?”

Walking away may also help you keep calm so you can model emotional regulation for your child. If you have a young child, reassure them that you’ll be back once you’re calm. For children and teens of all ages, provide a loose time frame, and explain what you’ll do to self-regulate, be it breathing exercises or going for a walk.

Create a Diversion

One of the best ways to distract your child from their emotional overwhelm is to ask for their narrative. Try to get your child to explain what they’re upset about and why, and what would help them feel better. Articulating their side of the story will help them regain a sense of control. Asking questions will also help your child feel heard and validated, which can do wonders for emotional regulation overall.

Other Strategies

- If your child is young enough, gently hug them for a few minutes if they’re lurching at siblings or other family members during a meltdown. Sometimes the simple act of hugging will calm down a child.
- Avoid doling out consequences in the middle of a meltdown. Often, punishment in those moments only teaches children and teens to be more devious and covert in their behaviors. Allow your child the opportunity to calm down by retreating to a spot of their choice.
- Prioritize your safety if your child’s aggressive episodes threaten your wellbeing.

Before and After the Explosion: Foster Emotional Regulation
All strategies to defuse explosive reactions work best when there’s a culture of respect and communication at home. As central as emotional dysregulation is to ADHD, it doesn’t preclude children and teens from learning about and trying to use tools and strategies to self-regulate.

Talk to Your Child About Their Reactions

The goal of these conversations is to reinforce the idea that explosive outbursts serve no one. You want your child to understand that you’re not dismissing their feelings – just their method of coping. Don’t be discouraged if your child agrees with you but continues to have outbursts.

Prepare to have this conversation many, many times – practice patience as your child tries to put what they know into practice, a real challenge of ADHD.

Self-awareness comes with age, so you’ll need to help your child recognize their unique stressors, the patterns their meltdowns tend to follow, and what helps them calm down. Proper sleep, nutrition, exercise, hydration, and other healthy habits play a role in regulating mood, and your child may need help tuning in to their body to recognize these needs.

As you determine patterns to the meltdowns, consider the possible role of other conditions, like anxiety and especially oppositional defiant disorder, by speaking with your child’s doctor. Many individuals with ADHD also experience rejection sensitive dysphoria, characterized by sensitivity to criticism, which also affects their emotional responses. As you help your child, think about your own triggers and what helps you self-soothe and manage stress. Practice self-care so that you can feel and act your best around your child.

Set Realistic Goals for Your Child

ADHD or not, and even with all the coping tools in the world, it’s unrealistic to expect that your child will never have another outburst. But it is realistic to hope for their responses to improve, so that explosive reactions become infrequent, less disruptive, and easier to manage.

The content for this article was derived, in part, from the ADDitude Mental Health Out Loud episode titled, “How to De-escalate Explosive Stress Reactions” [Video Replay and Podcast #409] with William Dodson, M.D., which was broadcast live on June 29, 2022. Reprinted with permission from ADDitude. Copyright 2022. All rights reserved. For more articles like this one, visit ADDitude online, www.additudemag.com.

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The Value of Routines



CAREGIVERS

Busy caregivers know how exhausting a day keeping up with kids can be. Many of us are balancing our own stresses with the stresses of taking care of the people that depend on us. Although they may show it differently, kids can feel stress, too. The good news is that there are some simple things you can do to make everyone's day run a little smoother. These simple things also build a child's brain and help get them ready for important life skills.



Family Meal Time

When you can, have breakfast, lunch, and dinner together as a family. Family meals build a sense of belonging and security. Any meal that you sit down and eat together counts as a family meal—it can be cereal for dinner, or a picnic of peanut butter and jelly. Be kind to yourself: it's about family, not food. Bonus: make family meals screen-free! Tell jokes, ask kids about their day, or tell them stories about what you did when you were little.



Explain Daily Agendas

Each morning, telling a child (or adolescent!) what they can expect that day can help them to feel safe and secure. "This morning you'll go to school and see your friends. Grandma will be here when you get off the bus to play. I'll be home at dinnertime, and we'll have pizza!"



Utilize Calendars

For toddlers and elementary school age kids (kindergarten through fifth grade), hang up a weekly or monthly calendar on the fridge or somewhere easy for them to see. At the end of the day, help them cross it off. Talk about what they can look forward to that week and show them on the calendar when it will happen. Older kids and adolescents can help make their own calendar.



Bedtime Routines

Create a bedtime routine together. Doing the same things in the same order, around the same time every day gives kids a great sense of security and helps build their brains. Even very young babies love routines! A bedtime routine doesn't have to be long (it can be as short as a few minutes). You might choose to do a "BBB" routine, with "bath, books, and brushing" (teeth) every night. Cuddling up together and reading together is a great way to end the day.



Is It Okay For Me To Cry In Front Of My Child?

BY CATHERINE LIGGETT

REPRINTED WITH PERMISSION
FROM GENERATION MINDFUL

FEBRUARY 2023 | 14

I'm a highly-sensitive, introverted mama to a very active, extroverted little girl, and it was one of those days where it was all just way too much.

Late that afternoon, I was in the kitchen putting dinner together, and she thought it was hilarious to run circles around my legs as I went back and forth from the cutting board to the pan.

Was it cute? Yes. Did I have any capacity in my nervous system right then to see it as anything but annoying? Absolutely not.

A great pressure began burning in the middle of my chest. The annoyance became rage. Then, the rage was swallowed by an all-too-familiar visitor ... intense guilt.

The voice of this guilt said, "She's not doing anything wrong. She's playing. What's wrong with you that you can't just see it as cute, smile, and laugh with her? You're weak to feel this rage. You really need to pull it together and show up for her right now, Catherine." Standing in that kitchen, I collapsed under the weight of my own judgment. Bracing myself against the counter, tears began pouring down my face.

The tears said, "I just can't handle this anymore."

Then, the guilt returned, this time in fuller force. It said, "She really needs you to keep it together. Control yourself. You're teaching her that it's her job to comfort you, and that's going to mess her up."

"Is that true?" I wondered. "Will crying in front of her really mess her up?" I felt torn between two possibilities - my head, telling me it was wrong, and my heart, softly intuiting that it was not only okay but important.

In that moment, I made a split-second decision to do something radical. Something that would break the cycle of emotional repression I'd learned from my own family of origin.

Here's what I did:

Still crying, I sat down on the kitchen floor in front of my daughter as her eyes held me with curiosity and empathy deeper than I can put into words.

I sat up, looked her right in those ocean-deep eyes, and said, "Sadness is visiting mama right now."

"... Why?" She asked.

"Feelings are like visitors," I said as I caught my breath between sobs. "They come, and then after some time, they go away. Like the rain, or the sunshine. And while they're here, there are things we can do to help ourselves feel better."

My daughter has been using her Calming Corner for some time now, and so I trusted her to know the answer to my next question:

"What are some things mama could do to help her feel better while sadness is visiting?"

"Drink some water ... or draw ... or hug a stuffed animal."

Without me even asking, my small daughter walked over to the kitchen table where my water bottle was. She picked it up and brought it over to me.

"Here, mama."

Her unfathomable sweetness, paired with a swirl of uncertainty and guilt for being supported by my own daughter, caused more tears to well up in my eyes.

How could I both receive her kindness with grace while also showing her that mama is responsible for her own feelings?

Here's how I decided to straddle both:

"Thank you so much, sweetie. That really shows me that you care about me. And also, mama is going to the Calming Corner now to help herself feel better. Do you want to come with me?"

She joined me there. Nestled on our soft pillows, I used the feelings chart to identify the visitor of sadness, and then picked out something to do from the calming strategies poster.

"Mama's going to draw for a little while to help herself feel better. Do you want to draw with me?"

We got out the paper and markers, and after a few minutes, I felt the visitor of sadness leaving my body, making space for calm connection with my daughter.

What happened in our home that day took no longer than 15 minutes, but it felt like a dimensional shift.

When I cry in front of my daughter, I still feel vulnerable and conflicted about it. Because it's so different from the way I was raised, my head sometimes has doubts about it being "right." But I've come to understand that this is often how it feels when we commit to breaking cycles of generational wounding.

There's one thing I'm absolutely certain of, however. As she grows older and perhaps has a family of her own, I want her to know in her bones that she is lovable exactly as she is, tears and all. That she doesn't have to feel her inconvenient feelings in solitude.

My heart glows with the knowing that not only am I shifting my family's story, I'm also healing the child who lives within me. She's learning, day by day, that she is absolutely lovable, tears and all.



RAISE THE FUTURE
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utah department of
human services
Child and Family Services



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Obviously it's not always feasible or appropriate to give a child exactly what he wants, but **we can build and strengthen trusting relationships by creatively and joyfully meeting our children's needs whenever it is possible.** Identifying and meeting a child's needs helps her to feel seen, safe, and understood.

Dr. David Cross