

POSITIVE PARENTING

DRAMA REDUCTION FOR FAMILIES: RESPONDING INSTEAD OF REACTING

By Dr. Linda Miles

In the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee, a young girl named Scout is fighting with other children because they are critical of her father, attorney Atticus Finch, for defending a black man in the South in the 1930s.

Atticus is a wise man, and advises his daughter, "you just hold your head up high and keep those fists down...No matter what anybody says to you, don't let 'em get your goat. Try fighting with your head for a change."



MINDFUL REWRITE

Mindfulness practice helps children to hold their head up high, their fists down, and not allow others to "get their goat," instead using their head to handle disputes. The *Journal for Family* (2013) reported that in a study of 400 children, mindfulness training resulted in significant increases in students' attention, self-control, classroom participation, and respect for others.

There is increasing interest in using mindfulness practices for education. The UCLA Mindful Awareness Research Center found improvements in self-regulation abilities of preschool and elementary school students after they participated in eight weeks of mindfulness training.

Children who initially had the most problems with self-regulation showed the strongest improvements. Although it's ideal to start these practices at a young age, it is never too late to begin to increase your abilities of self-regulation.

It is never too late to heed the advice of Atticus Finch by refusing to allow others to "get your goat."

PRACTICE

Children can be taught to breathe in deeply and then breathe out as if they are blowing out a candle. Set up a peaceful space in their room where the family can sit together quietly for a minute.

Teach your children to think about what they feel by naming emotions and help them notice that they pass away. Help your family communicate with curiosity instead of judgment. For example, "I wonder why Jan is so quiet since she got home?" instead of "Jan, what is wrong with you?"

Help your family with loving kindness by practicing and teaching compassion. For example, I recall a time when my son came in after I heard him with a group of boys being bullies to a neighbor. I asked him to picture what the hurt child might be feeling.

My son, Brett, who is now in his 40's told me that he would "rather be beaten" than asked to consider how he had hurt another person. He now laughs that the beating would be over quickly but his concern for the boy lasted for hours. The strategy worked because, as a minister, he is a very compassionate adult.

In *NO-Drama Discipline*, Dr. Dan Siegel and Dr. Tina Bryson suggest that you communicate safety and comfort to encourage your child to discuss feelings by putting your hand on the child and saying, "It's hard, isn't it. Can you tell me about it?"

Walk together as a family and show your child mindful appreciation for nature. Develop rituals at dinnertime or bedtime when you notice things you feel grateful for.

PARENT PRACTICE

When you feel tense and notice attack thoughts, drop your attention into your body and scan for how you are holding your muscles. You can imagine that it is as if the muscles are knots and you are loosening the knots...letting go of stress. The more you learn to calm yourself down, the less drama ensues.



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