

Elke Schicke

33 SENTENCES FOR A HAPPY CHILDHOOD

Fischer Verlag

Pub. August 2026. 208 pages

Simple words with great impact.



33 Sentences for a Happy Childhood distills the essence of successful pedagogy into 33 concise sentences that parents, grandparents, and caregivers can easily apply in everyday life.

Each sentence is a key that unlocks a door to more trust, understanding, and emotional closeness. They can be effortlessly incorporated into conversations, encouraging reflection, rethinking, and growth.

This is more than a collection of clever sayings: the accompanying explanations clarify the "why" behind each one, revealing the core educational attitude. Abstract concepts like "mindfulness," "unconditional love," or "friendliness towards mistakes" are made tangible through concrete, everyday formulations.

Parents learn how to reduce uncertainty and stress, bringing serenity and trust into the relationship with their children. The sentences are small

impulses that relax everyday life and create a positive family atmosphere. They show how communication can encourage children, make conflicts solvable, and prioritize the parent-child relationship over control.



This book provides immediately implementable inspiration and is ideal for anyone looking for less theory and more "heart and hand" in parenting.

Why This Book Is Needed

Every day, the successful ELTERNgespräch podcast receives emails from parents expressing the same core anxiety: they feel unsure, caught in the tension between leadership, responsibility, and empathy. They are constantly searching for a framework that is as flexible as it is clear.

This guide is that framework.

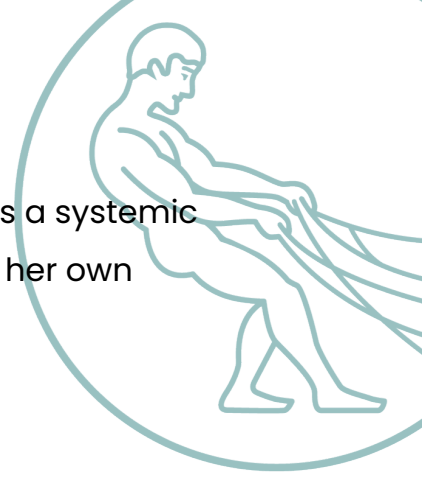
One of its key strengths is its format: written in the style of an accessible, easy-to-understand dialogue (like an interview), the topics are entertainingly packaged. This makes the book perfect for busy parents to read in small, manageable stages.

About the Author

Elke Schicke (Dipl.-Psychologist and systemic therapist) has been a central figure in the ELTERNgespräch podcast team for years. With her friendly directness, warm humor, and rich expertise, she has captivated listeners and was named "probably the most popular parenting expert in the Republic" by the Südwest Presse.

When she is not in front of the microphone, Elke Schicke works as a systemic team and organizational developer, coach, and supervisor with her own practice in Hamburg.

www.elke-schicke.de



33 Sentences

1. I love you. Always.
2. You are not responsible for my feelings!
3. That is my compass.
4. May I ask you as a child expert?
5. What you feel is okay.
6. You have a right to the consequences of your actions!
7. 1 – 2 – 3... or: On your marks. Get set. Go!
8. Like a button on a jacket, conflict holds us together.
9. Nagging makes you ugly.
10. What little Johnny doesn't learn, big John will.
11. Anyone can win – losing is for pros!
12. Have the courage to say you're sorry!
13. Stand tall when things go awry.
14. So you think that's good. Aha.
15. Tell me about: Beautiful! Different! Tomorrow.
16. My childhood is not your childhood.
17. Lion's paw: This is my boundary.
18. Words can cast spells or hexes.
19. Whining or complaining – what are you trying to tell me?
20. Yes, that really hurts.

21. Tried is almost as good as done!
22. Big or small – everyone pitches in!
23. Look how much I love myself!
24. We are a multicultural zoo!
25. Kangaroo to owl: Where are you-hoo? *(Hier habe ich versucht, das Wortspiel "duhu" mit "you-hoo" einzufangen)*
26. You are beautiful to me!
27. You hold the magic wand yourself.
28. I am so lucky to have you.
29. Sharing is quite beautiful (and hard).
30. Justice is in the way – or "Look at your own plate!"
31. What does your body want?
32. Is your soul cozy?
33. I am your fan! You will find your way!



Invitation

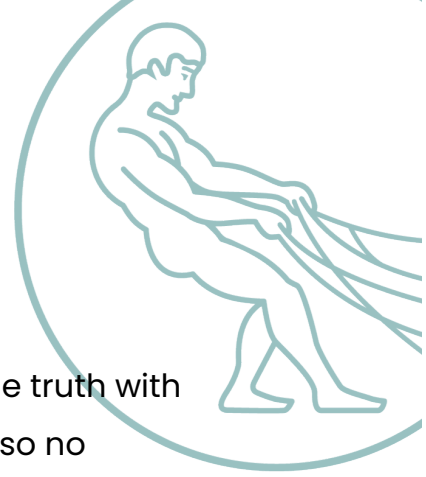
There is no philosopher's stone, no ultimate advice, and no single truth with which we can definitely raise our children correctly. There are also no parenting guides that know exactly—or even know better. So please, do not believe everything in this parenting guide.

An Eastern proverb says: "If you meet Buddha on the road, kill him." This means: Do not follow the path of others. Find your own! We get much further when we go our own way. Finding the path that suits us in a confusing, ambiguous world and shows us when to courageously stand up for our values. That is often exhausting and confusing. Often, we also have to turn back because we were on the wrong track and try again from the beginning.

We can learn some things from others, but mostly I have to struggle to find the answers myself. That requires courage ; especially in such an important undertaking as raising children. Consider carefully whether you find the suggestions in this book sensible, whether they suit you, and whether you want to try them out.

Take the sentences as an opportunity to think about how you want to relate to your child. Because that is what it is all about between parents and their children: not about raising them, but about the relationship. About the challenge of filling the space between you and me.

These sentences are invitations to think about how living together can succeed in a clear, helpful, and clarifying way. They strengthen togetherness by supporting parents and children in developing their own strength and thus



jointly facing life upright. They are easy to remember, concise, and will perhaps occasionally serve as little helpers and guideposts in stressful situations.



It doesn't matter at all whether you remember "exactly this sentence" or variations that suit you. Or you can simply use them as inspiration for your own sentences that make your attitude tangible.

Enjoy reading!

Sample Chapters

1. I love you. Always.

This is not a fair-weather phrase for evenings on the cozy couch or holding hands on a walk. "I love you. Always" unfolds its power especially when things are tense between us or when I myself am currently shaky.

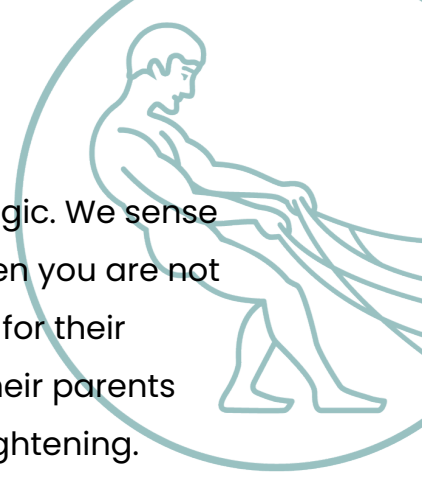
Of course, we love our children. Always. And of course, we also have a variety of other feelings when we are with them. They make us angry. They make us sad. They make us helpless. They scare us. They shame us. They hurt us. We feel guilty, and sometimes there might even be a little hate. All these exhausting feelings are simply there. And not only because we are parents, but also because we are in relationships, have jobs, juggle households, and have to cope with ourselves.

Parents are reluctant to admit their exhausting feelings or they play them down. Yet such feelings are powerful and sometimes lead to ugly behavior in the most wonderful parents. Often, parents don't dare to openly express how they feel for fear of not being "good" parents. Also for fear that the children might not feel loved if they knew how we felt. So there seem to be good reasons to lie about oneself.

However, we cannot escape feelings; especially when we deny and suppress them, they push even harder to the surface. They are always present and guide our behavior more than our mind. Children have fine antennas for these feelings—even more so when we are connected in love and are important to each other. Rest assured: Your children sense you



precisely—even if you say something else. That's why love is magic. We sense each other beyond words. Your child can feel very precisely when you are not doing well. This worries children, and they have a natural desire for their parents to be well. Often they feel responsible or even guilty if their parents are not well. This is challenging for children, sometimes even frightening.

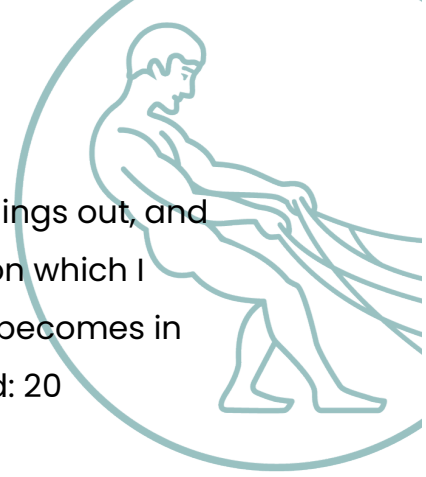


Don't confuse your children by claiming you are well when you are not; by telling them everything is fine when it's bad; by saying you are proud when you are ashamed. Children stumble over this, but because they consider us infallible, they are more likely to doubt themselves than us. They are more willing to think they were wrong than that their parents are talking nonsense. In an attempt to protect the children, we teach them to distrust themselves and their own perceptions; and as they get older, not to trust us either. What exactly do we want to protect them from? What do we believe is too difficult for them?

Children live in our world. It is imperfect, rough, and often unjust. There is suffering and hardship. Our task is to find our way in it, to recognize and contribute to the beautiful and wonderful. By doing this, we also give our children the chance to learn how to master the world. That requires courage and confidence. It also requires trust in children's ability to grow with challenges.

In Zen, it is said: "Everything that is, may be. And what may be, can change.". If I allow and trust my feelings, I first get to know myself, and only then do I learn to master myself. The more confident I am in myself and my feelings, the easier relationships become. If I know myself, I can perceive my boundaries, maintain them, bravely approach conflicts, and take care of myself and others. But honestly—who can claim that about themselves? Mostly we grope

through life and rarely have time to get to know ourselves, try things out, and learn to love our rough edges. The more stable the foundation on which I learn to stand as a child and adolescent, the easier navigation becomes in adult life. (How to do that is another book, which should be titled: 20 Sentences for a Happy Puberty/Youth.) .

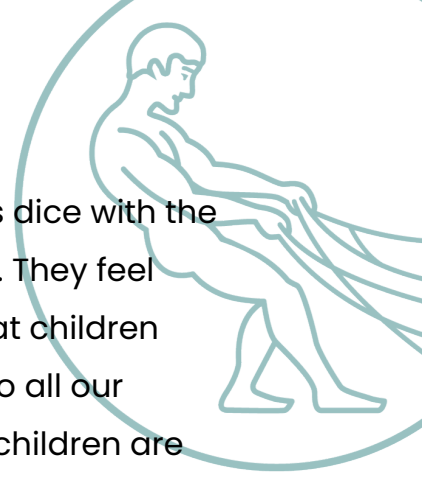


And then we have children. They evoke feelings in us with an intensity previously unknown. Parents are touched by the deeply felt love and shaken by the negative feelings that children can trigger in them—strictly speaking, there are no negative feelings. Feelings simply are. Some are easy and natural, others exhausting. Parents swallow the latter too often, pushing tears, anger, and disappointment aside or letting them simmer beneath the surface. On the surface, we claim everything is okay. It confuses children when their feelings don't match their parents' language. They don't understand what's going on and sense danger.

Children live off the love of their parents. When they feel uncomfortable or worried, it is often the first thing they question, what they fear for. Belonging, not being outcast, is elementary for us as pack animals, which we still are. Parents who are themselves in distress often forget to secure their children. "I love you. Always" is the most important message to our children. Reassuring them in the certainty that an unbreakable bond between us and them can withstand all adversities is comforting, securing, and encouraging for children. It is the fuel with which they dare to venture out into the world.

It is okay if children are also allowed to feel when feelings are difficult. They urgently need to practice this to master feelings. For this, it is essential to expect this of them—in an appropriate dose, of course. If the mother suppresses her tears and says: "No, darling, everything's fine. I'm fine.". If the

father talks worriedly with the mother and then laughingly plays dice with the children, this causes confusion and helplessness in the children. They feel something different from what they are told. We often forget that children have the kindness and patience to challenge us, to follow us into all our corners, and to love us unreservedly in the process. Just as our children are enough for us, we are enough for them.



This also means expecting our children to handle the fact that we do not always agree. That behaviors, statements, and decisions displease us and trigger emotions in us. Of course, we must convey these in an age-appropriate way, and of course, children are not our private emotional trash cans. Nevertheless, it is helpful if parents tell their children how they feel, so that the children:

firstly: can learn to trust their own perception

secondly: can understand what is going on

thirdly: can get to know their parents

fourthly: can learn by observing how to regulate oneself

fifthly: can experience that no matter how the parents may feel, the love for the children is never in question.

So, if the father is choked with tears, he may calmly tell the children that he is sad, that he feels it in his stomach, and that he would most like to cry.

Depending on the content and age of the children, he can even say more. He can explain what he does with it: "I want to take my mind off things, that's why I'm going to yoga, that's why we're playing tag now.". He can communicate that being sad is exhausting and that he doesn't feel like being silly right then. And he can say: "It's nice that I can be sad and love you at the same time.". Or: "I'm really angry right now because you're late, and I always love you anyway."

Or: "I always love you. At the same time, I'm embarrassed to be summoned to see your teacher. I don't even know what to say."

This way, children can experience that the world, just like our feelings, is complex. And they can experience that love endures and is the foundation of the relationship with their parents. "I love you always" is a phrase especially for distress, shame, anger, and helplessness. It is a phrase that, especially when I myself am confused, provides orientation and security. So, spoken before a conversation at juvenile court, before report cards, or before an expected defeat, it works wonders: "No matter what the teacher says in a moment, I will always love you.". "Even if we argue a lot right now and often say ugly things to each other, I will always love you!".



2. You are not responsible for my feelings!

Curtain up for a sentence that fundamentally improves not only the parent-child relationship but every form of relationship, be it a partnership or working with colleagues.



You are NOT responsible for my feelings.

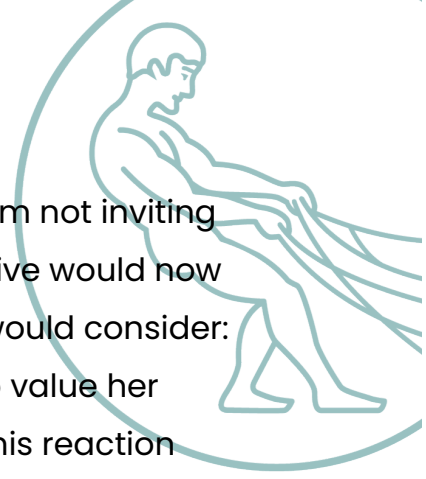
Huh? Who is then? After all, YOU insulted me, didn't follow my wishes, or looked offended. Well, the good news is: I am responsible for my own feelings. Always. I have the freedom, the power, and the responsibility to determine my own self. It's possible that I don't always succeed right away, and it's also possible that I'm not always firmly in the saddle. But as humans, we have leeway and are fortunately not a simple stimulus-response chain.

That's really easy to understand! But unfortunately not so easy to implement...

If you consistently follow this sentence to its logical conclusion, it means: I don't blame you if I feel sad, angry, or hurt. I don't expect you to make me happy. Because that's exactly what we often do, and too quickly. This has something to do with our learning mechanisms: Our brain is very attentive to the connection between a stimulus and the subsequent reaction. We smell cake and think of coffee, think of a birthday and hum "Happy Birthday.". It seems to fit together. It's similar in relationships: Someone says something, and I immediately feel something. Aha, so one leads to the other. Cause and effect are linked, and thus it is flawlessly determined: If YOU had said something different, I would feel different. Blame clarified.

Is it that simple? Of course not! Let's put it in slow motion for a moment and

see what happens. Ben growls: "You're not my friend anymore! I'm not inviting you to my birthday!" and Matilda cries. The conventional detective would now send Ben to jail; he's guilty after all. Sherlock Holmes, however, would consider: What went on inside Matilda that led to tears? Matilda seems to value her relationship with Ben. She is sad. She loves birthdays. She finds his reaction too strong. She feels excluded and threatened. She believes she can't defend herself. She is hurt by the cancellation of the friendship. She knows that tears soften hearts, call parents to the scene, and are a silent punishment. She cries out of revenge, out of relief not having to go to that dummy's party, out of calculation, out of anger, out of overtiredness and being overwhelmed.



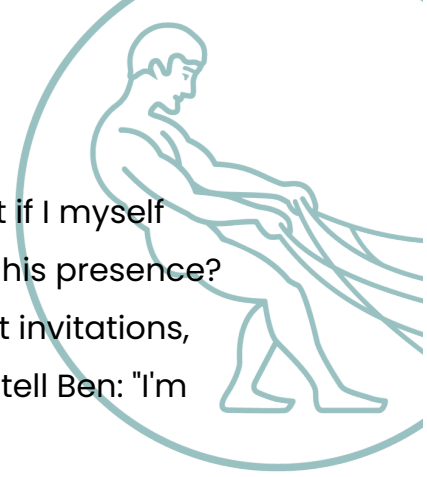
Strictly speaking, we outsiders don't know, and honestly, Matilda often doesn't know exactly either. Mostly it's a mix of everything. "Interesting," Holmes would say. Why didn't Matilda decide to push Ben, stick her tongue out at him, uninvite him too, call her big sister to the rescue, tell on him, laugh at him, or yell at him? All these reactions would have been conceivable and possible. Now, probably only the master detective could clarify in detail which biographical, biological, and formative elements led to exactly this Matilda-reaction.

But it becomes clear: Matilda cries after Ben uninvited her. But Ben is not to blame for Matilda's tears. He is the trigger for a challenge that Matilda meets with tears. If we reverse the situation and imagine Ben not inviting US to his birthday, we would smile mildly and feign indignation. Would we then also arrest him for these feelings? Of course not!

Important Rule: Whoever blames others also gives them power.

Of course, actions, sentences, and physicalities in our environment trigger

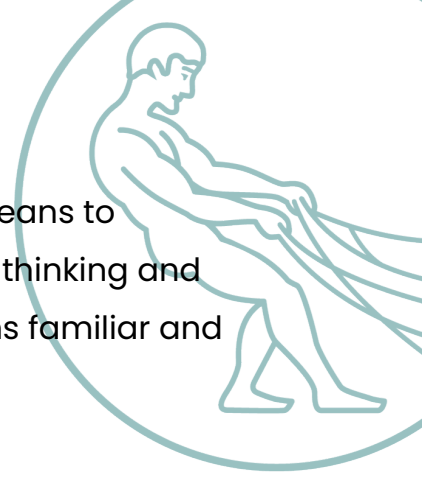
feelings in us. But: Is the outside responsible for my inside? What if I myself consider whether I want to be friends with Ben after I feel sad in his presence? If I get to know myself better because I could feel how important invitations, belonging, and friendship are to me. If I seize the opportunity to tell Ben: "I'm crying because I think you're really stupid right now and I'm too well-mannered to punch you.". "I'm crying because I hope your mother comes and tells you off."



The connection remains: Ben says something, and Matilda cries. The blame goes away, and responsibility is added. Ben is responsible for saying something unkind. Matilda is responsible for her reaction. We are not subjected to each other, but connected to one another. Our responsibility is to treat this connection respectfully, otherwise we jeopardize it. Children among themselves have to practice this for quite a long time. It becomes easier when they find good role models in their relationship with their parents. As parents, you can, for example, say: "I like it tidy, then I'm in a good mood," instead of: "If you tidy up nicely, Dad will be happy." Or: "I'm stressed because I want to leave on time and you prefer to play. When I'm stressed, I get loud.". Aha, then the child's playing is a trigger, but not the reason. Here, a child can learn a lot about their parents without having to feel guilty.

In the most diverse situations in our own childhood, emotions, areas of responsibility, and the moods of different people blur into a sticky sameness, where in the end no one knows exactly who should feel responsible for what. Children, in particular, are often and gladly held responsible for how the mood, reactions, and emotional states of adults turn out. They are supposed to make their parents proud, other children happy, and just not make anyone sad. At least, that's the custom in many families and corresponds to a broad societal understanding. On the one hand, because that's how we learned it,

on the other hand, because a bad conscience is a perfidious means to "educate" desired behavior in big and small people. This way of thinking and distributing responsibility for everyone's feelings therefore seems familiar and somehow okay.

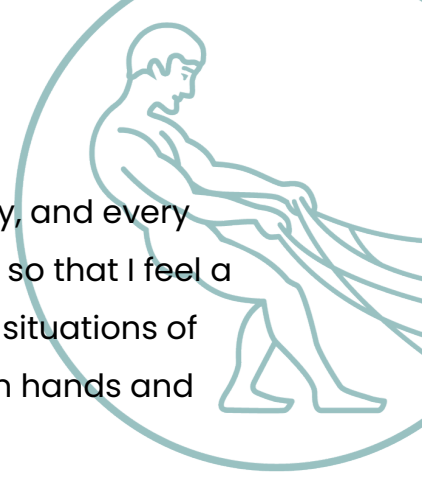


However, it is precisely not okay to make others, and especially children, responsible for my happiness. This burden belongs on my own shoulders. Children love their parents. That's why they are willing to do anything for their happiness. But they can't manage that, and so they feel guilty and try even harder. As a result, an overstraining occurs, which sometimes looks defiant, sad, or self-destructive. Having to go through life with the feeling of never being enough is a burden and the ticket to miserable relationships.

A child who constantly feels responsible for their parents' mood therefore does not, as desired, develop a great deal of empathy for the other person, but rather diffuse feelings of guilt and anxiety. They will believe that it is somehow wrong if the parents are sad or angry, perhaps also that they absolutely must somehow "make these feelings go away". How this then manifests in individual cases is very varied. While some children, for example, begin to suppress their own feelings, others may begin to distance themselves so much that they develop very little empathy. The possible effects are as diverse as there are relationships and people. However, they do not serve mental health and successful relationships.

Whatever results from the perceived responsibility and guilt: children who are repeatedly made responsible for the feelings of others have fewer opportunities to develop healthy boundaries and self-regulation. If I am responsible for emotional regulation myself, I am powerful and free. If, however, the story is that others are responsible for my feelings, this has

far-reaching consequences for our view of the world, our society, and every kind of relationship. The attitude "The others owe me something so that I feel a certain way and do not feel another way" absolves me in many situations of my duty and also my chance to take my happiness into my own hands and to expect this from others.



No question, consistently implementing the sentence "You are not responsible for my feelings" externally and especially internally requires a lot of emotional maturity, and depending on one's own conditioning, practice and perseverance. Giving your child the gift of being allowed to develop free from the ballast of diffuse feelings of guilt on their shoulders is so valuable that the effort is worthwhile.

3. That is my compass

You are your children's compass in life until they can develop one themselves. For this, it is helpful if you are oriented and can provide orientation.



It is worth considering:

What is important to us? In living together, as a family, as parents?

What do we stand for? In society, as adults, as parents?

What do we want to enable for you? With you, with us, with your environment?

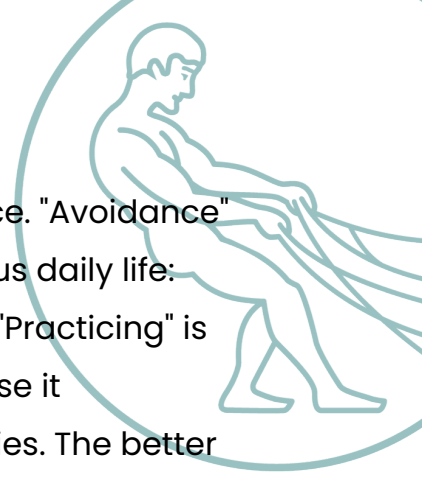
How much of the world do we want to expect of you?

Where do we make it easy for you so it doesn't get too difficult?

The answers to these questions are the cornerstones of shaping relationships with our children. They represent the parental attitude from which our behavior and our decisions arise. These are so personal, so individual—shaped by our biographies, our values, our fears, and desires—that we often have to explore them ourselves first. Most parent couples find it difficult to agree. Then we look around for help, wondering if we can't copy from somewhere, if other parents or a clever psychologist might know how it can be done without accidents. But parents have to find their own answers that suit them and their children. And they also have to take responsibility for them. You can't outsource that.

With our children, for heaven's sake, we absolutely do not want to do anything wrong. Parents often have a panicked fear that they could cause unjustifiable consequences in their children—a bad childhood or even a trauma. In order to avoid doing anything wrong, we then run after other people's values, principles, or rules. As a result, parents are more often concerned with the

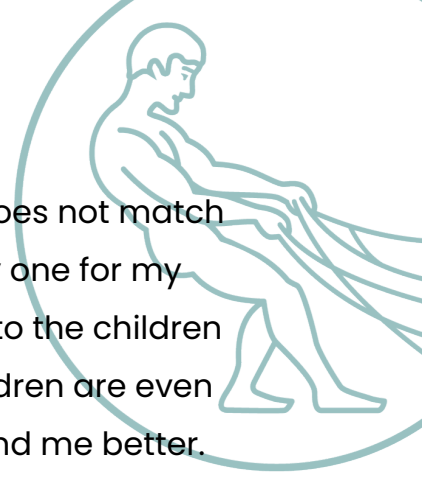
avoidance of experiences than with the **practicing** of experience. "Avoidance" gladly goes hand in hand with fear and worry. That is a strenuous daily life: trying to keep the world at bay. Warding off everything difficult. "Practicing" is in love with failure, success, and humor. I like "practicing" because it strengthens us, prepares us for the world, and creates possibilities. The better we master failure, the greater our freedom becomes. If, as a parent, I know what I stand for and why certain things are important to me, I can represent these before my children and also expect them to handle the unpleasantness that might come with it. Probably a development opportunity for the children will grow out of this. The parents stand firm in life and offer their children a climbing aid until the children themselves are big and strong enough to develop their own attitudes.



If climate protection is a core concern for me, and we therefore only vacation in Germany, if we want/need to save money and therefore only buy at the flea market, if we find media in the house harmful and therefore only use computers and cell phones for work, then this has consequences for the children. These are exhausting and will certainly lead to protest and nagging, and the children will certainly also find a workaround. Nevertheless, parents can be true to themselves and convey an attitude to their children. This not only contains the value itself, but also the steadfastness in the matter and the ability to endure doing things differently than everyone else around them (children often find the latter point the most lamentable).

I am not singing a hymn to narrow-mindedness and rigidity, but to clear attitudes whose consequences are carried with dignity. Children should be allowed to notice what their parents stand for, to perceive them as a force and a compass. It is different when parents have the same values but act differently out of concern that the child might miss something. In doing so,

parents and children get confused because the spoken word does not match the behavior. If I am against smartphones in first grade, but buy one for my child anyway so they are not excluded. Then I become illegible to the children as a parent, and my behavior becomes so full of holes that children are even more likely to cross my boundaries to try and learn to understand me better.



We do ourselves, our children, and ourselves as a family a great favor if we are clear about what we stand for, what is important to us. Our children can get to know us. They will adopt some things, find others stupid and do them differently, and some of our values will be irrelevant to them. But we will gain contour for them, and a stable relationship can develop from that.

4. May I ask you as a child expert?

Every person is an expert on themselves. Only we know how it feels inside us and sometimes even why it feels that way. Beyond that, we are also experts for our gender, our profession, our biography, our generation, our society, and many more categories. And we are beginners, laypeople, or former participants for just as many things. Very few of us are experts when it comes to children. How good that we have the pros sitting at our breakfast table. And the only fee they demand is a kiss and a buttered bread.



You can ask your children about all topics in life. They don't see through some things at all yet, and that's exactly what makes their perspective interesting or amusing. Often in these conversations, we find out how children explain their world to themselves and what they forge sense or nonsense from. Beautiful conversations arise from this.

But children are primarily experts in all questions regarding childhood, childish experiences, children's wishes, and children's logic. Try out what happens when you put your child in the expert chair and seriously interview them.

"So, Nick, you as a child expert, tell me why your brother makes such a fuss in the morning."

"So, Nick, you as a child expert, does it actually help if I don't read to you because you haven't brushed your teeth?" ("No, it doesn't.") "Aha. What would you recommend a mother to do so that her son brushes his teeth?"

"So, Nick, you as a child expert, what would you advise me as a father: Should I be strict with the sweets, or does it help more if we find a different rule?"



Surely some child experts are so funny that they try to lead us by the nose, and they give a cheeky answer. "If you give me a kilo of sweets every day, we won't have the hassle either. Good staff is hard to find.". That's fine too, nothing is lost—at least there is something to laugh about.

Most child experts, however, find it wonderful when they are taken seriously. Several beautiful things can happen:

You understand much more about your child because you take the time to listen to where the real problem lies.

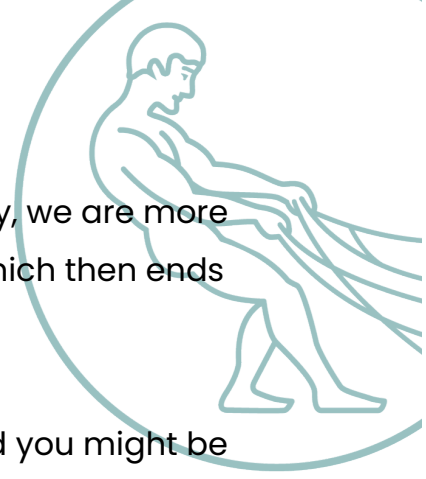
Your child understands much more about what happens between you (again and again).

Both of you gain emotional leeway and empathetic understanding because the space between you becomes palpable and debatable.

This space spans between what you as a parent want and what your offspring desires. Those are frequently entirely different goals. If you now ask what your child's advice is, a change of perspective becomes possible for both. You are no longer standing in the family arena competing against each other, but sitting comfortably next to each other in the jury seats and observing what is playing out there. From this position, the other's motivation becomes clear to both.

Most children know very well what the natural task of parents is: to offer love and care, to represent reason, to adhere to times and rules. Children kindly don't hold this against us. On the contrary: children really like it when parents fulfill their task. Children's tasks, however, are different: playing, seeking

freedom, testing rules, exploring unreasonableness. Interestingly, we are more likely to resent our children for carrying out their natural task, which then ends in frustration and unnecessary scolding.



Together in the arena jury, great expert conversations arise, and you might be surprised how much permission for regulation and clarity you get from your personal experts. Often they can tell us quite precisely when we should step in or what from us is superfluous or not very effective. Ultimately, such conversations are a beautiful opportunity to get to know each other better and better. Through the shared understanding of the different goals, some pre-programmed disputes become predictable, and parents and children recognize each other more in their role execution (educators vs. explorers). Then you don't have to take the behavior personally anymore, but find a more humorous or at least more distanced look at each other.

So: If I have something wrong with my teeth, I go to the dentist; if I have something wrong with the drain, I go to the plumber; and if I have something with the children, I go to the... exactly!

5. What you feel is okay

Feelings are inescapable. They are always there—coming and going without us understanding exactly why and how. Sometimes we can summon them at will, and often enough they simply don't obey. Each of us actually already has our hands full with our own feelings. And then there are the feelings of everyone else around me! At that point at the latest, the thicket turns into a jungle. If love then intervenes—the troop of monkeys races through the forest.

There are a number of favorite feelings that we have: Sure, love (if it works out), joy, pride, courage, confidence, and many more. Those pass smoothly, as long as we don't exaggerate them. And then there are the more exhausting feelings that require more practice and from which we like to try to run away: I get booed, not invited, or scolded. I am offended, refuse, or protest. I am sad, helpless, hurt, and ashamed, feel guilty, am disgusted. If I'm unlucky, multiple feelings even come at the same time, and if it gets really bad, they are also contradictory. (In Northern Germany, people say to that: "Oha.") . So it's worth it if we are well-versed specifically with the unloved feelings.

A key to lifelong happiness is to convey to your child: What you feel is okay. Perhaps it's not pleasant, but you can deal with it. I am by your side when things get tricky, and I will accompany you in perceiving, naming, and sorting these feelings. Unfortunately, I cannot take them away from you because they are within you. And that is why only you can learn how you want to deal with them. You can appropriate them and learn not to succumb to them, but to make good decisions hand in hand with them.

"You betrayed Ben's secret, and now you can't come to his birthday. Yes, that's sad for you, and you are ashamed." "I planned my time badly and snapped at



you, and yes, now I'm stressed, angry, and grieving." "Yes, you were so angry that you smacked Younis."

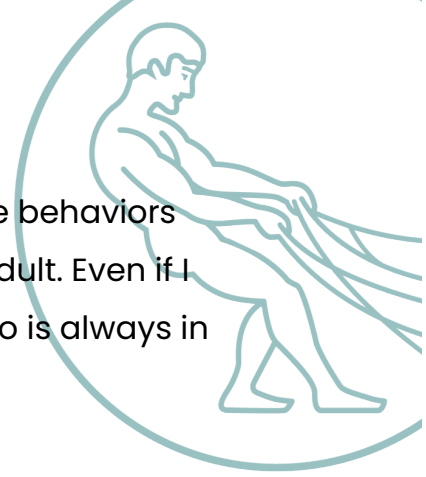
The magic lies in the little word: "Yes". Accepting the feelings with all your heart. Lovingly embracing what I feel. Perceiving what is there and what has happened. And resisting the urge to find quick solutions. It is disrespectful to feelings if we want to get rid of them quickly. Only by feeling deeply do I get to know myself, and only then can I learn to control myself and better choose who I want to surround myself with.

A little magic door to our children opens when we understand that it's perfectly okay to sometimes feel a bit "devilish". We are human beings and not angels. The attempt to be a good person and behave correctly lasts a whole lifetime and is a slippery slope over long stretches. It's good if children understand that we **struggle** with this too. Our children, however, look at us with admiration. They think we're super and believe in their innocence that we have the hang of it. They don't notice any of our inner circling around the right decisions and behaviors; instead, they only see that we are solid, honest, well-behaved, and just.

Many adults have learned to successfully direct themselves and keep their lower instincts in check. Or to only pursue them when the children are in bed and we comfortably reach for the remote control with greasy chip hands. Children measure themselves against us and draw the short straw because they can't do it yet and get lectured for their stumbling: They should please behave better, friendlier, fairer, more honestly, etc., etc.. In the process, know-it-all adults far too often forget how wonderful it is to be mischievously pleased, to be schadenfreude, to exclude someone, to have slapped someone, to have gotten away with a fib, to have swiped something, to have



cheated, or to have cut in line. There's a whole list of undesirable behaviors that come to mind because they still bring me joy even as an adult. Even if I know that I'm actually not allowed to and shouldn't do it. But who is always in control? Nobody! Right!

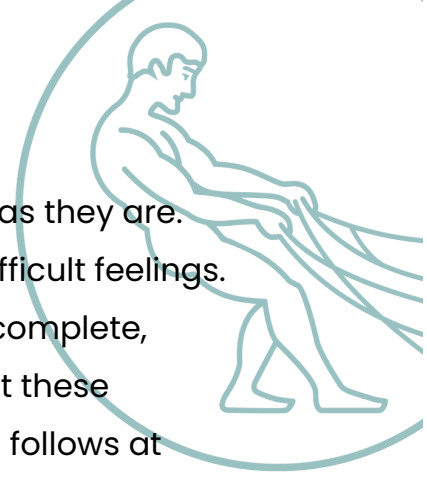


And here the magic door opens: Take your daughter on your lap and ask what was also good, joyful, exciting, vindictive, or thrilling about the misery. To do this, you would have to turn off your adult, parental mode of reason for a brief moment and simply follow your child's feeling. And really fully and with a full heart. The better you yourself can empathize with how your daughter must have felt, the better she can learn to name and assign the feeling and thus begin to understand herself. This is an indispensable step in not just being trained, but truly being able to steer oneself.

I know this is difficult for many adults because what must not be cannot be... But imagine, it really did your daughter good to smack Younis. It was deeply satisfying and exactly the right reaction in that moment—"... and then he finally cried". For children, it is wonderfully relieving when their parents can relate to that and say: "I can really understand that if you were so angry and helpless. The slap really matched the anger well. And you felt strong.". Such understanding makes children's eyes shine more than Santa Claus.

You can take a little stroll through the emotional situation: Talk about when the anger started and through what. Where in the body it was first felt. When it still obeyed and when it took command. Don't destroy this intimate moment with reason and suggestions for improvement. Just listen and follow the feeling. Your son doesn't have to pretend; he is understood exactly as he felt and gets the feedback that these feelings are comprehensible and absolutely okay. What a huge relief! In these moments, children experience that they are

loved no matter what. And that they are absolutely fine exactly as they are. Most importantly, they can start to assign and categorize the difficult feelings. It is perfectly okay that we have them; they are part of being a complete, well-rounded human being. And step by step, we learn not to let these feelings take the steering wheel. That is why the expert question follows at some point: "And now?".

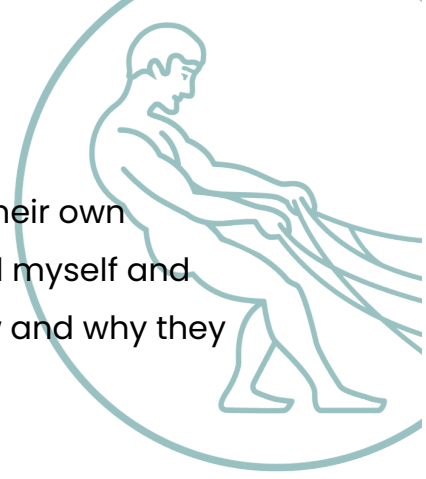


Your daughter probably knows the answer herself. Because no matter what good reasons we have for terrible feelings or actions, we still have to answer for them, and we only fully appropriate the feelings when we link them to actions. The apology to Younis is different when I have understood myself in the process. Access to my own feelings first opens the door to compassion.

There is rarely a simple solution for exhausting feelings. Sometimes you just have to endure them. The sorrow of not being invited, shame, being caught swiping something, helplessness with failed apologies, guilt over betraying a secret.... For parents, nothing is worse than seeing their children suffer. Then we perform at our best and pull out all the rescue stops in the world. And yet we cannot solve everything. Feelings are there and remain until they are fully felt. This cannot be accelerated or taken over. It helps children if their parents acknowledge these feelings and sometimes just accompany them silently: holding hands, making a hot water bottle, scratching their back. As parents, we know that it will get better; children still have to practice this confidence.

Premature solutions often backfire because the feelings are not given time to find a home in the children. Understanding what these exhausting feelings mean is the foundation for self-care and empathy. Going through these valleys is the emotional soreness on the way to emotional maturity. Matilda will probably go to Ben's birthday in the end. Of course, my mother will calm

down again. But until then, everyone involved has to deal with their own feelings. And what a gift is hidden in it when I am allowed to feel myself and can also tell or hear how it was dealt with. If my parents tell how and why they got angry and what they did to calm down.



6. You have a right to the consequences of your actions!

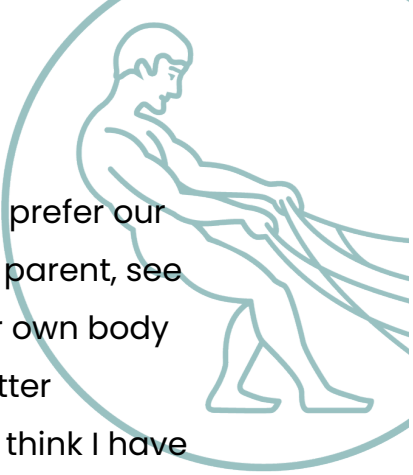
How wonderful it is to notice: What I do has an effect! I can influence the world! I can shape my environment!

But no masters have fallen from the sky: trying, falling, getting up, trying differently, falling again, getting up differently, falling again, crying and gnashing teeth, giving up, continuing, falling, and then slowly and steadily falling more beautifully, falling less often, getting up more elegantly, and finally getting the hang of it and mastering it yourself. HURRAY! (Although: oops, then you still tumble a few more times until it's really secure) .

On this path, children are confronted with all the feelings that belong to life: anger, shame, sadness, fear, frustration, helplessness, and finally pride and joy or acceptance. Learning doesn't just mean acquiring new skills and knowledge and accumulating it in my pantry. Learning means being able to fill and link content with emotions and meaning. Our body learns with us and builds a home for our knowledge. For this, we not only need movement (see chapter: "Whoever wants to relax must also be able to stomp"), but also an emotional connection, so that the knowledge touches us deeply and sticks. This creates passion, interest, or even aversion. And only then does the fullness of mastery emerge. I understand how my world fits together. I know how I can influence it according to my will. I control myself and understand the environment. I have tried everything and found the right path for me. **That is the profession of children: to acquire a driver's license for their lives.** And the task of parents is not to stand in the children's way while they do it.

What parents don't like at all: watching my darling fall down, not making it onto the climbing frame, arriving late to gymnastics. It is hard to endure the

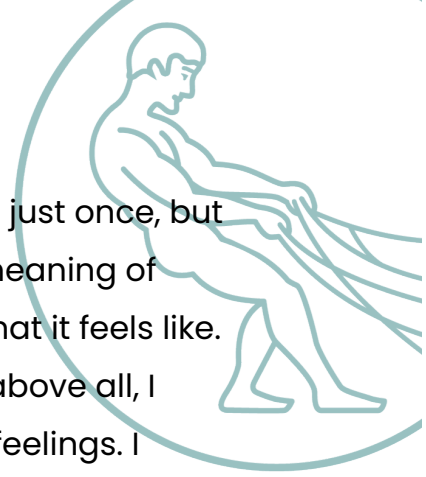




sadness, disappointment, or anger because, naturally, we would prefer our children to live in the constant sunshine of life. Not only do I, as a parent, see my child suffer, I also *feel* it with them. That is love: feeling in your own body how others are doing. The rolling tears, the sheer anger, or the bitter disappointment: We don't want to endure that, especially when I think I have the solution in my hands and we could seemingly just prevent these feelings. Then the suffering, the sorrow is averted, and everything can continue on the best path for our child. But watch out! If we look closely, it's more about our own desire to avoid the feelings and the consequences. Children are admittedly no huge fans of exhausting emotions either, but they find them and coping with them far less terrible than we do and often even have a certain fascination for these new feelings. Then the same hurdles are tried again and again, and parents get to be eye- (and ear-) witnesses to how their darling seems to go about the solution clumsily, only to slip into the same emotional outburst every time. Sometimes the children aren't just practicing the activity, but they are practicing the feeling in all its facets. Tom runs down the hallway crying loudly, keeps everyone in suspense, only to pause in front of the mirror and observe himself crying. After he has determined what he looks like while sobbing loudly, he trots on, more informed and *modulated*, to collect the appropriate reaction from his parents.

Modulation is the keyword here. Mastery doesn't just mean showing behavior and feelings or not showing them. Mastery means being able to play them in all gradations and on all keys. Think for a moment: In how many ways can one rage? Loud, quiet, silent, threatening, growling, screeching, offended, condescending, dignified, helpless, frozen, stomping, slamming doors, clenching fists, crying, lying on the floor, striking, scratching, whimpering, (laughing) mockingly, attacking, retreating, triumphant ... and that's not all. Children must try out all these variations for themselves, be allowed to

experience them themselves or at least observe them—and not just once, but quite often, until learning sets in. And here one recognizes the meaning of learning: I haven't just understood what anger means. I know what it feels like. I know how I express it and which form fits which occasion. But above all, I know how to get it under control myself. I am the master of my feelings. I understand myself in the world.

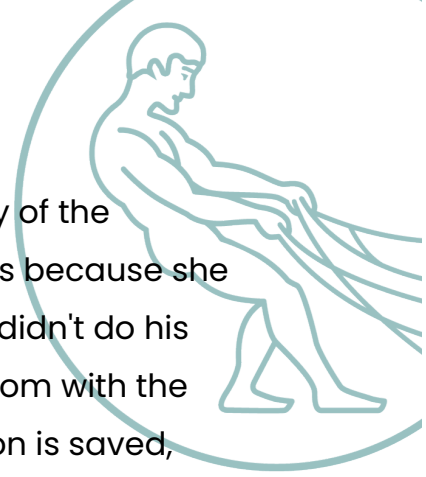


And no, it doesn't help much to explain it to them. We grasp the world with our bodies, through our own experience. (The experience-transfer machine is currently still in development and will be sold by me next year for one million euros a piece.)

Protecting children from the negative effects of their actions unfortunately often also means keeping them trapped in inability and dependence. Then they cannot rely on themselves and help themselves; then they are dependent on the red carpet being rolled out. Challenges become increasingly threatening as a result, because failure is not mastered. And "snap", families find themselves in a vicious cycle of little trust, rescue, less trust, more rescue—until everyone fears that life is an unreasonable place and succumb to the delusion that everything must function "accident-free". Avoidance, however, shrinks our room to maneuver and prevents development.

Sometimes, parents' own childhood memories are triggered that they didn't like or perceived as too difficult. They want to protect their own children from those anyway. (see chapter: "My childhood is not your childhood") . Sometimes, parents also simply lack the patience, time, or understanding to deal with the children's wailing and frustration.

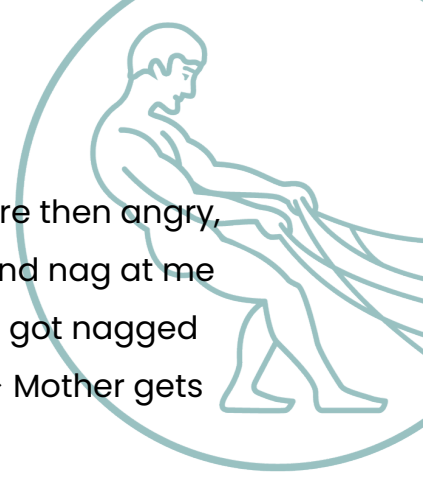
So, parents throw themselves with passion and fervor in the way of the consequences of the child's behavior. So before Klara complains because she is the slowest on the bike or Tom gets a bad grade because he didn't do his homework, we push Klara sweating through the park or talk to Tom with the tongues of angels. Phew, the situation is navigated, the afternoon is saved, and the drama won't be staged after all. And that is sometimes a very wise decision by the parents.



But quite often it's not!

Learning means: I can recognize the connection between my behavior and the result. What I do or refrain from doing has an effect. As an infant, I cry, and someone comes and takes care of me. Aha! As a toddler, I nudge the tower, and it falls over. Aha! (And please consider how often that is practiced!) . Later, I take wobbly steps one after the other and plop onto my bottom. Aha! Up to this point, parents don't get the idea to deny their children learning. But the older the children get, and the more complex the processes, or the seemingly more threatening the consequences, the more obstructive the parents act. They rescue, prevent, act, *before* the learning experience can even take place. Before Klara croaks because she is the last one, the big siblings have to ride behind her. Before Greta could feel hunger, the food is carried after her (which she then defiantly spurns). Before Tom feels bad because of a grade, he is forced to do homework with nagging and arguing. How often do we force children to their happiness instead of letting them search for it themselves. Sometimes, a whole court ceremony forms around the prevention of the consequence, whose sole purpose is to keep the child quiet. So how is learning supposed to happen if the consequence of their decisions remains hidden from the children? Sometimes the children are even really unlucky. Then they only learn that their whining, complaining, and

raging leads to a consequence from the parents. The parents are then angry, desperate, or listless because they have to "rescue" me again and nag at me or make reproaches. The learning experience: Did something -> got nagged at. Tried something -> Father rolls eyes. Practicing something -> Mother gets hectic.



The parents burden themselves and the relationship with their children with nagging, groaning, and services, making it unpleasant on this level instead of leaving it to life, which does what it does best: teach us something. It is absurd with how much burden parents try to save their children from consequences. It is much easier to make use of what is already there anyway: life!

If we turn to life with courage and confidence, learning opportunities arise on every corner.

Knocked over cup: learned to wipe up.

Didn't put on gloves: learned to be cold.

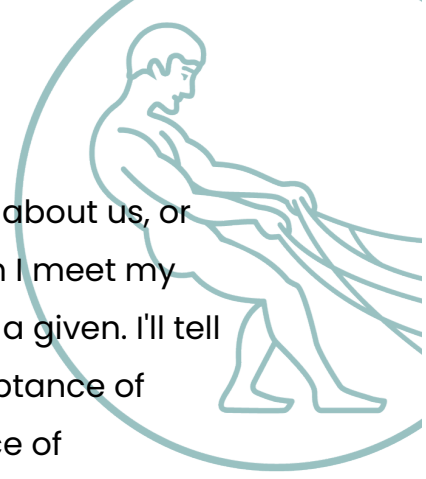
Didn't get up: learned to be late.

Fell off bike: learned to get up.

Lost: learned to lose.

Now, life is just structured in such a way that falling, failures, and sorrow are part of daily business. Adults, too, stumble from one disappointment into the next mishap. A key difference between us is how we interpret this stumbling. "You have to be good at luck," as the saying goes. So, if I put a lot of energy into averting mishaps or into mourning unpleasant experiences, there isn't much left over for courage and adventure. I also have the option to accept unpleasant experiences as unavoidable, as inevitable. Then there is strength left over that I can use for coping. Ideally, I then overcome this situation, and

mostly I have even learned something essential—about myself, about us, or about the world. Right, that requires an inner attitude with which I meet my environment. Where do I get it from? Because for many, it is not a given. I'll tell you the hiding place: It sits in parental compassion, in the acceptance of challenges, in the comfort for the children, and in the wise choice of consequences.



Being able to assess the consequences of my actions makes me free and secure. However, this art is hidden even from most adults: fully aware of the consequences, they stuff their faces, drink, consume media, and spread out their own social behavior. I claim that chip consumption would drastically plummet if, at the first crunch in the mouth, the pants button popped open, or the car would simply stop if, when turning the ignition key, the tree in the front yard pulverized. It's interesting, isn't it, that we demand from children what we ourselves hardly master. And these examples illustrate how urgently we depend on direct effects in order to get into action control. Children can only age-appropriately assess what their behavior triggers. The more short-term the connection, the easier the learning. The further away the effect is in time or place, the more difficult it is for us to make the connection. So the trick lies in allowing children to experience the consequences in accordance with their level of comprehension.

Parents can ask themselves the following questions:

Is the effect manageable for my child?

Is the effect reasonable?

Can my child learn something from the effect? Failure, rejection, and boundaries also want to be learned!

Does coping with the effect lead to a desired behavioral adjustment, or

does only a sour taste remain?
Can I withstand the effects myself?
Can I chalk up the effects as a learning success for my child?
Do I have enough calm and compassion to accompany the situation
meaningfully?

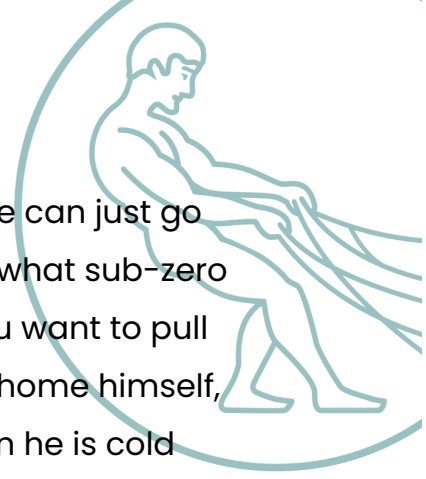


Ludwig cut in line. That's super! Then he seems to have understood that cheekiness wins. Do I want him to learn that? Then I can stay seated and keep staring at my phone. Or do I want him to learn social rules, that he learns to wait, and that he gets the chance to be part of a group. Then I have to get up, go over, grab the dear boy and say: "You'd like to slide again quickly. Waiting is pretty hard for you, and the line seems very long to you. I can understand that. The rule on the playground is: get in line, wait, only slide when it's your turn.". That is the long first sentence. If Ludwig is an adventurer, he'll try again right away what happens if he bypasses the line. And this is where the consequence would have to happen: a short, brief, reasonable little thing: Ludwig has to let five children go ahead of him.

Mieke doesn't want to clear the table. That's super, because with that she saves herself a lot of work that her parents can do just as well or even better. If you think so too, or don't feel like arguing, or enjoy the romantic couple-time at the sink, everything is fine. But if you think Mieke should contribute her share to the household, then calmly close the kitchen door: "Mieke, your brother cooked for everyone, your father set the table for everyone, and you are clearing the table for everyone. That's how we do it here, and nothing else happens until it's done.". And then the kitchen door doesn't open again until after the table is cleared.

Nico doesn't want to put on his gloves. That's super! He's practicing being a

weatherman and doesn't trust his overcautious parents. Then he can just go out into the winter weather and have the experience himself at what sub-zero temperature his hands do get too cold. Think about whether you want to pull out the gloves triumphantly then, or if he should get them from home himself, or if the gloves are in his backpack and he decides himself when he is cold enough.

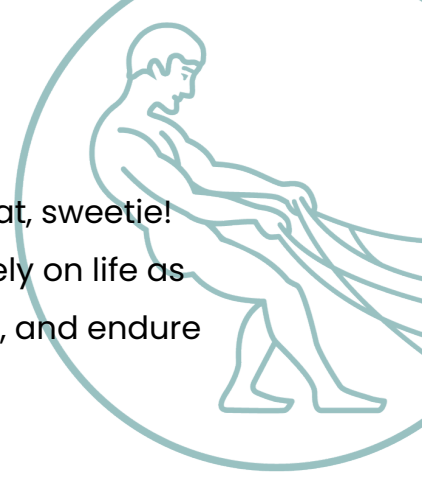


Friederike doesn't want to put on her sneakers at gymnastics. That's super! She wants to run in socks because she loves sliding on the smooth gym floor so much. Unfortunately, she can't use most of the climbing equipment then. Her father can inform her about that. What that means, Friederike can only find out if the gymnastics instructor doesn't let her on the equipment. The changing room isn't far, and Friederike can then go get the shoes on her own.

These effects are **reasonable** and **manageable** for the children. They offer wonderful learning opportunities. Other consequences are also logical, for example, unbrushed teeth, missing sunscreen, and road safety, etc., but often cannot be fully grasped, even by older children. There, we as parents remain obligated.

Sometimes, enduring the self-chosen effects also means frustration and tears for the children. They belong to the club of feelings. As parents, we don't have to prevent them and not "make them go away" either. We have a hand, an arm, and a lap, so we can offer comfort and validation. "Yes, the little hands are really red and cold. That's probably uncomfortable. Come here, my darling. What do you want to do now?". You'll probably hear the word 'gloves' underneath the complaining mumbling. Then go ahead and encourage Nico to search for and put on his gloves.

And NOW comes the cream of the crop in parenting: "Look at that, sweetie! Learned something new." Both of you, in fact! The parents can rely on life as an educational partner, and the children can learn to feel, carry, and endure their own limits.



The effects are not always rosy and not always crowned with success. All the more valuable when parents are there who comfort me and help me "eat the soup I've cooked" [face the consequences], without eating it away from me.