



NATP

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF THERAPEUTIC PARENTS

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The National Association of Therapeutic Parents endorse this letter.

To Whom It May Concern:

You may think I am a bit of a weird parent. You might be worrying that I seem a little strict or rigid. Maybe you are worried that sometimes I don't give my child the benefit of the doubt? On top of this, you might look at my child and notice that their behaviours are very difficult. You might think they need 'taking in hand' or punishing and that I am 'too soft'.

This all makes me a rubbish parent, right?

WRONG!

I used to be just like you. I thought I knew all about parenting. I have had some good successes in my life. What I DIDN'T know, was that there is a big difference parenting children who have suffered early life trauma. I thought silly things like, 'Love will see us through,' and 'Time will heal.'

To be honest, sometimes I think it would be *a lot easier* if my child had an obvious disability. If s/he was deaf, or could not walk, society would make allowances and adjustments for that. In fact, we *expect* society to.

My child looks so normal. People even say that to me. It's VERY annoying when people say that. People also say things like, 'my child does that too'. That is annoying too. If you have said this to me, please stop.

Sadly, s/he is not 'normal', (or at least not our society's view of normal). My child has experienced things which have damaged their brain and changed the way they respond to the world. If you think about the way in which we evolve, children also adapt and evolve to suit their environment. If they are in a dangerous, traumatic environment, the part of their brain which responds to that situation, becomes overdeveloped to ensure their survival. (There are well documented brain scan images which show this. I can point you in the right direction if you would like to see them)

My child is frightened of adults. Imagine that! The very people who are working hard to protect them and reassure them, are their SOURCE of fear. My child cannot learn to stop being frightened. We can't TELL them to stop being scared of us.

If you are scared of spiders, frankly you don't care if it's a good spider. You don't care if the spider says you can trust it. You just want to get away. Your heart pounds, you might sweat, your brain runs very fast looking for escape route. You might do something out of character to get away. This is what my child does.

You might see that he/she cannot

- Concentrate
- Sit still
- Remember what you have said
- Tell the truth

On top of this he/she might

- Lash out at others
- Appear very rude or defiant
- Be very controlling
- Steal things
- Lose things

If I saw these kinds of behaviours in a 'normal' child, (i.e. one who had not suffered brain damage through trauma), I might use standard parenting techniques. I might give them 'time out'. I might use reward charts to improve behaviour. I might even shout at them, tell them off and give them a punishment for their bad behaviour. I might get them to say sorry, or write a letter of apology. If they lied I might insist they told me the truth and accuse them of being disrespectful. I would use these methods to 'help my bird to fly'. I can't use these strategies for my child because although I have a bird, it is a penguin.

My child's brain works in a different way so;

- They cannot link cause and effect (I.E. If I do this I might get in trouble)
- They don't feel things in the same way (I.E. heat, cold, pain, hunger, shame, empathy, remorse)
- They don't experience things in the same way (I.E. everything may be loud or overwhelming most of the time)
- They cannot calm themselves easily and may be very anxious and escalate behaviour quickly if they feel they are being forgotten about, to remind you they are there.

Just imagine, you found a dog running in the road, trying to avoid cars, whizzing by closely, making the animal terrified. Would it be helpful to shout at the dog? To tell him off? To punish him afterwards for getting out by shutting him in a kennel? Would that action make the dog think, 'Hmm I see what I did wrong there. I ran in the road, and got really scared. So, fair enough I need to be locked in here alone now'.

Obviously not.

We would probably try to stop the traffic so that the dog was not in danger and stopped running about. We would be careful on our approach as we would be aware that he might bite us, out of character and from his place of terror. We would speak quietly and calmly. Making no sudden movements.

So if we can see that this is a much better approach to take regarding a terrified animal, why is it so difficult to see that we need to adopt a different strategy when dealing with a terrified child?.

That's what Therapeutic Parents do. That's what's I do.

I am a Therapeutic Parent and I make no apologies for this. I am doing what my child needs me to do to help them become functioning members of society, to be able to show kindness, build relationships and become effective parents themselves one day. **Therapeutic Parents are NOT therapists.** They don't DO therapy. They are simply parents who need to parent differently to help their children's brains to grow. So, my parenting looks different. I help my child to feel calmer when they are frightened and behaving badly from that fear. I use empathy to help my child to feel calm. I don't insist my child says sorry, when they are overwhelmed with fear and shame. I use natural consequences to build synapses in my child's brain, so they start to learn about cause and effect, and the world starts to make sense to them. I have very clear boundaries and routines so my child can predict what might happen next. I don't insist my child tells me the truth. I just let them know that I know the truth, so they don't spiral down into toxic shame. I don't send my child to 'time out'. That would be like leaving a crying baby to 'sort themselves out'. Instead I keep them close and try to work out what their behaviour is telling me. Just like we do with a very young child. I always think about my child's emotional age, and not their chronological age as their chronological age is not very relevant to be honest.

This is a very long job. It won't be done in a couple of years. We can see some small improvements quite quickly, but they are external changes. The big change is the one where my child feels good enough. Where he feels safe. Can trust adults to meet his needs. Can admit when he's made a mistake. Can feel remorse when he has made a mistake. All that will take a very long time. Probably more than 10 years.

Being a Therapeutic Parent is **a very tough job**. If you would like to know more so that you can help me to heal my child, then please feel free to ask.

In the meantime, please don't mistake my child for a bird. My penguin is technically a bird but s/he needs to learn to swim in order to survive. Please don't throw them off a cliff to see if they can fly.

Kind Regards,

Therapeutic Parent