

Letter of Encouragement
(to Parents of Young Children)
by Tricia Berg

To the woman at Wal-Mart yesterday with the screaming little boy:

I heard you throughout the store having trouble with your son melting down, and I felt bad for you and your children. People were giving you that "look" of disapproval over your son's behavior as if they all had perfect children (even the ones who never had any, I'm sure--or maybe those people were saying that's why they never had any children. LOL) When you turned up behind me in the checkout line, I wanted so badly to offer you some helpful advice, but you wouldn't make eye contact. Your face was so flushed and you kept your head down and your eyes averted in embarrassment. After a few attempts to make eye contact so I could get my foot in the door to say something encouraging, I gave up out of worry that I might make the situation worse if you were sure I was judging you. I prayed for you instead, but I can't get you and your family out of my mind. So here's what I would have said if I could have gotten a chance.

I'll start with the small piece of advice that I hoped to have time to get in yesterday. (It takes way more words to explain when typing than to actually just say.) I have no way of knowing, but I suspect that your son is tired and hungry. Based on the time of day, I'm guessing that you may have just picked up your kids from school and/or daycare after working and all of you are tired and hungry. You are probably being efficient by combining the trips and getting what needs to be gotten while you are already out, but it's not working out so well. Can I suggest that if this is the case, that next time you drive through somewhere and get something from the dollar menu to tide everyone over after picking them up and before shopping? For a few dollars, the crisis might be averted.

I used to do this with my kids when I had to do shopping after picking them up. We had a blast sitting in the car at Wal-Mart eating our little snack, talking about the day, laughing about how silly it was that we were eating in the Wal-Mart parking lot. (We still laugh about it sometimes now that they're grown, but it adds stress to try to take kids inside a restaurant the same as shopping does.) Your kids miss you when they're away and things happen that they might want to share--sometimes good things and sometimes things that cause them to really need reassurance that their mom loves them and everything is going to be fine. Maybe the teacher or daycare provider scolded them or their best friend played with someone else. Whatever--it's important to a kid.

Anyway, it's so hard to behave when you feel tired and hungry, isn't it? I bet you had a headache, too, and a little snack can sometimes help with that as well. Be sure that the kids understand that this fun thing you're doing is conditional upon their being good during the shopping to follow--that you will do this again (maybe next week?) but NOT if they misbehave. (But if that ends up being the case, then try to bring a little juice box and packet of crackers to head off the potential crisis.)

Now DURING a melt down, there is a technique you can try that I had success with. First, empathize with the child by saying that you understand he is not happy or he is upset about something, no matter how ridiculous it seems to you. This will get his attention and at that point, reiterate that you care about how he feels and acknowledge that he is having a problem. At this point, the child will hopefully be defusing and you can then ask them what they think needs to be done to solve the problem. They may have an absurd idea, but rephrase it back to them in a way that is acceptable. That could be the end of it. Sometimes we just need to be acknowledged and reassured. I used this more than once on my kids and was shocked to see it work, but I'm not making any guarantees.

Here is a sample conversation:

Child: I hate everything! My socks are uncomfortable! (throwing a tantrum)
Mom: I agree that is so horrible when socks are uncomfortable, how awful.
Child: Yes, socks should always be comfortable. I hate socks! (still upset, but not making a scene anymore)
Mom: What a problem this is, I feel bad for you that your socks are uncomfortable.
Child: Yeah, and this isn't the first time this happened to me. (less upset, glad to be listened to)
Mom: What do you think we could do about this?
Child: We could throw my socks in the fire!
Mom: I hear you saying that you never want to see those socks again. How about if we donate them to charity and wear different socks next time? (child is no longer acting out)

This will not work in an all-out screaming on the floor tantrum, but it will hopefully help prevent the situation from escalating to that point (along with the trying to make sure the child is not on the brink of having no self-control to begin with by trying to time the shopping trip when they are not tired, hungry, sick, etc.)

Another thing that you can practice at is to catch your children being good. If they only get attention when they do something wrong, they will do things to get your attention. They NEED your attention. So reinforce the behavior you

want to see. Your son wanted to help you put the groceries on the conveyor belt and got upset when you took the glass jar from his hands. He then put something unbreakable on the conveyor belt (you may have handed it to him--I wasn't staring but I saw in my peripheral vision). I wanted to tell him "good job." He needs to know that even though he was naughty, you still love him. The more you give him attention when he is good, the more he'll see that is the way to get your attention. He'll want to please you and get that positive reinforcement. This goes for both (all) of your children, of course. And be careful not to place one child in the "good" category and the other in the "bad." The "good" child may take delight in seeing the other punished constantly, even egging him on when you're not looking...

I saw you very quickly swat your son in the head after you put him in the basket of the cart. He barely reacted and so I assumed he was used to it, which is sad. I know you didn't hit him hard, but I have to say that hitting in anger is not discipline (and **never** hit your child in the head). All it does is to make the child feel angry and probably unloved, and it makes you feel like a bad mom. You may have been raised as many of us were, with plenty of spankings. If you want a disciplined child, hitting is not the way (unless he does something dangerous where he needs the lesson to really sink in quick for his own good). A child needs to learn SELF-control and so enforcing their behavior with violence does not lend itself to that end. The Bible does say that if you don't discipline your child, he will bring you shame. However, I would like to point out that there is a right and wrong way--indiscriminate hitting is abuse.

Try to break the cycle if there was a lot of physical "discipline," yelling, name calling, etc. in your house when you grew up. Your kids are going to be parents someday and you will want them to be happy adults (not scarred and broken) with healthy children. You will care how your grandchildren are treated, but by then you will probably forget that the way your kids parent is how you taught them. Believe it or not, and I'm sure everyone tells you this, the time when your kids are little is going to fly by. Each phase that you think is difficult will be replaced by a more difficult phase until they are parents. (I'm just being honest here, each time you'll look back and wonder how you thought the previous phase was difficult.)

Hopefully you'll have a loving, mature relationship with them when they are adults, where they respect you and you are supportive to them (but you will always be their parent first--people who say that they become "friends" are exaggerating--we always need our parents even when we're grown). In this selfish age we live in, that is not easy to achieve for anyone. People these days equate getting their own way with love and make way too many comparisons

with others. (The grass is always greener on the other side.) It will be very difficult to reach that peaceful point of harmony unless the groundwork for it is laid down along the way. (Think therapy if things continue as they are--the teen years are coming before you know it and they are NOT easy. Learn coping strategies now.)

A lot of people think they know a lot of things about raising kids (despite there never having been a perfect parent, ever, and that most definitely includes me), but these are **your** kids. Your gifts from God and your privilege to raise. (Psalm 127:3-5) They actually still belong to Him, as do you. He owns the earth and everything and everyone in it. (Psalm 24:1) We become His **children** when we **believe** in His Son for salvation (John 1:12-13), but whether we do or not, He owns everything He made and that includes us. He sees everything we do and we will answer to Him. (Psalm 94:9-11, Hebrews 4:13)

Now is a good time to be forgiven and call on God to help you in this tough challenge of raising kids. (Joshua 24:15, 2 Corinthians 6:1-2) We all need forgiveness (Romans 3:23-25) and we all need help surviving in this world. Great news--God loves us! Even though He knows everything about us, He still does. Amazing! Call on Him when you're at your wit's end. Even if He doesn't intervene directly by giving you peace or wisdom or strength just when you need it, it pleases Him that you put your trust in Him. (Psalm 9:9-10) He will bless you for doing that (Jeremiah 17:7), and during the time you pray, you are not doing anything you regret.

Start your day by asking God to help you and make you more like Jesus. End your day thinking about what didn't go right, asking and receiving forgiveness from God for it and asking Him to help you do better tomorrow so that you can sleep in peace. (He hears your thoughts, so you don't have to say anything out loud if you don't want to.) Pray (aloud) a blessing over your children before they get out of the car and before they go to sleep. It will remind them how they are special and God is always with them. Tell them you love them and God loves them. Take them to Sunday School* or at least get a children's Bible to read them. (The one who learns the most from Sunday School is the teacher as she prepares for class. You are their teacher 24/7/365.) Train a child in the way they should go and when they are old, they will not depart from it. (Proverbs 22:6)

God cares about you and your children. (Matthew 13:14-15, Matthew 6:25-34) He knows why you react to stress the way you do, what all has happened, what struggles you face, even what you're going to do next. You can trust Him. You are loved and you are not alone. You are my "neighbor" and I love you.

(Matthew 19:19, Romans 13:8-10) I hope that you will be my "sister" in the Lord someday. (Galatians 6:10) God doesn't want anyone to perish, and neither do I. (John 3:16, 1 Timothy 2:3-4, 2 Peter 3:9) (And I am not trying to judge here, I realize you may be a believer having a particularly bad day, but better to err on the side of giving more support than less.) I will keep praying for you. If you read this, please pass on any of the advice that you try if it works for you. And hold your head up high. Your children got born and that wasn't easy or pleasant, but you did it. Congratulations!

*PLEASE, stay away from any denomination that has a "special" version of the Bible and/or relies on "authority" from other sources. God wrote it exactly right the first time. There is no need for additions--unless someone is trying to deceive others.

To everyone else: Wouldn't it be a much more beautiful world if everyone prayed for others who are struggling instead of giving them dirty looks? Let's repent of our self-righteousness and selfishness, and do that the next time we get an opportunity to show the world what our great God is like. God is love.
1 John 4:7-11

Written by Tricia Berg, January 2017, 5 pp. If you have been blessed by this article, you are free to share but do not claim as your own or sell, and do not make modifications and attribute them to me.

You can download as many free pdf devotional articles as you wish from my blog <http://layoutfortoday.blogspot.com/> (The most recent articles are at the bottom of the page after you click on the "free pdf downloads" tab at the top of the page.) You can also read this article at <http://clotheyourselves.blogspot.com/>, where the Bible verses should pop up when you hover over the cites.