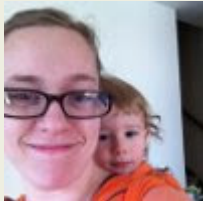


How Does That Work?



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“Balancing on My Toes” is an original column appearing every other Friday at Everything-Voluntary.com, by Angel M. Ethell. Angel lives in the Chicagoland area with her family: sons Teen (13) and Lil G (2) along with their little sister Cassie Pie (dog), her partner Daddy G and father-in-law Grandpa G. She loves learning new things along with learning that she might not always be right... 100% of the time. Archived columns can be found [here](#). BMT-only RSS feed available [here](#).

As a natural, gentle parent I get asked that a lot. A. Lot. Sometimes it will refer to breastfeeding, sometimes it will be co-sleeping, and sometimes it will be about something totally different altogether. But although the answers to these questions vary, the grace with which I try to answer them stays the same. Yes, you should be breastfeeding past one year; the benefits do not decrease, they increase. Yes, I co-sleep and still have sex; it just may not always be in a bed, and I do many other things traditional parents just cannot wrap their heads around. Sometimes the questions get under my skin; sometimes I delight in talking about things I am passionate about. It depends on the situation most times.

Non-Aggression, What Now?

The Non-aggression Principle (NAP). We get it. Most people don't. When I tell traditional parents that my children are not harmed by me (any longer, I did traditionally parent my older son, and that's how I know it doesn't work for squat for me) as punishment, they cannot understand it. They do not think of it as disciplining instead of punishing; many tend to think no punishment means *lassiez-faire* or passive parenting. On the contrary, when I'm done telling them how much research I've done, how many people I've talked to and how many different methods of guidance I studied before my son got old enough to need guidance they are inevitably impressed. When I tell people that they can actually prevent meltdowns and that they are probably to blame for them (I don't usually add that last bit unless I really know the person), their heads spin. Preventing meltdowns though is the best system of discipline for all children because it focuses on meeting needs and creating a baby-led schedule which cuts down tantrums dramatically.

Time-Ins

Because of the research I've done, I understand that children do not learn when their needs aren't met, and that a meltdown is just a plea to meet a need. This need can be as basic as needing to calm down when excitement causes a child to forget him/herself. I have heard much negativity directed my way when instead of "giving that kid a whooping," I give my son a hug and tell him I understand his frustration. Many (almost all) traditional parents think badly of me. I could not really care less, though. When my son is too worked up and is throwing a tantrum, it's probably because I forgot to pack a lunch, or took him out during nap time or something like that. His tantrum is probably my fault so why punish him for it? I do feel bad for all the misunderstood children out there, but I cannot impose my ideals on others. All I can do is help spread the word.

I Don't Reward to Manipulate, Either

Many parents give their children presents for acting in a momentarily desirable behavior. I have come to understand that if a child always receives a gift or praise for performing, they will lose intrinsic desire in the every day in favor of desire for the gift or praise. This creates superficially obedient children and teaches children to manipulate others around them both by learning it's okay to manipulate and that performance is not necessary unless there is a carrot. Intrinsic desire comes from enjoying the action itself instead of the praise one receives, and this can be lessened and usually is in children that are heavily praised and rewarded. Telling children they have "done a good job" is different than "You tried really hard and you did it! How does that make you feel?" The first will create artificially increased awareness of what others think, which leads to wanting praise, instead of the self satisfaction of a job well done which leads to increased desire to achieve.

Listening to Children, Not Forcing Their Will

Bedtime schedules, potty training, and eating are sources of contention in many households. Not mine. Want my secret? Baby-led training. Our bed times are not set in stone, although many people need to follow a schedule for work and other activities. I have tried to adjust my activities around his schedule. I don't work full time, but I do work. I have a job that allows me to come in at 11am and be done by 5pm; I specifically looked for this kind of job so I could be with the younger one in the mornings, so that we can use baby-led bedtimes, which are a bit later in my house. It works for us. Potty training with encouragement and not punishment is non-traditional as well. Many children have accidents, but I have come to realize that the reason so many parents become angry with their children is because they really think the children are doing it to spite them for some reason, not, like me as a kid, just having too much fun and didn't notice the urge. Gently raising children fills them with confidence and the desire to please their parents because it makes them happy to do so. Traditionally-raised children try to please their parents so they do not get punished, which leads to a similar outcome, but a much different mindset as they grow older.

In this age of information, ignorance is a choice. It just is. While there are some exceptions to the rule, like those people in poverty who cannot raise themselves out, this statement holds true for most people in America and other developed countries. There is no reason that one cannot educate themselves on different methods for many things, and parenting is a big one. If all you have is a hammer then everything will look like a nail, but when you add tools into your parenting toolbox you can see that there are many fixes that do not use force or physical punishment at all. Schools and daycares give real world examples of this principle. They are not allowed to harm children any longer so, they have been more creative. All it takes is a little imagination and Google. Natural gentle parenting works for me and my children. Our house is peaceful and because I don't hold unreasonable expectations of my children, there are no punishments; only learning situations and examples of real life consequences. And the reason the sometimes hostile questions I get do not always bother me is because I love telling people that there are different ways to raise children than what is traditionally thought of as good parenting.