

# It's Parenting, not Posturing



Send her mail. [f](#)

*"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](#).*

The last time I was in a store I was without my little guy. These instances are few and far between, but I'm okay with that. I understand that if I want a well regulated child in the store, I have to control as much as I can, so I don't take him during meal hours, or before naps. I just don't. I also make sure to have my sling handy in case I need to just pop that little guy in my sling which helps up both calm down most of the time. Stores are *boring*. I know that and I try to empathize. But you have to do what you have to do, so sometimes that little dude needs to sit in a sling if he is not going to sit in a cart so we can just get our shopping done and over with. It can definitely be unpleasant. Shopping for clothing is worse because its extra boring. Well, while I was at the store there was a woman who stepped into line behind me hauling a new toddler and telling her quite calmly that she cannot run around because it was time to stay in line. I have had the same conversation a hundred times. So I let this woman ahead of me. She smiled and went on ahead after thanking me. I told her about my tot and went about my business.

## **Such a Pleasant Experience**

But most of the time something else happens all together. What happens? Well often a child that is acting on instincts and un-met needs, and is trying desperately in the only way she knows how to communicate, melts down. And what do we adults do around her? We scowl at her and judge the parent harshly. I've done it myself! How bad I feel about myself when I catch these thoughts varies each time, and I still have to moderate my attitude towards screaming children, but I'm trying. As the parent its embarrassing. We all know the shame felt when we cannot live up to unreachable societal standards. To counter this shame some parents act out to exert control over a situation that needs to be allowed to run its course. Often this turns into physical punishment and/or threats against the child.

The parent feels threatened and embarrassed and because of this puts him or herself in a bad situation. Parents might threaten to leave or to not buy something the child wants, but this will really only work on older children because the younger ones have very little concept of later, so will not understand not having the prize item. This threatening often just makes the child cry more which will have to lead to more threats. The more adults around to witness the situation the more escalated the threats will likely be. The whole time the parent will be ultra aware of the other adults and their attitudes towards her and become more stressed imagining the negative conversations that must be happening. A parent might tell a child they are embarrassing her, but this again only works on older children who still won't really understand the societal pressures we put on ourselves and each other. All this posturing children don't understand and it confuses them. Posturing damages the parent child relationship. It leads to mistrust on both side: adults mistrust themselves and question their parenting, and children mistrust the adults that are supposed to be guiding them because of the sudden change in their expectations of a situation and its outcome.

### **Expectations of a Situation?**

Yup, even children that are restless and have a hard time in stores and other public places expect that their parent will meet their moods and behaviors in the same way they always have in the past. When a parent suddenly changes her behavior because of embarrassment a child can have lasting memories of the event and have a learned fear of public places and mistrust of others.

### **Who Does This?**

Everyone. I'm not sure where this idea that all children have to behave in public and not cry and not fuss and basically not be kids came from. Adults that are not parents have the least understanding of the needs of a child and why they might be acting in a way that draws attention and, in my opinion, are the first to judge. Shaking a head or giving a sharp glance at a struggling parent can crumble the small amount of control she may have and turn her towards this posturing behavior to gain some self assurance back. But adults without children are not so bad, after all they have no idea what is in store for them when they do, if they do, become parents. Its the adults that have children that confound me the most. Like I said earlier, I do it too sometimes. I don't know why. Why is it so objectionable to hear a child crying? I can't say. I believe it is a learned behavior. Maybe an unconsciously leaned behavior, but a learned behavior nonetheless.

### **Changing Attitudes One Person at a Time**

I'm guessing those of you that choose to read this are already pretty aware of parents that do not traditionally parent their children so it will be well received, but to take this message

out to the stores would be awesome. I am trying to be a better person for myself and for my children to model after and if I teach them to look down on others I am not being the best parent I can be. And neither are you. Too harsh? I don't really mean it, but I do mean it when I say to you: please, next time you see a parent struggling with a child or children in a store offer her an assuring smile. Let her know it is okay to be a sensitive parent even in this insensitive culture. Model this behavior yourself. When out with your children act in a positive parental way to give an example to those that have not seen a kind parent empathizing with the needs of their child. If all we see are others acting negative we may not realize that there is a positive way to handle this behavior in children. If enough parents model positive parenting there would be more parents acting positive because they saw that it is something acceptable to do. And it is very acceptable. We can change the future if we tried. And we should for the sake of our children and their children.

Namaste