

Managing the Emotions of Children

I think modern parenting is often too focused on avoiding conflict and managing the emotions of children. I am working to set certain cultural trends away from this in my family.

The other day I took my kids to the park. I lead my kids making their breakfast in the morning, and I decided not to bring lunch for my kids. I only brought almonds, which I left in the car. I want them to take responsibility for their hunger, and I think most parents inadvertently keep their kids constantly fed as a means of managing their emotions. I figure almonds are pretty bland, but they scratch that itch. By leaving it in the car, they have to make an investment to feed themselves and take a certain degree of responsibility.

I originally intended to take the kids to the park for maybe 2 1/2-3 hours. However, a lot of their friends were there, so I was happy to have them there longer. After about 4 hours, the kids were super tired and under fed. This is a situation that modern parenting tries to avoid, but I am trying to embrace it. My kids are on edge and grumpy. It's not that I want to encourage this state, as much as have my kids take responsibility for their hunger and emotions. This is an opportunity to teach, grow and set cultural premises.

This ended up being a mixed bag. I got a little too much of what I wanted. My middle kid had the largest emotions I've ever had to deal with in regards to any of my kids. As we are wrapping up the trip and going to the car, things started to get big. She was super tired and hungry, but she didn't want to go. This ended up in screaming, crying and huge demands. Generally, I want to embrace this moment, however, it went a little farther than I desired. I made sure to be kind, while making her responsible for her emotions and not trying to redirect, feed her (until we got home), and encourage her to cope with grace. "Grace" ended up escalating into my middle child intentionally kicking my youngest kid in the face repeatedly as he was buckled into his car seat. Yikes! I addressed this by swiftly removing her from the situation, comforting the youngest, and some other things. It was convenient that the other two kids were quite cooperative. When we got home, the kids helped make lunch and my daughter became a very considerate child once again.

I am going to be making this same adventure every Thursday for a while. I think the only thing I will change going forward is to talk to them before we go about taking any snacks if they want to bring them.

My kids take responsibility for their emotions and desires pretty well. However, my greatest desire is for my kids to be competent, responsible, individualistic, and gritty while having self-respect. I think the best avenue towards this is through developing functional

emotional systems of self-regulation. I am curious how these park days will go in the future.