

Try Not to Take it Personally

I think the best advice I ever received when I began my peaceful parenting journey was to not take anything your children do personally. If your child is upset and throwing a tantrum, it doesn't mean they hate you or want you to suffer.

The purpose in not taking our children's behavior personally is help us remain calm and composed, in order to think rationally about what needs of theirs are not being met, and then to figure out how to meet them.

It's plain and simple advice, but was not plain and simple to take to heart. My own upbringing was by parents who yelled and got violently angry first, asked questions later. Those were the tools I was taught, and so those were the tools I used once my first child hit that age where it his negative behaviors were ripe for misinterpretation is an attack on me personally.

There is one caveat to this advice, however: if you have been the cause of your child's suffering, then their anger may very well be personal. You *should* take it personally, but if only to learn from it. It's no different than when an adult is angry at you for causing them some degree of suffering. Take responsibility for your actions, apologize, and make it right.

This has me thinking more about adult relationships. Sometimes people are angry or upset, and sometimes that anger is directed toward us. But it's not always the case that our actions inspired that anger. If we know that it did, recompense may be in order. If we are unsure, then stay calm and composed, and do some digging. Taking it personally is unhelpful, both to you and to them.

I see angry people in the world. Some of them are my peers, others are distant strangers. Their anger sometimes seems directed at me as a man, or as a white man, or as an American. I really need to heed this advice, and not just in my home. People are suffering, this is true, and I know it's not because of anything I've done. I don't hurt people or take their stuff. I'm a good person. I truly believe that. I work very hard at being that way, day in and day out. It's my life's mission, really. Anybody who knows what I stand for can attest to that.

But people are hurting. They truly are. And for all sorts of reasons, all of which, I now know, are because they've been made the target of coercion and aggression and violence by other people, as children first, and as adults later. It's the greatest injustice of our time.

But I've had enough of it. I no longer employ these tools, nor do I stand for others employing them. I speak out. I write. I podcast. I discuss. I disobey. My greatest hope in life is that others will do likewise. Will you?