

When Did That Happen?



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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), and her partner Daddy 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.

My older son is fourteen years old. He is a typical teen: he smells bad, looks greasy, would exist on junk food if he could and lives on video game time. Pretty typical. He is also graduating Junior High in a few days! When did that happen? This child makes me very proud. He has been though more than I ever wished him to although he did have a better upbringing than mine. I have explained before that I only recently found radical attentive parenting (or attachment parenting) and wish I could go back and change many situations in his life.

Some Things You Don’t Even Realize Will Be Harmful

I wish I could change the spanking. I cannot. With the spanking came yelling and shaming. These are terribly damaging things to children and the side effects can last a lifetime. I wish I could change schooling and homeschool him. My older son had a rough time in school even back in daycare. He was the kid that got bit, and the kid that acted out. He was not singled out many times, but his inability to sit still was a detriment. He had to go to daycare so I could work and go to school as I was a young Mom. I wish I could change his nutritional path; breastfeeding past a few months after bad advice from my then doctor, but the thing I would change if I had only one thing to do all over again would be to not have been away from him so much. I thought I had to at the time. This made him very insecure. Separation anxiety lead to real stress when he was younger although he always calmed once I had been gone a while. It didn’t help that I didn’t sleep with him, but we did room share out of necessity, but even still he had very little attachment to me even though I didn’t know it.

But Let’s Zoom Past Early Childhood

Once my older son hit about 5th grade he began to catch up to his peers. He was always a

bit delayed, but not tremendously so. The previous year he was put on the Asperger's spectrum (although later he was taken off) and given an IEP which basically admits that not all children learn in the homogenous classroom and need other options. He would cycle during the school year between compliant, eager and resistant. Later after he was taken off the spectrum he was given a diagnosis of oppositional defiant disorder, ODD. They call this a disorder, but when I did my research I found this was no disorder at all, this was the result of his traditional upbringing. Mistrust of authority, not complying with rules or circumstances even to his detriment, and no intrinsic motivation to do much of anything let alone what some authority figure tells him: these all stem from his detachment and negative attention. Kids learn to believe they only deserve negative attention so they will seek it out to fill their need. I wish I could have given him the love he needed to overcome those issues.

But There Are Things I Would Not Change

My son is a giver. At least before teen age set in. He would give his last anything to the people he cared about. He would willingly give hugs and kisses to his family and he loved to cuddle. He would always share his Halloween candy with his friends and family and was never greedy about it. And he is so loving. He is chill too. Often times as long as we talk about the things we are going to do in a day before he sets his heart on video games for the whole day and I can convince him to help do a chore or two before he leaves for la la land. He is a good person. He needs to be reminded once in a while to not be offensive while his brother is in the room, but on the whole this is a kid that would be a really great friend if he had the developed social skills to do so. That by the way is another aspect of traditional parenting that I have learned is harmful for a child's future.

Even Though He Is Older I Am Now Trying To Make Our Connections

As I parent of my younger son I feel bad sometimes because my older son sees the way I am with him. The old techniques I ask him to not use. I can see his brain thinking they were good enough for him, so I have had that conversation with him a few times. I have told him he did not deserve the treatment he got as a child, but that I really didn't know better. He kind of understands, but it is going to take a while to really understand fully, and that is okay. There is still culture that exists between us that I am moving to change. These things are triggers from my childhood I'm guessing. I was always yelled at and shown no patience and that comes out in our interactions sometimes. I am working every day to not yell and think with empathy which is actually happening. Slowly, but happening still. I am learning to think about situations from his point of view and giving patience. I have to try really hard because it does not come natural to me but I'm getting there and Joe will end up growing up to be an exemplary adult male. Of that I am positive.

To Sum Up My Point

It is not too late. We can watch our children grow up or we can actively participate in their upbringing. It does make a difference in their lives, but its never too late to try attached, gentle parenting. I would even say if your children are adults it is still not too late to begin the process of attachment so that you can really enjoy any grandchildren that come along. For the last two and a half years I have been working to educate and empower myself for my children. No, I did not start as early as I now wish I had, but we cannot change the past we can only shape the future. Its your future. Shape it. Model it and make the world a better place for future generations. It can happen.

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