

Yes, and ... A Parenting Idea

In most live shows (improv, radio, skit shows, etc), they teach you that the main rule is “yes, and”. What this means is that when working with other people you work off of each other, build off what the other person does, never contradict the other person (some exceptions are allowed in certain situations), and with this simple rule you are able to often form a cohesive show as a team.

My wife told me about a little boy a while ago and his mother (I never met either). She said the boy is very high strung and difficult to guide, while the mother is exactly the opposite. Anytime she hung out with these people the mother spent the whole time trying to calm the boy down and guide him into easier to consume actions.

I had a very similar childhood in a slightly different way. I probably wasn’t quite so physically active, but I had very large emotions and ideas in a world that wants children to be small. A “good” child is generally regarded is one that is calm, quiet and obedient. When a child breaks from this mold, we assume something is wrong and we often look to place blame and “solve” the problem. I find this story is absolutely horrible, and I am super grateful that I never learned to be a “good” child.

Our big emotions, big ideas and big actions aren’t a problem in the adult world. Almost every innovator, historical figure, successful business owner, composer, writer ... I can go on ... were people with gigantic ideas, feelings, and/or actions. The problem with being so big is that we are incredibly difficult to control.

My idea for a parent with a “big” child, or just a parent whose child is “big” in a moment is to try something a little different. Instead of trying to shrink them down to a more palatable size, join them. When they get very big, think “yes, and”. If they start throwing something in the house ... Pick it up, and throw it harder (and than maybe guide the activity outside). If they desperately want to show you their dive into the pool, have everyone watch intently, applaud the effort, and than ask them to watch while you jump into the pool fully clothed (the 15 minutes it takes for you to change your clothes will be worth the admiration and lifelong memory you built in your child). Spit off of roofs, play catch at Target, make large fires.

Eventually, when you “yes, and” enough, your child will be a little bit more easy to control when you really need them to be small. Your child will now see your preferences as merely weighing values rather than someone who is just merely trying to keep them small and always say no. “Yes, and” makes you teammates towards the same goals. Eventually they will also learn “yes, and” with you.