

Being a Reflective Parent, Raising Reflective Children

As a parent, do you sometimes act before you think, overreact to small things (especially at times of stress) or fall into unhealthy patterns you learned in your own childhood? Research shows that becoming more reflective about how you respond to the challenges of parenting is the first step in learning a better way. And as you become more reflective, you will be better able to help your children do the same. Here is guidance from Marti:

I. What does it mean to be reflective and why is that so important?

- Reflective is the opposite of impulsive. It means being thoughtful, mindful and intentional. And it means learning from your mistakes.
- Research shows that reflective parents are most effective. And teaching children to be reflective helps them succeed in school, relationships and life.

II. Tips for parents

- **When emotions rise in a challenging situation, pause and reflect**
What is my child's perspective and purpose? What other stresses are fueling my emotions? Am I reacting in a way that is helpful or am I falling back on old patterns?
- **Tell your child you are hitting the "pause" button**
For example, say very quietly, "I'm feeling upset and I need to take a break to think about this."
- **Set aside times to reflect on how you were parented**
Think about what you want to carry forward and what you want to leave behind (looking back, moving forward). Talk about this with your partner, a close friend or, especially if you had a difficult childhood, a therapist. Research shows that it is not how you were parented that determines how you parent your child, but it is how you have come to think about it.
- **Coach your child to reflect on emotions and behavioral choices**
Teach your child to recognize when his or her emotions are starting to heat up and teach specific self-calming strategies (e.g., take three deep breaths, use your words). After a difficult situation (when you and your child both have calmed down), ask, "What could you have done differently?" Acknowledge positive ideas your child comes up with for handling the situation better.