

Avoiding parental paralysis

We've all had those days. When parenting is just overwhelming.

Take Jill and Steve. They've read every single book about sleep training. They've also scoured every blog, forum, and Facebook post about how to get your kid to sleep at night. Sometimes, they're sure they have actually reached the end of the Internet.

But as unfair as it seems, their son still doesn't sleep well. And they're frazzled, exhausted, and overwhelmed. And they're not alone.

Talk to caregivers today. Many of us feel this way.

We're faced with a staggering amount of information - books, forums, social media, magazine article - not to mention the advice and opinions from everyone around us. (I'm talking to you, Facebook.)

All of this can lead to parental paralysis - feeling overwhelmed to the point of doing nothing.

If you are feeling this way, here are a few tips from local experts.

Question everything.

"Anyone can put anything on the internet," says Jennifer Best, certified family life educator with Iowa State University Extension. "Saying it doesn't make it true, healthy or safe."

When you are reading or researching parenting and child development topics, ask yourself who, what and why?

For example:

- Who wrote this? Is the person an expert? What education and experience does the person have?
- What credibility does the source have? Is the information reviewed by others or is it enhanced by (relevant) research?
- Why did the person share this? Is the author trying to sell something to me or defend his/her own decisions?

Trust yourself.

When you reach the point of paralysis, it's time to put down the books and get off the Internet.

"You are the expert on your child," says Sue Klingaman, early childhood mental health consultant at Robert Young Center. "Not the professionals - you."

Many parents put professionals on a pedestal - be it a pediatrician, an author, or a self-professed expert on the Internet. But as a parent, you know your child better than anyone else.



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One size never fits all.

The reason that the experts don't know everything?

Because every single child is different. Each has individual preferences and lives with her own circumstances.

Don't just do something. Stand there.

So, you've stepped away from all those experts who mean well.

now what?

"You can learn more by standing back and watching what your child is telling you," Sue explains. "This gives you as a parent the authority to make the best decision for your child."

Because there is more than one method, be curious about what your child's actions tell you. Kids may not be able to verbally tell you, but how they act is telling you exactly what they need.

For example, Sue was observing a child who had experienced some trauma. When playing, she kept returning to a stuffed animal. Caregivers were concerned about the behavior as they saw it as not age appropriate.

But her actions were clearly showing that she needed it. To her it signified safety and sameness. By observing her, adults were able to understand what the child was craving. This allowed them to not only provide her with the opportunity to use this "baby toy," but to commend her for understanding what she needs, finding a way to meet those needs, and working to find other ways to provide structure and safety.

When children behave in a certain way they are doing so for a reason - sometimes simply watching and observing help us to better understand the motivation behind the behavior.

Ask an expert on YOUR child.

If you still need help, turn to those around you who actually know you and your child. Sometimes, these people observe behaviors that you may miss.

The key is that they know your son or daughter well enough to pick up on those cues.

It could be a good friend, a daycare provider, or grandparents. Those who spend time with your child are the next best qualified (after you as a caregiver) to help.

Think long term.

Jennifer also encourages thinking about the following questions:

- Over the long term, what I am teaching the child with this approach?
- Does this lead TOWARD how I want them to be as a young adult or away from it?

Everything we do as parents should have a long-term perspective. Because as caregivers, we are trying to raise our children to be successful adults.

now what? Keep Learning.

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When we put consequences in place we should ask ourselves what we are teaching the child or what life skill they will learn from this.

For example, giving your daughter a toy every time she screams in the store may be simpler. But when she becomes an adult, you may not want her to believe the world works this way.

"Just because something is quick, easy, and takes care of an 'immediate' issue doesn't mean it is the right thing to do," Jennifer explains.

On the other hand, putting consequences in place for things like eating in the living room just because your mother doesn't think it's right may be silly, too.

Rules should have a purpose to teach. This can help you as a caregiver to have clear expectations to reinforce because continuity is so important. You (and your partner) are more likely to enforce the same rule the same way if everyone understands the reason it exists and can see the big picture!

now what? | **KEEP LEARNING.**

It's wonderful that today's caregivers have information and research at our fingertips. And it's always good to learn and grow as a parent.

However, when this leads to parental paralysis and when research takes the place of really listening to your child, it's time to step away from the Internet (and books, experts, and opinions).

You are the most knowledgeable when it comes to your home and family. So learn to trust your own judgement and be curious about what your child's actions are telling you. You'll learn more than you'll ever find on your computer.



Originally posted on the Now What? Blog 8/20/14. The Now What? Blog served for nearly 7 years to

- 1. Normalize parents seeking support and help as a manner of child abuse prevention*
- 2. Engage community in how they can work to prevent child abuse*
- 3. Work to build resiliency in families through promotion of the 5 protective factors*

Maybe you coach a baseball team or you help care for the neighbor kids from time to time. You are investing in the safety and security of the children in our community. Because it truly does take a village to raise our children, we want to offer the tools needed to bring awareness and education to preventing child abuse.

now what? Keep Learning.

