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 @thegreenparent · December 11, 2024 · 5 minutes read

# Respectful Parenting Lights Up My World!

How compassion rather than control can radically alter your relationship with your child. Winner of a Highly Commended Prize in our 2024 Writing Competition

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# When **Filiz Taylan Yusak** became a mother 6 years ago, she started to read about parenting and changed my life and routines completely to fit around her child's needs

It was important for me to be there when she needed me. Sometime later, I came across the term `respectful parenting`, also referred to as gentle parenting. Always believing that children should choose their own destiny, I was hooked on the idea that the child is at the centre of this parenting style.

I am particularly influenced by a book titled Raising Our Children, Raising Ourselves by Naomi Aldort in my respectful parenting journey.

Her S.A.L.V.E method is consisted of practical steps to be a respectful parent.

It all starts with **separating your own emotional reaction** from your child's need at a particular time. I accept this is hard and I cannot always remember this rule. But when I practice it, I see that I am guided by the love of my child, and she feels this too.

The next steps are directing your **attention** and **listening** to your children, then **validating** their feelings. Aldort also says: 'If your child resists you, it is a sign that you have exercised control in relating to her; you have been resisting her.' This quote was my a-ha



moment. We mostly think that our child resists us. But as parents, we resist our children by controlling them. If we can keep our compassionate, tender, and kind manner instead of control, this would bring peace and calm to both our parent-child relationship and to our life in general.

## Using Respectful Parenting in Everyday Life

There are so many areas we can practice respectful parenting that it is easy to make it work in daily life. Setting our children as free as possible in what they choose to eat, wear, listen or watch all counts. Even my child's fussy eating improved with my respectful parenting, because I don't insist her to try a new food or to finish her plate. I trust her that she knows her body and recognises her needs better than me. Now she sometimes even asks to try a new food, because there is no pressure on her about eating.

Another area to practice this parenting style is deeply related to personal boundaries: is not forcing them to kiss, hug or talk to anyone unless they want too. Yes, even grandparents!

Respectful parenting also fits into my simple, minimalist and mindful lifestyle. I don't see my child as a 'project' carting her to clubs and activities every day. I don't force her to attend clubs or activities that she doesn't like. I know she gets tired at school, so I don't over plan her schedule or our weekends.

## Living by the Motto: Every Child is Different

I try not to compare my child with other children, especially in terms of milestones, going by the motto 'every child is different'. I believe that she will do things in her own time, when she's ready. It is much easier to trust the flow, and not worry about milestones or age ranges. This is also about accepting your child as she is, with her personality, likes, dislikes, strengths and weaknesses.

Although at 6, she is still a younger child, she deserves my respect, as she is an individual, and has her own thoughts and feelings about oh so many things! I always try to take into account what she thinks, and I must confess her perspective is refreshing sometimes!

## Understanding my Child's Needs

At the same time, I try to always remember that she is just a child, not an adult, and she deserves my empathy. I feel obliged to do this as I brought her into this world, and I want her to be content with her life. This brings a greater understanding about her needs and wants.

As Sarah Ockwell-Smith (who came up with the term 'gentle parenting' back in 2005) mentions, respect that I started to feel for her, brings along my child's respect towards me too. She knows that I will listen to her, and she can share everything with me, that I will have open arms for her no matter what.

I don't believe that punishment (including consequences) or reward is effective. I try to praise the effort, not the outcome, but I need more practice when it comes to this! I give 'descriptive praise' and 'reflective listening' as suggested by Noël Janis-Norton in her book titled *Calmer Easier Happier Parenting*, especially when I need her to get ready on time for school!

This is still about the outcome some of the time, but at least it is about seeing one specific step that the child takes towards a goal (such as being on time for school in the morning), rather than being a blunt and shallow praise, not serving a purpose. And it works! Because it motivates the child, and she notices that you recognise her littlest effort in reaching a goal.

This parenting style doesn't mean "never saying 'no' or raising your voice" as claimed by Polly Dunbar. We have boundaries and limits, especially when her safety or well-being is concerned. I am trying to be consistent around here, but also choose my battles and try to say 'yes' as much as I can! As a result, my 'no' is always a firm no and has meaning. But I always explain why I didn't say yes.

## **Self Care to Help me be the Best Version of Myself**

I am well-aware that other areas of my life also impact my parenting and perception of events. So, I turn to self-care, even maybe 5-10 minutes every day. I need to practice self-care, to be the best version of myself as a mum, more patient and capable to deal with

what the day brings. But we also rightly need that because we deserve it as human beings.

It is so interesting that being a parent brings you back to your own childhood memories, so I keep in touch with my inner child. As parents, we must regulate our own emotions to model this to our children. But this is only possible by making peace with our past, opening our hearts completely and honestly, to accept, respect and love ourselves just as we are. This would bring along self-confidence. Only then, we can model our child towards self-acceptance, self-love and self-confidence.

## **The Difference that Respectful Parenting Makes**

I can see so clearly the difference respectful parenting brings. My child is confident that I respect her choices, decisions, and preferences. The genuine connection between us is nurtured by my parenting style and this made our relationship even better. As a result, she trusts me and feels safe with me, so turns to me when she needs support. That's priceless. She is mostly calm and collected, and I believe that respectful parenting plays a part in this as well as personality.

Aldort states in her book that there are five basic emotional needs: love, freedom of self-expression, autonomy and power, emotional safety, self-esteem. It is easy to observe how these needs can be met by only practicing respectful parenting.

My child taught me to go with the flow, but this doesn't mean permissiveness, inaction or laziness. This rather means to witness and be part of her budding life, and life flowering around her, while being there for her as much as I can, and guide her when she needs, but otherwise watch and let her lead the way in perceiving and living life, as beautiful and simple as it is.

Filiz is an experienced content creator and social media specialist who loves to write about culture, music, food & drink, parenthood, and nature. She lives in Hampshire with her husband and 6 year old child.

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