

Helping You Navigate Your Journey Through Parenting

The Power of PAUSE

BY KIM DEMARCHI

Happy New Year! When I started thinking about what to write this month with a new year abound, it came to me instantly. Many of us have just come off a two week period with our children out of school for winter break and home with us. Did I mention our children were home with us for two weeks... actually 16 days to be exact? Not that we don't love our children immensely and want to spend quality time with them, but that's a lot of togetherness.

Did we decorate gingerbread houses and laugh hysterically when they collapsed? You bet! Did we play the traditional white elephant gift exchange game and steal other family member's gifts? Yep! Did we ring in the new year with friends, fondue, sparkling cider and champagne? Sure did! Did we go ice skating, to the movies, tubing in the snow, bowling, swimming, and have sleepovers? Thumbs up! We even made it to a Blazer game to cheer on our local team. I haven't even mentioned the gifts yet!

There were some amazing memories made over the winter break. There were also disagreements, arguing, crying, loud voices, quick tempers, high emotions and consequences. I try to gauge this balance, and when things get off balance, I've come to realize that I am a key decisive element in our family and home.

It is my personal approach that creates the climate. It is my daily mood and approach that makes the weather.

Being that it's a new year and many people like to set goals for themselves and improve upon different things, I'd like to share one of the best parenting tools I've ever learned and when I'm using it, the weather in my home is warm and sunny: The Power of PAUSE.

Imagine your child repeatedly poking and grabbing at you while you are typing an email. You try ignoring the behavior, which obviously rarely works. Then, you REACT in an equally as obnoxious way by grabbing their poking finger and yelling "Stop! What do you want?! Can't you see I'm busy?!"

How does your child feel now? How are you feeling now? Neither parties are feeling very good. The poking was the stimulus and the adult had the big reaction. A stimulus

could be siblings arguing,
your child not listening,
whining, dawdling,
just about anything
that could irritate

you.

After your reaction, have you ever smacked your forehead and said, "I wish that I hadn't said that or done that!?" Of course! We are human. Most of us are unaware that there is another option. PAUSE. After the stimulus, just pause. This sounds much easier than it is, trust me! Growing up I wasn't ever aware that there was such thing as a pause. I learned it when my children were infants in a parenting course.

Now, instead of Stimulus = Reaction, it is Stimulus + PAUSE = Response

If you need to, go ahead and smack your forehead. Pretend there is a PAUSE button located right on your forehead. Literally, don't say a word. You can: close your eyes, count to ten, breathe, walk into another room, anything to get calm so you can respond, instead of react.

Ask yourself, "What is my intention?" When I ask myself that during a PAUSE, I can usually find the answer. It certainly isn't to hurt, intimidate, humiliate, punish, control, etc...It is, however, usually to teach something or to communicate effectively or to be helpful in some way. Hurtful or helpful? Choosing to PAUSE, not only will you feel more peaceful and less stressed, your child will be happier and more cooperative.



The icing on the cake is that you are modeling for your children and 95% of what children learn is by what they see. When their initial instinct is to have that big negative reaction to something their sibling, friend, teacher, parent, coach, colleague, or boss did, they will have been given the gift of the PAUSE.

As parents, we possess tremendous power to make our children's lives miserable or joyous. We can be tools of torture or an instrument of inspiration. We can humiliate or humor. We can hurt or heal. In all situations it is our reaction or response that decides whether a crisis will be escalated or de-escalated and a child humanized or dehumanized. There is power in the PAUSE!

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