

[Happy, calm children learn best](#)

All parents want the best for their children – we want them to grow up healthy, happy, strong, kind and to live a meaningful life as adults. We want them to be able to manage living in our chaotic world and avoid becoming overwhelmed by the speediness and busy-ness of modern life. One of the best ways to do this is calming our children’s lives. Stress is a new health and social contributor to challenge children in our modern world.

The “hurried child” and the over scheduled child are both modern developments. Somewhere over the last 10 years parenting has become a type of competition and the hidden stress this places on growing children causes many other issues that delay healthy development and growth on all levels emotionally, socially, mentally and cognitively. We have sped up the pace of life and living. We live in an instant world where we expect everything NOW. Communication, food, pain relief, results, well-behaved children – you name it, we expect things instantly.

This expectation works silently and unconsciously creating stress when things do not always happen like that. Children take all of childhood to grow – to learn how to think, learn, process information, behave appropriately – manage their lives, dress themselves, find their way home and learn who they are! We cannot rush this vital development.

Daniel Goleman in his now-famous book, *Emotional Intelligence*, wrote that “happy, calm children learn best”. Homes that consciously create calm and quiet times are building enormous support structures that will help children feel safe, allow them to enjoy their own quiet company and lower the stress levels within their growing bodies. The over-exposure to TV and screens is over stimulating many little minds and bodies.

I recently read Bruce Lipton’s book on *The Biology of Belief*. In this book he wrote that babies’ and toddlers’ brains download everything they hear and see from TV – even when they may appear to not be paying attention. That means all the violent images and stories on the news and other adult programs are downloaded into their memory banks – and because they are so vulnerable, it causes them to skew the way they see the world. Please avoid TV as much as possible in the early years and then be very vigilant on what programs your child’s sensitive minds watch or are exposed to. Also keep your noise levels down in the home – voices, radios and volume to TV.

Canadian psychology and philosophy professor Dr Stuart Shanker has an important key message for all of us who work with families and that is that children’s capacity to self-regulate largely determines how well they will perform at school, much more than whether they can count, or be good at picture recognition or colour-in within the lines.

A child who has the capacity to learn to self-soothe and self-regulate their energy and emotions will start school with a huge advantage over a child who cannot. Being treated with kindness and fairness will give children the best opportunity to learn this vital life skill. When we treat children with anger, avoidance and abuse we threaten how their sensitive brains process information and experience for life.

Dr Shanker has discovered in his research that children differ greatly in how they use energy. There are many things that will sap a child’s energy: poor attachment to mother, over-scheduled lives, overstimulation, poor sleep patterns, too much TV/screen time, low-quality food, lack of predictable routines and boundaries, abuse, shouting, shaming, and unrealistic expectations.

Children need to be in a relaxed calm and focused state to be able to play and to be able to learn.

Dr Shanker believes that kids vary how much “gas” or energy they have in coping with life. If a child is struggling with stress, abuse or feeling disconnected they will have less energy to learn, to think and to be happy.

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According to Shanker's six levels of energy, he says kids need to be in level four to be able to play, to concentrate and to learn.

1. Asleep
2. Drowsy
3. Hypoalert
4. Calm, focused and alert
5. Hyperalert
6. Flooded

WHAT HELPS BUILD SELF-REGULATION?

- MUSIC
- DRAMA
- ART
- NATURE
- SPORT
- SAFE TOUCH
- DEEP LOVING RELATIONSHIPS

WHAT DOESN'T

- TV
- VIDEO GAMES
- TOO MUCH PRESSURE
- NOT ENOUGH HUMAN CONNECTION
- STRESS AND THREAT

One of the main inhibitors for children's learning well is prolonged chronic stress. Eric Jensen believes that there is up to a 50% reduction in neuron development within a week of a major stressor event. He also believes that the existing neurons wither with continued chronic stress (*Enriching The Brain*, 2006). This has enormous implications for children and their learning in both our homes and our schools. Many small stressors can have the same impact as one large one such as a death of a loved one, divorce or social dislocation like moving school, town or country.

Simple Tips for Calming Children

1. **Be comfortable with quiet yourself and model it.**
2. Use quiet tonality when speaking or making requests of children.
3. Use soothing music in the home.
4. Spend time in quietness like taking a nap together.
5. Use massage and safe touch to calm hyper active little ones from birth
6. Connect children to nature and spend time outside often
7. Turn the TV, Computer and off more often. Limit its use.
8. Take walks and swims often – it settles spikey energetic fields.
9. Create family quiet times -Meals with no TV. Eat outside often.
10. Encourage reading for pleasure.
11. Read to hyperactive children to calm them.
12. Try aromatherapy using oil burners. Check you are using calming essences like sandal wood, lavender or a mixture specially made for calming.
13. Stroking gently the forehead, the back or the feet.
14. Bush flower essences or Bach Flower Remedies for calming.
15. Sensory Activities like play dough, clay modelling or building with sand. Finger painting, painting the back fence with coloured water, blowing bubbles outside.
16. Try to use humour to diffuse energy. Do the unexpected!

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17. Milo Time! Maybe it is an illusion however making a cup of hot chocolate for both of you can soothe frazzled nerves.
18. Encouraging quiet time in their own room, bed or bean bag.
19. Use creative visualization CDs or nature music in their own rooms especially as they prepare for sleep. Repetition helps build pathways for calmness in the mind. Also positive messages can be set in the unconscious mind.
20. Hug and reassure often. Practise more kindness and compassion.
21. Improve sleep patterns and opportunities.

The magic of silence and stillness is something that helps shape the developing child in a positive way. While there are many cognitive (left brain) benefits from teaching silence, there are even more emotional and social (right brain) benefits. The inner world of children today is in turmoil and the outer turmoil of the world that we have created probably contributes. I believe that children who can build a doorway to their own sense of value and worth will be better able to manage this chaotic rapidly changing world. This doorway is found on the inside rather than the outside.

Calmness is a skill that can be learned early in life. Please help teach your children and you will have happy, calm children who learn on all levels best. So consider putting your best foot forward in your home by creating more quiet, stillness and calmness - everyone will be happier.

© Maggie Dent 2011. Author, parenting and resilience educator. Author of *Saving our Children from Our Chaotic World*, *Nurturing Kids' Hearts and Souls*, *Real Kids in an Unreal World*, *Black Duck Wisdom* and *Saving Our Adolescents*. www.maggiedent.com

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