

Parenting *ideas* INSIGHTS

Building parent-school partnerships

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RAISING space cadets

Learning to stop and think before reacting is one of the most valuable life skills a child can develop.

Know someone with a hair trigger? The smallest thing sets them off. That 'thing' maybe a cutting comment from someone, a nasty look or a thoughtless remark. Whatever it is, not a moment is taken to think, consider or weigh up options. They simply explode.

Anger exudes from every pore.

I know some adults like this. They are awful to live with. Their family walks on eggshells, not wanting to upset them. The trouble is, they've been like that since childhood.

I also know some kids like this. I wonder if their hair trigger will remain into adulthood. Such kids, who are usually highly strung, need to learn to put a space between an event (that leads to a reaction) and their response. They need to become space cadets, learning how to stop, think and act – all in a split second.

When a space cadet hears someone say something sarcastic he'll pause for a

split second while he thinks of different responses (ranging from doing nothing through to engaging in a bit of humorous banter) and only then choose the best of those responses. Some space cadets I know, who have been taught this skill, will call on their BEST SELF and choose the best response based on one that represents their values for that occasion.

Space cadets generally have healthier relationships as they are predictable, more considerate and better able to match their responses to their own BEST self.

Anyone who has ever regretted a remark they made to a friend, loved one or workmate under duress will know what I mean. You felt that the remark 'let yourself down'. Space cadets experience less of this guilt as they are more likely to make the right remark in the first place.

Space cadets have high emotional awareness which not only leads to better responses, but it also leads to better regulation of emotions and behaviour. That's why the development of self-awareness in kids is probably more important to long-term wellbeing, success and happiness than the development of self-esteem. If not, it's on a par because it's such a valuable skill to possess.

WHEN SOMETHING EVOKES AN UNPLEASANT EMOTION (ANGER, FRUSTRATION OR ANXIETY), ENCOURAGE KIDS TO:

STOP

AVOID reacting impulsively. Take some deep breaths. Be calm.

THINK

WHAT happened? How are you feeling? What are you thinking?

ACT

HOW can you best respond?

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