

CONNECTING!

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Parents Leadership Institute's E-Mail Newsletter
Volume 2, Number 8 – November 15, 2002

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Parents Leadership Institute is a non-profit organization that fosters healthy parent-child relationships that will last a lifetime.

We give parents simple, concrete tools to build and rebuild a close relationship with their children, and to lead their families well. We promote parent-to-parent support founded on mutual respect, listening, and the desire of parents to love their children well.

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In this issue:

PLI Events Calendar

Parenting Tip: Staying Proud of Our Children
Link to "Holidays and Meltdowns Go Together Like Peanut Butter and Jelly"

Success Stories - My Son and the Christmas Lights
Getting Dressed With Humor
We Cancel Christmas Presents

- News – * Mothering Magazine, Nov./Dec. Issue, publishes "Cry for Connection: A Fresh Approach to Tantrums," by Patty Wipfler.
- * Give the gift of great PLI information! Order online, or get a discount.
 - * PLI PlayMorning in January for Parents and Children.
 - * Let us know how you use the articles on our web site.
 - * Got great photos?

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A fresh PLI Events Calendar (San Francisco Bay Area) can be found at
<http://www.parentleaders.org/Classes.html>
Look for events in Alameda, Santa Clara, and Santa Cruz Counties.
Our next calendar will be posted January 1st, 2003.

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Parenting Tip:

STAYING PROUD OF OUR CHILDREN

This season, we stretch. We stretch our schedules, we stretch our energy, we stretch our pocketbooks, and we stretch our hearts to keep them open for our children, our siblings, our parents—all the people we love. As we stretch, our children sometimes get panicked that we don't "see" them any longer. They feel desperate for our attention. And their feelings leap forward, raw. Most of the time, the laws that govern these things insure that our children's feelings and unworkable behavior erupt at the worst possible moments.

(See our article on Holidays and Meltdowns at
<www.parentleaders.org/articles/HolidaysAndMeltdowns.html>)

We can be proud of our children, no matter what troubles they may exhibit when family comes around, or when we're at our most harried. The good news at difficult moments is that:

- our children are determined not to simply endure the situation when they feel terrible inside;
- they are self-respecting enough to resist a forced march through our schedule;
- they trust us enough to pull out all the stops when they need to offload bad feelings.

The conventional wisdom around parenting hasn't yet caught up with the intelligence of our children. So we need to "run interference" for them when other adults get judgmental or harsh.

Even when they're making mistakes, even when we're upset and fed up, they're still GOOD CHILDREN. They may need limits from us, they may not be able to do what we wish them to do, but they're not "bad." They're likely to be feeling separate, alone, and they're not thinking well. (We are likely to be feeling something along those lines, too!)

One way to head off trouble is to set up more frequent, short "Special Time" breaks when life is busy. Refreshing our connections with our children, even briefly, can help them hang onto their ability to make workable decisions. Another is to let your children know ahead of time what will and won't work when you're together with the relatives. "Grandma loves it when you say please and thank you. Do you want me to help you remember this when we're there? How do you want me to help? Shall I whisper in your ear? Tap your foot?" can set up some parent/child cooperation that can keep the connection going in challenging circumstances, and head off misunderstandings.

Rather than send you a long article, I want to share with you three parent anecdotes. Two of these illustrate how parents have set up times for laughter, and allowed time for crying, to bring their children back to them from hurt or defiant places. The third is from a parent who had worked through her own feelings of inadequacy enough to confidently change holiday traditions.

We at Parents Leadership Institute hope your holidays are warm and joyous. We parents build our families, interaction by interaction, with our attention and our love. The gifts we give each day are many, and vital.

We hope these little stories will be useful to you as you navigate among friends, family, and expectations this holiday season.

Patty Wipfler

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Parent Success Stories

My Son and the Christmas Lights

“Christmas stresses me out. I never have enough money or time this time of year. On this particular day, I had just walked in the house with the kids and my son went right over to the Christmas tree and started "fixing" the lights. I had just put them on the tree. He pulled at them, and he messed them up. And I got mad.

I blew it, basically. I said, "What are you DOING?! You wrecked it! I can't believe you did that!" I went on and on. (It's so awful when you make such big obvious mistakes.) Anyhow, my son put his head in the sofa pillow and cried. So I went over to him. He kept turning away from me. I apologized. I said I'd made a mistake. I asked him if he wanted to fix the lights now and he wouldn't touch it. I told him I knew he was just trying to help. This brought more tears from him. He was crying hard.

He moved away from me. So I decided not to move toward him. If I move in too fast when he's crying, it seems to make him angry, and things between us get harder. Instead, I stayed on the sofa and kept talking to him. I kept asking him if he'd come sit in my lap. Then he cried harder. I guess it helps him feel how alone he feels when I've yelled at him. After a few minutes of crying, he came and jumped on my lap! I told him again that I was sorry. Then I said that moms make dumb mistakes sometimes, and that this one had been pretty dumb. He laughed, and we were feeling close again. We wrestled and played for a little while. Then I asked him if he wanted to fix the lights. He said yes, jumped up, and fixed the lights.” --a mother in Berkeley, CA

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Getting Dressed, with Humor

Desperate, one day, to get my active and resistant 3-year-old dressed, I came up with this game (and other modifications). Maybe it'll help someone else --certainly we enjoy it a lot!

Me: "Hey David, time to get dressed. Here's your hat!" I say, waving his underwear in the air.

David: "That's not my hat, that's my underwear!"

Me: "No way! Look -- it's got holes for your ears!"

David: "NO!" (gales of laughter)

Me: "Yes, see, it fits perfectly" (putting the underwear on my son's head)

David: "No!" (more laughter), "it's for my BOTTOM!"

Me: "Okay, okay -- try it." (David starts to put it on in the right place, while I keep spouting off, and the more I play up being the know-it-all, the more he loves it) but you'll see that it doesn't fit. SEE, it doesn't fit. Brother! Imagine thinking that a hat is underwear. Oh...oh dear. (It's starting to be obvious that he was right)...Oh...Oh my...but if that is underwear, what's this?" (Said while holding up the shirt.)

David: "My SHIRT!"

Me: "No way! It's for wearing on your legs."

David: "It's not for your legs, it's for your arms."

Me: "My arms...but it doesn't fit my arms!" I say while attempting to wear his shirt. And on we go (having a former career as a clown has paid off!).

These games are fun for us both, and they get the job done!

--a mother in Winnipeg, Canada

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We Cancel Christmas Presents

"I'm a single mother. I have very little money--sometimes it's a struggle just to pay the rent. Last year, my parents were going to be celebrating their 50th wedding anniversary in New York, and our whole family was going to gather. The celebration was scheduled for January, and I really wanted to be there with my two children (they were 10 and 12).

There was no way we were going to be able to pay for tickets to New York and have Christmas gifts too. No way. I've done a lot of thinking and working through my feelings about my parenting and about our financial situation in Listening Partnerships over the years, and I've been able to stop feeling like I'm a bad Mom if I don't have extra money. I am a good mother!

So I sat down with my children, and told them about the gathering and who we would see there. I was excited about the trip, and I conveyed that to them. And I told them, with enthusiasm, that we were going, but it meant that we weren't going to have presents at Christmas. We could give each other one gift each. It could cost no more than \$5. That would be our rule.

They were totally fine with this. I couldn't believe it. And guess what! This was the very best Christmas we have ever had. I wasn't running around like crazy beforehand. After years of stressing about Christmas, this one was a relief! A big relief! I wasn't stressing about money. I wasn't feeling bad about the things I couldn't afford for them. On Christmas Day, we opened our gifts--they were so thoughtful with what they got me and each other--and then we relaxed. We went to the park, played, and had a nice little dinner together. It was the best day! My kids were absolutely fine about it--not one complaint.

And we had a great time in New York!" --a mother in Berkeley, CA

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SEND IN YOUR STORIES!

Please send your stories of how you've used the PLI approach to parenting. We'd love to hear about what you've learned, and to share it with other parents.

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NEWS

** "Cry for Connection: A Fresh Approach to Tantrums," by Patty Wipfler, has been published in the November/December issue of Mothering magazine. It outlines the PLI approach to tantrums in a bit more detail than the Tantrums pamphlet PLI publishes. You can find Mothering in most large bookstores and libraries, or contact <www.mothering.com> .

** PlayMorning January 11th, for parents and children 2 to 9 years old. Parents who have had some introduction to the PLI approach, their children, and relatives or friends are welcome. We play hard (pillowfights and chasing are big with the older children), make sure each child gets Special Time with his or her parent, and get Playlistening going when we can. Often, children find ways to let big feelings bubble to the surface after an

hour or so of play and attention, and we mentor parents as they listen to the feelings and help their children work them through. It's a place where it's safe for your child to be himself, where children's difficulties are seen as opportunities for us all to learn, and where every parent gets listened to at some time during the morning. Join us! For details, see our events calendar at www.parentleaders.org.

** PLI booklets, tapes, and videos make great holiday gifts! You can obtain everything we publish with a click of your mouse at www.parentleaders.org . We're pleased to make it easy for parents to obtain good, effective information from PLI. If you are buying more than 10 items, you will receive a 10% discount from PLI if you order by mail, fax, or over the phone. We don't offer this discount online, so keep our phone number handy too: 650-322-5323, fax (650) 322-5179.

** We'd like to hear how you're using the parenting tips and articles we're sending you. If you duplicate our articles for your parent group, nursery school, or church or temple Sunday school, please let us know. You're free to spread the word! We'd love to hear where and with whom. Tell us at info@parentleaders.org

** You can help PLI and appear in print! We're looking for great photos that show close communication between you and your child. Please scan and send! Or mail an extra copy (we can't return it) to us at P.O. Box 50492, Palo Alto, CA 94303. If we decide to use it, we'll let you know and get specific permission. We'll enjoy what you send, guaranteed.

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PASS IT ON!

Do you know parents who would find our newsletter helpful? Zap it to them! To obtain past issues, write us at [<info@parentleaders.org>](mailto:info@parentleaders.org)

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