

There But For An Internet Post Go I...

Submitted by Sarah Fitz-Claridge on 27 July, 2003 - 12:15

Laura Smith suggested that there should be a column in *Taking Children Seriously* for personal stories of what brought people to TCS, what they were doing before, how TCS has changed their lives and relationships, what was hard for them, and so on. Given that TCS folks are keen to avoid writing things that might embarrass their children when they later become Prime Minister or the President, Laura suggested that this column should be anonymous to allow people to say slightly personal things without violating anyone's privacy. She wrote: "I am so interested in how much TCS has changed my whole life, my approach to all relationships – my worldview, I guess you could say. Not to mention my parenting. I am interested in others' stories too."

TCS Stories is the outcome of Laura's suggestion. So if you would like to contribute a piece, please [send in your submission](#).

And now, the first TCS Story, first published in *Taking Children Seriously*, the paper journal (TCS **29**):

There But For An Internet Post Go I...

Just having gotten a computer I was looking around for something to use it for. We had two children under 16 months old and I wasn't sure what I was going to do in terms of parenting. I was watching parenting shows on TV a few times a week. Dr Brazelton and Dr What's-her-name and a few Dr Whomevers. They sounded as though they knew more than I did so I paid careful attention and tried to learn as much as I could about parenting from them.

Among many other things, I discovered from one of them that I should teach my children to sleep by putting them to bed at a regular time and mostly ignoring their cries (checking back in occasionally to let them know I was still around somewhere). Supposedly, they would cry a lot at first, but if I just got through this bad period they would cry less and less and then sleep through the night on a regular basis. Having been raised with a fair amount of this sort of treatment, and being incredibly tired through lack of sleep, I figured it sounded like reasonable advice. My wife agreed, so that's what we did. I don't remember how old the eldest was when we decided to do this with her, but perhaps she was 12 months old. The younger baby was too young for this, the experts said.

I didn't want to be ignorant about what was going on so I tried to watch closely to see how my child reacted to this treatment. I was quite taken aback by the expression on her face as she cried. If I were to see an adult looking that way I would think they were badly afraid of something and extremely hurt and unhappy. It was too painful even to watch for long. Somehow, though, I allowed myself to accept the conventional idea that children's feelings don't mean the same thing as adults' feelings. But it didn't feel right. What if they really were as afraid and hurt as they appeared?, I wondered.

So anyway, there I was with the new computer on the internet looking at sites on the World-Wide-Web and reading newsgroups. For anyone still in the bad old pre-internet world, newsgroups are virtual message boards on particular topics where people meet, chat, discuss, inform, entertain, and criticize one another freely. On the misc.kids newsgroup (which

is for discussion of issues in connection with raising children) I saw a discussion about a child at a supermarket whose parent was complaining that her child wanted to stay at the drinking fountain instead of doing as she was told and following the parent to the car. "How can a parent allow their children to do this?" the parent was saying.

One of the replies was pretty strange. It talked about how fascinating water fountains were and how nice it would be if children were allowed to play with water fountains if they wanted to. It questioned whether leaving the supermarket couldn't wait a few minutes for an entranced young child to finish her exploration of the water fountain. It said that life does not have to be about winning or losing and that there is a solution possible to such conflicts that both parent and child would prefer, if only the parent was willing to give up controlling her child. At the bottom of this message there were instructions for how to subscribe to an internet discussion list called "Taking Children Seriously."

I remember how odd it felt reading that reply. It brought back something from my childhood, I wasn't sure what. I think I imagined how nice it would have been to be treated that way when I was a child. I wanted to know more about it so I subscribed to the TCS list.

It was a topsy-turvy few months at first. Most of the spinning was in my head as I tried to figure out TCS. Some of it sounded wrong, but I wasn't sure if that was because it was wrong or because I didn't understand it, so I decided to keep trying until I figured it all out. I questioned everything. I challenged everything TCS advocates said that sounded wrong to me. I played devil's advocate. After thinking about it with a spinning head for a few weeks I starting to talk to my wife about it. Amazingly, she seemed to understand it easily and to agree with it in a fraction of the time I was taking. I still don't understand how that worked.

Since then I have gradually learned about TCS. Early on I decided to try to be a TCS parent and I have been ever since.

One of the most interesting parts of TCS to me is trying to understand how children get twisted into bad, self-defeating patterns of thinking and dealing with the world. Perhaps the main thing that drew me to TCS was the thought that it might be possible not to so twist my own children.

Recently there was a conversation on the internet about children who are labeled with one of those 'neurological conditions', such as Asperger's Syndrome, ADD, ADHD, and numerous other pseudo-medical diagnoses. A parent was explaining what life is like for and with his child, who has been diagnosed. It was heartbreaking. The parent talked about structuring the child's environment and drug therapy. He clearly sees himself as a kind, loving parent who is helping his child to live with her difficult condition. But he sees her through the glasses of his theory that she has a Problem, and so, of course, she does.

When I read such stories, I feel overwhelmed with gratitude that our family found TCS. There but for the grace of something or other go I... But for Sarah [Fitz-Claridge's] post on misc.kids, it might be *me* saying these things about my children! But for TCS, my own children might now be living with one of those 'neurological condition' labels. But for TCS, we might have inadvertently coerced our children into such a syndrome. Have you ever just missed a head-on collision in your car? Or just missed falling from a dangerous height? You remember the rush of feeling you get immediately afterward? I feel like that.

It is a cold fear followed by a warm rush without losing all the cold fear thinking about what might have happened. If my wife and I had tried to direct, coerce, or correct our children in the conventional way, they might have been unable to solve their problems. They might be stuck staring at walls all day or be stuck horribly confused about important things in some other way. Instead they are steadily, remarkably, amazingly figuring out how to solve their problems because we *all* consider such coercion *wrong* and try to avoid it like the plague. It is the coercive control that makes them stuck, not the starting point of their problem.

I guess I don't really have much else to say other than to say thank you, TCS, from the bottom of my heart for helping me and my family so much.

to post comments

Comments

Interesting read...

Submitted by Serious on 7 March, 2005 - 06:33

I find that many of us don't 'listen' to our own bodies enough. We are like the next human being. I believe our children would learn to listen to their bodies if we kept our strong hold off of them. I'm glad I found this site. I came across it and was grateful when I discovered the content. Why? Because both my partner and I have total opposite parenting styles...does this mean we should by pass loving care simply because we disagree? I don't believe so. I believe it should be lead by the biological parent. Thanks for the read. Peace!

to post comments

Huh?

Submitted by Michael Golding (not verified) on 24 April, 2006 - 00:33

Frontal lobe disorders (causing various types of Attention Deficit) and Autistic Spectrum Disorders (including Asperger's) are genetically based illnesses. They have been demonstrated to be caused less by people's "ideas" and more by genetics, than most other medical conditions, including adolescent type 2 diabetes and lung and colon cancer.

Scientific illiteracy will not help children.

to post comments

pseudo-medicality of ADHD

Submitted by [A-lady \(not verified\)](http://addinainen.blogspot.com) on 9 July, 2006 - 19:41

I'm not the parent of a child diagnosed with ADHD. I'm a *parent* diagnosed with ADHD less than six months ago. The sensitivity runs in my family, but neither of my parents has full-blown ADHD (neither does my child, fortunately she's adopted :) In my case a contributing factor is an infancy (-> 15 months of age) characterised by a physical condition requiring surgery and painful post-op care procedures that my mother had to perform. But my parents are/were as TCS as parents can be before the term was even coined. And I still have ADHD. The way I look at it, adult ADHD is a complex, subtle physical problem (and YES, it's a problem! Not remembering to put shoes on your child in winter is a problem!) that manifests in a multitude of ways depending on other facets of the person's personality. Childhood ADHD is basically the same, except that I believe that if we knew how, children could be coached out of it.

My point is in fact this: that a structured environment and a steady schedule (and rigorous drug regimen) are necessary for me to feel good and competent, rather than tired, wild, stressed and exploding at the least imagined provocation. If I'm just "allowed" to do my own thing, I guarantee you from long experience that I'll be feeling very very bad in a week or so. Like I did most of my childhood. I did not begin to improve until I found a hobby

(well, let's call it Life, 'cause that's how much it means to me) that forced me to be disciplined and forced me to do unpleasant things for long-term gains. I didn't know how to do that before, you see, didn't know how to regulate myself because I'd never been taught by my TCS parents who took me so seriously I could convince them of anything and never had to do anything against my Serious Wishes. Now I know how to control myself, regulate my actions and feelings, and adhere to discipline, and I'm happier, more contented, more fulfilled and much less aggressive.

to post comments

Very inspiring

Submitted by [Eric \(not verified\) \(http://www.pro-article.com\)](http://www.pro-article.com) on 13 February, 2007 - 03:00

When I read such stories, I feel overwhelmed with gratitude that our family found TCS. There but for the grace of something or other go I... But for Sarah [Fitz-Claridge's] post on misc.kids, it might be me saying these things about my children!

to post comments

grateful for open discussion

Submitted by [Crash Test Mommy \(not verified\)](#) on 19 November, 2007 - 02:22

I'm always trying to learn how to be a better parent, and looked up this site after reading about TCS in "Brain,Child" magazine.

I have Aspergers, have a son with AS, and a daughter with sensory integration disorder. I'm grateful that someone said here that these neurological differences have a genetic basis. The "refrigerator mother" theory has been damaging enough without adding "coercive" to the list of causes.

That said, I admire how respectful and trusting TCS parents are with their children, and hope to find ways to implement it in my family.

to post comments

Great Idea

Submitted by [ADHD Discussion \(not verified\) \(http://list.adhdirect.com\)](http://list.adhdirect.com) on 8 April, 2008 - 23:31

This is a good idea. I like the idea of anonymous submission. I know my child would be completely horrified to have their name show up on a google search with comments from his Mommy. :-) Nice article, too. Good job, Laura!

to post comments

Comment on Aspergers

Submitted by Teresa (not verified) on 11 June, 2009 - 20:26

I was raised with something approximating TCS, and I have Aspergers and Tourettes. I am now 26 and a graduate student.

TCS will not keep you from being Aspergers. It may simply delay the moment of realization that there is something different about you.

On the one hand, I function a lot better than a lot of other young adults do who have these things, because I learned to solve my problems rather than just do what I was told. On the other hand, problem solutions that worked great when I was 5 (or even 15) don't always work all that well when I'm 25.

There are times when I really wish I knew better coping strategies. I've tried all sorts of therapists, but none of them are prepared to deal with my TCS-induced responses to their "suggestions" (have you ever noticed that therapists' "suggestions" are really more like demands?) like "Well, that seems like a good idea, but here's why I'm nervous about trying it". They want to believe they know better---and maybe they do! But having been raised like this, I want them to share *why* they think it's better, not just tell me "because I said so".

It's terribly frustrating when I realize that every one of my friends either has Aspergers themselves or has a sibling with Aspergers. It says to me that I am not able to function well in the general environment of people, and that's something I desperately want to do. But I don't know how, and I have yet to find anybody willing to lead me without coercing me.

So was TCS a good idea? I don't know.

to post comments

ADHD

Submitted by SomeOne your not (not verified) on 2 December, 2009 - 14:29

People with ADHD and ADD are not bad people. I'm 16, i have ADD and bipolar and I'm an honor student. Alot of people think people with those problems aren't going anywhere in life but that's not true. With the proper treatment (I don't beileve in medication) you can do anything you want, even if you do have something like ADD and ADHD.

I'm doing this at school so if my grammer and spelling is off i'm sorry.

to post comments

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