



# Rifka Schonfeld **STRATEGIES**

THE NEWSLETTER FOR OPTIMUM SUCCESS

TIPS ON SOCIAL SKILLS FOR ADULTS & CHILDREN

## Survival Guide for Parents with Young Children

Dear Readers,

This week's newsletter includes a "survival guide" for parents with young children.

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### QUESTION:

As a parent of young children, can you give me some guidance on how to deal with difficult situations that arise?

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**ANSWER:**

In 1980, Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish wrote a seminal parenting book entitled *How to Talk So Kids Will Listen and Listen So Kids Will Talk*. In January 2017, Adele Faber's daughter Joanna Faber teamed up with her friend Julie King to write a new book for parenting younger children. The 2017 book, entitled *How to Talk So Little Kids Will Listen: A Survival Guide to Life with Children Ages 2-7*, utilizes many of the parenting techniques from the original 1980 book, but modifies them for the modern parent and younger children.

The first section of Faber and King's book deals with helping children deal with difficult feelings, something that author Joanna Faber argues many parents want to skip in order to get to the more concrete, what to do section:

*Most of the parents in my workshops have been pretty impatient with this first topic: helping children deal with difficult feelings. They'd like to move right on to the second session: how to get your kids to do what you tell them to do! Not that we don't care about how our kids feel. It's just not generally first priority for a frazzled parent. Let's face it, if they did as they were told, things would go so smoothly and we'd all feel great.*

*The problem is, there's just no good shortcut to getting a cooperative kid. You can try, but you will likely end up knee-deep in a bog of conflict...*

*So what's the point of all of this? The point is that we can't behave right when we don't feel right. And kids can't behave right when they don't feel right. If we don't take care of their feelings first, we have a little chance of engaging their cooperation. All we'll have left going for us is our ability to use greater force. And since we'd like to reserve brute force for emergencies such as yanking children out of traffic, we've got to face this feelings things head-on. So let's dig in!*

*In other words, we have to deal with these negative emotions before we can deal with the negative behavior. Even with children as young as two-years-old, we need to address their negative feelings in ways that are problem-solving, rather than simply attempting to shut them down. In their book, Faber and King describe five common mistakes parents make when talking to young children about their feelings.*

**Denial of feelings.** After you have made your daughter's favorite grilled cheese sandwich, she says to you, "I hate grilled cheese sandwiches." You might want to say, "You don't hate grilled cheese sandwiches! You love grilled cheese sandwiches." But in that moment, she is not going to say, "Oh, right, thanks for reminding me!"

**Philosophy.** There are always lessons to be taught in life, and as parents we always want to teach them. The problem is that when your child is experiencing negative feelings, he is not ready to listen to those lessons. So, if your son had a fight with a friend in school and you tell him, "Well, you know life is tough and you are going to fight with people. You just have to get used to it." He is not going to walk away feeling like he has dealt with those negative feelings.

**Questions.** If your daughter colors on the counter for the third time that week, you might impulsively want to say, "Why did you color on the counter again? Didn't I tell you a million times that the crayons are for paper?!" She will not likely have a good answer to that question, and whatever reason she did color on the counter will still remain.

**Comparison.** When things go wrong, especially in public places like supermarkets, school lobbies, or shuls, we tend to look at the other children who are behaving like perfect angels. In those instances, we want to say, "Look at Shaindel. She's quietly helping her mother load her groceries into the bag. How come you can't do what Shaindel is doing?" This comparison only emphasizes the negative feelings, rather than attempting to get to their core.

**Lecture.** Children, especially young children, have a limited amount of information that they can take in at a time. That's why when we begin to lecture we lose them completely. They retreat into their negative feelings and hear almost nothing that we have said.

Now that we've gone over all of the mistakes that parents make when speaking to their children who are dealing with negative feelings, what are some of the good ways that you can help children deal with negative feelings?

Faber and King's main advice revolves around problem-solving. You can reconnect with your child and help them work through those negative feelings in order to guide them towards better behavior the next time around. This sounds like a grueling process, but in reality, the more you invest in teaching problem solving, the less you are going to need to invest in dealing with meltdowns in the long-term. The key is that it's about cooperation

and future actions, not the moment you are struggling with right then.

For those specific moments? Faber and King have plenty of tips for those too!

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