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# Setting boundaries for your children

“There is no single effort more radical in its potential for saving the world than a transformation of the way we raise our children. They must grow up to be adults with only a fraction of our neurosis or the world is in serious trouble. This is not the time to mimic our parents.”

So says author and modern spiritual guru Marianne Williamson. I’ve been mulling her words as I casually observe parents and kids in the tantrum-inducing throes of back-to-school shopping. I don’t agree with her completely.

In raising a daughter and son, I chose not to mimic my parents, who loved and cared for their five children’s physical needs, but who paid very little mind to our thoughts and feelings. My mother was of the “stop crying or I’ll give you something to cry about” school of parenting. She loved us, still does, but our contentment was not central to hers.

I went too far the other way, as did many of my peers. Our kids are neurotic in a whole other way. We were forever taking our children’s emotional temperature and striving to keep them happy by putting their needs far above our own. It was a mistake. We raised children who left home convinced they were the center of the universe. For those kids, it was a shocker when a boss, professor, potential partner, even the guy behind them in traffic didn’t care a whit about their wants and needs.

The good news is that mine are quicker learners. The world is managing to put them in their place even if their mother rarely did. They’ve turned into compassionate, honorable, hardworking people in spite of my mistakes. I got lucky.

Not parenting like your parents is not the same as parenting well. To do as your parents did, or to flat-out reject their way, is a dangerous cop-out. Each child requires your thoughtful approach to guidance. It takes more work.

The only no-fail parenting advice — which I learned very late in the game — is this: Set boundaries for your children about what’s acceptable behavior and what isn’t, and what makes good common sense and what doesn’t. And then manage your own anxiety so you can stick to your guns. Acknowledging your child’s thoughts and feelings is different than agreeing with or acquiescing to every one.

Sometimes we cave in to our kids because it’s easier than enduring their tears or angry disappointment. Easier on us, that is, but not on the kid. Not in the long run.

In the stores this fall, some parents will meet their kids’ wardrobe and accessory demands at the expense of their own self-respect and even financial security.

If our schools were brimming with happy, calm, motivated kids, I’d say maybe that’s how it’s supposed to be. They aren’t.

Too many school-age kids are anxious, obnoxious, and mad as hell when the world doesn’t dish out exactly what they wish for at the moment they wish it. It is a recipe for failure.

Our only moral obligation to our kids is to provide food, shelter and a sense of safety. We do not owe them designer clothes and shoes, expensive haircuts, professional manicures, nice cars, cell phones or the newest electronics. We surely don’t owe them our peace of mind, which is what we give up when kids decide household budgets or standards such as curfews.

Marianne Williamson is correct in suggesting it is not the kids who need to get a grip, it is we.

Here’s wishing other moms and dads the courage to take a stand to parent well and the strength to weather the resulting meltdowns. Tantrums pass, just like our chance to mold our kids into fair-minded, compassionate human beings who don’t freak out in the face of adversity, but rather can weather it by modeling our thoughtful example. The results may very well be people with the potential to save the world.