

## **Parent Child Journey**

*An Individualized Approach to Raising Your Challenging Child*

by Dan Shapiro, MD

### ***Ninth Mile: Pausing for Empathy and Self-Reflection***

“Rock”: When to pause for empathy and self-reflection

- ignoring or time-out is inappropriate or counterproductive; especially as children get older
- you and your child need mutual understanding, compassion, support and connection
- you and your child are feeling distressed or frustrated

Why empathy?

- Empathy helps keep parents and children out of power struggles
- Empathy helps your child feel understood
- Empathy helps teach your child the language of emotion
- Empathy helps parents gain traction with their child for problem solving together

How to respond empathically

- Verbal empathic responses
  - “I guess you really don’t feel like doing this right now.”
  - “That sure is frustrating!”
  - “It seems like you don’t want to stop what you’re doing.”
  - “It sounds like you’re pretty angry.”
  - “That looks hard to do.”
  - “Bummer.”
  - “You were really expecting that to go differently.”
  - “I’d feel a little nervous about that too.”
  - “That sure was scary.”
- Nonverbal empathic responses
  - Coming close (but not too close)
  - Body language
  - Facial expression
  - Touch / hug
  - Nonverbal vocalizations (such as a sigh)
  - Just staying 100 percent present and truly listening

## Why self-reflection?

- Self-reflection helps you stay out of internal power struggles:
- Self-reflection helps self-understanding:
- Self-reflection helps you learn the language of self-acceptance:
- Self-reflection helps you stay calm and rational for problem solving:

## How to self-reflect

- What am I dealing with in this moment?
  - Today? This week? This year? At this phase of my life?
  - What am I thinking?
  - What am I feeling?
- What am I carrying with me from my own past?
  - From my own childhood family system?
  - From my community?
  - From my culture?
  - From my environment?
  - From my experience?
  - From my genes?
- What judgements am I making about myself? What distorted or irrational thoughts?

## Homework for the Ninth Mile

1. *Practice pausing for empathy.* When it is inappropriate to ignore or use time-out, or if you are just unsure which reactive strategy to use, try empathy. Help your child feel understood. Validate his or her feelings. Help your child learn the language of emotion. Resist the temptation to say “but.” Do not shift prematurely into teaching or problem solving.
2. *Practice pausing for self-reflection.* Do not battle yourself. Avoid self-criticism. Identify, validate, and accept your own internal thoughts and feelings. Stay calm. Practice self-awareness.