

## **Book summary: Parenting a Child Who Has Intense Emotions, Harvey and Penzo: Dialectical Behavior Therapy Skills to Help Your Child Regulate Emotional Outbursts and Aggressive Behaviors**

Your child may exhibit some of the following behaviors if they have intense emotions:

- Is unable to differentiate between situations responses, causes, and effects.
- Responds to events in an extreme way.
- Reaches high level of intensity very quickly.
- Has trouble prioritizing what is important and is overwhelmed by choices.
- Takes a long time to return to a calm state after an upsetting incident.

Important things to remember while parenting:

- Parents are always trying their best and can strive to do better.
- Children are always trying their best and can strive to do better.
- Let go of judgement and blame of self and others.
- Individuals are not their behaviors, nor are they defined by them.
- Individuals are not their thoughts, nor are they defined by them.
- Individuals are not their emotions, nor are they defined by them.
- There is no absolute truth. Individual's truth is based on interpretations of events based on the individual's own experiences, emotions, thoughts, and behaviors. It is difficult and important to learn to accept individual's truth as their own.

### Principles of Effective Parenting:

1. Do not assume the worse. There may be reasons why your child is behaving the way that they are. Respond to their behavior, not assumptions of their intentions.
2. Don't be judgmental. If you are thinking negatively about your child, gently remind yourself that your child is doing the best that they can.
3. Validate your child. Respond to your child's truth and feeling even if it is difficult.
4. Be responsive, not reactive. Take a few moments to keep your emotions before you respond to your child's behaviors.
5. You can lose the battle, and still win the war. It's not essential that you have absolute control of your child. Choose your battles so you can have a more positive relationship with your child. This will enable to you reinforce positive changes over time.
6. It takes two to engage in power struggles. You can walk away without feeling like you are giving in.
7. Balance your response. Balanced parenting means giving your child some choices while still setting behavioral guidelines.
8. Choose the most effective response. Are you achieving your long-term goals? If what you are doing isn't working, try something else.

## Psychoeducation to help support Principles of Effective Parenting:

According to Marsha Linehan, PhD there are three states of mind, reasonable mind, emotion mind, and wise mind (each are described below). Depending on the event/situation, one state of mind can take over. With individuals with intense emotions, emotion mind may be the primary state of mind during increased stress.

### **Reasonable mind definition:**

Logic brained

Can have discussion, logic based, not emotion based

Unable to think about how decisions affect others.

### **Emotion mind definition:**

Purely in fight/flight/freeze

Unable to make reasonable decisions

Unable to hear anything reasonable

### **Wise mind definition:**

Able to identify emotions and thoughts

Able to make decisions while taking into consideration emotions AND thoughts

Able to understand others, have empathy for others, and still make logical decision

This is where we are striving to be

Parents and children can be in and out of different states of mind at different times in their day based on their perceived interpretation of events.

## **Incorporate Dialectical Thinking:**

Two thoughts that appear to be opposite can both be true.

View behaviors in whole context, not just from our own.

Entertain different perspectives in others and within self.

Find less extreme and more effective ways to think.

### *Ideas to incorporate into daily life:*

1. Use words like “sometimes” “some people” instead of “always”, “Never”, “Everyone,” “all the time”.
2. Think both/and instead of either/or...ex. “I am angry, and I still love you.” Vs “I can’t love you because I am angry.”
3. Other opinions can be legitimate even if you don’t agree with them.
4. “I feel” statements, rather than “You are...” statements.
5. Acceptance of child for who they are AND hoping for motivation to change.

### *Validate, Validate, Validate:*

Practice Validation:

1. Understand (Quietly Listen)
2. Acknowledge (Let him know you are listening carefully)
3. Empathize (we all have our perception of what has happened)
4. Accept (not the same as agreeing)

When a child is in Emotion Mind, it is difficult to reason with them (they cannot access Reasonable Mind or Wise Mind). Sometimes, validation is used as a parent's skill until the child calms down and can have a discussion using Wise Mind.

Try Responding vs. Reacting. This requires describing what is happening non-judgmentally instead of emotionally responding with judgmental language.

Examples include:

*Assess Your Goals in the situation:*

**Stop**

**Take a step back**

**Observe non-judgmentally**

**Proceed mindfully**

*Things to ask ourselves:*

1. What do I want to accomplish?
2. What is the most important goal I have?
3. How do I want both of us to feel when this is over?

*Things to think about daily:*

What are some preexisting vulnerabilities?

Examples: lack of sleep, not feeling well, change in routine, tension in the house, New people or situations, stress from friends/siblings, perceived sense of having done something wrong or upset someone, difficulty in school, bedtime, vacation....etc.

*Body Sensations:* Identify

Discuss emotions in home, led by example

Discuss what emotions feel like in the body, to support being able to identify it before it happens

Possible mood chart on the fridge. Referring to it often throughout the day.

*Identify Triggers:*

ex. Separation from a parent, change in the household, losing in a competition, limits on TV, spending time with a sibling (perceived as more time spent). All experiences are perceived based on their interpretations.

*Create a Pleasant Activities List, what is calming for them, what do they enjoy doing?*

1. Post it on the fridge
2. Refer to it when seeing signs/triggers take place
3. Let them pick what they want to do, to support self-regulation

*Create a list of things that the child feels competent in doing*

Try to incorporate this into the weekly schedule

*Create a list of calming/distraction activities.*

1. Try to incorporate this into the weekly schedule, integrate into daily structure.
2. What can we do to make you feel better right now?