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Our Children's Weak Moments

This article could have been titled “New Year’s Resolutions and Changing the Size of External Events,” but that seemed too vague. By the time you finish reading this, the connection between the two titles will be obvious.

Every year for at least the past 35 years I made New Year’s Resolutions and often realized that I was including the old standbys once again. The old standbys are the ones that still need work even after the benefit of another year working on them. You might have your old standbys as well. And every year I try to make some progress on my resolutions, and every year I am (mostly) *patient and forgiving* of myself when I struggle, and then include the same need areas on next year’s list of New Year’s Resolutions again. Sound familiar? But what does this have to do with our children’s weak moments?

If you have more than one child, you are probably surrounded by sibling rivalry. If you have a twelve-year-old, there are probably eyes being rolled in your direction along with a tone that doesn’t exactly scream “I love you and thank you for everything.” If you have a fourth- or a fifth-grader, you are probably wondering how much you are supposed to help when they aren’t particularly organized and aren’t taking their academic career as seriously as they should be. If you have a five- or six-year-old you have probably felt “at wit’s end” just trying to get out of the house in the morning.

It is never clearer to me than at this time of the year, as I put my old standbys into yet another list of resolutions, that progress is slow and difficult, even for adults. This reminds me

that it is reasonable to expect progress to be slow and difficult for children as well. When I remember this, it changes the way I view my children's uneven progress on their need areas, and I am more likely to react in a more *patient and forgiving* way.

It is by remembering our own struggles with the need areas of our lives that we remember to be compassionate for our children's struggles. We have a choice in how we view the morning struggle to get out the door and we can change how much it bothers us by how we view it. Same thing with the fourth-grader's need to become more serious about school and the twelve-year-old's need to work on respect issues. They are just as allowed the time to work on their issues as we are allowed the time to work on our issues.

Our children need for us to learn how to view their behavior in a way that keeps us at our best. And to do that, we need to learn to change the size of external events. External events don't have to dictate how we feel or how we react. This is difficult to do when our children are having their weak moments, but the work we do to change how we view those external events is the most important work of our lives as parents. Fortunately, it is just as true that other external events aren't supposed to control our feelings either. And that is where we can do some of our best practicing! The practicing that we do when we are stuck in traffic (choosing to view this as a minor inconvenience rather than a day-ruining catastrophe) helps us with our viewing skills with our children as well.

May your New Year's Resolutions, especially your old standbys, help you view your children in a patient and forgiving way, even as they continue to work on their weak moments.