

Wellness Wednesday



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Looking Back At Your Childhood Could Change The Way You Parent — For The Better

Rather than following in your parents' footsteps or bolting in the opposite direction, reflecting on the way you parent and making changes to your behavior can strengthen your relationship with your kids.

There are as many styles of parenting as there are families, and which camp we fall into can change from day to day, and even moment to moment.

Roughly, however, most of our choices can be categorized as one of several parenting styles, as defined in the 1960s by psychologist Diana Baumrind. Authoritarian parents exert a high degree of control over their children's behavior and are not responsive to their children's needs. The relationship is parent-directed, and expectations are justified with explanations such as, "Because I said so."

On the other hand, permissive parents respond to their children's needs by always meeting their demands and rarely enforcing rules.

The sweet spot, or middle ground, is known as authoritative parenting. These parents are responsive to their kids' needs but also set clear expectations and engage in open, honest communication with their kids.

A fourth category was added in the 1980s by researchers Eleanor Maccoby and John Martin. Neglectful parents are neither responsive to their children's needs nor demanding in their expectations. Rather, they remain uninvolved in their children's lives.

Which style of parenting we use is up to us, but we can only be intentional when we're aware of what is happening. If we're not mindful about which way our parenting is leaning, it may feel like we are doing the obvious, right or logical thing when in fact we are falling back into whatever patterns were set for us by our own parents.

"People who just haven't had any opportunity to gain awareness inherently follow in the internalized parenting strategies that they received," Sarah Bren, a psychologist in New York, told HuffPost. She describes this process as automatic, or "This is what I know, so this is what I do."

"Almost every parent I know has had some moment when they opened their mouth ... and their mother/father/etc., came out. That's not inherently good or bad — it's just an indicator that, like every other human on the planet, how you were raised is impacting how you're raising your kid," Kristene Geering, director of education at Parent Lab, told HuffPost.

It's helpful to identify your parenting style.

There's nothing necessarily wrong with following in your own parents' footsteps. They may have been excellent parents! But if you don't examine your own beliefs and get curious about the way you react in certain situations, you won't have the opportunity to tailor your parenting approach to fit your current family circumstances.

For those of us who know that there are things we want to do differently, there's a danger that we will swing too far in the other direction.

"In my practice, I'm usually working with parents who can be overly harsh, critical, controlling and dismissive at one extreme and overly permissive, fearful, and under-assertive at the other end of the spectrum," Nanika Coor, a psychologist in Brooklyn, told HuffPost.



While not all families fall at either end of this binary, Coor says she sees many parents "get hijacked by overwhelming emotions that have less to do with what's happening with their child at that moment, and more to do with their own past."

People who say things like, "I don't want to parent the way I was parented. I want to be a cycle-breaker," explained Bren, sometimes "take it to sort of the complete extreme other end and it's, 'I'm afraid to say no, I'm afraid to discipline, I'm afraid to inhibit my child in any way because I felt so inhibited as a child myself.'" In this case, someone who had authoritarian parents might take efforts not to be authoritarian too far and wind up being permissive.

The way to get to the "sweet spot" of authoritative parenting, says Bren, is to be reflective. This involves an awareness and examination of the relationship between what you are feeling, saying and doing.

It also involves realizing when something is triggering to us, and pausing — giving ourselves enough time to think so that we are able to make a choice about how to proceed instead of simply reacting.

When something happens, and you feel a surge of emotion, instead of acting or speaking impulsively, stop and observe, "Oh, I'm being triggered right now. Is it because of something my child's doing? Or is it because of something I'm projecting onto the situation?" Bren suggested.

When we do this, she explained, "We are activating the prefrontal cortex. We are not in fight or flight." This allows us "space to make a choice," she continued, noting that all of us, even those who didn't have traumatic childhoods, have our triggers.

Think reflectively about how you yourself were parented.

Coor says that if you're having a lot of tough moments with your child, it can be illuminating to think about how your own parents would have reacted to those same behaviors coming from you as a child.

“Sometimes parents are reactive with their children because in childhood their own parents would have punished or otherwise disapproved if they’d done the same thing. Or, they’re trying so hard to do the opposite of what was done to them that they over-correct,” said Coor.

Either way, you may be missing a chance to meet your child’s needs in the moment. It can help to take an inventory of your experiences both as a child and as a parent. “Parent-child conflict isn’t always the direct result of parenting, but your own behavior is the only thing you have real control over, so it’s always a great place to start,” said Coor.

She suggests you ask yourself the following questions:

- What was my relationship with my parents like when I was my child’s age?
- Am I worried that my child might experience bad things that I experienced?
- Am I worried that my child might not experience bad things I experienced, and I envy that?
- Do I have a lot of fears about being the same kind of parent that mine was?
- Were there certain emotions I wasn’t allowed to express to/with my parents?
- These questions can help identify some of your triggers. And if you find they bring up a lot of tough stuff — which, for many of us, they do — look for ways you can find support throughout this process.

“Some parents choose to do that exploration with a therapist or other mental health professional ... and some choose to do that with friends or an intimate partner or even through self-help books,” said Geering. The purpose of excavating the past like this is learning how to face the present, not simply blaming your own parents for all of your faults.

“It can be very easy to start laying blame on our parents, but I truly think that the vast majority of parents ... do the best they can with what they have at the time,” said Geering. “You may not agree with some (or a lot) of what your parents did,” she added, but it can be helpful to try to see things from their perspective, too.

It’s worth noting that not everything you remember from your past, or discover in your present, will be negative.

“Our parents also did the best they could with what they had, and there are times we can be incredibly sweet and caring without thinking. That’s just as much a part of your early experiences, and it helps parents realize they’re probably doing a lot of things ‘right,’” said Geering.

Examine your fears.

The force behind our motivations is often fear, says Traci Baxley, parent coach and author of *Social Justice Parenting*.

“Often parenting practices are directly linked to adults’ childhood experiences and show up in the form of fear,” Baxley told HuffPost. “The intention can come from a good place, but the end results can create children who internalize and live out their parents’ stresses and anxieties,” she said.

If we can notice our fear before we jump in and react to it, it “can serve as a tool to unpack negative childhood experiences and break cycles of generational traumas,” said Baxley. “The first steps,” she explained, “are awareness and reflection. Think about where the fears are coming from, when you started feeling them, and what memories are wrapped in these fears. It’s important not to judge the fears as right or wrong, or good or bad initially.”



Baxley suggests that we ask ourselves, “Is this a valid fear or is this fear rooted in my childhood, and is it relevant to the childhood I am building for my kids?” Of course, sometimes our fears are very real.

Baxley said, “As a Black mother, I have a healthy fear of keeping my Black sons safe when they are out in the world without me. My family engages in open dialogue about why this is a fear for me and how we can take courageous action to manage this fear.”

Parents can both acknowledge injustice and remain warm and attentive in their own interactions with their kids.

“[Black and brown] kids need to know that they will not always be treated fairly but that they deserve to be treated fairly,” Coor said.

Give yourself some grace, and know that you can do repair work.

Of course, we won’t always be able to live up to the parenting standards we set for ourselves — or the ones we may have had modeled for us. A trigger might pull at us before we have a chance to pause and examine it. But the occasional mistake won’t undo the overall picture of our parenting.

“It’s all about the aggregate,” said Bren. “There isn’t one thing that we do that is going to make or break things.”

“Sometimes we’re going to be overtaken by our emotions and our fears, and we’re going to act in ways that aren’t aligned with our values. And we can repair with our kid after that,” Bren continued.

This repair work strengthens our relationship with our kid, as well as their future relationships.

“The ability to repair a relationship is a critical skill for everyone to learn, and is an important part of all relationships as those repairs allow us to be vulnerable with another and create more intimate relationships,” said Geering.

Stating what you did that was wrong (“I yelled at you”), offering an unconditional apology and promising to try to do differently next time can go a long way.

“Being authentic with your child and admitting when you’re wrong can strengthen your relationship while offering valuable lessons at the same time,” Geering said.

“Children’s hearts are very forgiving, and they are ready to receive our love. Sometimes we just need to get out of our own way, let go of unrealistic expectations, and be the best we can be in that moment.”

When something kicks up feelings from our own childhood, we can practice taking a pause to recognize what we are feeling, then making a conscious decision about how to react.



HIGH PROTEIN EGG WHITE MUFFINS WITH TURKEY BACON



144 Calories | PREP TIME: 15 mins | COOK TIME: 35 mins | TOTAL TIME: 50 mins
YIELD: 6 servings | COURSE: Breakfast, Brunch, Meal Prep | CUISINE: American

INGREDIENTS

1/2 tablespoon extra virgin olive oil
16 ounce carton egg whites
5.3 ounce container 2% cottage cheese, a little over 1/2 cup
1/2 teaspoon garlic powder
1/4 teaspoon seasoning salt, like adobo
1/4 cup chopped shallots or red onion
1/4 cup chopped scallions
1 medium orange or red bell pepper, chopped
1/2 cup chopped steamed broccoli or frozen
6 slices Applegate uncured turkey bacon, cut in half (from 1- 8 oz package)
1/4 cup sharp shredded cheddar cheese
olive oil spray

These easy, protein packed muffins are loaded with egg whites, turkey bacon, cottage cheese, bell pepper, broccoli, scallions, and shallots. They are baked in a muffin tin and topped with a little cheddar cheese. They're naturally gluten-free and delicious!

Are egg whites healthy?

Egg whites are healthy and are very low in calories and high in protein. However, they have less nutrition than egg yolks. So, if your main goal is to reduce calories, then egg whites are a good choice, but if you want all the nutrition that eggs offer, don't skip the yolks.

Nutrition Information

Serving: 2 muffins, Calories: 144 kcal, Carbohydrates: 4.5 g, Protein: 20 g, Fat: 4.5 g, Saturated Fat: 1.5 g, Cholesterol: 33 mg, Sodium: 502 mg, Fiber: 1 g, Sugar: 2 g

Source: Skinnytaste.com



INSTRUCTIONS

1. Preheat the oven to 350F. Spray a nonstick 12 cup muffin tin VERY generously with oil so the eggs don't stick.
2. Sauté the shallots, scallions and bell pepper in oil over medium-low heat, cook until tender, 5 to 6 minutes.
3. Add the broccoli and cook 1 more minute.
4. Meanwhile, in a large bowl combine the egg whites, cottage cheese, garlic powder and seasoning salt.
5. Add the veggies and mix.
6. Using a 12 cup muffin tin, line each cup with a half slice turkey bacon around the edges and pour in the egg mixture, about 1/3 cup each.
7. Top with the shredded cheese and bake in the center of the oven about 25 minutes, until set.

FEATURED EXERCISE

<https://www.self.com/gallery/full-body-strength-workout-basic-moves>Featured Exercise ► **Alternating Chest Press** » **Do it:**

- Lie faceup with your knees bent and feet flat on the floor. Hold a weight in each hand with your palms facing your legs and your elbows on the floor bent at 90 degrees so that the weights are in the air.
- Press one weight toward the ceiling, straightening your elbow completely and keeping your palm facing your legs.
- Slowly bend your elbow and lower it back down to the floor.
- Now, do the same thing with your other arm. This is one rep.
- Do 10-12 reps.

[Click here to view online!](#)

This unilateral exercise is obviously great for firing up your chest or pectoral muscles. But it also really works your core stability, says Fagan, since your core has to engage to prevent your body from rotating to the side as you press the dumbbell overhead.

Regular exercise can help you control your weight, reduce your risk of heart disease, and strengthen your bones and muscles. But if it's been awhile since you've exercised and you have health issues or concerns, it's a good idea to talk to your doctor before starting a new exercise routine.



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