

“FILL MY CUP” A GUIDE TO EMOTIONAL REFUELING

Imagine that every child has a cup that needs to be filled -- with affection, love, security, and attention. Some seem to have a full cup most of the time, or know good ways to get a refill. But most children get a little nervous when their cup gets near empty.

Some ways that children deal with having an empty cup:

- steal from other people's cups
- misbehave to get your attention and show that they need a refill
- seem to have bottomless cups, or need constant 'topping off'
- can't sit still for refills or actively refuse them
- bounce off the walls when they approach 'empty'
- think they have to fight or compete for every refill

What fills a child's cup:

- play
- friendship
- one-on-one time
- love and affection
- connection
- succeeding
- doing what they love to do or what they choose to do

What empties the cup:

- stress and strain
- rejection by peers
- loneliness and isolation
- yelling and punishment
- failing
- fatigue
- doing what they're forced to do or they hate to do

How do you give refills? How do you fill up your own cup

The Principles of Playful Parenting

1. Join children in their world (the world of play)
2. Focus on making a connection and encouraging confidence
3. Follow the giggles
4. Learn to roughhouse playfully
5. Reverse the roles (let children be the strong one, the capable one, the monster, the doctor giving the vaccination...)
6. Empower girls and connect with boys (because *all* children need roots and wings, that is, encouragement to spread their wings and nurturing to plant their roots)
7. Follow your child's lead during play times
8. Encourage emotional expression (children's tears and tantrums are their best ways of showing their deepest feelings)
9. Tune in to your child
10. Rethink discipline
11. Bring problems into the 'play zone' in order to reduce tensions
12. Make sure to recharge your own batteries

THE KNOT OF TENSION

A Knot of Tension is a set of distressing feelings and behaviors linked to a particular situation.

Children often develop knots of tension around emotionally charged experiences, such as:

| | | | |
|-----------------|----------------------|-------------|----------------|
| separations | bedtime | rules | meals |
| toilet training | giving up a pacifier | school | chores |
| losing at games | musical practice | doctors | medicine |
| friends | siblings | transitions | disappointment |

These are all areas where *parents* tend to have anxiety or emotional intensity. In fact, it usually takes at least two people to “pull on the knot.” Knots are most likely when children feel helpless and isolated.

These things tend to tighten the knot of tension:

| | |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Punishment | Time-outs or other separations |
| Labeling a child as “bad” | Trying to “teach them a lesson” |
| Withdrawing love for misbehavior | Forced compliance |
| Scolding, yelling, threats | Attempts to control |
| Giving in and then resenting it | Avoiding the issue |

These things tend to loosen the knot of tension:

| | |
|--|------------------------------|
| Laughter | Play* |
| Surprising and unexpected responses | Empathy for child’s feelings |
| Increased closeness | Avoidance of power struggles |
| Unconditional love | Release of feelings |
| Looking at our own behavior and feelings | Reconnection |

*Two types of play loosen knots of tension best:

- One-on-one special time between a parent and child. The child is in charge of choosing what to do while the parent is extra enthusiastic.
- Playtimes where the parent gently introduces themes that are related to the knot of tension (for example, with tension about separation, you can playfully introduce lots of goodbyes and reunions).

PLAYING BY HEART

*“When you are dealing with a child,
keep all your wits about you,
and sit on the floor.”*
Austin O’Malley, 1915

Larry’s Rules of Playful Roughhousing

1. Provide basic safety
2. Look for every opportunity for connection and for increasing the child’s confidence
3. Provide just the right level of resistance (so they can use all their strength and no one gets hurt)
4. (Usually) the child wins
5. Stop immediately when someone is hurt
6. No holding children down and tickling them
7. Keep your own feelings (such as competition and timidity) from getting in the way
8. Everyone loves a good pillow fight!

Rethink ‘Discipline’

1. Cool off first
2. Make a connection before trying to ‘make your point’
3. Choose a family meeting, or a cuddle, instead of a time-out
4. Play!
5. Instill good judgment and cooperation instead of enforcing obedience
6. Look under the surface of the behavior, at the child’s feelings and needs
7. “Effective Discipline” means an improved relationship with your child
8. Set clear limits without threatening or pleading

For more information, see *Playful Parenting* (Ballantine Books) or
www.playfulparenting.com