



**Making it count:
Hack your parenting
so your kids get more
out of you.**

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As a busy parent, you are pulled in so many different directions and it's hard to know what to prioritise. If you could maximise the attention you invest in your kids so they could squeeze the most juice from your effort and that it would really hit the spot, perhaps you'd:

- Fall asleep at night feeling like a good parent.
- Skip out the door each morning, smiling, connected and on time.
- Know your kids feel really well loved even when you have lots on your plate.

And because this is a therapeutic, trauma informed parenting approach, when you work on 'making it count', you also benefit from the side effect of helping your kids recover from difficult times in their lives. You'll start to see your kids emerging as bolder, more settled, more easy going versions of themselves. And you'll notice the same shift in yourself. Less conflict and chaos, more easy, affectionate enjoyment of each other.



Step 1: Get your nervous system in good shape.

Our kids are vigilant to the state of our nervous system. They are the first to notice our non verbal cues like when our facial expressions get flat or our voice becomes monotone. This signals actual danger to our kids' emotional brain! It's a sign that the person they rely on for survival isn't in tip top shape to be responsive.

When we are overloaded by stress, our capacity for clear thinking is literally, physiologically taken down. Even if we have made time to be with our kids, we obviously become less available to them on an emotional level when our brain function is limited by stress and we're preoccupied by our to do list.

How do you usually feel when you are with your kids?

Are you relaxed, present, playful? Or do you find you feel overwhelmed/irritable/checked out/exhausted? On a very basic level, our kids are stressed by us being stressed.

You might want to look at the bigger picture of your life and attend to what elements are contributing to the state of your nervous system and what structures you could put in place to support yourself, but the most potent way of shifting your state both in the moment and gradually over time is the practice of Listening Partnerships.

Listening Partnerships are where you exchange time listening with another parent. Specifically, you create a safe, non-judgemental place where you know you can say anything and still be met with the other person seeing the best in you. You not only use this time to offload stress and tension, but you'll hear that your Listening Partner also has struggles and that their emotional experience is similar to your own.

This kind of connection; being seen and felt by another adult is what humans thrive on and what we need as a resource when we are doing the emotional work of parenting. And as we lift out the emotional backlog of overwhelm, rage, sadness or fear, we find we become infinitely more calm and patient with our kids. Those facial expressions start to signal safety and availability.



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How to set up a Listening Partnership:

- Reach out to a friend you'd like to connect with in this way or a parent via the Facebook group Hand in Hand Listening Support UK.
- Set a regular time if you can. Use a timer to divide whatever time you have (10-30 minutes each is ideal).
- As the listener it's not your job to fix anything, give advice or share your own stories. You simply keep your focus with your partner's experience and you uphold that they are doing their very best.

Bonus tips:

You can have as many Listening Partnerships as you need to stay in good shape. You might even have one every day if you're particularly overloaded.

When you notice yourself slipping out of calm regulation at work or with your kids, you can also reach out for emergency listening by texting your listening partners. If someone is available, they'll listen to you for 5 minutes without you needing to reciprocate. This is a potent tool for interrupting stress patterns before they escalate.

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Step 2: Help your child offload stress.

Instead of responding to your child's day to day upsets by trying to fix the situation, or by distracting/scolding/bribing/threatening/negotiating, see if you can just stay close and offer your unhurried, relaxed warmth in those moments.

We want to help kids with the feelings that are driving difficult behaviour. It may seem as though they are being senseless or defiant or unreasonable, but there is always a valid feeling underneath it. Our kids are inherently sweet, cooperative, flexible and generous so when their behaviour deviates from this, it's a sign that a build up of feelings is temporarily clouding their thinking.

This accumulation of small hurts and upsets gets in the way of how connected children feel. Children so rely on this sense of feeling 'felt' by their caregivers that a break in connection signifies threat to their nervous system. This is when behaviour goes off track. Instead of labelling this behaviour as 'naughty', we want to slightly shift our perspective and remember that our kids need our help to regulate when they are overwhelmed by normal feelings about daily life.

How to help kids with their feelings.

- Move in with the lovely warmth and availability you've been freeing up through your Listening Partnership.
- When your child gets rigid/defiant/rude, you stop the unworkable behaviour and listen to the onslaught of feelings.
- Them getting upset is actually the body's way of releasing tension through crying/tantrums/shrieking/sweating/laughing.
- Don't take your kids expressions at face value during this time. Harsh words directed at you or siblings are literally just the brain firing off as it offloads.
- Shelve any feelings that come up for you and try to stay with your own feelings. Your ability to do this will increase the more you use Listening Partnerships.
- Validate their feelings eg. 'You wanted this thing to happen', 'You're so upset about this'.

Bonus tip: Uphold limits around any urgent demands. You might say 'We're not going to go in the garden just now' or 'No sleepover tonight' even if this is a limit you don't feel particularly strongly about. Doing so just allows them to stay with the upset before you rush into a solution.

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Step 3: Fill your child's cup.

The quality of attention that our kids really thrive on is our delight and presence. When we carve out time to offer Special Time, it says 'You're the most important thing right now; I've got nothing more I want to do than be with you'. This boosts our kids self esteem and sense of connection. You'll find they can be their sweet, co-operative selves more of the time when we top them up with regular doses of this.

How to do Special Time

- Set a timer for how long you can pay good, undivided attention (5-60 minutes).
- Announce 'I'm all yours, I wanna play whatever you want me to do'.
- Follow their lead and delight in whatever they suggest (bar anything that would hurt/damage anyone/anything).

Bonus tips: If you have a call or meeting you need your child to occupy themselves for without interrupting you, try offering Special Time beforehand.

Need your morning to run smoothly? Offer Special Time first thing before anything else. Connect before you direct! You'll notice the getting-out-the-door routine becomes less prone to hitches.



Roma Norriss is a Parenting Consultant specialising in turning around unworkable family situations. She is a mother of two living in Somerset, where she consults and teaches internationally about parenting, intimacy, listening and the impact of early trauma on relationships. Roma is known for being a refreshingly human, forgiving and warm facilitator. Roma writes for publications like Huffington Post, Elephant Journal, JUNO Magazine. She is an accomplished speaker experienced in webinars, conferences, radio, TV and podcasts.

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