

# Are your weekends a challenge?

So many families struggle with enjoying their weekends. They tell me that their children act horribly, that there are tons of melt downs and tantrums and that they can't go anywhere because it is all just SO bad! Well, it doesn't have to be so bad...here are 3 quick tips to help make your weekends more doable and enjoyable for everyone!

## 1. Be INTENTIONAL when it comes to FOOD!

Our children are ultimately survivors and food is a basic assurance of life. If they get triggered by their perception that there is a lack of food or that you may forget to feed them or that ultimately it will be bad food, you will be dealing with a child who is fighting, flighting or freezing – none of which fits into the vision of having an enjoyable weekend!

So, here are a few tips in regards to food...

- \* Have food with you at ALL times
- \* Have your child help you pack the food
- \* If you are going somewhere (even if you have been there a hundred times), give your child a snack on the way there and on the way home. Be sure to have some in reserve also (think flat tire).
- \* For any meal (at home or somewhere else), make sure you have food that your child regularly eats and enjoys available for him.
- \* Don't skip meals. Even if you are having brunch, the schedule should be breakfast, brunch, lunch and dinner.
- \* Have a bowl of healthy snacks (apples for example) as "free food" on your table at all times. DON'T let it run out! (I have been known to do a grocery store run very late at night to make sure there are apples in that bowl when my kiddos woke up). The goal is to let your kids eat it whenever they choose.
- \* Don't get caught up in society's craziness about food and weight. Your child has to heal first and foremost. I don't know if you have seen photos of my daughters, but all three of them are a healthy weight and gorgeous. When they get what they need for as long as it takes to trust from the core, it becomes a non-issue.

When it comes to calming your child's brain, FOOD is the place to start...it is survival. And YOU being your child's undeniable source of survival is crucial to healing!

## **2. Be INTENTIONAL when it comes to TRANSITIONS.**

Here's the thing about weekends - the routine changes and with that expectations change. On top of that, intimacy typically increases, meaning everyone is home at the same time doing the same things, etc... Weekends are the ultimate TRANSITION. Our children do not do transitions well...even after many, many years. It is a deficit, NOT defiance - no matter how it looks and feels. Our children are not wired to nor prepared with the tools they need to follow us through a transition, especially when they are fast paced and often. Just think about it...how many times do you drive somewhere and get there and think woah, that was fast? We just automatically do things; our kids don't process like that. When life changes (even if they have done it a hundred times before), our kids get triggered. And then we are dealing with...fighting, flighting or freezing...and you know how much that doesn't work!

So, here are a few tips in regards to transitions...

- \* (simplest one) Cut back on the number of times you run, change the plan, do something in a different way. (It won't be forever. Trust me, it is worth the investment now).
- \* If you have transitions happening, keep parts of the same routine whenever possible.
- \* Remember, you are your child's external regulator and he needs you even more in transition times.
- \* Know that transitions raise anxiety, which typically decrease emotional age. Be Intentional about meeting your child where he is (without being irritated or condescending).
- \* Bring food.
- \* If your transition entails your child leaving your house, bring his things along. For example, going to Grandma's house overnight or even a hotel? Bring his bedding and other important personal stuff.

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## **3. Be INTENTIONAL when it comes to staying EMOTIONALLY PLUGGED- IN.**

Weekends are one of the times when WE most often emotionally disconnect from our children. As a society, we are kind of trained that weekends are really looked on as a time for fun, relaxation and even celebration. A break from the routine. A time to let loose. However, that kind of disconnect is VERY often experienced by our children as abandonment. Feeling abandoned triggers the survivor; he must get control to feel safe. When their brains are triggered, there is NO executive functioning. He can't reason things out in his head and often times not even with help from you. He can't use past experiences to help him cope or make good choices because that part of his brain is NOT

engaged and he falls back on what his brain is wired to do...survive at any cost! He will do whatever it takes to pull you in or decide to just take control himself – neither choice makes for a good weekend!

So, here are a few tips in regards to staying emotionally plugged in...

- \* Pull your kids in a little bit rather than let them out on the weekends (physically and emotionally).
- \* Prioritize transitions and maybe not to do them all.
- \* If things are going crazy, look inward a bit...how busy are you? Are you dealing with an emotional issue outside your relationship with your child? Are you worried about finances? Life takes us away sometimes; that is normal. However, your child can't read it for what it is so if you can identify it and plug back in, you are going to change the whole feel of your home.
- \* Put words to your emotions or aches and pains. Don't put your child in the position of trying to read it himself because 9 times out of 10 he will misread it and go to shame or feel abandoned.

Being an Intentional Parent doesn't mean working harder; it means you need to work smarter. Putting effort in ahead of time really allows your child to be more successful in everyday life. It keeps their brain chemistry healthy and cuts down on those dreaded triggers. Less triggers equals less chaos!

You can have your weekend and you can enjoy yourself, you just have to remember that you are the parent of a hurt child and healing takes a long time and Intentional Parenting. Use these strategies consistently and for longer than you think and you can look forward to Friday again!

Come talk to me on Facebook if you have questions or want let me know how it is going – can't wait to hear!

Remember...you are NOT alone

Stacy Manning