

IMAGINE being a fly on the wall observing your own parenting.

You might figure:

'Insanity: doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results.'



(Albert Einstein)

You recognise that there are repeating patterns of behaviour in your family, that aren't helpful.
You want to choose a different way - to respond rather than react.
You know you're the only one you can actually change.

So, the next time you have an upset with your ten-going-on-seventeen year old, you see the conflict rising and you figure it's going to be more helpful to disengage rather than flip your lid.
We temporarily lose our rational ability when we've 'flipped the lid'.
We can't be reason-able when our emotions are out of control.
What doesn't help is to try to resolve the issue while you've emotionally upset.
Your child is pushing you to say yes to going to some party and you intuitively have some hesitation.
'I need time to think about this before I give you my answer. I'll tell you after dinner.'

Children have us sassed. He pushes you for an answer NOW.

You can use a response that does not undermine your decision.
'So you can choose to wait till I have time to think about this or you can choose to have my answer now. If you choose to have my answer now, my answer will be no.'

It's essential to stand by the choice that your child makes. If your child keeps pushing for an answer, clearly and calmly state that he has chosen that your answer is no.
'So you're choosing that the answer is no.'

Clear boundaries and consequences mean your children know where they stand. This moves us from the 'insanity' of repeating the same unhelpful relationship dance time and again.

I can imagine you asking:
'I can see we're heading for conflict and I try to disengage.
But my child won't let it go.
He comes after me!'

What helps?

Here's a useful picture, based on Siegel's theory¹, that can guide us to more helpful interaction with our children.

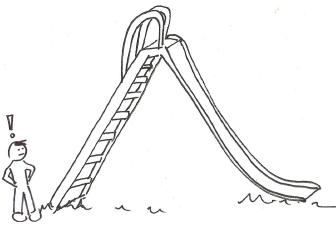
To engage in a more helpful way we can recognise that 'flipping the lid' / 'losing our cool' has stages.

Read on for Koemba's hands-on approach ...

¹ Daniel Siegel and Mary Hartzell 'Parenting from the Inside Out'

Stages of 'Flipping the Lid'

First we're **triggered**. Some situation causes our stress level to start rising. Not just the words, but something about the whole situation – maybe the child's aggressive or whiney approach, recent power struggles like this, or even memories of our own childhood experience.



trigger

At the **trigger stage** we can recognise that we're headed for emotional melt-down and can choose to pull out of the situation. It's like standing at the bottom of a slide. You choose whether you're going up.

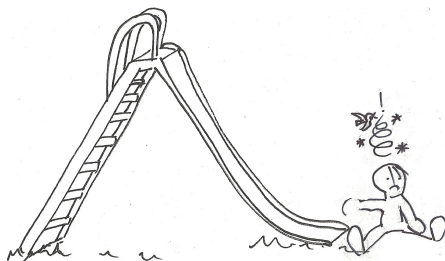
You've hit the trigger point. If you don't pull back. The situation escalates from here. You're now in the **transition** stage. If you choose - it's still possible to climb back down, and choose a different more helpful approach.



If you stay in the conflict. It's like climbing on up to the top of the slide. If you push on up, you reach a point of no-return. **Immersion**.



And you're on the slippery slope of arguing, yelling, nagging – whatever's your own personal brand of parenting behaviour when you're 'out-of-control'. It's not possible to pull back now – you're hurtling down the slope.



recovery

And then there's the **recovery** phase. Often we feel upset, drained, disempowered – even dazed – when we eventually stop. (And our children are likely to be left feeling the same way too). Very often we resort to blaming the child at this point.

Trigger - Transition – Immersion- Recovery

To pull back out of the upset we need to choose to do something differently at the **'trigger'** stage, or ideally on the first few rungs of the **'transition'**.

We – or our kids – can't let go of the conflict, because we're already well up on the slide, perhaps being nudged forward by others! Or we're already hurtling out of control.

What to do?

Learn to notice the first signs of upset in your body.

Increased pulse rate?

Feeling hot?

Clenching your fists or your jaws.

Hearing your own voice rising?

Whatever your body reaction to these family stresses – get to recognise the **trigger** symptoms.

That's when you still have the choice to do something differently.

You might only catch yourself when you're in **transition** – 'on the ladder'.

Step back out of it as quickly as possible, (emotionally and physically).

Recovery:

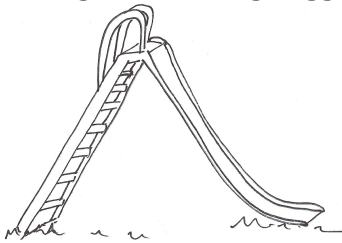
You've just hurtled down the conflict slide?

Take time to calm down and reassure yourself.

Beating yourself up for getting on the slide will only add to your stress.

When you're feeling back on level ground, reflect on what awareness you had.

What signals of being triggered do you remember?



What were your thoughts and behaviours that 'climbed you up the ladder'?

What could you have chosen to do differently at the beginning, before you moved into the transition stage?

A Few Added Thoughts

Neuroscience knows that young children cannot calm themselves.

The young brain is not developed enough to do this.

Young children NEED YOU to calm them.

(Even more reason to learn to recognise and respond to your own emotional 'slides').

Our feelings aren't wrong – it's what we do with them that counts.