What is the P.A.C.E Parenting Method?

Step one is always to take 3 deep breaths and make sure your “upstairs brain” is in charge. Then use these principles to guide your communication with your child:

**Playfulness:** Playfulness is an attitude between parents and children that we see through facial expressions, eye contact, voice tone and rhythm, gestures, postures, and touch. These interactions are known to produce opioids and dopamine, chemicals that suppress pain and promote happiness. In this way, playfulness can be seen as a “stress buster”. Playfulness is characterized by an air of lightness, a sense of hope and confidence, unconditional acceptance, positivity, shame reduction, sense of trust and safety, reciprocity, and increased attachment.

**Acceptance:** Infants are often unconditionally accepted for who they are. Their behavior is not seen as good or bad, right or wrong. Acceptance is helping your child to feel safe and accepted for who they are as they age and learn to navigate a range of emotions. One way to practice acceptance with your child is to be a curious observer in times of anger.

**Curiosity:** Curiosity begins with parents and their children as they get to know one another to create and strengthen the parent-child bond. An infant’s discovery and curiosity of their parent is important to their experience of themselves. Within parents’ brains, they perceive their children’s facial expressions, voices, and movements that help them make sense of their children’s emotions, thoughts, wishes, perceptions, interests, and intentions. Curiosity helps parents get to know their children from the inside out.

**Empathy:** When children are in distress, they feel unsafe and often experience anger or defensiveness. Children turn to their parents for safety and comfort as empathy conveys the parent is aware of their distress and will help ease their pain. Empathy happens in the right brain, and helps parents with the intuitiveness of their children’s experiences by receiving and transmitting input from the heart, lungs, and gut. Combined with left-brain cognitions that process our thoughts, parents are attuned to their children’s needs.
Practicing the 7 Attitudes of Mindfulness

According to Jon Kabat-Zinn, Director of the Stress Reduction Clinic at the University of Massachusetts Medical Centre, 7 Attitudes are necessary for the foundation of mindfulness being. Here are some paraphrases from his book Full Catastrophe Living (pp 33-40):

1. **NON-JUDGING:** Being an impartial witness of your own experience requires that you become aware of the constant stream of judging and reacting to inner and outer experiences that we are normally caught up in, observe it, and step back from it. Just observe how much you are preoccupied with liking and disliking during a ten-minute period as you go about your business.

2. **PATIENCE:** A form of wisdom, it demonstrates that we accept the fact that sometimes things must unfold in their own time. We intentionally remind ourselves not to be impatient with ourselves because we are tense or agitated or frightened. We give ourselves room to have these experiences. Why? Because we are having them anyway! Each moment is your life in that moment.

3. **BEGINNER’S MIND:** An open, beginner’s mind allows us to be receptive to new possibilities and prevents us from getting stuck in the rut of our own expertise. No moment is the same as any other – each one is unique and contains unique possibilities. Are you able to see the sky, the stars, the trees. With a clear and uncluttered mind?

4. **TRUST:** Developing a basic trust in yourself and your feelings is an integral part of meditation training. It is far better to trust in your intuition and your own authority, even if you make some mistakes, than to always look outside yourself for guidance. If something does not feel right, why not honor your feelings? It is impossible to be like someone else. Your only hope is to become more fully yourself.

5. **NON-STRIVING:** Meditation’s only goal is for you to be yourself. The irony is that you already are. This craziness may be pointing you toward a new way of seeing yourself, one in which you are trying less and being more. If you think, “I am going to get relaxed, control my pain, or become a better person”, you have introduced an idea in your mind of where you should be, and that you are no OK right now. This attitude undermines mindfulness, which involves simply paying attention to whatever is happening.

6. **ACCEPTANCE:** Seeing things as they actually are in the present. If you have a headache, accept that you have one. In the course of our daily lives, we often waste a lot of energy denying and resisting what is already a fact. When we do that, we are basically trying to fore situations to be the way we would like them to be, which only makes for more tension, which actually prevents positive change from occurring. Acceptance sets the stage for acting appropriately in your life, no matter what is happening.

7. **LETTING GO:** When we start paying attention to our inner experience, we rapidly discover that there are certain thoughts and feelings and situations that the mind seems to want to hold on to. Similarly, there are others that we try to get rid of or prevent or protect ourselves from having. In mindfulness, we intentionally put aside the elevation of some experiences more than others. Instead, we let our experience be what it is. Letting go is not a foreign experience - we do it every time we go to sleep. If we can’t let go, we find we are unable to sleep. Now we can practice applying this skill in waking situations as well.
Practice Using a Beginner’s Mind: A Step-by-Step Guide to Eating a Raisin

1. Holding: Hold a raisin or other small fruit in the palm of your hand. Look at it as if you’ve never seen a raisin before in your life.
2. Seeing: Really take the time to look at it with all of your attention. What does it look like? What color is it? How does the light hit it? Where do shadows form? What are the shapes within the greater shape of the raisin as a whole?
3. Touching: Close your eyes and focus on what the raisin feels like. What is the texture? Is it smooth?
4. Smelling: Hold the raisin to your nose. What does it smell like? As you do this, what do you notice in your body? Are you feeling hunger or maybe even salivating?
5. Placing: Put the raisin in your mouth. Notice how your arms and hands know exactly what to do to get there. Before chewing, explore what it feels like to have it in your mouth.
6. Tasting: Get ready to chew. Where does the raisin need to be to do this? Take a bite. What happens? What do you feel and taste as you continue to chew?
7. Swallowing: When you feel ready to swallow, think about where the intention to swallow comes from.
8. Following: Follow the raisin down into your stomach. Notice how your body feels as this exercise is complete.

How did it feel to approach the raisin with a beginner’s mind? These exercises can help us bring awareness to how automatically we do things, from eating to parenting. Since children are constantly growing and changing, it is important to recognize that our relationships with them are growing and changing too. A beginner’s mind can help parents be open to their children and their experiences with all the senses.

Practicing the Beginner’s Mind with your Child(ren)

Choose a situation with one of your children this week. We suggest choosing a situation that you find confusing, frustrating or doesn’t make sense to you. Perhaps a time when you ask yourself, “why is my child behaving this way?”. Use the Beginner’s Mind technique to observe your child. Don’t make any assumptions about their behavior. Observe them as if you are a complete stranger to them, and notice how your view of them changes. You can also ask them questions in a curious, nonjudgmental way to discover more about them.
A Mindful Parenting Glossary of Terms

**Attuned listening** is not simply undivided attention; it is both more and less than that. It does not mean a parent giving in to every whim of a child. It is the understanding of needs, and a response to those needs which ultimately help the other to regulate their emotions and arousal. It is bringing someone up when they need some stimulation, and bringing them down when the need calming.

**Being vs. doing** Parents are very busy, and can find it hard to take a moment to slow down and truly be present. “Doing mode” is driven by the task at hand or getting things done. “Being mode” is about being in the moment specifically to experience what is happening as it happens. Mindful parenting means really investing in the time we share with our children and adding to their lives or day. Even busy people can slow down to be truly present and mindful.

**Beginner’s mind** means of helping parents open to the fullness of their experience of their child, with all of the senses, and to be able to perceive the ever-changing nature of our child and our relationship with him. This mindset allows our attention to rest gently on all of our experiences, not being pulled one way or another. This creates more space in our experience of our child.

**Mirroring/affective matching** leads to subtle activation of the same muscles that we use when we are engaging in the type of action that we are observing. On a simple level, the contagion of yawning is probably the work of the mirroring system. When we mirror each other, we also tend to feel, at least subtly, some of what the other person is experiencing. In parenting terms, mirroring strengthens the parent’s ability to attune to a child’s conscious or unconscious intentions.

**Process & Achievement messages** Giving encouragement and praise in a process-oriented way can be most rewarding for the child in the end. If kids believe that their dedication and effort matter, it can lead to a long life of success stories and, more important, a lot of happiness! Examples: Wow, you really worked hard out there! - All that time you spent practicing your spelling words sure paid off when you took the test! - You guys must have worked hard in your practice, because it really showed in that game! - I know you can do it if you put your mind to it! - You must be so proud of all the work you put into that assignment!

**Reflective practice** rests squarely on the foundation of emotional safety, both yours with your own thoughts and feelings, and your children’s with being near you. Reflective practice may include asking questions to understand behaviors and motivation or having dialogue with the child. This leads to an understanding between you and your child and creates true resolution of an issue.