

The Stressed-out Parent's Guide to a Happier Home-life

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Session 4

Welcome back! Have you managed to have fun with family overnight? If not, don't worry; there's always tomorrow!

Speaking of tomorrow, in Session 5 we'll go back over some of this material and refine it for the future. These activities need to be practiced over days, perhaps weeks, to fully feel their effects. It's early days yet, but hopefully you're already seeing the potential benefits of making these changes. We've been experimenting with *alternatives to anxiety*. But why call these principles *alternatives*?

Because they give you something else to do instead of one or more of the following:

- Lying awake for hours at night, fretting
- Nagging or shaming your kids, your partner, yourself!
- Nitpicking and having to manage every small detail of your family's life and behavior
- Taking responsibility for other people's actions and words
- Dreaming of horrible outcomes
- Working yourself into a lather, having a meltdown, heading toward a stroke!
- Alienating your children and losing their respect
- Wasting valuable time and energy worrying about what other people think
- Asking over and over again the entirely unhelpful question: "Why won't my kids just be *good*?!"
- Missing unique opportunities to actually influence your children's behavior and self-image positively!

I'm sure you'll agree that this is well worth the effort. Ok, ready for the next alternative?

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Alternative #3: Rewriting your Expectations.

This alternative is built on a simple principle: *anxiety and frustration can arise when our expectations are not met.*

You might think “Well, I don’t have many expectations, at least not unrealistic or extreme ones”. I assure you, if you struggle with anxiety, there are some very strong expectations you hold onto that are not being met.



I have to be honest here and admit that I’ve recently discovered I have a ridiculous expectation of our family dog! At the root of my stress over the mutt (sorry, *dog*) is the unconscious expectation that it behave like the one I owned as a boy. But it’s simply not the same dog; it never met my childhood dog and it’s a different breed anyway. If I still want it to change, then I need to take some responsibility to patiently train it, rather than just get frustrated at its lack of adherence to my picture of *what a dog should be*.

To illustrate this further, let’s return to our feature film: *Parenthood*. Gil has entered fatherhood expecting his children to be well-adjusted from the start. This is not happening and it’s extremely unsettling. His expectations also *seem* to include thoughts that might be expressed like this:

- *my involvement should guarantee peace and affection between my children and me;*
- *everyone should be in the car early so we get to the concert early;*
- *other people should reward me for living by my principles.*

If you really get to the bottom of *your* irritation with your kids, you may find that ideas like these are pushing some of your buttons.