

Gaining Insight Into the Lives of our Children  
The Power of Single-tasking  
Mariola Strahlberg

It is early July and I am mesmerized by the beauty of the Alaskan's Sawyer Glacier sparkling in the midday sun. Our boat pauses amid the icebergs in the sapphire waters. The wind is pushing the smaller icebergs – they move slowly, confidently, as if self-directed – but where are they going? Suddenly, a bigger iceberg blocks their smooth sailing. They pause and wait. In a minute, an hour or possibly even longer, something will happen and the smaller icebergs will move around the obstacle or “blend” into the water.

And so it is with our children. We worry and push harder, we nudge and nag, forgetting that they are on their own paths, they are moving at the right speed according to their abilities and inner guidance. Sometimes a “big iceberg” surfaces along their path – Johnny can't read, Betty is misbehaving in class, Ben is not able to go to sleep at night. Yet, before we do anything, let us pause and take the time to pay attention to what is before us. As the wind pushes the icebergs in the Alaskan bay, the mysterious winds of children's destinies push them through the present moment into the future.

Why doesn't Johnny read?

Why does he have to read at 6 or 7 years old?

Can his young eyes track correctly from left to right, or from one line to the next?

Is he distracted by the noises around him, by the flickering of the fluorescent lights in his classroom, or maybe his body did not move enough today to allow him to sit still and focus.

And Betty, why is she misbehaving?

If you take time to observe her, you can see that she is constantly adjusting her clothing, scratching her left ear or using her index finger to rub the underside of her nose. What did she have for dinner last night or breakfast today?

Is she drinking enough water to flush allergens out of her body?

Did she have a good night sleep?

And poor Ben, lethargic with dark circles under his eyes - it takes him forever to fall asleep. It started in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade after seeing scary war images on the news. It was the color of blood – it seemed so real, not like a paint in the science fiction movies he saw many times before. He never mentioned it to his parents, they never asked and besides, his Dad really likes things relating to the military. He mentioned it to his friends but they laughed at him. So at night, all alone in his room, he anxiously waits to hear the sirens and war planes overhead.

It takes only moments of focused attention to notice these “things”, to allow us to hear what they are saying and to gain a deeper understanding into the lives of our children. We pride ourselves at how efficient we are, multitasking all day long: working on the computer while talking on the phone, listening to news while cooking, preparing “to-do” lists in our heads while sitting at a meeting, or

anticipating today's homework with Betty, while listening to her practice her violin. We are always rushing into the future or dwelling in the past. We miss the opportunity to be here, now. We fail to notice what is going on with us and our children, in this very moment.

When we are with our children, let us be fully with them, let us make every moment count.

Here are some specific examples. While Betty is doing her homework, we are thinking about her homework from yesterday or even the week before or we are focusing on that science project that took hours to complete earlier in the month. Those hours are long gone and we need to remind ourselves that Betty has learned something from her project, she is also older by a day or a week, and "today" is another day, a different one – let us be here and now.

So what can the parent do?

We need to gain some control over our minds, teach it to work for us, to listen to us. Small steps at first – let's dedicate 15, 10, or even 5 minutes at a time to focus and be fully present with your children.

No phone, no TV or computer, no cooking or cleaning.

Let your children feel that, at this particular moment of the day, **they** are most important, not a burden. Let them feel they are not wasting your "precious time", but are here to teach you important lessons. By being fully present with your children, your breathing will deepen, your minds will relax, your eyes will be able to see and your ears will be able to hear what your children are feeling, struggling with and longing for. Ask them questions, listen to them, try to figure out what they need. When they say they "hate" school, they are not telling you much – your job is to specifically pick out what is bothering them. Even four and five year olds have great insights into these things – take the time to listen to every word they say, don't rush them, don't add your views, your solutions, don't solve their problems. Rushing to another therapist or doctor, giving them another pill, getting another or different tutor, may not be the answer. Really listening to and understanding what is going on has so much more power. The recommendation I offer to parents of children I see at the Shining Mountain Children's Center is, talk to your children first and clearly identify the issue. Once the issue is identified, spend few minutes before going to sleep, picturing the opposite image of the issue you just discussed. The parent and the child are to individually see and feel the "new" picture, then let it go and go to sleep. For the next few days, they are to notice if things are different. Based on what happens, they are to take the next step. Using these simple steps, they may notice that specific issues get easier, that for example, homework may be less stressful, there is more communication and ease. Parents may also notice that by practicing single-tasking, life becomes less dull, less busy and s/he has more energy and more time. As Eknath Easwaran, founder of the Blue Mountain Center of Meditation said: "**time does not hurry us; we hurry ourselves**". My wish for all parents is, from time to time, to fully exercise their freedom to be completely in the moment and to choose wisely how they listen, love and live with their children.

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