

Should You Leave Your Child To Cry?

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SUMMARY

Maggie Langerak interviews Dr. Vanessa Lapointe about her book "Parenting Right from the Start," focusing on the complexities of responding to a child's crying. Dr. Lapointe emphasizes the importance of co-regulation, where parents soothe distressed children, ultimately helping them learn to self-regulate over time.

- *Every cry from a child is considered an emergency that requires a compassionate response.*
- *Co-regulation involves parents soothing their children, which helps them develop the ability to self-regulate later.*
- *Self-regulation cannot be taught directly; it is learned through repeated experiences of being soothed by caregivers.*
- *The "parenting mountain" metaphor illustrates the balance between being firm and kind in parenting.*
- *Overly strict parenting can lead to children feeling unsafe, while overly lenient parenting can result in a lack of structure.*
- *Dr. Lapointe opposes sleep training methods that involve leaving children to cry, arguing it leads to emotional distress rather than self-soothing.*
- *Understanding a child's temperament—whether they are an "orchid" or "dandelion" child—can guide parenting approaches.*
- *Adjusting expectations about sleep and crying is crucial based on a child's developmental stage and individual needs.*

hi welcome back I'm Maggie Langerak I'm the publisher at Lifetree media a hybrid publishing company specializes in books that help heal and inspire we are really driven to help mission driven experts to get their best knowledge and information into the hands of people who need it most and that's why I'm sitting here today with dr. Vanessa Lapointe if you've missed our previous interviews I'll recap for you dr. Vanessa is a mother and an author she's a clinician she's she's the head

of the Wishing Star clinic and she's an educator and she's here to talk about her expertise on her latest book parenting right from the start which is available now to pre-order so Vanessa I want to start with a pretty bold topic we're talking we're talking today about when what to do when your child is crying now the sound of a baby or a toddler crying must be one of the most difficult and distressing sounds in the

universe you know we are all primed to pretty much swoop in and soothe or you know alleviate that distress and make the crying stop basically and yet there's a lot of traditional advice that you know suggests that if we if we rush in to soothe and try to you know see our children's crying right away that we're gonna somehow make them less able to soothe themselves it's very confusing for parents so what would you say to

that yeah so my take is that every cry is an emergency every cry even a meltdown in target even and perhaps especially a meltdown in target and the reason for that is that we are a social species and part of being a social species means that we are going to grow best in the context of relationship and so when children are distressed what happens is they actually become co-regulated by us the caring

compassionate swooping in adult from the outside we walk across the brain bridge from our heart into their brain and we soothe them and settle them and so as this process repeats I don't know you have an infant at home 89 times a day you got a toddler at home 67 times a day you got a preschooler at home 24 times a day you'll do this thousands and thousands and thousands of times for your children and eventually over time what happens is

that experience of having been co-regulated from the outside gets soaked on in and up into their brains and gives them the possibility of eventually being able to self-regulate from the inside so for those who aren't familiar with that term can you explain another psychology talk regulation what what does that mean Co regulate versus self-regulate what does that mean yeah it's all fancy-pants language to say when you get all fired up you're not okay you are dysregulated and so if

you're having big yelling shouts if you're having a big tantrum if you're having a big meltdown if you're having a big cry you've become activated deep down in the neural core of the brain three inches in and down from where my finger is pointing right now and that's the downstairs part of the brain it's where all of our emotional circuitry is housed and so when you get fired up you are dysregulated you aren't in your most

settled state you aren't able to think you're not hey what's a problem-solve you're fired up and then your big person comes along because we're a social species that's how it works they come along and they saddle you and they soothe you and that's co-regulation Atsuko regulation so it's regulation from the outside and you cannot teach children how to regulate from the inside self-regulation is not something that can be taught through direct instruction rather you must gift your children the

opportunity to over and over and over again experience regulation via KHOU regulation from the outside and they will eventually become able to self-regulate not because they were taught because they experienced it what does that literally look like when you're in the lineup and your child is screaming and having a tantrum on the floor what what what do you physically do so physically what you're gonna do is you're gonna look in you're gonna see that your child's having a meltdown

you're gonna feel it for yourself if you're all up and you're programming you're gonna address it you're gonna do that really quickly and then you're gonna feel it for your child and you're gonna see that their stress you're gonna see that this is a child who is facing a huge disappointment because you won't buy them the toy or the candy or whatever that they wanted you're gonna see that this is a child who's just suffered through an hour-long

grocery shop or whatever it is you're gonna see that there's a struggle going on there and you're gonna feel it for

them and so you're gonna come alongside them and it doesn't mean you're gonna give in and stuff their mouths full of candy and try and get everything to be peaceful and happy and quiet you're gonna come alongside them you're gonna hold the boundary we will not be buying the toy we will not be buying the

candy so you be firm and then you be kind and I know you're upset I know you wanted a yes you got a no oh so hard it's so hard when you don't get what you want and so you come in alongside and then if the child is hitting or throwing things at you you drop a little flag that must stop you be firm gentle and you're upset I get it and you move right back into

kind and so it's this constant dance back and forth of being firm and being kind at the same time and I know that this is what you refer to as parenting Mountains so tell me about that yeah so the parenting mountain is all about what it takes to have a child really feel held capably and safely in our care and I talked about the parenting mountain as having this um splendid peak and you really really want to hang out at the

peak of the mountain because the views from the top are spectacular and so this is the peak of our mountain in order to be held there you have to be firm and kind at the same time if you get too big with firm and you sort of lose out on the kind side you're gonna roll down this side of the mountain very quickly if you have an orchid child as it happens maybe a little less quickly with

a dandelion but nevertheless you're gonna roll down this side of the mountain and you just become a bully if there's not kind balancing out your firm your child will experience you as mean and that doesn't give them a safe space to lean into in fact they'll be trying to run away from you on the other side of the parenting Mountain we have kind and if you get too big with your kind so you've surrendered all the firm and

you you get too big with kind you're gonna roll down the outside of the mountain and turn into this really wobbly jellyfish kind of parent who has no backbone no spine so one of the most challenging situations the in in raising a child especially when your kids are small their babies or toddlers is around sleep and this is where crying often becomes very real and very problematic for parents not knowing how to step in and why to step in and when to back off

and all of that there's a lot of there's a lot of disagreement and discussion about sleep training tell us your views on sleep training and leaving your child to cry themselves to sleep yeah so we don't do that that's the short version of my view on sleep training and the big picture around that is a really important one for parents to understand you see long-held beliefs were that if you didn't like the behavior then you impose

some kind of a situation to make the behavior cease to exist consequences exactly and what we discovered is that if we left babies to cry they stopped crying and so then we thought okay cool then we're winning so here's how we do sleep if our babies are just cry cry crying a lot then we just leave them to cry and eventually they'll stop crying and they'll figure out how to self-soothe and go back to sleep well

what we have discovered with the advent of new technology in terms of brain imaging and really understanding neurologically what's going on with children is that babies who are left to cry it out stop crying because the experience becomes so overwhelmingly stressful to them that they cannot tolerate staying awake and so the going to sleep is not uh oh hey check it I just figured out how to self-soothe they're going to sleep is I have emotionally gone dark and offline and

it's been so stressful that I've turned my brain off that's so heartbreaking and it's the opposite of what parents are trying to achieve in that moment that's right and so if we want to give the child the experience of being regulated from the outside meaning that we the capable caring during adults are gonna step in and soothe them and we don't leave our babies to cry and we certainly don't Sleep Train we adjust our expectations in terms of what sleep is meant to look

like based on two things one is their babies they don't know how to self-soothe they don't even have the neurological wiring in their brains yet to do that that is a long time off down the road so we have to adjust to the developmental age and stage of the child and we also must adjust to the sort of child that we were gifted do you have a really sensitive intense orchid child or do you have kind of a more easygoing

dandelion child and how we deal with crying and how we understand our child's needs will need to be calibrated to that kind of perspective dr. Vanessa thank you for joining us and for sharing your very heart centered and practical advice that you share in your book parenting right from the start and thank you for joining us we're gonna be back with Vanessa in another interview and I hope that you'll tune into that as well