

# Losing It, Regaining It: Parenting from an Embodied Sense of Self

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When I think about new beginnings, I immediately think about those new neural pathways that are beginning to widen and become stronger as I continue to stretch my own window of tolerance to attune, resonate, and co-create something new, especially in relationship with my son, Rylan.

As we begin a new homeschooling year together, moving into junior high, we are seeking to learn how to better contribute towards needs being met within our “learning” environment. How can we stay in that safe haven of heart connection with one another where learning is possible and creativity flows? My growing edge is dipping into self-connection, self-empathy. This is where I am learning something new within my sense of self that leads me to something new in relationship with others.

The first step is being able to “slow it all down.” I like to start with interoception, noticing the sensations in my body, and yet, there are times when I get more focused on the story in my own head (hearing what I am telling myself in the moment), especially when my window of tolerance is stretching seemingly beyond endurance!



I remember just this week noticing I had an hour and 30 minutes before my next client. Armed with this knowledge, I went upstairs to find Rylan, telling myself, “This is Rylan’s time,” completely unaware I was mentally checking off my list of all the things we were going to accomplish. Seeing him sitting in an over-sized chair holding his puppy, I greeted him, “Hey Rylan! Are you ready to get your shower going? Did you brush your teeth yet?”

Slumping down in his chair and frowning slightly, he clutched his puppy closer without saying a word in response. Feeling some irritation, I took a deep breath to center myself as I sat on the couch near him. Leaning towards him, I asked, “Hey, how’re you doing? Are you ready to go take your shower?”

As I watched closely, I saw he wasn’t responding in the way that I would really have most enjoyed, you know, like most of my clients would have. Rather than responding with warmth and attunement, his body expressed resistance, pulling away from me, putting his hands over his ears, saying in a higher pitch than usual, “I’m cold...” and rocking in his chair.

Feeling greater agitation move in, I took yet another deep breath as my eyes flew to the clock. The next thing I knew, I felt shock course through my system hearing what came out of *my own mouth!* “Well, now I only have an hour and 25 minutes left! You know, this just isn’t working for me!”

I had this whole story of how this was all *supposed* to happen and it wasn't happening! In retrospect, it took less than a micro-second for me to reach the moment where I felt my hearing go dim, the sensation in my belly expand like a huge balloon up into my chest, with it getting harder and harder to breathe. My eyes widened, my eyebrows rose in alarm, and a part of me noticed I was slipping past the edge of my window of tolerance. I could hear a part of myself catastrophizing as my awareness of body sensations dissipated. "I'm going to have a crisis of imagination!" I thought. For me, to have a crisis of imagination would mean I could no longer remain present and open in relationship. Having been triggered, the wave of emotion was accelerating quickly into a state of alarm within my being. Panic takes over my perception and limits my attention to focusing on my worst fears, making me see what is not there.

*Immediately* another part of my sense of self joined with the catastrophe story, my left hemisphere's strategy to make sense of my experience, and I heard myself say out loud with great exasperation, "Well that's just it; I'm just about ready to have a crisis of imagination so I'm going to step into the kitchen and I'm going to count to 10 until..." I honestly don't know how many years it's been since I actually planned to count out loud as a strategy to overpower my child's resistance and thus change my child's behavior. I am, however, grateful that choosing 10 rather than 3 gave me more time to calm down.

As I stepped into the kitchen, I felt sensations building within my body, I heard my own inner dialogue, as I saw Rylan slipping into more overwhelm. He was huddling down further in his chair, hugging his new puppy's body close to his face. This moment of truly reading and feeling the meaning of Rylan's face and body startled me into awareness, and I began to mindfully breathe into my body's wisdom bringing my right hemisphere back on board. Right away, I began to feel the kitchen counter's hard edge beneath my palms, digging into my back. This simple awareness practice allowed me, in this moment, to become more fully present in to what was happening relationally right now.

As I then purposefully reflected on what I had just expressed, I remembered something I had shared during a parenting class that week. Something about choosing to be mindful when we say something in the moment. "Are we expressing because we are choosing to be transparent in order to bring ourselves into awareness and self-connection? Or are we expressing because we are really thinking it is a great strategy to get us what we want?" Recognizing that I had been speaking from the latter stance, I gasped, saying, "Oh my God! This is not how I want to be showing up!" Immediately, I closed my eyes, placed my hand on my gut, and began naming my sensations out loud to ground myself through my senses, "Oh, my gut is feeling just so on fire. It's just so tight and yet hot, and my heart space is heavy, and it feels like there's a deep pain in my chest..."

That was as far as I got, because as my eyes were still shut and I was just sinking deeper into my body beginning to lean forward as I dropped even deeper into my sensations, I suddenly heard Rylan exclaim, "Fine! I know *exactly* how you feel; I *know* what that's like!"

I looked up quickly and saw Rylan had gotten up out of his chair and walked off into his room. Bewildered I thought, "What happened?" I slowly began moving towards his room as I sank once again into my body and named again out loud, "I feel startled and a slight shift in my heart, my face feels softer." Upon naming these sensations, I felt tears well in my eyes as I continued, "My throat feels tight, and I'm needing some compassionate understanding, self-connection. I'm needing connection, and love, and trust!"

By this time I had followed Rylan into his room where he was standing with his back towards me. Seeking his face, I moved to his side, and asked for a reflection, “Rylan, I wonder what you hear me saying?”

As he turned to me, I realized the look on his face was shockingly different! It was soft and warm, his eyes were wide with compassion and he said, “You need *connection!* And you need to know *you matter*, and Mom you *DO* matter!” He reached out to hug me - putting his forehead on my chest releasing the flow of oxytocin between us, supporting us both to reclaim the neuroception of safety and heart-connection – it was simply amazing. After a moment, he looked in my eyes as he said, “So - let’s get that shower started!” It was nothing short of a miracle!

As I write this now, it helps to ground me in awareness of just how key it is to mindfully come back to our sense of embodied self *in the midst of our experiences with ruptures* so that we are empowered to authentically reach out to others to repair and restore relationships. In this case, Rylan did the first reaching because something in the way I was able to shift from being completely caught by my irritation with him to focusing back on my body’s experience in the moment created enough safety for him to find his own resonance with me.

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There is more wisdom  
in your body than in  
your deepest  
philosophy.

-Friedrich Nietzsche