

**Tips for Parents** by Susie Kohl

## *The Transformative Power of the Pause*

“LET’S PAUSE IT!”—a phrase that can come in handy for more than announcing the temporary halt of a DVD. We should be grateful to modern technology for providing a concrete example for children of what it means to pause, an understanding that can benefit so many areas of their development. For example, when I see a child hesitate before hurting another child (physically or verbally) and reverse the decision, I feel like applauding. What a significant milestone in his growth.

We only need to look around us to observe how many adults missed out on acquiring this ability. The field of anger management is actually based in part on coaching people to learn to push their own pause buttons. However, there are many more arenas of life where this crucial concept comes into play. Here are a few:

***Awareness of danger.*** We want children to look before they leap, and that means taking time to check in with them-selves. “What does my inner voice tell me about riding my bike in this traffic?” The thrill of risk taking, especially in the company of others, can drown out a child’s sense of caution—unless he has learned to stop and think before going with the impulse. Take the opportunity to ask your child “Does this feel safe to you?” Using common sense depends on the ability to pause.

***Appropriate behavior.*** The Nurtured Heart approach to discipline uses the word “pause” or “reset” rather than “time out” as a neutral way of asking children to adjust their behavior. For example, when children get noisy, a teacher might say “Let’s take a pause!” People who have tried this technique are often surprised by the positive results.

***Proper decorum.*** As a child, did you ever get carried away by silliness? I remember giggling with a friend in church. Asking a child in a positive way to pause and observe how others are acting in a situation can be more effective than lecturing or sending a look of disapproval. Have her pause and look around.

***Interruption prevention.*** Some children have been taught lovely manners such as saying “Excuse me” when they want to tell us something while we are talking to someone else. However, if they haven’t learned to wait patiently for a turn to talk, they may say “Excuse me” again and again or pull on us physically to get our attention. Teach children how to wait gracefully for a turn to talk through role playing. Eventually, they develop the self-control to pause.

***Space between sentences.*** Isn’t it tempting to say “I disagree” immediately after hearing an unappealing opinion, even from a friend? We can teach children to actually listen to others by practicing the art of pausing and digesting another person’s words before speaking.

We need to make pausing more popular in our busy culture. One minute of readjusting can transform more situations than we can imagine.

*January 25, 2012*