



RESET #3

Yael Walfish, LCSW

“We need a solution *now!*” Mr. and Mrs. G. told me at our very first meeting. Their 8-year-old son Tzvi was not thriving either at home or in school. He was a cute, feisty and friendly child, yet the entire family felt as if they were walking on eggshells around him to prevent his all too frequent meltdowns.

“He’s dangerous!” Mr. G. said. “Completely out of control! There are holes in our walls from all the kicking and banging.”

“He’s only manageable when he’s on the computer,” Mrs. G. said. “When he’s on technology, we know at least he’s safe, and so is everyone else. It’s the only way we have any peace in our home or can get him to take his medications.”

Tzvi was taking meds for ADHD and anxiety. The psychiatrist who prescribed the medication had

referred his parents to me. Now I told them, “I use an approach that is simple enough to put into practice immediately. We are going to embark on a journey of helping Tzvi connect with his strength. It’s a process, but I see a lot of success. I’ve been training parents, teachers, and therapists for nine years now, and I see miracles! I’m sure we will help Tzvi reset and thrive.”

Mr. and Mrs. G. looked at me with skeptical expressions on their faces. I understood. So many parents have been searching everywhere for the right parenting solutions but find themselves just spinning in circles.

I asked for more details, and they came tumbling out: Tzvi was explosive. He would hit and throw things. He would constantly follow his mother around the house. He wanted to watch videos on the computer all the time, and his parents would give in because it afforded them the only peace they could enjoy.

Tzvi was having a hard time in school academically and socially, and he would sometimes say odd things that would distract the class.

Mom and Dad were both remarried, so together they had a large, blended family. Tzvi was the middle child of their three youngest children, the children they had had together. He was turning their world upside down.

Together, we set a vision by the end of our first session. Our goal was to help Tzvi to believe in himself and connect with his areas of strength. We wanted him to believe he was able to do his work, to build his social self-confidence and to learn to reset himself before he exploded and threw toys and other items!

SESSION TWO: This Won't Work!

Mr. and Mrs. G. came in for their session with challenging looks on their faces. Before I could even begin, they declared, "Before we hear more about this approach, we need to know if it will help with Tzvi's escalations. We need to help him stop getting physical. NOW."

Mom added, "He can be dangerous."

"I wish we could stop those escalations immediately, like magic," I said. "That's the end goal, but there's a *process* to this. Let me explain my approach to you."

The basic idea, I told them, is that intense children often do not respond to typical interventions. In fact, it often makes things worse. Tzvi, an intense child, is stuck in a cycle in which he gets upset and angry. He doesn't know how to stop, and he has actually begun to crave the negative attention and connection he gets from it.

I showed Tzvi's parents a cute and funny video clip: A baby touches a glass. His mother says no, and then he

keeps touching it over and over again. They laughed, because it's a very funny video. "I know it's fun and funny," I said, "yet imagine this to be a child of any age. That baby is Tzvi too. He's stuck."

We will begin to flip the script and notice Tzvi for the *good* things he does. We will even notice the neutral moments. We will help Tzvi see the kind, compassionate and gentle child he is underneath, and help him see that he can reset. That skill will build. We have to trust the process. I told them to give it a few weeks; I generally need six to ten sessions — though I thought to myself, *We may need more, because there are so many dynamics here!*"

"Right now," I said, "We will try our best not to energize the escalations with lectures, reprimands, warnings, redirecting or *even* kind and loving discussions about these behaviors. We will refuse to throw twigs into the fire we want to extinguish. Here's the opportunity piece: We will learn to create and build during calm moments. And Tzvi will learn. I see a lot of success, and I believe we will help Tzvi reset and thrive."

Mr. and Mrs. G. seemed so skeptical, so hopeless. They looked almost angry, as if imagining they were wasting their time. As for me, I happen to *love* these fiery kids. They are hard for their parents — super hard — but they are our future leaders!!!

"I see you seem unsure, like it's hard to believe this will be helpful," I shared. "I also couldn't imagine at first how this would help. Many years ago, when I heard about this approach, I thought, 'How will this ever work?' But now I see absolute miracles, and I've seen the most challenging situations: court referrals, youth psychiatric hospitals... I've even been to detention centers."

I decided to tell them about the first training I ever



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“To make matters worse, I felt shy and uncomfortable speaking to a group. But I had begun to use this approach with my family and my clients and had felt the magic, so my passion propelled me forward.”

gave, because I wanted to give them hope.

“My husband and I trained our first group of 25 at a residential youth center about nine years ago,” I related. “These teens were living there because of very intense behavioral and emotional challenges. The staff seemed kind and loving, and I wondered what I could possibly offer them.

“To make matters worse, I felt shy and uncomfortable speaking to a group. But I had begun to use this approach with my family and my clients and had felt the magic, so my passion propelled me forward.”

I told them that my husband and I ran a six-week training program with the staff, teaching them how to build another person’s strengths and de-escalate any negativity. After the first week or two, they started putting the techniques into action and came back with enthusiastic feedback: “I used it on my mother-in-law, and she was so much nicer!” “I used it in Home Depot, and the clerk suddenly became helpful!”

After the third week, a 17-year-old named Rachel was making a fist and becoming severely agitated and aggressive. Rachel was yelling, “I want to throw things! I want to break things! I want to hurt someone!”

Usually, when such incidents would occur, the staff would call 911. But now a staff member decided to try out the skills she’d acquired in our training. She said, “Rachel, you are so angry. You want to break things and throw things and hurt someone, but you are not doing it. You’re handling your strong feelings!”

Rachel stopped escalating. In fact, she started to calm down! No one had to call 911, and there was no hospitalization. The staff felt like they’d just witnessed a miracle! And Rachel experienced the ability to reset!

Now, I see this all the time. The skills develop. “Within a few more sessions, you will share success,” I assured Mr. and Mrs. G. “We are already resetting. We know Tzvi is a kind and loving boy, but he’s stuck in a cycle. When he escalates, he gets stuck. We’re going to help him out of this and help him identify with his strength and resilience.”

I briefly showed them my children’s book, *Menucha for Menucha* (Menucha Publishers), which is about a little girl who is tantrum prone. The illustrations show Menucha with a storm cloud over her head, and the story explains how she eventually sends it to Florida. I told them, “We’re going to do this step by step. We’re going to help Tzvi send his storm cloud off and find his sunshine! Intensity is our greatness. Tzvi is a powerful boy!”

Listening to my story, Mr. and Mrs. G. seemed to reset their own attitudes before my eyes. I could see an aha moment when we talked about how we have to shift to a child’s moments of strength and begin building all the white space. Now, I told them, “We’re on a journey to figure out how to help Tzvi become aware of his ability to reset.” Their homework was to begin to notice moments without escalation — anything neutral or positive. And they could verbalize any success they saw.

I said, “I see you listening and thinking and asking me lots of questions, because you care so much and want to help Tzvi be his best — and of course, to be safe too. You are such dedicated and loving parents!” They smiled, and I could see them becoming open; they were now able to take it in. They started to talk about using this approach with their older children too. “I believe we are on the way,” I said. “I have seen many parents like you. I can’t wait to hear your success stories next week! Success can be as subtle as a shift of mindset. Maybe you’ll simply be more aware of the energy in your home, especially around Tzvi this week.”

To be continued...

Yael Walfish, LCSW, is a therapist based in Passaic, New Jersey. She works with parents of children who are explosive, oppositional and anxious. She and her husband also train and support educators in an approach called NHA that transforms intense behavior and helps children thrive.

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Feathers IN THE Wind

RAIZY SHAPIRO

She said . . .

He looked at me sideways . . .

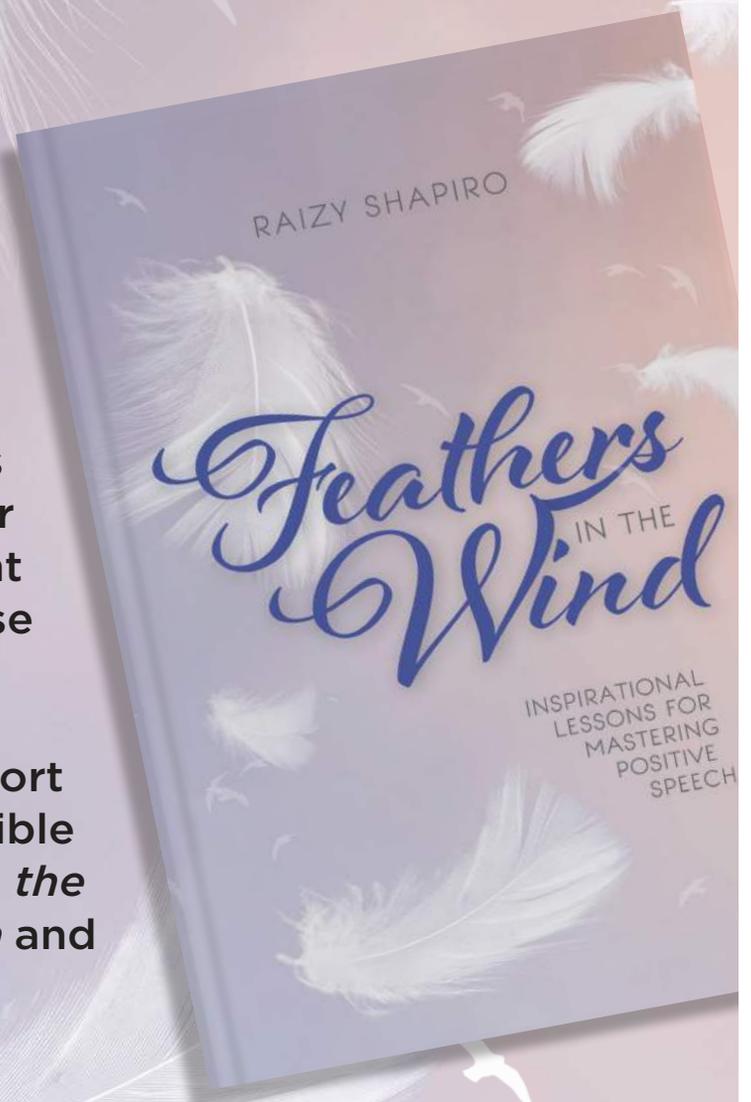
I wasn't supposed to hear, but . . .

What did you mean by that?

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Full of realistic anecdotes and short poems to highlight the incredible effects of our actions, *Feathers in the Wind* reminds us through *halachah* and *hashkafah* to keep our words holy.



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