



RESET #4

Yael Walfish, LCSW

Last week, I described my meetings with Mr. and Mrs. G., the parents of an explosive 8-year-old named Tzvi. Tzvi was on medications for ADHD and anxiety, and to avoid his meltdowns, his parents would let him spend hours on the computer. We discussed honing in on Tzvi's positive qualities and behaviors and trying to uncover his hidden spark.

SESSION THREE **Reset to Success and Clarity!**

I find that some parents are able to understand my methods and put them into practice with amazing rapidity! I had begun to teach Mr. and Mrs. G. the Nurtured Heart Approach, modeling how to use it, and now they were back sharing their successes.

"Tzvi did his math homework so well, and finished all of it," Mr. G. said. "After that I told him how responsible he had been."

Mrs. G. was beaming. "Tzvi's *Rebbi* sent home a note about a story he told in class. The other kids were all excited and engaged!" she said. "Tzvi told me all the details. It seems clear that his dynamic in school has been shifting and that he's definitely trying hard. I did tell the *Rebbi* that we are trying a new approach."

I shared their excitement. They were accomplishing! "I can see that both of you are becoming unstoppable in seeing and creating and verbalizing moments of strength for Tzvi!" I said. They agreed. I could see their pride; I could feel a shift in momentum.

Now we moved ahead to talk about technology. Mr. G. had come to a decision: He wanted Tzvi completely off technology. I thought it might be very hard for him to go from all to nothing, but I could see Mr. G.'s absolute resolve. "He's allergic to it!" he said. "I'm going to tell him we're taking him off it."

I had mentioned that clarity is key. Now I felt in

awe of Mr. G.'s clarity and confidence even as I warned him that we should not expect perfection, "We can set expectations, yet our children will make mistakes, and we will too. When we let go of all or nothing, the possibilities open up!"

I must say that as far as the tech "allergy" is concerned, I have seen so many children negatively impacted by technology. They go into terrible detox mode when deprived of it, like on Shabbos and in school. The escalations can become very intense. I myself would not have suggested taking Tzvi off of all technology right away — I would have just imposed rules and time limits — but I admired his parents' decision to take him off it completely. We discussed how to present these new limits to Tzvi and how to respond to his pushback firmly but without drama.

SESSION FOUR **Clarity Is Kindness!**

Mr. and Mrs. G. came in to report unexpected success! They had spoken to Tzvi and told him, "Your brain is not working well when you are on technology."

Tzvi continued to ask for it anyway, but his mother kept him very busy, taking him out for music lessons and sports. When he would ask to go back on the computer, she would gently remind him, "It's not working for you." Seeing that his parents were not giving in despite his repeated requests, Tzvi began to accept the tech limits.

"I admire your clarity and consistency," I told Mr. and Mrs. G. "You made a new rule, and you kept resetting to the new rule. Tzvi feels how clear you are, and you made significant progress. Meanwhile, you are building so many other areas of strength. Tzvi is so lucky to have you, a powerful team that is unstoppable in helping him see his own strength."

Now that Tzvi was following rules and resetting vis-à-vis technology, Mrs. G. asked for help with Tzvi's meltdowns. The family had bought my book, *Menucha for Menucha*, about the little girl who can't seem to stop having meltdowns. It shows the way her family helps her find self-control and peace. Even Tzvi's siblings

seemed to find the book enlightening and empowering.

We started to discuss more ways to build Tzvi; in particular, how to develop his skills of resetting and self-regulating. The first step was to begin to notice the moments when he succeeded. I suggested that we start with technology, since he had been remarkably cooperative. Mr. and Mrs. G. could say, "Tzvi, I know you really wanted to watch something, but when I said no you reset yourself. Tzvi, did you notice the way you've been stopping yourself and working to calm yourself down?" If Tzvi replied that no, he hadn't noticed it, his parents could respond, "Well, we've been seeing it."

We planned for ways for the entire family to use this helpful language at home, modeling for Tzvi. For example, if everyone was talking at once, someone could say, "Let's reset this conversation to one person at a time." If someone was upset, he or she could say, "I need to reset for a few minutes in my room."

Mrs. G. wanted to help Tzvi learn to handle his discomfort about going up to the second floor of the house by himself. I told her, "Tzvi asks you to be with him all the time. Many parents feel that if they make things easier for their children, they're helping them. But in reality, we are often encouraging their anxious behavior! Let's get clear with Tzvi about your expectations. Build baby steps by giving him a lot of recognition when he does manage to be independent."

SESSION FIVE **Onward and Upward!**

It seemed as if the G. family was on its way! Tzvi was doing better in school. The *Rebbi* was sending home nice notes and the G.s would make a big deal about them at home. Mrs. G. had begun helping Tzvi overcome his need for her to accompany him upstairs. Whenever he took steps in the right direction, she would say, "Tzvi, I see you went upstairs by yourself! You are being so strong and courageous!" Slowly he was becoming more independent and feeling good about himself for being able to accomplish this on his own.

We can reset. We can model. We can show a child, “This is your ability,” in the same way we can reset ourselves back onto a bike when we fall off.

SESSION SIX Two Steps Forward, One Step Back

I was dismayed to see Tzvi’s parents come in looking completely dejected. Tzvi had had an escalation in school and had been suspended from school. His parents were told that he had spit on a *Rebbi* in the stairwell. When they picked him up, they were understandably very angry and upset.

But Tzvi shared his side of the story with them. “We always have spitting contests, me and my friends,” he said. Somehow a *Rebbi* came into the stairwell at precisely the wrong moment. Tzvi did not hit the *Rebbi*, but the *Rebbi* thought he tried to target him.

Tzvi was actually crying. They left work early to pick him up, and now they felt like all my Nurtured Heart Approach methods were not working.

I told Mr. and Mrs. G., “Let’s think about this from a different angle. Tzvi was just being creative and fun, and he made a mistake. It sounds like he was remorseful and took responsibility. He was also doing this with a friend, which shows that he is doing better socially.

“I’m sorry he got in trouble for it, and I’m sorry you were called to school. Yet maybe this is a reset! He was playing and being impulsive, and it didn’t end well. But he told you the whole story and shared his ordeal openly. He wasn’t aggressive and he accepted the consequences. What does that say about him? He took responsibility! He didn’t want to ‘get’ the *Rebbi* — he was just trying to have fun. He didn’t escalate. He was mature about it.

“And what does that say about the two of you? You didn’t yell at him or threaten him. You listened to him. You were all a team. This was a reset!”

FINAL SESSIONS

I met with just Mrs. G. for about four more sessions. Tzvi had not completely stopped his escalations, but they had become less intense and less prevalent. He also began taking responsibility for his outbursts and was apologizing for them.

As our sessions drew to a close, I was excited to hear how well Tzvi was doing — at home and in school. He was doing his homework and had detached from his tech addiction. He had more friends in school and the home had become a more pleasant place to live. Mr. and Mrs. G. felt confident they had reset to a new path!

TAKEAWAYS

- 1.** We need to shift our lens and be able to start focusing and energizing any small molecule of success.
- 2.** Clarity: It’s not about punishment or escalation; it’s about setting rules and structure.
- 3.** We can reset. We can model. We can show a child, “This is your ability,” in the same way we can reset ourselves back onto a bike when we fall off. ●

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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