

Appreciating Children's Progress from Their Own Baseline



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There is a 3-year-old girl who, when she first started play therapy, would throw tantrums at home at least 3 to 4 times a day, each lasting over half an hour. After more than three months of play therapy, her crying frequency decreased to once every one to two weeks, sometimes even three weeks between episodes. However, her mother still felt troubled because, in her social circle, other children generally calmed down after crying for only 5 to 10 minutes. In contrast, her daughter still needed at least half an hour to gradually transition from her crying spells.

Another child, a shy little boy of the same age, when he first began play therapy, would only play with familiar toy cars in the playroom. He cautiously observed the unfamiliar environment and me, a stranger, within his small, safe space. A few months later, his father reported that he began to try playing on the slide by himself at the park and willingly participated in some interest classes without needing his parents' accompaniment. However, his parents were still very concerned about his social skills, feeling that "he is different from other children." Each time he participated in group activities, he would stand quietly in a corner with wide eyes, observing others without joining in.



Indeed, when comparing children to others, it is easy to notice their shortcomings. It is natural for parents to hope for their children's continued improvement and progress. However, please remember that every child is unique, and their baselines are different. When measuring a child's progress, if we use a "one size fits all" approach based on others' standards, we may struggle to recognize their advancements and encourage them to keep moving forward, focusing instead on what they have yet to achieve.

For a child who is sensitive, easily frustrated, and has difficulty adapting to change, it may still take her half an hour to express her dissatisfaction. However, when she begins to enhance her resilience in facing difficulties, reducing the frequency of her crying spells is already progress. Before her next crying episode, she may have expended all her energy trying to adapt to the changes in her life and cope with various frustrations. What she needs is for her parents to understand her momentary weakness. She may not confront life as easily as more adaptable children do. Yet, with the understanding, compassion, and acceptance from her parents, she will gradually develop resilience and adaptability, making her life a little easier.



For introverted and highly sensitive children, various external stimuli may overwhelm their capacity to cope. They need to withdraw when they feel it is appropriate, retreating to their safe and comfortable zone to observe their environment slowly, in order to maintain their integrity and sense of security. They may never possess the boundless energy of extroverted children, who can dive into most situations with ease. Parents do not need to overly protect their children, keeping them in their comfort zones indefinitely. However, parental acceptance and companionship can help them gradually expand their world. Trust that their inherent curiosity will guide them in finding ways to engage with this world that suit them. They are not disinterested in socializing; they simply have not found the right approach for themselves.

Humanistic psychology believes that the innate desire of individuals is to grow and mature. Children progress every day. Regardless of the pace, they are making strides. The question is, can we purely stand from the child's perspective, patiently waiting, and appreciate the unique vitality they radiate throughout their growth process, based on their nature, temperament, and baseline?