

My Kids Still Sleep With Me Because Attachment Parenting Never Ends

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Every parent ends up giving something to their kids they'll need to work out in therapy someday.

When I relegate all the kids' smartphones to the kitchen counter and force the [family](#) outside, they change. The hard, teenage-attitude exteriors melt and I see glimpses of my sweet children who used to throw their arms around trees and exclaimed when they spotted a toad on a forest walk.

They become, in a word, happier. More relatable. Seemingly in sync with what actually matters, rather than stupid sh*t on Instagram and the duck-face, peace-sign selfies they usually fill their time with. They transition from superficial unhappiness to depth communion with meaning.

Deep down, I know this [parenting style](#) works and it's what's best for them, and for me.

It used to be called attachment parenting, and when they were little it meant letting them sleep in bed beside me, breastfeeding for years until they self-weaned, and pureeing sweet potatoes and avocado rather than buy jarred baby food.

It also meant taking my children on hikes, limiting their exposure to television, making video games off-limits, and engaging them in conversation every step of every day.

It meant a holistic approach to life where synergy was the goal, driven by a belief that an early life foundation of attachment fostered ultimate independence, self-confidence, and joy in life.

But that's not how I was raised. I was born in 1971 to parents who believed in letting babies cry it out in a crib in a room down the hall. My folks did what they thought was best.

That meant sending me to summer camp for a month at a time when I was 9, and every year thereafter. It meant leaving me and my siblings for a week every winter to vacation on their own. It meant setting boundaries like bedtime and adults-only, so we knew our place.

It also meant encouraging us to strive for high grades, and every goal we could imagine. When I was 10, I decided I would be the first Jewish woman president of the United States. I didn't see any reason why not.

There's a good and a bad to every parenting approach. My parents might have been rigid in their framework, but they were loving, too.

I remember a quiet early-morning conversation with my father the day after I got my first period. I couldn't wait to tell him and he didn't make me feel embarrassed or weird for wanting to discuss it.

He listened carefully, smiled warmly and said something like, "You're growing up, Linnie." There was a hug involved.

We said "I love you" a lot — like, all the time — and meant it. We said "I love you" to aunts and uncles and cousins so that now, when I have a favorite friend, I think nothing of proclaiming my love for her.

I spent nine summers at sleepover camp, and I can honestly say that for the first five I was perpetually homesick. I had fun, yes — waterskiing, arts and crafts, tennis and archery.

I loved the friendship services every Sunday morning under a big, old, fragrant pine tree, with guitars strummed by older campers, and mellifluous songs featuring the voices of all the girls around me.

I loved the letters that came every day from my mother, the weekly packages, and weekly letters typed by Dad but signed in his illegible scrawl.

I loved and hated being sent away. They believed it would build my independence; perhaps it did. My sister didn't like it and now lives a block from my parents, but she's sending her kids to summer camp anyway.

I'm not convinced, though.

Childhood is so fleeting, and since I've been with my babies since day one, I don't want

to miss more than I have to.

I know they'll leave when they're ready. I know they'll succeed in life. I know it even more because if they feel they have a safe harbor in me to connect to, then they can go anywhere and never be alone.

My kids are 9, almost 12, and 13. They still climb into bed with me every night, and when my [husband](#) goes out of town, they negotiate who gets to sleep in my bed which nights. I tell him to go away for increments of three days, so they each get a night.

Mostly, I believe my attachment parenting approach was the best choice possible.

Sometimes, though, I think I've given my children too many choices and too little structure. That's when I hear my mother's voice in mine, saying things like, "That's what I'm planning. You'll do it." Or, "Because I said so. I don't owe you an explanation."

I don't know if divorcing their dad or my parenting approach is the reason for my kids' version of neurosis.

My daughter is a strong girl who literally won't take no for an answer. Sometimes I have to threaten to take away technology or time with friends just to get her to listen.

I hate those moments. I really hate them. It's not the kind of parent I want to be. Strong-minded myself, I wish I were the parent-whisperer, who never raised her voice, nor threatened or grew angry.

My eldest son is the only one who didn't get full-on attachment parenting from the start because I simply didn't know back then. He started in a crib in another room; his dad and I were zombies for the first six weeks of his life, stumbling to his room when he cried awake at night, rocking him or nursing until he'd quiet again into sleep.

I tried the cry-it-out method once with him, crying myself on the floor of my room next to his, thinking how cruel it was to leave a helpless baby to scream himself to sleep without understanding why no one will come. I didn't make it through; he cried and cried, and eventually I ran in and scooped him up and reassured him.

But that mixed message might have messed him up.

My rabbi said recently that kids can tell when parents are on the fence. If we aren't solid in our own beliefs, they won't go along with anything we say.

That's a kinder way of saying, "Take a stand; be the parent; it's your way or the highway."

When my kids' father says, "I know what's best for you," or, "Don't question me," I cringe. It feels so autocratic, dictatorial, and mean.

But I've come to believe that it does no good to my children when I give them too long a leash. When they can choose from absolutely anything, they choose nothing. They sit in indecision, addicted to their phones, barking harshly at me and one another.

Sometimes, being the parent means taking a stand, however unpopular it makes you. There's a saying that every parent ends up giving something to their kids that they'll need to work out in therapy someday.

It happens whether you snuggle them up in bed next to you all the years of their lives or banish them in a room of their own to learn at a young age to fend for themselves.

Some will stand up, dust themselves off, and walk mightily toward the horizon; others will simply crumble, no matter what approach you take.

Which leads me to believe that parenting may be more about figuring out who we — the parents — are, than about teaching these baby birds to fly, to soar above the clouds.

It's our lesson, our mistakes, our stumbling. Our chance to get life right, and our chance to mess it up. Our chance to leave a legacy: good, bad, or indifferent.

Parenting is ultimately about what we want to leave the world — a bundle of nerves who can't contribute to society or someone who makes that lasting change we've all been needing.