

By Hal Runkel, LMFT

**W**hen's the last time you saw a parenting book that asked parents to defocus on their kids? - Rabbi and family therapist Edwin H. Friedman

The greatest thing we can do for our kids is learn to focus on ourselves. That opening line is meant to come across as contrary, even heretical. "Now, it's all about the kids," is what most of us recite as soon as we bring offspring into the world. And we keep receiving countless bits of counsel urging us to continue taking all focus off ourselves and placing it squarely on our kids. After all, what they need is our constant attention, affection, and sacrifice so they'll think the right way, feel the right way, and behave the right way. Right?

Wrong. Such child-centered advice is simply a lie. Mothers have especially been sold this lie and that's why we see so many moms just give up pursuit of any sort of sexy individuality; their new primary identity is Mother. So the denim overalls replace the little black dress and the Keds knock out the stilettos. This is not to mention the bob haircut. But it's not just moms. Now dads like me are bombarded with messages to make up for our fathers' relative absence by being supremely present, even to the neglect of ourselves, our marriages, and our careers. And before you know it, the stickers with our kids' names get emblazoned all over our minivans, shouting to the whole world who really owns the van—and the rest of our lives.

But here's the truth: we cannot orbit our lives around our children without giving them the impression that the world revolves around them. Then we have the nerve to call them self-centered, disre-

# What is ScreamFree Parenting?



spectful, and unappreciative when we're the ones that helped create them that way! The advice we followed is actually creating the problems we were hoping to avoid!

That's why the greatest thing we can do is focus on ourselves, because we're the only ones we can control. We cannot control our kids, that's for sure—that's why we're reading parenting books in the first place! But every parenting expert we've read before has just given us more tools ("techniques") to help us do just that. But the more we've tried to control our kids (with new charts, new

Cont. on page 41



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rewards, new punishments), the more out of control they've become. That's because nobody likes to be controlled and it's because our kids are not the ones out of control. We parents are out of our own control, placing ourselves in the backwards position of needing our children to behave for our benefit, because, after all, they now represent our whole world. No wonder why we end up screaming, shutting down, or simply giving up and caving in.

ScreamFree Parenting is not just about lowering our voice. It's about learning to calm all of these emotional reactions, learning to calmly focus on our own behavior more than our kids'— for their benefit. This is because our biggest enemy as parents is not TV or the internet, not bad influences at school, not even drugs or alcohol. Our biggest enemy as parents is our own emotional reactivity, because when we "lose it," we're actually losing our adulthood. And then we wonder how our kids have so little respect for us.

ScreamFree Parenting offers a revolutionary new option by inviting parents to focus on themselves, grow themselves up, and calm themselves down. Following these ScreamFree principles leads parents of all ages (with kids of all ages) to create and enjoy the family relationships they've always craved.

To learn more about the principles of ScreamFree Parenting, go to the Samaritan Counseling Center's website at [www.sccnw.org](http://www.sccnw.org) and register for one of our upcoming workshops. You can also watch a FREE 30 minute video full of tips and insight or sign up to be part of our growing community of parents fueling other parents.

*Hal Runkel is a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist, relationship coach and extremely popular keynote speaker. He is the visionary founder and president of ScreamFree Living, Inc., the organization that is calming the world, one relationship at a time.*

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