

LEAVE YOUR (INTERNAL) KID AT HOME!

by Deb Elkin, LPC

I received a phone call from a client of mine this week. During our session the previous week she had told me that the intern site she had chosen in school wasn't working out for her. She wasn't learning what she wanted and needed to learn, and she wasn't getting the supervision she felt she needed to grow as a professional in her field. And she was pretty clear that no one at the school would really listen to her, doubted anyone would try to help her, and that more than likely, she was stuck there. She was very unhappy about it, and felt pretty resigned to it.

We explored some of Karen's early life experiences which had taught her that what she wanted didn't count, how she felt didn't matter, and that no one would ever take her seriously or take care of her. Still believing all of that, her internal kid was terrified to speak up or make waves. She didn't expect to get heard, she feared she might be shamed or ridiculed or bullied, and she didn't want to go through that again! So she wasn't even going to try – what was the point? She knew the outcome – or so her internal little kid thought!

We all do this type of thing to ourselves. We grew up in our own unique family setting. We learned when to speak and when to be quiet. We learned whether or not it was OK to feel. We learned which feelings were OK to express and which ones were unacceptable. We learned if and when it was safe to ask for what we wanted. And from those early learnings, we made decisions about how to live our lives and what to expect from life. Unless we've had some help working through all of this, most of us are probably still living and acting from these old belief systems. Karen's situation is a good example of this.

Now that we are adults however, it's important to realize that these beliefs and ways of behaving in the world don't serve us anymore. Our inner kids aren't equipped to handle our adult life situations and decisions. And they weren't meant to! Putting our scared or angry 5, 10 or 15 year olds in charge, or letting them take over, whichever the case may be, is a pretty mean thing to do to ourselves and to them!

So how do you take your kid out of your adult interactions and let your much more socialized and competent adult be responsible for them? The first step is to recognize that you do in fact have a competent adult living inside of you! Many of you forget that you do in fact have successes functioning as adults in your world. Let yourself take a minute to really acknowledge yourself and what your adult successes are and have been. It's important to SEE yourself as the adult that you are.

The next step is to start paying attention to when a younger part of you is in charge. You can recognize them because they tend to be more reactionary, more defensive, more scared. They also tend to expect things not to go their way or for things

to really be a struggle or a battle. They may be ready to fight, or as in Karen's case, they might not even want to take on the fight.

Once you recognize that one of your young ones is present, then you need to take a moment to talk to him/her. It really doesn't take long. You can just say to yourself, "Ah! My 5 year old is here. Hi honey. Pretty scared/pretty angry/pretty frustrated (etc.) huh?" That's the acknowledgement part. I know you're here, I see you (so to speak), I hear you. That's what they are really looking for is to be noticed and taken seriously. (Isn't that what you really wanted as a kid?)

Now the most important part. Now that they know they've been heard, next let them know that you'll take over now and handle it from here. My scared little girl loves to play in my backyard in the sunshine, watching the birds and exploring in the garden. So I send her off to play while the adult me takes over and handles what needs to be handled. Karen let her little girl hide behind her, the way little kids hide behind their parents' legs when they are scared or shy, while her adult took over and handled what needed to be handled.

So what happened for Karen? Her advisor told her that if her intern site wasn't working out for her, they would help her change it. They were completely supportive and helpful. Karen was amazed, delighted and completely surprised! Her kid's worst fears were not real, and when her adult was able to take over, she had a totally different experience than she'd had in the past. (This doesn't mean that you'll always get what you want, but you'll have at least asked for it, allowed for the possibility of getting it, and done it in a way that leaves you can feeling much better about yourself.)

Life becomes much easier when our little kids aren't running our lives. We become more highly functioning adults, we become more self-confident, and we begin to trust and respect ourselves more. Know that this will take work and practice on your part. You can journal about it. You can share this process with a friend, helping each other to recognize your little kid voices, your competent adult's presence, and how to put the adult in charge. Or you may decide you want to seek the professional help of a therapist to work with this issue. Whatever you choose, commit to yourself to taking your kid off the hook and putting your adult in charge of your life.

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