

## **Muffins and Oranges**

It is 3:00 and we could go for a muffin, or perhaps an orange. Whether we have the muffin or the orange, the difference will not be noticeable that day. However, after a year or two, the difference between having a daily muffin or an orange will be very noticeable, perhaps twenty pounds noticeable.

*How could something that is virtually imperceptible while it is happening turn into something very perceptible down the line? And what does this have to do with parenting?*

Let us say we are with our children and they are being challenging. Perhaps they are talking back to us, whining about how unfair something is, or lying about the half-finished donut we found under their bed (“It’s not mine, you can’t prove it”). If we are at the top of our game, we forgive them for what they are doing before we respond and then proceed to discipline with reassurance and protect the connection, understanding that children act this way from time to time. “That hurts my ears when you talk to me like that and when my ears hurt, I won’t drive you anywhere for a few days. Dinner in five minutes.” Or: “Your consequence for eating in your room without permission is no screens this week.” And we say it in our best adult voice, the same voice we use with our neighbors, in-laws and co-workers.

If we are not at the top of our game, we might speak to them harshly, disrespectfully or arrogantly. “How many times do I have to tell you not to talk to me like that?” Perhaps said in the same kind of voice they are using that we want them to stop. “Quit lying to me! Do you think I am going to fall for your lies?”

On any given day, the difference between one parenting approach and another is imperceptible, just the same as the difference between eating a muffin and an orange on any given day is imperceptible. But over a year or two, if we have too many days when we parent without regard to the core principles (protect the connection, forgive instantly, discipline with reassurance, celebrate mistakes and disappointments, honor sovereignty, as discussed in my book *Insightful Parenting: Making Moments Count*) we will inadvertently contribute to the gradual erosion of intimacy between parent and child.