

Ever wanted to drop your kids and drive off?

Many of you have probably heard about the Scarsdale mom who ordered her squabbling ten and twelve-year-old daughters out of the car in downtown White Plains and drove off. The twelve-year-old apparently chased the car and was allowed back in leaving the ten-year-old alone and crying on the sidewalk. She was found by someone who bought her an ice cream and hailed a police car. Mom, who is a high-powered Park Ave. lawyer and lives with her lawyer husband in a two million dollar home, is facing charges of child endangerment and was locked up for the night. She is out on \$1500 bail with a hearing scheduled later this month.

More than a hundred comments on the Times website were split between those appalled by her behavior and those sympathizing with her plight of dealing with car-bound fighting kids. They ranged from comments like:

“What would any of you people say if instead of being taken to the police headquarters, this child was taken to some pervert's house? This is still the real world we all live in and there are dangerous people out there that don't exactly go around wearing signs hanging from their necks.”

To:

“So what? It's a mark of how ridiculous our society has become that this is seen as negligent. When I was 10, I would be out with my friends on bikes or playing around and spent plenty of time more than 3 miles from home. Believe it or not, kids of that age can get around Westchester fairly safely.”

Many spoke of the capabilities of a ten-year-old finding a bus and getting home safely or how they often spent time on their own away from home at that age—all missing the point that these girls were abandoned and not on their own by choice. This story is less about two girls on their own than the sudden retribution of an enraged mother. The message her girls are left with was ignored. Can no one empathize with what it must have felt like to be these girls? And far worse for the mother to pick up the older girl and leave the younger alone, then call the police station to report her daughter missing. Her actions came from her own emotional hijacking. This may be understandable but is her responsibility, not her daughters’.

The scariest comments were like this one:

“Wow! There is a mom who will do something which will make her kids better citizens and my country a better place in which to live. Thanks mom. You do not just do the talk but can do the walk as well. Shame on those who find a reason to criticize a mom for doing the right thing as a parent.”

This mother was far from “doing the walk”, which requires conscious deliberation. She had lost all ability to reason. Her emotions were driving that car. We must understand that the fear that comes with abandonment, even temporary, leaves a scar that results in later reactive behavior—why so many children grow up to be irresponsible parents themselves. That’s how we get our buttons pushed. Those buttons we all seem to have are the scars left from times we felt unloved, unimportant, not good enough, or abandoned. Our child taps that sore spot, and we react, and like this mother, we say and do things we regret. Our reactions range from ineffective to damaging. Tough love is another way of saying, *I don’t know what to do anymore, I can’t stand this pain*. So I retaliate. Tough love is not for the child, it’s for the parent at the end of his or her rope.

Although one comment said that she must have panicked, no one spoke of the responsibility this mother holds for going over the edge. What is it that flips that switch in us so that reason clicks off entirely? We all hate it. I’m sure this mother regretted her actions as soon as her reason returned.

Here’s one comment I found that is a responsible and effective response to her situation:

“A much safer way: I’d pull over to the side of the road, and park. I’d tell the kids I’ll continue on, when THEY quit bickering, on their own, without my involvement. I Totally Ignored them from that point on, pulled out a good book and read it....They quieted down really fast!”

We may not all have the time to read a book while we wait, but anger never has to be the necessary way to get kids to do what we want. It’s just the only way most of us know. It may work for the short term—my guess is that these girls will never fight in the car again—but long term it leaves wounds that rear their heads when least expected.

One lesson from all this is that irresponsible parenting decisions know no socioeconomic class. If we didn’t learn that from Columbine, then this is a good reminder. The stress of little resources is huge but that is clearly not the deal breaker. I know many with little resources who are wonderful, nurturing parents and many with

plenty of resources who are just too busy for the whole parenting thing. My hope is that this mother is required to take parenting classes, not removed from her children, which was the initial call. She needs to be with them to make amends and heal—not to mention learning some skills to manage sibling rivalry.