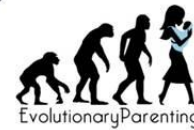


# GROWING ORCHIDS

A COURSE ON RAISING THE HIGH-NEEDS OR ORCHID CHILD



## Growing Orchids: Week 1 Understanding the Orchid Child

Welcome to Growing Orchids. If you're here, I'm going to take a leap and assume you too have one of these very unique children. You know the ones. They are not quite like any of the other kids you've seen around or perhaps even raised and sometimes you can't help but wonder what exactly you've done that can make things *so freaking hard...* but also so very rewarding. How does this child who can meltdown in a second with the best of them also be one of the happiest and attuned kids you've met?

This is just one of the complexities of the orchid child and why parenting these kids is something people really don't understand unless they've been there themselves. Why all the advice people give you not only doesn't work, but you almost know it won't work right off the bat.

*Cry-it-out? I just know in my heart that my child not only wouldn't sleep better, but probably would never stop crying either.*

*Punishment? I've tried and it just seems to devastate my child in a way that I'm not comfortable with.*

*The quick daycare drop-off? They say my child will just adjust but it's been months and we're still at the crying stage and my child clings to me like their life depends on it unless I'm there for a while before leaving.*

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These are just some of the normal things that parents of orchids experience and for many, they turn to the same question: **What did I do?**

NOTHING!

Well, perhaps not truly “nothing”, but nothing *wrong* at least, and we’ll get to this issue later this lesson.

This brings me to what the purpose of this first lesson is and that is: information. So many people who have an orchid child really don’t quite understand what this means for the child or for them as parents. I think it’s imperative that families truly understand what makes an orchid child, why they even exist in our society, what their strengths and weaknesses are, what kinds of parenting they generally need (specifics are for later lessons), and also what it means for those of us who may be adult orchids or married to one. In fact, for each lesson I will do my best to link the information provided to adults because, as we’ll get to, there is a genetic component to being an orchid and so many of us find that these traits that may be baffling to us in our kids are quite similar to ones we ourselves had or that we see in our partner.

I hope you will also forgive me for the use of stories from my own experience, but I have found over the years that examples can sometimes be far more powerful than any long-winded explanation of things. Given I am raising an orchid-par-excellence, my example file is quite full and hopefully my failures can serve as a basis for your successes.

## Section 1: Defining the Orchid (And Where Did They Come From?)



As someone who has no green thumb whatsoever, I have to admit that the first time I heard this term, I was a little confused. I knew orchids were beautiful, but that was about it. As I learned through studying the research on orchid children, however, orchids themselves are incredibly difficult to grow; for most people, they are just unable to get that orchid to bloom as it was made to. The key to growing orchids is apparently in the environment; you have to have that perfect environment for an orchid seedling in order for it to become that famously beautiful flower.

See where we're going here?

Orchid children are like orchids in this way: They are highly susceptible to their environment and what kind of environment they grow in will dictate how well – or poorly – they turn out. This ability to go one of two ways depending on the environment they grow in is referred to as *differential susceptibility*. In short, it means that when orchid children have the right environment, they thrive and thrive in ways that go beyond other children and we'll talk about this, but when they are raised in the wrong environment, they are the ones most at risk for a variety of problems, including mental health problems, physical illnesses, substance abuse, and so on.

This is in contrast to the other children who are considered *dandelions* for their more robust nature. The bulk of children fall under the dandelion umbrella and are more resilient to the ups and downs of their environment. Like all humans, they can of course struggle and face risk of negative outcomes when the environment is horrific, just as you could kill dandelions if you try hard enough, but by and large these children seem unphased by things that could devastate the orchid child.

This terminology and the bulk of the research on orchid children comes from Dr. W. Thomas Boyce of UC San Francisco. He has spent decades studying these individual differences in children in order to help us come to a fuller understanding of what it means to have an orchid child. Like most of us who are interested in orchids because we're raising one or are one, his interest initially stemmed from his sister who was an orchid that did not fare so well. Although there is other relevant research that has formed the basis of the information in this course, including quite a bit of work by Dr. Jay Belsky, I felt compelled to give special mention here because we truly would be lost without the work Dr. Boyce has done.

## Growing Orchids: Week 1: Understanding the Orchid Child

So we have the idea that we have these kids that are susceptible to their environments – far more so than the average child – but how many of these kids are there and why on earth do they have this trait?

For starters, studies seem to find that orchids make up 15 to 20% of all children (and thus adults). This is a pretty robust finding that has been replicated numerous times. However, it's worth mentioning that although they are classified as a subgroup, in reality we're talking about a *spectrum*. Children may be more or less orchid-like depending on one crucial factor: their stress reactivity.

Many families ask me how they can know if they have an orchid child and the answer is how they respond to stress at a physiological level. Unfortunately this can actually be hard to tell in some cases (though in others parents are very certain they see this immediate and strong reaction to stress in their children starting at a young age), especially for kids who just aren't exposed to that many stressful situations which is why it's often determined in a laboratory during a study. Researchers expose children to moderate stressors and measure their physiological response. Those that fall in the top 15-20% are the orchids and it's often because that level borders more of a gap than if it were purely continuous, though some children may be closer to orchids than their other dandelion counterparts.

You may be wondering how to tell about your own child's stress response now. Many of you will have seen first-hand how your child responds to situations that are stressful and it often involves a very large amount of distress, but some won't. This is why a laboratory setting is needed because not all children respond to stress in the same outward manner; in fact, one can be an orchid who looks calm but is in fact highly stressed but internalizing all of it. These children may be the orchids who struggle the most because they are not easy to identify and may even come across as aloof or troublemakers. They get highly stressed, but instead of melting down, just hold onto it and let it out slowly and likely in ways that seem like they don't care.

This stress reactivity is so crucial because how children develop in the world is in large part dictated by how they respond to it. And how they respond to it is dictated by how they interpret it. And when we are stressed out, our interpretations can be incredibly negative.

This brings us to the question of why on earth we have these children anyway? Wouldn't it be better if we were all resilient?

As it turns out, no. The orchid children and adults in our life actually have great value to our entire community, especially historically when we lived in smaller communities and survival was of the essence. The orchids among us are the canaries in our coal mine, as Dr. Boyce so aptly says. Their heightened sensitivity to their environment makes them perfect at sensing danger and discord ahead of when it may happen. This is likely why, for a while, there was discussion in the research that orchid children had to be exposed to some environmental stressor which is what triggered the "orchidness" (this is where epigenetics come into play as it is a combination of genetics and environment). Needless to say, the parent of any orchid would be panicked over this because the idea that you may have created an environment that was traumatic in some way is horrifying to think of (trust me, I know). Now, the thing is, that environment could have been prenatally in which you faced stress during

pregnancy; it could have been prematurity and trip to the NICU; it could have been exposure to a natural disaster; so there are lots of things that are out of a parents control.

But as is typical in research, it isn't so simple.

Yes, our orchids can be "activated" by negative environments and we do see more orchids born into these situations than more benign ones, but – a big but – there are also more orchids on the other end of the environmental spectrum. That is, we also see more orchids in nurturing, loving, responsive environments where orchids thrive. There are (at least) a couple hypotheses here (that I'm aware of). One is that these individuals also have a benefit to our society in good times because their positive traits (which we'll get to) greatly assist those around them. The second is that because in hard times it may be more difficult for them to procreate due to some of the negative effects of being in such environments for them, and because they have such a value to societies in those times, they are overrepresented in the positive end of the spectrum so that we always have enough when times are tough.

So for parents who were worried about this potential exposure to trauma, you can rest easy knowing that perhaps your orchid came about *in part* because you were so nurturing and loving. This "in part" may be more or less depending on the individual genetic contribution for your child. That is, when we speak about epigenetics, we must acknowledge that for some people the genetic is the driving force and small environmental effects will trigger an expression of a particular gene. However, for others, the expression may come about in larger part due to environmental circumstances that suggest this is an ideal environment, in this case, for an orchid to grow. This fits with the observations of many in the gentle parenting field that it seems to be inundated with orchids relative to the population of families who started out and maintained more Western-culturally-specific parenting practices, though I personally haven't found research to wholly support that this is the case.

Of course this now leads to the argument that you may have inadvertently created this rod for your back, but to that I have two comments. First, if providing a wonderful, nurturing environment that suggests this child could become the type of leader and wonder that orchids can be is considered a bad thing, then please take a moment to rethink your longer-term expectations for your children. Second, although this may be harder, there is nothing you can do about it now – the orchid expression is there and will not change if you change the environment again. In fact, only bad can come from that. So I'm sorry, but you'll have to accept it and move forward.

I think it's also important to note that orchids aren't just found in humans, but have been identified in other primates as well, highlighting their importance to other social mammals as well. This social element is crucial because their ability to either serve as the canary in the coalmine in negative times or use their ingenuity to help lead our communities in good times results in greater benefits for all members.

Regardless of where or how your orchid came about, you have one and hopefully it's nice to know that there is a larger purpose to the hard times that often accompany being the parent of an orchid, but you didn't come here to learn just why your child is an orchid, but rather what to do about it.

## Section 2: Strengths and Weaknesses



In school we always learned when giving people feedback to start nicely with all the good things, but I admit that when it comes to parenting and hearing about your child, most parents who are struggling are more open to the negative first because it's what they've experienced. I mean that it's hard to hear good things when we're struggling and often we are more receptive to good once the bad has been acknowledged. So that's how I'm going to do this, starting with the orchid children's weaknesses (ones we've all likely seen) and then move on to those very real positives.

### 2a: Weaknesses

I don't particularly like the term weaknesses, but it does seem to capture the areas that our orchid children struggle with. Of course, I likely don't like the term because I come from a Western culture where weak is synonymous with bad as opposed to viewing our weaknesses as being a way to connect with others for help or areas to dig deeper into to learn more. I hope that when we think about these "weaknesses" for our orchids, we can think of the latter instead of the former.

These are not failings of your child and they are not bad traits or experiences. They just are what they are and the main problem is that they often don't mesh well with our society which is why they are seen as "weaknesses" to begin with. Often it does mean more work for us to help them, but as their parents I would hope that we would be open to this, especially when we understand what's going on. Think of it as having a child that struggles with math or reading – should we get mad at them for this struggle or do we do what we can in order to help them through the difficult times? So it should be with an orchid, yet it often isn't due to people's expectations that they should be just like everyone else.

### Weakness #1: Coping with Stress

This is the biggest one and one that will get more attention next week as we look at the emotional life of an orchid, but let's briefly discuss here. As mentioned above, the very categorization of orchids versus dandelions comes from how they respond to stress. Children who are hypersensitive to stress are the orchids. The problem here is that in a world that is much more suited to a dandelion temperament, being hypersensitive to stress means our orchids struggle far more.

This often means we struggle more because our children find any anxiety-provoking event to be more like the end of the world. These reactions can be hard on us as parents for a number of reasons, including that we weren't often raised to cope with big emotions (instead told to keep them quiet) and so we don't often know how best to respond except to try and make our kids stop. This, of course, causes our lovely orchids to lose their minds even more, perpetuating a cycle we struggle to break.

I will use an example here from my own experience to highlight how this can look. My very orchid daughter does a homeschool gymnastics program and at the end of the year all kids, including those in their regular and competitive programs, were invited to a showcase where they would perform in front of everyone and get rated by a panel of judges. Although she was very excited at the prospect when they were rehearsing, as we got closer, the anxiety kicked in. Of course, we've worked on this quite a bit in her 9 years and so she was coping pretty well.

That is, until she entered the arena for warm up. She tried to hold it together, but about 5 minutes in she was hysterical crying. Her coach brought her to me and she just was beside herself, begging me to let her go home and not do this. Over and over and over again. Now I won't give this one away as we'll discuss this event and its conclusion in another lesson (but quick spoiler: she competed and I didn't force her), but the point here is to highlight the degree of stress that these orchids can feel to moments that may not seem like they warrant it.

My daughter was not teary and shy – she was almost screaming and couldn't breathe properly. This is the type of hypersensitivity to stress that they speak of. As you can probably imagine, when we think about the typical stressors of childhood – daycare, school, friendships, fights, divorce, failure, and so on – we can hopefully see how these events may be far more difficult for our orchids than all those other kids we keep thinking they should be like.

### **Weakness #2: Struggle with Change**

My daughter and I go to the same diner every week for our Mommy-Daughter special time. She loves it there because it's bright and cheery, they do dairy-free food (she's allergic), there's colouring, and it's just a fun, wonderful time. Recently my daughter did a kids market event in town where the kids created their own things to sell. She made her own greeting cards and her and I made huge cookies to sell as a fundraiser for her favourite charity. It was a huge success and she sold out in just over an hour.

To celebrate, her dad and I decided to take her to this favourite restaurant (her younger brother was with grandma). We arrived and they were packed but were able to fit us at the diner which she'd always wanted to sit at (on those fun stools). Of course, it was also much louder than usual and suddenly those stools were not nearly as comfortable as she had hoped. About 10 minutes into what was supposed to be a celebratory lunch, I was with her by the bathrooms as she bawled that it was *too different*. Not only were we sitting someplace new, but it was more crowded, louder, and to top it off her dad was there and as she said, "I'm just not used to him here".

Orchids are known for resisting change. This is linked to that first issue of stress response. We all feel somewhat anxious when things are different – kids in particular struggle with a lack of predictability –

but an orchid doesn't just feel anxious but can face a high stress response. Because the orchid is so attuned to their environment, changes to that environment result in it not being that safe place that they love so much and this then causes insecurity and stress.

The struggle with change comes not just in bigger changes, like starting school, but in these smaller moments too. Parents can notice this when they try to change up the bedtime routine to get another parent or carer to handle it and the child just point-blank refuses, often with intense distress. It may be that someone who always wears glasses isn't and this can lead to a struggle to trust or spend time with that person.

There are three different changes that may impact your child, but not all orchids struggle with all of these. The first is **the environment**. Changing the physical environment can be difficult for many orchids, and the degree of difficulty will vary. Think of this as moving homes or even redecorating. Think about the change in the environment at my daughter's favourite restaurant – changing the noise and where we sat and who was there was enough to trigger a strong stress response.

Notably, we won't always be able to predict what parts of the environment trigger this stress. For example, my daughter – who struggled with the restaurant change – is a trooper when it comes to travel. She does feel some anxiety when we take off on a trip, but by and large she loves the new scenery and people and time away. Those dramatic changes don't affect her much at all. However, other orchid kids may struggle immensely with any travel because all the new sights, sounds, and so on are just too much.

The second type of change is to **the routine**. Many orchid children really like having a bit of a routine and when this is upended, they can really have a hard time. Now I want to be clear that this is *not* about a schedule. Orchid children *do not* inherently need to be on some strict schedule that doesn't allow for flexibility, but rather they often have elements of their days that are crucial to keep going. For example, although my daughter has always traveled well, she has always needed her same downtime every day to just have quiet, imaginative play. Whatever else happens, if she has that, chances are we'll be okay, but if she misses it, she becomes overwhelmed and struggles for the entire rest of the day.

The final type of change is to **the caregivers**. I am not just referring to parents here, although we should be very clear that changes to home life like divorce or, heaven forbid, death of a parent, can have a disproportionately negative effect on orchids, depending on what happens and how they are cared for during these times (of note, they can survive these as well or better than others when tended to in an appropriate way for them). However, orchids also struggle with changes to daycare situations or providers, changing teachers each year, changing babysitters, and so on. Handling these transitions can make for greater difficulties than one might expect. The child that is crying at the start of the school year each and every year or who doesn't want to go to daycare once there's a new teacher there could be signs of your orchid child showing you how hard it is for them to deal with this change.

As I mentioned, not all orchids respond poorly to all of these nor do they necessarily respond in what you might find to be a logical manner. It really comes down to where they derive comfort and how



changes to that impact their ability to navigate their own stress. This is something that you will need to work out at an individual level for your orchid.

### **Weakness #3: Sensory Issues**

Many of us are aware of sensory issues only insofar as we've heard about them with kids on the Spectrum or who suffer from Sensory Processing Disorder. Those of us with orchids may have, at one time or another, wondered about our own kids in this regard. Are they high-functioning Austistics? Do they suffer from SPD? Except when we look at it all, it just doesn't all seem to fit together, but there seems to be *something* there.

There is.

Orchids seem to have sensory struggles (as opposed to the disorder). They often get overwhelmed by sensory stimuli, but like children with SPD or on the Spectrum, the way it manifests isn't the same over each child nor is it necessarily logical. However, what is more common is that orchids tend to be sensory averse more than sensory seeking. That is, they are more prone to getting overwhelmed by the stimuli around them rather than understimulated and needing to seek it out (which is different than needing to seek out comfort during times of stress). My own daughter has a list of sensory struggles ranging from not being able to handle a lot of different clothing things (tags, jeans, any sequins or scratchy materials, etc.) to struggling with loud noises or too many people speaking at once to being highly sensitive to the effects of light.

(A quick note though that our youngest kids can be understimulated in terms of appropriate stimulation, like being outside and in nature, and act out in ways that reflect this understimulation. This is often due to the fact that being out in nature helps our children calm and feel centered – as it does for us all – but I am separating this from the type of sensory seeking behaviour that comes with having an underreactive system.)

When we consider the main feature of orchids as being highly attuned and sensitive to their environments, it really shouldn't be a surprise that these children can struggle with sensory input when our world is anything but calm. Now depending on your own environment, you may find more or less of this. An orchid living in a loud city who is in a class filled with 30 other kids is more likely to exhibit behaviours associated with their sensory struggles than an orchid living in the country who is in a forest school, but even those kids are likely to show some struggles.

### **Weakness #4: Sleep**

I admit I think this is the weakness that has led many of you to me. So many people find their orchids are those who seem to struggle with sleep the longest and require *so much* more of their parents than other kids. We're going to talk about sleep as its own section later on in this course, but let us take a brief look at two of the main reasons *why* sleep can be such a struggle.

First, there is the issue of stress reactivity and how this plays into the normal, natural anxieties that accompany the night. All children have some fear of the night, but this is likely even stronger for an

orchid who is – by design – more attuned to the potential negatives in that dark environment. So they are more likely to *feel* that stress at bedtime and overnight. Couple that with their stronger stress reactivity and their ability to “self-settle” is far more limited, not because they have fewer self-soothing skills than other kids their age, but because their *experience* of the stress is so much greater.

Second, there is the issue of sensory struggles. As we know, children on the spectrum and who have SPD often struggle with sleep because the very nature of having sensory struggles means sleep is more difficult to come by. Although our orchids are not at the same level as this, depending on what their sensory struggles are and what your sleep environment is like, you may face more problems than usual. For example, an orchid baby who struggles with tactile input may hate PJs or tags but be unable to tell you, so he wakes often needing comfort to get beyond that sensory struggle and get back to sleep. Or an orchid child who struggles with noise, but lives in a city with constant noise, may find it hard to settle the mind and sleep well, but also may not know how to articulate that is a problem because it’s all she’s ever known.

Of course, neither of these issues works well with Western methods of sleep training or with Western expectations of sleep. In fact, most of these orchids will struggle even more and be even more vocal in their distress, in part thanks to their stress reactivity.

## **2b: Strengths**

Now that we’ve gone through those “weaknesses”, let’s take a look at the very things that we can overlook as we struggle with the harder parts, but which constitute the beauty of having an orchid child. Most of these will come up again as we talk about the specific struggles with parenting, but I feel you need that overview now to understand the potential that lies within each of your orchid children.

Of course, I need to be clear here that these strengths are not *givens* in that they will have them regardless (that’s the trait of the dandelion), but rather that these *can be* their greatest strengths provided they are given the right environment for them to flourish. Orchids are a product of their environment more so than others and for these strengths to emerge, we need to foster them too.

### **Strength #1: Emotional IQ**

This is by far their largest strength and it is beautiful. It is so amazing that it’s the main topic for next week’s lesson so I’m not going to go into depth here because you’ll get an earful next week! Suffice it to say, these children have the capacity to be the most empathic of us all when raised in the nurturing environment they need, they have emotional understanding that often puts us adults to shame, and they are so very self-aware of their internal worlds.

### **Strength #2: Leadership**

Research on children leading groups finds that orchid leaders are quite different from their dandelion leaders. Orchid leaders are more likely to be the type of leader you *want* to follow because they are considerate of others, do not try to put others down to build themselves up, and they care about those

they are surrounded by (remember the strength of empathy). When they lead, they seem to do so with kindness, not force, and this often creates a more peaceful environment for all people involved.

### **Strength #3: Creativity**

Perhaps because they see the world differently from the rest of us or perhaps because of their sensitivity, orchids tend to be on the creative side of things. We know that sensitivity seems to be linked to the artistic side (think about the idea of the tortured artist) and in our orchids this seems to ring true. Orchids are able to create beauty where most of us may not see it and they can share this with the world when we allow them to. What type of creativity they show will be entirely dependent on your orchid and please don't ever think it's just the traditional arts – engineers, doctors, and others can be highly creative in their approaches to their work.

(I want to briefly note here one misconception people have about creative types. They often feel that if someone is creative, they are an orchid. Not so at all. There are many highly creative dandelions in our world, but the difference seems to be that the creativity we see in the dandelion is relatively unaffected by their environment whereas the expression of creativity in the orchid may be highly influenced by their environment. So although orchids may have a greater likelihood of being taken in by the arts, they are certainly not alone in the arts, but can work alongside some of the most creative folks who happen to be dandelions!)

### **Strength #4: Memory**

In research studies, orchid children have been found to have either the best or the worst memories, depending on the context in which the events take place. This is going to be highly relevant later and we'll get into more details then, but suffice it to say that the orchid memory can put us all to shame when in the right context. You may already have noticed this if your child is verbal and able to share stories of events that you can't believe they remember, especially with respect to those tiny details we never knew they noticed.

Of course, this also means they remember some things we'd rather they didn't too, especially certain words we may accidentally say... but we'll let that slide for now 😊

As I hope you can see, there are ways in which our children can thrive and their potential strengths are going to be dependent on the environments we provide for them. This is the scary part for most of us parents – how do we not screw up these precious children? Although we'll be talking about this in depth as we explore various issues that face the parents of orchid children, let's briefly look at some of the factors to remember.

### Section 3: Your Parenting Role



Congratulations you've given birth to a child you can help thrive or, well, whither in a way most other parents won't experience. No one warned you this was a possibility and as I've said earlier you've probably noticed just how different your child is to others. The issue for many of us who find ourselves in this situation is what to do about it. I believe there are three main messages that you need to take home as parents and these will be intertwined in each other lesson as we relate them to the specifics we face with our orchids.

#### **Message #1: "Good enough" is not necessarily enough**

This is the hardest message to share because it's the hardest to receive, but for our orchids, sometimes "good enough" isn't actually enough. I have actually read articles from people who say that as long as we don't abuse our kids or neglect them, even orchids will be fine. The problem is that the research really doesn't back that up. They are so sensitive to their environments that we must be far more aware and serve to buffer if needed.

Now, sometimes "good enough" is good enough, but that would be because the rest of the child's environment is so good that you don't have to be better than it to help them thrive. However, if your child struggles at daycare, school, in a neighbourhood that they feel stressed in, and so on, you will likely need to be better than good enough in order to counteract those specific negative elements of their environment that can take a large toll.

This doesn't mean we won't make mistakes – we all will – but we just have to learn from them a little faster and respond to them in the right way for an orchid (we'll talk about this in another lesson, don't worry). I do believe the key difference for orchids is not in never making a mistake, but in how we respond to these mistakes. Ignoring or glossing over them will be a far cry from "good enough" for them.

**Message #2: You have to work on yourself**

The day-to-day struggles you will face with an orchid can seem utterly overwhelming and you will need to be sure that you are bringing your A-game. If you aren't, you will likely fall prey to the triggers that will result in the suboptimal parenting we need to minimize. In fact, because our orchids are some of the highest of needs kids with some of the biggest emotions and reactions, we can be triggered far more than other parents and run the risk of spending far too much time in the suboptimal zone. It seems rather unfair that the parents who need the most leeway because of the inherent difficulties they face get the least, but there you have it.

Whatever you need to do to remain calm and present and aware is essential. Many parents find mindfulness and/or meditation helpful. I admit I'm not actively doing either of these, but I find speaking my perspective-taking process out loud quite helpful (a type of "self-talk" tool we'll discuss later and may even be considered a bit of mindfulness). I also admit to my mistakes with those I trust so I can better get it off my chest, be forgiven, and then mentally be ready to learn from them. But perhaps the most effective tool I've had is to simply stay quiet until things are calm. If I can remain quiet, it gives my heart and brain time to get back in sync and my response will always be more appropriate and better reflect the needs of my kids in the moment than when I accidentally speak too soon. Now I should add that just because I'm not speaking, doesn't mean I'm not there. I am there physically, but verbally I keep quiet.

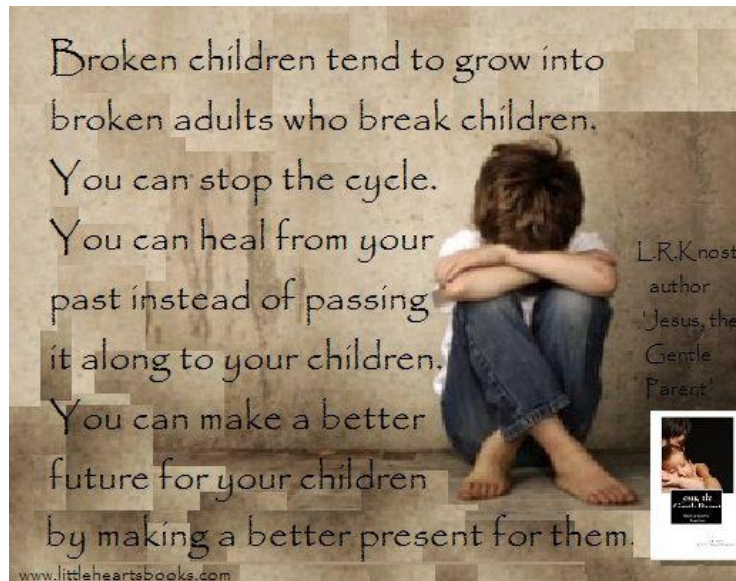
If you find yourself getting regularly triggered, this is something I'm happy to help discuss in office hours.

**Message #3: It's never too late**

One of the more heartening things that I have seen in the research is that although the early years are so crucial in so many ways, it's not all a lost cause if we haven't been the type of parents to an orchid we need to be. At any stage if we can become better, it will benefit our orchids. The thing that is harder when it's later down the line is that we often expect it to be quick, because we want these difficult times to end, when in reality it's actually going to take longer to see the positive effects.

The more developed a child is, the harder it is to change and if there have been negative events, it can feel even harder. Think of it like if you started with half a tank of gas and didn't know you were supposed to fill the car so eventually you get really low. You would first have to fill it to half before you could get to that full tank. This is what happens when we shift an environment – we have to get back out of the negative to baseline before we can create the positive and this takes *time*. But I promise you, it's worth it.

**Bonus: The Adult Orchid**



Some of you may be reading this and thinking it sounds eerily like you or your partner. Unfortunately for many of adults who might identify on the orchid-spectrum of things, you may not have had the type of parenting that would have enabled you to thrive at an emotional level. You may struggle with rage or depression or anxiety or a host of other mental health problems that affect how you feel and interact with others. Mental health problems are one of the big risks for adult orchids who are not given the type of environment they need to thrive.

As parents, we probably struggle with our own demons more than others (because we were affected more) and feel even less equipped to handle the needs of the children that are just like us. They remind us of ourselves and because we go to what we know, we often go to the very negative that hurt us when we struggle with their intensity and their own struggles. It is crucial that if you are a struggling orchid parenting another orchid, you have the ability to step back and acknowledge your own limitations here and perhaps lean on your partner a bit more until you're able to work through some of what you faced.

If you are partners with an orchid, you will probably find that many of the principles in this course will apply to your partner as well. The same strengths and weaknesses should be looked at and when you think about the environment you create for your partner, you may see areas that you can work on as well. If you know that by helping your partner, you are also helping your child, it can ease some of the resentment you might feel at having to be even more to more people.

***This is the end of Growing Orchids: Week 1: Understanding the Orchid Child***