

Why Not Trying Sometimes Works

While I typically counsel parents to try for a significant time, sometimes completely stopping for a while can be more effective. Here are some reasons:

* The child may respect you more for it. Our continuing to reach out despite their rejecting us can make us look like we're doormats. Now I know I'm confusing a lot of you right now because I talk a lot about the importance of making amends and continuing to reach out. And I do think that you do have to do that in the early stages of an estrangement and that overall, I see more parents than not backing off too soon or writing letters of amends that send very mixed messages. But sometimes stopping is the right thing to do.

* It may also work to let go because they may feel like you're respecting their wishes more. That you're accepting their request. This is especially true for those of you have had kids who say it's temporary, or they need more time and boundaries

* It may allow them to miss you more. The old saying how can I miss you if you never leave is also true in families sometimes. If we're showing how available we are even if they're not responding, they don't have to face the ways that they miss us when we're not there

* It may encourage more self-reflection. If the parent continues to reach out no matter how badly they're being treated, the child isn't forced to do the same kind of self-reflection that they might if the parental contact suddenly dries up. It's like if you're in an argument with someone; if you stop arguing and they keep yelling, at some point they have to look at themselves more clearly than if you keep it going.