



TRYING NOT TO BE PART OF THE PROBLEM

GOLDIE GROSSBAUM



So here I was thinking that maybe, as a seasoned mom in business for almost 20 years, I had summer overnight camp down pat.

I know how to talk myself out of the panic when I don't see my kid in a camp picture and how to calm down even when their smile isn't as big as I think it should be in the photo, and I know how to use my sane voice to remind myself that maybe they were about to sneeze or something.

I'm not going to claim to have completely overcome the worry because that's just part of being a mother and I've come to embrace it, but it is more under control than it used to be.

And then, two days into the month-long overnight camp, my eight-year-old calls. "Mommy, I fell and hurt my arm."

He's calling from my oldest son's phone; my oldest is a counselor there. It's a new stage in life I am thrilled to have reached—having a child as a staff member in camp where other siblings are campers.

I slow my racing heart. In my head, my voice is rising; *What happened? Are you okay? Does it hurt? Is it broken? Are you crying? Do you want to come home? Ugh I should never have agreed to him going to camp!*

And I know that here comes the hard work.

I find my calm voice. Slow and steady. "Oh no, what happened?" I say as casually as possible.

"I fell on my arm at the bounce place." I hear something that sounds like a snuffle. Or a rustle of something. Or it's the background noise. What if he's crying?!

Calm voice. Slow down. "So, what are you doing?"

His big brother the staff member bought him a Slurpee.

I do some deep breathing and pretend to be totally chilled, even though I am totally not. His big brother takes the phone and tells me not to worry, all is well.

I hang up the phone and I do just that—worry.

I message my son the staff member later that night: Tell me how he's doing.

It's okay, he reminds me. Don't worry. Yeah, right.

The next day I get a photo of my eight-year-old with a huge smile and an equally big splint on his arm.

Is he smiling because he's happy or is he smiling because he wants to make me happy or is he smiling because he doesn't want me to know he's sad, and is he sad? Is he in a lot of pain? Is he crying?

I don't have any answers!

I panic and I worry all at the same time and then put my phone down so as not to let it all out.

And then I get a call from the camp EMT. We think there's a fracture and we need to go the ER for X-rays.

How is he? Is he handling it ok? Do you need me to fly in? Is he asking to go home? Is he crying?

All the questions I have been holding in come tumbling out and the EMT calmly reassures me that he is doing okay. But I want to know. Is he sad? How will I

know?! And deep down I wonder why I want to know anyway; it's not like it'll make me feel better!

The thought of my little eight-year-old being sad in camp just breaks my heart.

I message my older son yet again, and I think he's regretting that he's in the same camp as his younger brothers.

We get the X-ray results—yes, a fracture.

I speak to my little boy again and try so hard to be calm and cool. *Don't be part of the problem*, I remind myself. *Be part of the solution*.

"It's about him, not about you," I reprimand myself. "You need to support him; don't make him have to reassure you."

"I chose blue," he tells me excitedly. "I can't wait to show my counselor!"

"Does it hurt? Does it bother you?" And I finally ask the question I've been burning to ask, in the best way I can think of.

"Are you okay staying for the rest of camp with a cast?"

I wonder if he can hear what I'm not saying in the way I phrase the question. The things I want to say but hold back from saying because this is about helping him, not making myself feel better. What I'm not saying is—

Are you happy? Are you sad? Do you want to come home? Do you want to come home right now? Do you want me or Tatty to fly over right away? Oh, my poor child, what if you are sad and need your mother now? What if you feel so alone?

I try to imagine how I would feel if it was me as a kid with a cast in camp. I start to really unravel. Stop it! I tell myself. He is not you and you are not him. He is excited that he got to choose the color for his cast, and he chose blue!

Focus back on what he's saying.

"Yeah, I want to stay. You can come visit if you want."

Do I ask more questions? More questions just to satisfy my overload of mother emotions?

"Mommy. I need to run to the next activity. I don't want to be late, bye!"

And he hangs up.

And I'm left standing there, trying to figure out why, if he's okay, I'm a wreck.

Because he broke his arm.

And I'm his mother. And I'm a gazillion miles away.

And it's difficult to close your lips, relinquish control, slowly let go and let your kids soar on their own.



GOLDIE and her husband, Rabbi Yossi Grossbaum, direct Chabad of Folsom & El Dorado Hills in Northern California, with the able help of their 11 children ka"h.

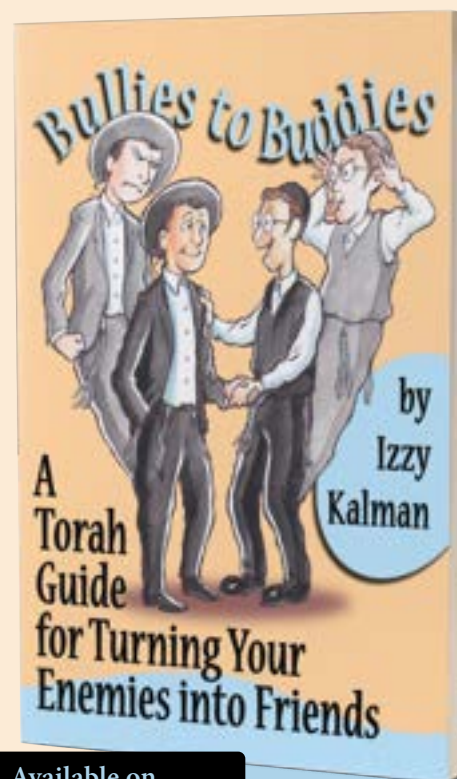
Goldie is a mikvah.org Certified Kallah Teacher as well as a Certified Life Coach. See her ad in this issue. In her spare time, Goldie blogs (littleyellownotepad.com) about being the mom of nine boys and two girls, ranging from baby to teens, and finding the humor in the ups and downs of raising kids and life in general.

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