



TEACHING THE PARENTS

By Yvonne Thomas, Ph.D.

Most people have heard the statement, “Children don’t come with a manual.” It is unfortunate that parents DON’T get any prepackaged, FOOLPROOF instructions for how to raise happy and healthy kids upon a child’s birth. Thus, it’s no wonder that many believe being a parent is the “hardest job in the world.” Think about all the challenges that go into being a successful parent: you need to be loving, nurturing, and supportive of your children while SIMULTANEOUSLY maintaining firm and consistent boundaries and limits with them; you need to guide and expose them to new experiences, but still allow them to “find their own way” regarding such things as their interests, hobbies, likes and dislikes; you need to practice what you preach or you may give your kids unintended “MIXED MESSAGES” about what you do and don’t expect of them, and so on.

As hard as it is to be a good parent, there ARE some key steps one CONSCIOUSLY can follow to increase the likelihood of raising a confident, secure child. Firstly, it is ESSENTIAL to have some BOUNDARIES and LIMITS that you set for your children. As much as kids typically DON’T like having these (and may loudly make this known at times!), children NEED and actually feel more SECURE to know that there is someone they can fall back on who’s in control and the “stronger” one.

In conjunction with this, it is critical for a parent to have CONSISTENT MESSAGES so that one’s words and actions MATCH each other. Without this, it’s hard to be seen as credible or taken very seriously. For example, if you instruct your child to do something and he/she doesn’t, don’t let things just “slide” because you want to avoid a power struggle with him/her. Not backing your words up with congruent actions can actually create BIGGER, possibly longer-lasting problems in which you may not be taken seriously for FUTURE requests AND may lead to your child feeling emotionally “unsafe” and insecure due to your WISHY-WASHINESS.

Another significant tip is to try to strike a BALANCE between being INVOLVED in your child’s life versus being oppressive and smothering. Show your child that you are interested in him/her, but not to the point of micromanaging everything which can PREVENT a child from NATURALLY developing into who he/she really is. Also, keep promoting more and more INDEPENDENCE over time based on what is age-appropriate and what your child can handle regarding his/her particular personality and needs.

Additionally, encourage and practice OPEN COMMUNICATION and provide a safe, NONJUDGEMENTAL attitude, both of which can lead toward building good interaction skills and confidence with others. By making it EASY for your child to talk to you early on, there is a greater chance that he/she will feel more comfortable and inclined to do so (and with difficult topics) throughout childhood, adolescence, and his or her adulthood.

Furthermore, DISTINGUISH between your child and the BEHAVIOR he/she is doing that is making you upset with him or her. Let your kid know DIRECTLY that you don’t like his or her BEHAVIOR, but that you ALWAYS love and like HIM OR HER.

And last, but certainly NOT least, don’t forget to acknowledge and compliment your children periodically, and SHOW them you love them through BOTH words and actions. Children that grow up with only CRITICISM and/or having their positive qualities and actions taken for GRANTED ultimately DO carry these SAME attitudes into their adulthoods subconsciously. By becoming one’s own “critical voice” this, unfortunately, contributes to and perpetuates LOW self-esteem and a lack of confidence in that person. Likewise, unless children are shown through words and behaviors that they are likeable and lovable, they’ll grow up NOT believing or feeling this. If you think your parenting skills could use a “tune-up” or more assistance, consult a Psychologist trained in this area.

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