

## What Children Want From Their Parents

One of the great paradoxes of life is that the two most important jobs in the world are given to people without any training or instruction: politicians and parents. And yet parenting is one of life's vital roles. Your children develop their values, beliefs and sense of self from your parenting style; your children's feelings are validated or not validated through your parental guidance. Children learn who they are and how to contribute in the outside world from you, their parents' experience and example.

Parenting mostly has to be learned just as any role has to be learned. It is a tragedy that much of the insight and wisdom comes to us later in the parenting cycle. However, no matter how old you or your children are, you can still learn how to be more loving, more supportive, more caring and more unconditional within your own family. Don't leave the enrichment of a really good relationship with your children until they are grown up. Take the leadership initiative with your children now, whatever age they are.

*'We have to break down the barriers to talk with our children, knock on that door, lay on the bed listening to them. Put constant effort into listening to them so that your children will be around you as your best friends as you grow old.'*

*Ingrid Moedt,  
Parent*

Many parents immerse themselves in work where they can measure their productivity or performance by budgets and outcomes. It can be difficult to put the same energy and value into your children because the results are harder to measure and the task often thankless. The option of immersing yourself in your work outside of the home can be highly appealing.

*'If fathers work more than sixty hours a week when their kids are growing up, they will fail as fathers, damage their daughters and cripple their sons.'*

*Steven Biddulp,  
Author, 'Raising Boys'*

Times are changing, many people are coming to understand that there is a lack of integrity to be effective in the paid workplace, but unable to talk face-to-face with their son or daughter. A senior public servant said to me recently *'It is easier to talk with State Cabinet than it is to talk to my teenage son.'* Parents are realising that all the financial success in the world does not hold a candle to the love and support for a child and being there when they need you.

In researching *'Life Smart'* a book for teenagers about families, friends and future, I asked many teenagers what they needed from their parents in terms of guidance and love here is what they told me.

### Actively Listen

Be centred and in your body when talking with your child, give them your full attention, as much when the conversation is routine as when focused on a special or difficult subject. Don't be thinking about the washing or work or what you have to do next.

Children are very sensitive about your attention and react badly when they think you are only fitting them in. When in conversation with your child, remember you need to be grounded in the present moment and focused on what can be achieved in the immediate conversation, right now. Don't critique them while they are speaking, either verbally or in your head. They sense you judging them adversely which will stop the flow of ideas. Allow yourself to experience the conversation without judgment.

Actively listen to what they have to say, be there, look at them, don't talk at them, talk with them. Regardless of your child's age, face them, give them your undivided attention including with your body language. Show you care through your body language.

An effective and active listener doesn't get involved in trying to solve the problem but acts as a catalyst for the other person to solve it themselves. The difference between helping by fixing and helping by listening allows the person to actually go through the experience themselves, knowing that you are there with support and guidance.

Fixing the problem robs the person of the experience whereas really listening shows you have trust, faith and confidence in them. Stop trying to rescue them, that is not what they want or need.

*'My daughter, Jen would come home from school and be*

*angry about something that had happened between her and a girlfriend. It used to burn me up. I would make all these suggestions on how she could fix the problem and afterwards the problem would stay with me for days. Two days later Jen's friend, Sonia would be having afternoon tea in our kitchen and I was the one still feeling all the anxiety. Jen would have resolved the issue with Sonia and I would be still carrying the anger. The difference for me was learning to really listen and reflect the story back to Jen rather than trying to solve it all for her. Both Jen and I are a lot happier with how we do this now.'*

*Ginna Smart,  
Mother*

### **Encourage Your Children to Acknowledge Their Feelings**

Talk with your child about how you are trying to understand their feelings. You may not agree with their point of view but try to understand the way they feel. When you acknowledge their feelings they really know you are hearing them.

If their feelings are upset and they have to hold on to their emotions because of the environment, encourage them to make the time later to go back to the feelings and really immerse themselves again. For a child, immersing themselves in their feelings allows them some completion about the event or the trouble. Emotions and feelings are messages about change so encourage them to listen and respond to their bodies, their emotions and intuition rather than avoiding or suppressing them.

Encourage your child not to be superficial about their emotions, feelings and intuition. Help them to understand and be guided by them. Exploring and understanding their emotions, feelings and intuitions and acting on what was hurting or disturbing them enables them to be stronger, clearer and more centred. This is important no matter what the child's age.

Here are some ideas for helping your child deal with their feelings and emotions:

- Reassure your child that lots of feelings and emotions are normal and not at all unusual, even the turbulent and challenging ones.
- Teach your child to accept their emotions as a point where they can learn more about themselves.
- Teach them not to hate their emotions, their emotions are telling them

that work needs to be done to help understanding in a particular area.

- Encourage them to feel their emotions, allow them to physically feel the sensations in their nerves and muscles.
- Show them that crying and deep breathing help them to release their emotions and centre themselves emotionally and physically.
- Encourage them to explore relaxation and meditative techniques.

### Look For The Positive In Your Child

Notice and tell them about the things they do that are positive. Use the 80/20 approach; at least 80% of what your child is doing is positive and on track, 20% is about learning. Focus your attention in that order, 80% of the time catch them doing thing right and reinforce the positive behaviour with praise or expressions of love. This balance encourages positive behaviour and helps them understand how to alter behaviour that is not appropriate.

If you constantly yell or criticise it becomes ordinary background noise and a child becomes accustomed to it. How can you influence a child's behaviour if they won't listen to you? They quickly get used to yelling and block it out. When a child is constantly reminded of their 20% mistakes without any of the positive reinforcement, that part of their behaviour becomes 80% to 100% of their attention as a direct result of your reinforcement. Focus on the behaviour you want from your child, focus on what you want them to do more of. Look for areas of agreement with your child, not disagreement. Children respect themselves more if you can do this for them.

### Care For Yourself As A Parent

Look after yourself; how can you care for your child if you don't care for yourself? Lovingly caring for yourself is the strongest example a child can ever have. Keep nurturing yourself and your self-esteem as parents. It is difficult to help or guide your child if you are not prepared to build you own base of self-value first. Give yourself clear positive self-talk. The 80/20 rule works best for your child if you are prepared to do it with yourself and your partner, first.

Your behaviour is the strongest influence you have on your child. You are a key role-model and they mostly end up modelling your behaviour. Your behaviour impacts far more than your words. To influence your child, be kind and considerate with yourself and your partner.

*'I guess the thing I hate most about my Dad is that he*

*is so inconsistent. One day he will be up, the next he will be down. He very rarely follows through with anything and never does what he tells me to do. I never know what to do. I wish he would be more consistent.'*

*Johnny,  
age 17*

### Nurture Their Leadership Skills

Help your child develop their own leadership skills; give them challenges and trust them to achieve to the best of their ability. Allow your child to lead you sometimes, have faith in them to show you the way sometimes.

*'My 27 year old son sat me down and gave me a talk about responsibility. It was wonderful, it's great when you get your own stuff back from your children.*

*It shows maturity on both our behalf's.'*

*John Taubman,  
Father*

It is a great complement to you when your child takes on a thought or idea from you and crafts it into something they passionately believe. Never say *'I taught you that'* as doing so diminishes their learning and achievement and disheartens them from further learning.

Ideally, leadership in families is like a game of charades where everyone gets a turn to lead the group. Every situation creates a new leader depending on the expertise, clarity and creativity needed for the task.

Here are some challenges and suggestions for nurturing leadership among your children:

- Take turns to chair the meeting during family discussions. As a family, set guidelines about how meetings are to be managed then let your children lead and support the process.
- When your child is trying something new, accept 'near enough' or 'close to' until they gain more confidence.
- When your child comes up with an idea that you taught them and claim it as unique, let them feel the strength of their achievement and don't rain on their parade.
- Trust your child to try things and trust them to make mistakes.
- When you really listen to your children they always have some

interesting additional insight or knowledge that they have to add, so listen carefully and learn from them.

### Encourage Your Child To Achieve Their Full Potential

Encourage your child to get out of their comfort zone and try something new every day. Encourage them to share information, knowledge, love and friendship with you. If they are willing, teach them about doing the things you love to do. Don't be impatient. Tell them realistically about their potential and support them in doing things that are new and challenging.

Teach them crosswords, backgammon, cards, chess, scrabble, things they can do easily together in an every-day environment, things you can do together and have fun with all your lives. Create rituals that you can enjoy all your lives together.

Let them know how you feel about them and their achievements. Write a letter, e-mail or note about the good things they are doing. Your child may retreat to their room but the message will have a big impact even if they don't show it. Keep a diary of things you think they do well or things you love about them and let them read it every now and again. Write down your feelings so your child can understand where you are coming from. Connect with them emotionally, don't be afraid to tell your child about your feelings and your thoughts.

I asked some children what they enjoyed doing with their parents and these are some of the things children said made them feel special:

- When my Mum gets home I just tell her all the stuff that happened at school. Just the everyday things.
- I love bike rides to the park with my Dad, we just hang out and it's cool.
- I enjoy playing cards games and board games together with my family.
- It's great when we get a video out and watch it all together.
- When I am doing my homework I love it when Mum or Dad come into my room and visit me in my environment where all my stuff and my home is.
- Dinner time is my favourite time, we all sit at the table and talk about the day and eat good food and laugh and sometimes fight, but mostly have a good time.
- When the weather is raining outside, sometimes we have a family picnic inside. We lay out a blanket on the living room floor and set up a picnic and roll around and have a great time.
- I respect my parents when they are consistent with me. I feel so encouraged and optimistic about life when they do what they promised.

## Trust And Encourage Your Child's Intuition

*Co-operate with your destiny,  
don't go against it, don't thwart it.  
Allow it to fulfil itself.*

*Nisargadatta Maharaj,  
Philosopher, Poet*

Your child's intuition is very strong. Children have stronger and easier access to their intuition and are less influenced by logic and analytical thinking. Their connection to their intuition and inner wisdom is very strong. Hear them out; listen to them when they trust you with their intuition and their imagination encourage them to trust what they feel. Your intuition is vital to your decisions; your child's intuition is good for them. Even if you decide you can't let your child go ahead with a decision based on their intuition still hear them out, there may be something you can both learn from their perspective.

Here are some ideas to encourage your child to trust their intuition:

- Take time to talk with your child about their creativity.
- Talk about how you access your creative side.
- Listen to their imaginings, their intuitive ideas without correcting them or editing what they are saying.
- Ask your child about their creative process.
- Do some creative exercises with them.
- Read, paint, do puzzles, write songs, poetry or play music and make up tunes and songs together.

## Respect The Need For Privacy

Your child needs space to be alone. They need space to do their own things and some of these will be things you do not approve of. Let them have their individuality. Their belongings are an extension of themselves and they may just view the way you treat their belongings as the way you feel about them. When you criticise their taste in music and won't let them express their personality with their clothes and possessions they feel this very personally. Even if their clothing seems to you to be as conformist as any businessman's suit, it really is an expression of themselves as an individual at the time.

Knock when you go into their room, respect their privacy and their belongings. Their things may not be your idea of good stuff but they are

important to them. Create mutual ground-rules about what is private and what isn't for both you and your child and stick to these ground-rules. Review these as a family regularly so everyone can be happy. Your child deserves dignity and respect and will grow up to treat you that way if you treat them that way.

### Get A Life Of Your Own

Many parents don't have much of a life outside their children. For your own sake and theirs, create and develop your own life and interests outside of your children. Enjoy your time with your child but it is not healthy for either of you to make your child the centre of your existence. Cultivate your interests and balance your life to achieve your own goals and let your children achieve theirs.

*'Whenever I see those stickers that say 'Mum's taxi' I feel sorry for the kids, they probably don't even know how to catch a number 456 bus or a train. They grow up with little independence and a shocker of an attitude. They are the ones that are so precious when they come to our camps and the least independent. Look, they have to become independent sometime. It cracks me up to see these kids who have been driven around all their lives and have no independence skills.'*

*Troy Saxon,  
Camp leader*

It is sad to hear parents talk about how they reared their children without any reference of the child's influence on them. The process is very much an education both ways. People who open themselves to the wisdom and influence of the young are brighter, more passionate and more open hearted than those who rigidly believe that child-rearing is a one way education. Open your hearts and minds to honest, open communication and enable yourself to become a more effective parent and person.

*Written for Sydney's Child 29<sup>th</sup> July 2003*