



## Parenting Our Children

**WE LOVE OUR CHILDREN** and we want the best for them. But parenting today can be hard. No one trained us to do it. How do we go about it? The secret of good parenting is to maintain intimacy and connection with our children. One might think that's easy, but the truth is intimacy between parents and their children doesn't come automatically with feeding and clothing our child, but is something that has to be nurtured. Our modern life and its stresses have disrupted the emotional bonding between a child and their parents. When we don't mend the break, the child is hurt and the parent is anxious, confused and can feel ineffective.

Parenting today often involves two working people rushing home to get dinner on the table and then collapsing in front of the TV or computer. It is difficult to be fully present for our children because we are tired or preoccupied with other matters. The television or computer thus becomes an influential source of shaping our children's identity rather than the nourishing bond of time and shared communication between parent and child.

Raising children who feel secure, have a strong sense of self and who are able to resist the constant assault of drugs, premature sex, and other destructive behaviors needs a warm connection from their parents so that the parent's values flow towards and into them. Parents who are emotionally present in their child's life accomplish this. By present I mean attention

that includes giving care, communication and unconditional love. Children learn values from the stories that parents tell them of their life experiences, from watching them, learning from them and imitating them in countless ways. When the bond between parents and their children is tenuous, the result leads to loss for both. In order to heal the rupture, parents need to initiate the healing by nurturing ongoing, meaningful interactions with their child. When children don't receive this, they become superficial and fragmented in their thinking and end up lacking a strong center to draw from. When parents have no time for them, children don't know how to be there for themselves nor for anyone else, thus their relationships with others also suffer. They end up feeling lost and insecure because they lack a strong sense of identity.

Aware parents with two careers can make good parents even with all the demands facing them. The important factor is the parents' intent and their priorities regarding their child. Parents whose priority is the well-being of their children are naturally attentive to them. It is this quality of presence and genuine concern that makes for positive bonding. Children will intuitively sense their parents' intent and feel secure. Conversely, a stay-at-home mom who does not know how to be "there" for her child can also leave her child feeling emotionally alone. So, we are talking about an interactive connection between the parent and child as the basis of communication:

imparting feelings, ideas and a sense of union between them that will flow to others, both in school and in the larger community. One working mother told me, "Even though both my husband and I have busy careers, our kids are number one and they know it."

In today's climate, most kids will be offered many types of drugs. They will also be expected to have sex early on. They aren't going to resist the temptation and know how to be true to themselves, unless they have the deep roots that give them a sense of self, of being whole, and the feeling of belonging to something deep and stable. When children feel connected to their parents, they develop a core feeling of strength within themselves and are not as easily influenced by outer sources. If there is a void, drugs, sex and acting out will rush in to fill it.

Being present for our children does not mean we sit them down and lecture them imparting our values. Rather, it is that we truly dialogue with them by hearing them and sharing our life experiences and wisdom and by giving them our time and attention. Kids learn first and foremost from example. Children imitate parents' behavior. They know hypocrisy when they see it. The do-as-I-say-and-not-as-I-do syndrome bounces right off of them. They intuitively pick-up on the truth of our intent and actions. If anything, they are often faster, smarter and more imaginative than us because their minds are still innocent and more open. It is important for us as parents to be honest about our motives and clearly look at ourselves because it is what and who we are that we pass down to our children.

Emotionally unstable parents produce emotionally unstable children who in turn produce more emotionally disfranchised children. Loving and caring parents produce caring children who feel secure and give back to others.

Following is an image we can use to gain more perspective about our child. Imaging A Child Eidetic Imagery, developed by Dr. Akhter Ahsen is a type of mental image stored in the brain of all our life experiences that can be retrieved for deeper exploration. The eidetic images of our children and their behaviors are imprinted in our brains and carry information we may miss in our daily inter-

actions with them. They can be retrieved in order to discover what is going on emotionally with our child and can offer us new perceptions on how to deal with them more effectively.

Begin the exercise by seeing them in your mind's eye, wherever the image spontaneously takes you. You may keep your eyes open or closed and allow the information to come to you.

1. See your child somewhere in your house.
2. Where is he/she?
3. What is your child doing?
4. Notice his/her mood, actions. What do you see?
5. How do you feel as you see them?
6. Look into your child's eyes. There is a feeling or story there. What do you see?

A mother seeing this image saw her adolescent daughter totally engrossed in front of the TV with the computer on, obsessively instant messaging her friends. She realized by looking into her daughter's eyes that her child felt isolated. When her husband followed the image instructions, he too saw his daughter in a similar manner. Eidetic images reveal the actuality of a situation. In this case the parents saw the loneliness in their daughter's eyes, which deeply upset them. They began to engage her in simple ways such as, talking to her over dinner giving her their full attention, scheduling times on the weekends to do activities with her, telling her stories of their own childhoods, asking questions about her feelings, and engaging in meaningful communication about the events in her life. In time, their relationship improved and their daughter began to share more about herself, ask for advice from her parents and readily participate in family activities. ■

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Dagnall, L. (2003). Image as an Educative Psychotherapy Model, Ahsen's Learning Ability and Disability EPT Test for Parents. *Journal of Mental Imagery*, 27 (1 and 2), 195-215.