

Advice on how to improve as a parent

I believe most people sincerely desire to be better parents but fail to see that their “job” needs continuing education. What’s strange is that many of us prepare for the birth of our children as if we were getting a graduate degree. Yet, when it comes to parenting many of us rely on impulse, feeling, reaction and the “built in” system we experienced from our parents.

Just as an athlete needs self-discipline, practice and motivation, so does a parent. Athletes often spend long hours repeating basic skills and learning new ones so that they can improve their performance when it really counts – the competition. Yet, any athlete will tell you that while they are engaged in the mundane work of practicing they are regularly rewarded with a sort of neurochemical high that leaves them feeling wonderfully separate from the drudgery and worries of the world. This “zone” is a great place to be as an athlete. It makes the bar seem lower, the hoop bigger and the marathon like a jog through the park. I believe that the sweetest moments as a parent evoke this same “zone” experience. Nothing touches a parent more deeply than observing a loving act from their child.

So, what is the most successful and powerful parenting technique? Look in the mirror. Your child will do what you do, not what you say. You are the most important instrument of change in your child’s life. You can preach and lecture all day long to your child BUT if you cheat, lie, steal, do drugs, scream to resolve your problems, hit others, gossip, backstab, fake sick to miss work, rage on the road, drink to avoid your problems, pout, manipulate, fail to report 100% of your earnings so you get out of taxes, look at and use pornography, fail to grow up and resolve your problems, etc... GUESS WHAT...?

If you are married, have you examined your marriage lately? Children are comforted and secured when they witness an active, loving and selfless marriage between their parents. You can urge your child to marry someone they truly love and find their “soul mate” but if your marriage is filled with yelling, screaming, avoiding each other, power struggles, abuse, negativity, game playing etc... GUESS WHAT...?

If you are divorced, have you learned to collaborate with your ex-spouse? Re-read the paragraph above and apply it to your post-divorce relationship.

What you are as a person and a parent is the single strongest predictor of what your children will grow up to be. No, you are not perfect and you never will be. But, if you show your children that you are trying your best to grow in your weak areas they will respect you for it tremendously. It will give them hope that they too can grow up and change for the better.

By now you should be feeling really irritated with me and maybe even saying out loud (even though you are alone), “Gee thanks for the encouragement Dr. Quack. How about some guidance?”

Ok, I hear ya. Here goes. Good parenting involves a balance between two basic ingredients delivered consistently: encouraging and limiting. First, praise is important for building inner strength, self-esteem and success into your child.

You need to start by recognizing that your child’s current success strongly predicts their future success. If they feel like they are a “bad person” because they are constantly in trouble at home and in school guess what they will grow up to be?

Watch your energy. How much do you give your child when they are misbehaving? How much time and energy do you give them when they are behaving? Helping your child succeed is accomplished by removing the energy (lectures, yelling, fuming, hitting, begging, bargaining, etc.) from misbehavior and only giving it when they are behaving (neutral or positive behavior). This is like **PAYING YOUR CHILD TO SUCCEED.**

Second, how do you limit your child? How do you say “no” and mean it? This requires the realization that you **ABSOLUTELY** must follow through with realistic and enforceable consequences. If you threaten to punish your children and rarely follow through, you are simply teaching them that they do not have to believe what you say. For example: “If you don’t stop you are going to be grounded for a month (Yet they continue and you never ground them or you forget about the grounding in two days)!”

If you give your child unrealistic or unenforceable consequences you are teaching them that you are a liar. For example: “I’m going to call the police and they are going to take you to jail.”

A lot of parents like to give their children warnings. They say things like, “Jimmy, if you do that again you are going to get a spanking.” Or, “ONE, TWO, TWO

AND A HALF...” If you give warnings to your children you are failing to prepare them for the real world (how many warnings do you get when you break the law?)

Saying “no” means placing limits and boundaries on your child’s behavior. When your child misbehaves, simply give them a realistic and enforceable consequence without much energy (use your poker face).

Finally, to improve your parenting skills, I recommend the book, DVD or video of one of the following:

“The Nurtured Heart Approach” by Howard Glasser – Website:
www.difficultchild.com

“Love and Logic” by Jim Fay and Foster Cline, MD - Website:
www.loveandlogic.com

To improve your marriage, I recommend the following books: “The Marriage Builder” by Dr. Larry Crab.

“Making Real Love Happen” by Joyce Buckner, PhD – Website:
www.joycebuckner.com

Or go attend one of the incredible marriage seminars offered by the Family Life organization – website “www.familylife.com”

Now, get out there, learn new skills, practice them and enjoy the sweetness of parenting in the “zone.”