

Conscious Parenting

Parenting can be so rewarding and yet so frustrating. In these busy times where stress is the buzzword, parents often become unstuck with their parenting as they try to juggle work and family commitments.

We have undoubtedly transitioned over the years from autocratic parenting (where children were to be seen and not heard and ruled by the rod), to permissive parenting (a backlash in the 60's where children ruled the roost), and from there to more democratic parenting styles of today, where principles of social equality, self-discipline, co-operation and shared responsibility are fundamental.

Whilst democratic principles may resonate in theory with most of today's parents, putting them into practice can prove more than challenging. How often have you heard the catchcry "*This child never came with a manual.*"

How often do you plan to interact with your child a certain way but end up *reacting* in another, and often in a way similar to that of your parents (which you swore you would never do)? Do you then beat yourself up and feel like giving up because it's all too hard and that your child has the better of you? Rest assured you are not alone here. Parenting *is* challenging and there is often an expectation that parents should instinctively know how to deal with their child's difficult behaviour, and that is invariably what they do. Our instincts however are not always in our best interests or indeed those of the child!

There are countless books available on pregnancy and childbirth that expectant parents gladly pore over before the exciting 'new arrival' but all too often the focus and energy goes exclusively into preparing for this wondrous event and not into *what next?* How often do parents sit down before the birth and discuss how they plan to parent this beautiful bundle of joy that may at times not always be so joyous!

Without discussion and understanding of what they want for their children, why they want it and how they plan to achieve it, parents can soon hit a brick wall when their bundle of joy rears a monstrous head.

Thankfully there are some good clues available and the parenting tips outlined here are based on the theories of Individual Psychology, which in a nutshell assumes that not only are we active decision makers but also purposeful and goal-oriented individuals who are relatively free to determine our own behaviour.

With this in mind, let us move on to looking at children's behaviour and to focusing on what motivates them. Children are motivated by a desire to belong, to find their place in groups that are important to them (such as in the family and in school), to become fully accepted and to be able to contribute. This is what is important to them and essentially is what drives their behaviour. And as we know, all behaviour is modifiable, so when you have hit that wall with your child, fear not as change *is* possible.

A quick way of finding out if your child "belongs" is to ask yourself how well he or she functions in the family as far as being constructive and co-operative goes. Our world has become so competitive these days and the pressures and demands on children so great that often they feel inadequate and unequal in many ways.

As such, they frequently seek to belong and to find their place in the group, not through contribution, but by being un-cooperative. This kind of behaviour will carry on if it satisfies the child's need to belong, to be noticed, or to feel important, regardless of any repercussions.

Keep in mind therefore that *all behaviour is meaningful* and must not be seen in isolation, but within the social context of the whole family. This is where birth order becomes interesting. If Sam, the eldest, is responsible, tidy and well behaved, it won't be unreasonable for Susie, the second born, to be irresponsible, untidy and difficult...and so on. Each child will develop a unique pattern of behaviour based on the belief he or she has created about fitting in. Some children feel they belong only if they are the most powerful, whereas others feel they have to be the smartest, the funniest, the best, the most in control or indeed the most hopeless.

With the arrival of a Susie, Sam is suddenly usurped. First born children frequently seek to be first or best in their attempts to reclaim the limelight. They often fall into the category of high-achievers, and tend to be more conservative and likely to toe the line. Susie, Sam's new 'threat', will invariably be what the Sam is not. The competition is now on for her to take over the reins from Sam when it comes to getting their parents' attention.

Generally speaking, children tend to misbehave when their confidence drops. This loss of confidence often results from their unsuccessful attempts at 'having a go' by way of achievement, contribution or co-operation being overlooked by their parents. Let's use an example of Susie who attempts to sweep the floor only to have mum do it again because she didn't do it *properly*. As a result, Susie becomes discouraged and loses faith in her ability to do a good job. Have you ever been guilty of taking over from your child because you'll do it quicker or better?

Discouragement also comes about as a result of employing less than favourable child rearing practices. So if you spoil, pamper, reject, neglect, overprotect, indulge, nag, fault-find or physically punish your child, remember that you are depriving them of the experience of discovering their natural talents, their likes, their strengths and their uniqueness. Once discovered, the seeds of happiness will be sown and the child will grow up living a purposeful life.

In short, discouragement leaves children feeling useless, so here's what to do: provide each of your children with some encouraging experiences; hold off the criticism; make sure you communicate with respect at all times and focus on your child's strengths rather than on his or her weaknesses. This way you will be giving your child a great head start in life. How much better can that get?

Please send us an email at caroline@peoplerich.com if you would like more information.

Author: Caroline Crosbie
Copyright © 2005-2008 People Rich Pty Ltd