



Relationships *The Adlerian Team*

Letting Go

By Susan Prosser

The day our first child is born we begin the process of becoming a parent. At the same moment we begin the process of letting go – first in child birth and then through the process of adapting as they grow and change and need us in different ways. Parenthood requires us to hold on, to protect and to guide. Letting go requires us to encourage, empower and believe in the capacity of our children to make their own decisions and learn from their own mistakes. The question is: How do we become an effective parent and at the same time allow our children to discover life in their own way?

Our Dance Together

This begins the dance of relationships. We love so much that we want what is best for our loved ones. This wanting is tricky because what we think is best might not be the best for our child in the long run. Often, what we think is best comes from our own experiences and our own fears and unfulfilled dreams. We can be determined that our children will be saved from our hurts and disappointments. We can't bear to think that we will fail them in any way. We don't want them to suffer as we have suffered. Our part of the dance can become the process of imposing our will onto our children. Our children may not agree with us, so they step on our toes or may not even dance with us. The dance becomes a power struggle.

We find ourselves in these power struggles and we don't know why. All we want is the best for our children. Why do they fight us? Our strong children will fight us because they have their own agenda. They have interests that may differ from our interests. They have timelines that differ from ours. They have minds and hearts of their own that will guide them in ways that we may not like. When this happens we may feel like putting on our parenting hats and forbidding them from doing what we "know" will hurt them.

Of course we want to guide, protect, lead and care for our children - all those good parenting rules that we know and trust. Our children certainly benefit from that kind of commitment and due diligence. What our children also need is for us to walk beside them and be there for them when they make mistakes. They need to experience the world in their own way in order to figure out how to be themselves at their best. They will make mistakes. They will suffer. They will learn and they will grow up. Letting go is a process of getting to know ourselves and getting to know our children.

Getting to Know Ourselves

1. Observe your reactions. What makes you upset, impatient, angry, disappointed, dissatisfied?
2. Think back into your life and remember when similar feelings have surfaced. Remember how you felt as a child and how you would have liked things to be different.
3. Perhaps a similar dynamic is occurring in your life now and you can handle it differently. For example, if you felt that you were misunderstood and nobody would listen to you no matter how hard you tried, you may be feeling the same way with your children and spouse in the present day. As a child you didn't know how to express yourself and command attention, but now you could learn that important skill. You can learn how to express a need instead of a demand: "I need your help – it would make a big difference to me", as opposed to "do this right now, or else!"

Getting To Know Our Children

1. Observe your child's emotional responses and take a little time to understand where they are coming from. Like you as a child, he/she may feel misunderstood and therefore is acting out in order to be heard and respected.
2. When your children feel understood and validated you will see a change in their behavior. They no longer have to work so hard to get you to realize that they have something going on in their minds that they want to attend to in their own way. This doesn't mean you have to allow them to have their way it just means they need to have their way considered as a viable option.

Steps to Positive Connections:

Parents need to:

1. See ourselves as people who are parents. While our parenting roles serve important functions, our children also need to know us and see us as people just like them who make mistakes, don't have all the answers and experience failures and successes.
2. See when our hopes and fears and insecurities are in the way of allowing our children to find their own path
3. Learn to know and trust our own strengths.

Our children need to:

1. Feel that we take them seriously even when we believe they are making mistakes.
2. Know that we will not give up on them when they make mistakes.
3. See that we do not give up on ourselves when we make mistakes.
4. Experience their parents learning and adapting to life's challenges.

In summary, find ways to believe in yourself as a person and as a parent. Be kind and patient with yourself. Listen to yourself and your own needs. Trust in what you hear. Dare to be who you are and not what you think others expect of you. From this position you will be better equipped to help your children to honour themselves in the same way. You will see yourself and your children feeling better about themselves and it will be far easier to let them go into the adventures of life.

Susan offers counselling to individuals, families, and couples, and conducts workshops and courses on parenting, relationship issues, self esteem and communication at the Adlerian Counselling and Consulting Group, Inc. The holistic approach of the Centre is congruent with Susan's approach to working with people.