



Relationships *The Adlerian Team*

Parent as Teacher

By Susan Prosser

Leadership is communicating to people their worth and potential so clearly that they come to see it in themselves.

[Stephen Covey](#), *the 8th habit*

Covey's definition of leadership embodies the role of parent as teacher. The family environment is the true classroom for children where they learn about themselves, the world and how to function at their best.

Parents feel they have to discipline their children. This often becomes translated into controlling their behaviour. The word disciplinarian comes from the word disciple which means teacher. I believe that when parents see themselves as teachers, parenting takes on a manageable mandate. When children feel they have someone on their side to help them to learn to function at their full potential, they calm down and feel ready to learn and cooperate.

Learning to Apply the Principles of Teaching to the Parenting Role

To be an effective teacher one must have belief in the student and be willing to give the student all that he or she needs to learn. My son-in-law is a teacher for whom this comes naturally. At the end of the year he gave his grade 6 students several projects that seemed to me to be very challenging and when I asked him what happened to his weaker students when they were faced with these difficult tasks, he assured me that they enjoy the work as much as the strong students. He explained that he makes sure that they all have what they need to succeed! Not for a second does it occur to him that his students will have trouble. Consequently they all do well and experience success at their own pace. This is my idea of how the ideal classroom can function and of how we can create healthy environments for learning in our families.

Parents who consult me about child behavioural problems are often looking for a way to get their children under control. My approach is to assist the parent to help the child to gain control of their own behaviour. In order to feel safe and comfortable in the world we all need to know we have the skill set to handle various situations. Take time to teach your child the skills required for cooperation, how to handle frustration, fears and worries and the other daily challenges with which he/she is faced. If your child is misbehaving it means he has a problem and doesn't know what else to do to solve or manage it.

For example, if your child is having trouble cooperating with you it would be helpful to determine the cause of the difficulty so that you can find ways to teach your child to be successful. Without understanding the cause it is difficult to find an effective solution. There would be no point in teaching cooperation skills if the cause of the problem is fatigue.

Be creative in your teaching style so you can engage your children in the process. Role modeling, mentoring, role play, creative instruction which engages their imagination are examples of how you might teach the skills of communication, cooperation, self-control, self-expression, emotional intelligence, organization, mutual respect and so on.

When my step-daughter was 7 years old she was having trouble printing. Since she was and is extremely intelligent and her mind worked very fast this was very frustrating for her and she would avoid homework and be unable to sit still for very long. One weekend when we were going through the homework problem I approached her to see how she was doing and she ran away and hid in the closet.

If I saw myself as the parent who needed to get this behaviour under control I would have hauled her out of the closet and fought with her to sit at the table until her work was complete. Since I see myself as her teacher, I realized that she was feeling shame and frustration about her work (assessing the source of the behaviour problem). I went to the closet and asked her what was happening and she whimpered "I can't do it!" I said, "it looks to me like you have two choices – you can give up or you can do something about the problem. If you want to learn I will sit with you and teach you". She flew out of the closet and came to the table and we sat for an hour and a half as she carefully learned, with my emotional support, how to print legibly. She was so content because she felt understood and supported. This was a turning point for her and never again did she have trouble printing and homework time became manageable. On the surface, I taught her the skill of printing but the greater lesson learned that day is how to manage fear and shame.

Do's and Don'ts of Effective Teaching

- Do assess the source of the learning difficulty. This could be anything from fatigue to shame. Human behaviour is subject to all sorts of influences. If a child feels insecure, tired, hungry, under-valued, confused, afraid, sad, guilty etc, she won't be able to perform well. Finding out what is going on can be challenging but well worth the effort. Knowing

something about your child's growth and developmental stage helps to understand what might be happening in a particular situation.

- Do believe in their student's ability to learn, to try, to cooperate. All children are not genius but they all want to be successful. They all want to feel good about themselves and they want important adults to hold them in high regard. They just don't always know how to make that happen. When they find that adults are not happy with their behaviour they often feel frightened and insecure and the behaviour gets worse instead of better. The child will often believe that he is bad or inadequate which only makes them feel more shame and less able to manage.
- Don't compare one child to the other. This sets up a competition which cannot serve to bring out the best in each child. Each child has a unique offering. The most rebellious child might be great at helping us to see new ways of looking at things!
- Don't believe you have to fix a child. Believe that each child has the capacity and the desire to learn and improve.

As you instill in your child a sense of taking responsibility for his/her own behaviours and a belief in his/her own potential, you will see confidence grow as she/he takes on the challenges that life has to offer. Children will be able to see in themselves what you see in them. That is the gift from parent to child, from teacher to student.

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