



Relationships

The Adlerian Team

Parenting – challenges and choices

By Susan Prosser

Can you remember your ideas about the kind of parent you would be before having children? Did you decide what you wouldn't do as well as what you would do? Did you have a picture of how your children would behave?

Planning and anticipating being a parent is so different than real life experience. Parents of today work hard at doing it right but often feel they are still not doing enough and aren't always sure what to do differently. Building a solid foundation of security, lovability and teaching life skills is our work as parents.

The three C's for a healthy foundation

Understanding our children is a prerequisite to understanding ourselves. We are born with a need to be loved and to belong. From day one, these needs motivate us to figure out the world and decide how we should behave in order to have a place of significance. Our first task is to build trust with our caregivers and find a way to connect to our family members. Eventually, as we gain more security and confidence, we search for ways to be autonomous. We gain a sense of personal power and self esteem by mastering age appropriate skills as we come to believe that we are capable and competent. As we gain this sense of ourselves and the world, we have a need to count and to make a difference in our world.

Children find unique ways to meet these developmental requirements in their early years, based on their innate temperament, birth order position, family structure and lifestyle, and life experiences. Children are excellent observers; yet, lack analytic skills and therefore make mistakes in their interpretations of the world. When it works in the ideal, we find healthy ways to connect, to be capable and to count, and grow up feeling we can cooperate, be self reliant and make a contribution to the world. When we face too many obstacles, we may doubt our own value and find other ways to connect, like frequent attention-seeking behaviour; other ways to feel capable, like power struggles; and other ways to count, like seeking revenge or withdrawing from the mainstream.

Our work as parents

We each have different ideas, fears, experiences, core beliefs and attitudes that make up our script for life. As

parents it is helpful to know what comprises our own script before we try to figure out what our children are creating. Scripts are powerful and contain "hot spots" or "buttons" that, when pushed, can send us off into an emotional place just like when we were children. So when I'm in that place I become a child trying to discipline my child. Sound familiar? We are unaware of much of the material which has built our own foundation. Thus, our reactions and behaviours can be confusing to us and our children.

Our work as parents is not to control behaviour but rather to re-direct behaviour. We don't have to be heavy-weights who will teach them a lesson they will never forget, but rather allies who understand where they are coming from and know where they want to go. Through encouragement, we can show our children that they count, are capable, and are acquiring the skills they need for life. They need courage to make their way in the world as we need courage to focus on what is working in our relationships and to seek support and resources if we are struggling.

Parents learn best by doing and by sharing their concerns with other parents. Parent education courses create an opportunity to learn new ideas, practice alternatives to replace yelling and nagging and meet others who are asking similar questions. Learning about developmental tasks, communication, discipline, problem solving and encouragement can make parenting a more enjoyable journey. Attending a parenting course can increase your self confidence because you hear you are doing many things correctly and creatively.

Parenting is about having options and alternatives and attending a parenting course offers you an opportunity to increase your knowledge, celebrate your successes and expand your skills. Investing in yourself is an investment in your children!

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.