

## Do You Know Your Child?

*By Jackie Block, MFT*

In this day & age many are on the fast track, multi-tasking from morning to bedtime. It is important to keep on schedule, get ourselves & everyone else in the family where all need to be, but at what price? Many parents love their children but do not create the time to hear, see, & know their child.

The purpose of this article is to help you regain your status as the moral compass, the guide, the authority, the one your child looks up to-the greater influence in your child's life other than the media & peers. As I look at children today, there is a definite hunger to be known at any cost. Identifying with the famous has become a major obsession. Being the best at the expense of others is a common theme. Lying, cheating, fighting, & self-abuse have earned casual acceptance.

It's time to take charge & reclaim our children by listening! It no longer can be parallel play-you working in the kitchen, or on your laptop & your child in front of the TV or playing video games. The interaction must be between the two of you. There must be total focused attention.

Start by looking at your child. Note the similarities & differences between your child, you, & his or her siblings. Think about the role temperament, personality, impact of birth order & family history play. Think about sleep patterns, clothing choices, messy or sloppy, food likes & dislikes. Is your child easily reduced to tears when a voice gets loud, or do they just shrug it off & walk away? All these things & more contribute to the making of an individual. If you know your child, you will know how to respond when your child needs you. In the book, Nurturing Good Children Now, by Ron Taffel, Ph.D., there are ten core traits that contribute to the health of a child. They may vary in degrees of strength but are important as a whole. The first is **Respect** for parents & other adults. Respectful children know what is required of them by parents & other important adults. These children are also willing to follow the requirements. Children who are respectful feel more secure & less angry in their daily lives and are less likely to be drawn into risky behaviors. In what ways have you modeled respect for your child? Are you clear where you stand on certain behaviors, actions & attitudes or do you shut down, allowing negative behaviors to continue because you are overcome by uncertainty, or don't have the time or energy to follow through?

**Mood Mastery-** Children who have been taught how to moderate their emotional states are less likely to turn to outside influences to do it for them. Parents who are able to model appropriate responses to various upsets, frustrations & disappointments, & provide safety, security & limits will help their children to manage difficulties with confidence. You must also remember that one size does not fit all. Some children respond well to time out, while others need to be shown how to self-soothe, offered a re-direction or helped to figure out what's going to work best for them.

**Peer Smarts-**The ability to make & keep friends & to know when to walk away from harmful or demeaning friendships. Have you taught your child about what is acceptable

in friendship? Have you modeled healthy friendships? Do you ask your child about classmates & friends? Do you ask for more than a general description? What do you know about the family of your child's friends? Remember, we often become who we spend time with.

**Expressiveness**-The ability to talk about what really matters including feelings, friends, dreams, & frustrations. Children who have difficulty expressing themselves often are angry because they cannot make known what they want others to hear. It's important to take the time to find out what's going on in your child's life, to encourage play, to ask questions about feelings, & offer ideas in the form of choices when your child gets stuck. Just take time to play, talk, or be in the same room as your child. Allow opportunity for expression-*listen, listen, listen*. To help your child think things through & to decrease a heated response, paraphrase what they've said first, & then answer. Have your child do the same in their response.

**Focus**-Staying with a particular task to gain mastery over it is important. Parents can teach focus by being focused on what their child needs & encouraging follow-through. Let your child know that time plus patience can offer good results. Lend encouragement during difficult tasks.

**Passion**-Enthusiasm for a particular idea, hobby, sport or subject. Encouraging passion and providing opportunity for your child to decide on his/ her passion, (not yours), will carry your child away from negative influences if the passion is important to him/her. It gives a child something to believe in, feel good about and can connect joy & knowledge to success.

**Caution**-Is needed when attempting or considering something new or risky. As a parent, be open & directive so children will seek guidance & be able to discuss difficulties afterwards. You can be the first one they ask to solve problems. Don't lose that spot by not caring or responding. Stopping & weighing risk and benefits of words or actions can go a long way. Demonstrate while offering guidance & allow opportunities to practice new skills or tasks in your presence.

**Body Comfort**-Teach your child to accept the way he or she looks. As a parent, avoid food struggles & sexual attitudes that affect self-image. Model your own acceptance of self. As a parent, don't fuss about your negative attributes. Studies show that parents who are dissatisfied with their own looks are more likely to create children who will feel the same. Parents who are over concerned about body image are more likely to have children who develop eating disorders.

**Team Intelligence**-The ability to know basic rules of group dynamics. Talking about friendship issues & demonstrating thoughtful responses to difficult situations will go far with your child. Observe your child with their friends & look at what actions & attitudes they pick up on. Have discussions & role play difficult situations.

**Gratitude**-The healthy appreciation for the gifts of life. Nurturing spirituality in your child will also help them during difficult times. Practice gratitude in your child's presence. Offer opportunities to volunteer. Knowing one can contribute bolsters self-esteem.

There are many things we do in life that are without thought. Make a conscious effort to truly see, hear, & know your child. Stop & listen to what is being said. Respond with respect to the importance of your child's words. Be mindful of the trust given to you, the privilege for you to hear what your child has to say. To stop & be present is the greatest gift you can give.

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