



Crack the Parenting Code

Parenting can feel like a Rubik's Cube. It's always easy to make a first move in response to a situation, but then what happens? If you are like most of us, playing with a Rubik's Cube is fun for a minute but quickly becomes one bad move after another with no satisfying progress. So how is it that the experts can buzz through the puzzle with their eyes closed? They know the rules and they stick to a plan of do's and don'ts. Parenting isn't a mathematically based puzzle but there are guideposts that can be understood and habits to be developed if you want to avoid making the same mistakes over and over again.

What would help you to elevate your awareness so that you can best help your children to learn and grow? It begins by slowing down and allowing yourself to take a more planful approach.

Here are a few tips to consider:

Connect and be in a relationship

Achieving anything with another person begins by gaining their interest and trust. Advertisers appeal to our ego and values. They ask, "who do you want to be?" Educators appeal to curiosity and drive. They ask, "What do you want to do?" A counsellor might appeal to our desire for relief. Causing us to ask, "How do I want to be?"

Implied at the deepest core of each of these questions is another idea. "I see you and I care." We are all vulnerable to this message. We look to be seen and joined at every phase of life but never as urgently and deeply as we long to be seen and cared for by our parents.

Certainly, infants look for signs that you are going to lovingly recognize and meet their needs. Older children continue to worry in new ways as they begin to understand how uncertain life can be. Even teenagers push you away as they look for the rope that they hope ties them back to the safety of loving parents.

Be interested in the details and say and do the things that show you care. The attachment between parent and child is the deepest and longest lasting influence you will ever have.

Stay in tune with yourself

Most parents want to intentionally respond to their child in positive ways rather than emotionally reacting to behaviors and situations. Despite that, we all react to fear and insecurity and we fall back on the habits developed in our own childhood.

So how do we break the cycle? A good way to think about it is to make a habit of shifting your focus inward. Accept that you are likely to contribute to the problem unless you can observe your own reactions with some fairness. The more self-aware you are, the better you will be at seeing your child's struggle and caring for them as they explore and learn.

Shift your perspective

Behaviors are often a frustrated expression of deeper feelings. A drowning person will claw at their rescuer but that doesn't prove that they want to drown or hurt the person seeking to save them. The natural reaction to drowning is to grab anything that might keep you afloat.

All behavior represents needs, feelings, and wants. If we allow ourselves to look only at the behavior then we are misreading the facts. This leaves us unable to help a child find better ways of coping and responding in order to get what they need and want. A parent's job is to help their child decode reactions and think more deeply about reaching success. Ideally, that child can find praise and approval as they slow down and regroup. Criticism may keep them waving about in the water, looking for another life raft.

Actively listen to your child

"Active listening" is one of the most important tools we have for gaining the trust and partnership of another person. The powerful effect of feeling seen and heard is a remarkable and lasting experience. It turns our inner-sense of emergency off and allows us to imagine that we may be okay. In fact, we begin to open our mind to new possibilities and hopefulness. "If you are listening to me and understand why I'm struggling, then maybe I don't have to use all of my energy to prove a point."

Parents can become supportive listeners by paying full attention at important moments, reflecting back what they hear, and doing their best to resist jumping in to interrupt when their child is talking.

Parent Tips – *Crack the Parenting Code*

With support, time and space, any child will be in a better position to think and learn. Don't expect a dramatic change to occur overnight. Most learning occurs when as a person has permission to retreat, reflect and reconsider their options.

Get to know your child

It's easy to forget that children are complex and mysterious despite the fact that you know so much about them. Like a sculpture hidden inside of the stone, a child emerges with gifts and abilities that could not have been predicted until they emerge. The artist parent plans and chisels away at the marble but the texture of the stone will gradually determine the true, best outcome.

Getting to know your children means discovering who they are in layers. Each stage of development reveals new possibilities, fears, hopes and gifts. Parents can resist each change or celebrate the learning process. None of it is permanent and all of it is useful so be interested and patient rather than controlling and you will enjoy more influence.

Don't beat yourself up

Parenting is much harder than the Rubik's Cube so learn to laugh at yourself and forgive your mistakes. It will keep you energized as you maintain the priority focus of staying engaged and committed to the ever-changing work of loving and supporting your child. It also provides your child with a model of self-worth and permission to learn. Most things are negotiable but the idea that "I see you and I care" is not. It is an active demonstration of love that can overcome the confusing ups and downs of life together as parent and child.

Adapted from: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/angela-pruess/5-insights-every-parent-n_b_14327296.html

If you would like more information on this topic you can contact Family Centre and ask to speak with the Community Support Worker at 232-1116.