

Children Believe Everything You Say

(Excerpt)

Introduction

Creating healthy self-esteem with children

Much has been written on the subject of self-esteem during recent years, some of it controversial and much of it valuable and in many cases transformational. Fortunately, most parents today recognize that children (and indeed all human beings) need a solid base of self-confidence and esteem to be able to function as healthy, balanced, successful individuals in today's very complex society. However, recognizing this can be frustrating unless we have tools to actively help our children build such a base. Overwhelmed as we often are by juggling domestic difficulties, professional problems and financial uncertainties within seemingly unreasonable time limits, child-rearing can appear daunting. The challenges facing parents today are probably greater than at any other time in history. Never before have we had to raise children surrounded by the profound changes and constant state of flux existing within our society and throughout the world.

There is no course of study that prepares parents or children for the increasing levels of stress we are experiencing. There is no curriculum that gives parents the tools or the support to raise happy, well-adjusted children in today's society, children who have the healthy self-esteem necessary to make wise, appropriate, effective choices in an increasingly volatile world.

Yet tools do exist, support can be obtained, and we *can* help our children to build the self-esteem they so sorely need – and we can do it within the limitations of our own hectic lives.

One of the most powerful, simple, fast and readily available tools is the imagination! Guiding the imagination *consciously*, through the language we use, through story and through imagery, we can create our own integrated 'parenting curriculum', not only for building self-esteem, but for teaching, implementing and sustaining family values – also sorely needed in today's world. Another equally if not more powerful tool is the management of emotions (some would call it a focus on the heart.) Through a *conscious*

focus on generating feelings of love, care, compassion, humour, and appreciation we create the strongest antidote to stress – which is the greatest adversary of both self-esteem and living according to our values. The two tools integrate together. Imagery is frequently the most effective way to access positive feeling and the heart, which in turn is the most effective way to alter negative or detrimental images, thoughts and perceptions.

We think in images all the time. As you are reading this, images are flashing across your mind at the speed of –or faster than- a movie. If you don't 'see' the images, you either 'hear' them or you sense them. In some way, we all 'visualize' constantly, from the day we are born until the day we die. How we utilize this inborn ability determines how we perceive the events of our lives and in turn how we react to and experience life.

Most adult imaginations are controlled by What ifs: 'What if I get ill?', 'What if I can't pay the bills/', 'What if someone saw me run the red light?' And when our children are very young, we teach them to do the same. We conjure up images, in detail, to keep our children from getting hurt or to enforce discipline: 'Be careful or you'll fall and hurt yourself!'; 'If you're not careful, a car will run you over and you'll have to go to hospital!'; 'If you don't study hard, you'll fail and then what will become of you?' You'll!' (please feel free to fill in the blank.) Unfortunately, we do not spend nearly as much time or attention on giving our children *positive* images.

Our children grow up hearing their parents say things like, 'I'm sick to death of it!', 'He's a pain in the neck!', 'She's at boiling point!', 'It's just not good enough!', 'You'll be the death of me!', and 'I need this like a hole in the head!' Imagine for a moment the images that go through a toddler's mind on hearing remarks like these.

The imagination is a powerful element of our being. If you were in a room with a plank lying across the floor and you were asked to walk across the plank, chances are that you would be able to execute this with little trouble. However, if the plank were suspended between two poles twenty feet above the ground you would probably find it somewhat more challenging. This is because your imagination would begin to play 'What if?' tracks in your mind. When these 'tracks' are strong enough, they will affect your confidence, your balance and your ability to perform the task.

The imagination also has a *direct* effect on your body. Imagine for a moment a lemon. Imagine holding it and feeling the waxy, uneven texture of the peel. Smell the bitter-sweet, distinct smell of the peel. Imagine placing the lemon on a table in front of you and slicing the lemon in half. Now imagine lifting one half of the lemon slowly up to your lips, open your mouth and bit into the lemon. Feel how the juices explode in your mouth. More likely than

not, you are now salivating. Although it is not always as obvious, every one of your mind's images has an effect on your physical body.

One of the first things I noticed when I began working with children was how easily stress manifests itself in their young bodies. Already in their first year in school, if peers or teachers cause stress for a child it shows up in the child's body: tense shoulders, stooped posture, bowed head, etc. The tension in a child's body will increase in direct proportion to the fearful or anxiety producing images in his or her mind. Stress amongst children is reaching epidemic proportions in our society, as it is amongst adults. In terms of building healthy self-esteem, stress rates as the number one deterrent.

Stress, in children and adults, is the result of how we *perceive* a situation in our minds. Stress is not –as is a common belief – a result of the situation itself. Stress is a result of our perception of the situation and is the body's reaction to fears, assumptions and, more often than not, projections about our future – 'what ifs?' that we conjure up in our minds. The more vivid these images are, the greater the stress will be. The greater the stress, the more insecure we become about our ability to handle it and the less we believe in our own coping abilities. The result is a lower and less healthy self-image; the lower our self-image and self-esteem sinks, the more likely we are to perceive a situation as stressful. It becomes a never-ending cycle.

We can, however, learn to harness our imagination and use our inborn ability for creating images to *prevent* stress rather than to cause it. We can increase our level of awareness to become conscious of how we use imagery in daily life. We can develop visualization as a skill to improve the quality of our lives and the lives of our children. We can use imagery as a tool to communicate with our children, to build a positive, healthy self-image, and to help us be more effective parents.

The conscious use of imagery to teach and raise children is not new; most cultures have recognized the power of the imagination and have used legends, stories, and visualization to teach children throughout the ages.

This book provides a collection of tales, stories, awareness games and processes, suggested resources and creative visualizations to support key areas of parenting, teaching children coping skills and values, building self-esteem, and strengthening the family. It offers a variety of different ways to focus and develop the imagination and the heart as positive tools for the improvement and enhancement of life; your children's and your own. Everything in this book has been tried and tested countless times, in families (my own included), groups, workshops and counseling situations – always with great results.

Part I consists of personal coping tools for parents, designed to support the skills you already have; to improve your ability for self-care (making you better able to care for others); and to help you see life from your child's point of view, thereby making it simpler for you to effectively guide him or her. Part II consists of stories, games, and guided imagery for your children, your family – and yourself.

Each chapter in Part II carries a specific theme, although all the chapters have the underlying common denominator of love. Each chapter leaves room for expansion, creativity and play. All the stories, games, and processes are designed to be easily integrated into family life, however busy you may be. You might like to begin by choosing your favourite story, game or process, and planning the easiest time to introduce it; this could be at the dinner table, at bedtime, on a Sunday morning, or instead of your least favourite TV show. As you discover the most comfortable way and time for you and your family to use these tools, you will naturally and gradually expand their use until they become an integrated part of your lives. Eventually you will find yourself picking up other stories and games to add to your collection.

The contents of the book are intended to initiate rather than lead, to facilitate rather than teach, to guide rather than to inform and to inspire rather than tell. Most of all they are intended to make the process of creating healthy self-esteem an enjoyable one.

Have fun!

Since Time Began

(From Positive Indian Parenting)

'Our people have been using legends as a way of teaching ever since time began. Legends were told only during the wintertime, because that was the time for teaching, the time the children were inside the longest.

The storyteller was a man or woman who was well respected in the tribe. Sometimes they were parents or grandparents. The storyteller had to know the legends, history, be involved in tribal politics, religious ceremonies, and be an excellent child-psychologist. The storyteller had to learn to work well with groups and be able to sense the need of the audience. They could read children by just observing them.

There were many lessons in storytelling. Trickster stories for example, have moral teachings. Raven stories are called 'Trickster Legends'. Storytelling brings generations together. The elders, parents and children all participated in the storytelling process. There were no generation gaps in our culture mostly because social functions were not age exclusive. Storytelling is an example.

Most legends stress that one should not be greedy, boastful, or make fun of others, especially elders, and that small beings could outsmart bigger and stronger beings. The legends also encourage older children to watch out for and help younger and weaker children. In this way, legends taught the right way to do things.'

CHILDREN BELIEVE EVERYTHING YOU SAY is written for busy parents who want to parent more consciously but do not have the time to read a slew of thick parenting books!

"A delightful and valuable guide for parents. A splendid addition to the growing library of practical, helpful books for enlightened parents."

Joseph Chilton Pearce, Best-selling author "Magical Child"

"..... accentuating the positive to encourage self-esteem in children!"

Mother Knows Best

"Positive parents will love CHILDREN BELIEVE EVERYTHING YOU SAY - a guide to creating self-esteem and coping skills early on!"

Good Housekeeping Magazine