

## What's Love Got To Do With It?

Which parent hasn't experienced that wonderful, warm, fuzzy feeling in your heart when you watch your child sleep, felt the proud swelling in your chest as you watch her or him playing happily with other children, or had that irresistible urge to smile as your child recites a poem or prayer and gets a key word completely wrong! Until we become parents, we have no idea that we can love another human being in this way. It is truly miraculous. Poets and religions have claimed, since time in memorial, that such unconditional love is the most powerful force there is. And most of us wholeheartedly agree.

Why then, have we created a society where more and more of our children believe that adults don't care about what they say or do? (27% last survey), a society where unconditional love has little or nothing to do with how we function? A world where, according to recent studies, 97% of teenagers are afraid to tell their parents what they think or do?

Why are we not using love as the powerful force and tool that we believe it to be? Is it because we don't *quite* believe it to be all powerful, – or maybe it's because we actually don't know *how to use* it in day-to-day life?

Love has traditionally been viewed as sentimental, 'mushy' and abstract, not something associated with practicality, scientific facts or how we handle 'real life'. Using feelings of love as a tool to handle daily life is, for most people, an abstract concept. Until recently, it was certainly not something considered to be practical – or even supported by science! Now, happily, we are not only seeing scientists researching love and proving its power, but they are actually developing ways to give the feeling of *love* practical application in day-to-day-life! As you are reading this, research studies are being conducted on emotions and feelings of love, and how we can use feelings of love to improve our health and our lives. From Stanford University and The Institute of HeartMath in California, to Southampton University in England, these studies have been on-going for years and are beginning to publish some

significant results. Personally, I was fortunate enough to come across a few of these studies as early on as 1990, and have had ample opportunity to use some of the findings in my practice as parent consultant and counselor. The results are impressive, to say the least, and as renowned author and educator Joe Chilton Pearce said recently, they reveal 'true coherence in the midst of a massively incoherent system'.

Many of the studies, in particular those done at, or in conjunction with, The Institute of HeartMath, (IHM) use simple techniques designed to help people change the way they feel, to determine how feeling states affect health. Their findings have shown that our mental and emotional reactions have a *direct* effect on our health. When feelings of anger and frustration are felt, there is a clear deterioration of the immune system, (lasting for up to 6 hours after the feelings of anger were felt), as well as an increase in heart rate (increasing the risk of heart disease), and speeding up of the aging process. However, when feelings of love, caring and appreciation are felt, there is a consistently marked improvement in the immune system, an increase in DHEA (the anti-aging hormone), and a balancing out of the heart rate. These studies also show that our feelings and emotions have a direct effect on our ability to think clearly. Recent best-selling books such as *Emotional Intelligence* by Daniel Goleman, have thrown light on this subject, citing studies that have been conducted for decades. The term emotional intelligence or EQ – the emotional and social skills that make up what used to be referred to as character - has now become a buzz word amongst teachers and counselors, as extensive research findings conclude that EQ is much more important to the future success of a child than IQ. With all this, it has become quite clear that human emotions are considerably stronger than human linear and logical thought, and that our forefathers were wrong; our hearts do rule our heads!

Research shows that the heart is not just a blood pumping muscle, nor is it just a place where we feel things; the heart itself has its own intelligence system. This intelligence system tells the heart when to beat and sends messages up to the brain and back again to the heart. It is central in determining our mental and emotional reactions, (thus in turn affecting our health), and also regulates, among other things, the cortex, (the outer layer of the brain), which is responsible for organ function, higher mental function and perception. The heart is electrically 60 times stronger than

the brain, and of all the feelings we feel in our hearts, the feeling of unconditional love is more powerful than any other. All this is now scientifically proven. The power of love, and of the heart, is now a *fact* – something that we can teach our children, as a *fact*. The question of *believing* in it is no longer relevant.

However, the question of *HOW?*, remains. How do we use this power of unconditional love to handle day-to-day life? And how do we teach our children to do the same? How do we use love to counteract the stresses we all experience on a daily basis? How do we change to the feeling of love when we are in the midst of a traffic jam, and we're supposed to pick up the kids - ten minutes ago? Or when the kitchen sink overflows and the phone rings and one child bangs the other on the head, all at the same time? In the words of one mother; "*How can I be all lovey dovey when all I want to do is scream?!*"

The good news is that 'lovey dovey' is not where it's at. Being in a feeling state of love without sentimentality or expectations, is! When we can be in a state of calm love, without any conditions, our heart sends messages to the brain that allow the two – heart and brain – to become synchronized. This enables the entire body, including the brain, to function at its most efficient. As a result we are much more likely to respond with creative solutions, and to act according to our highest potential. In other words, we are more likely to handle the sink, phone and fighting kids in a firm, managed way that we feel good about afterwards.

Replacing feelings of frustration with feelings of love is, of course, a challenge. Being able to do it in a moment of turmoil requires a definite method or skill! One very effective method is an 'in the moment' skill, that I have used for a number of years, both in my own family and in families I work with. It takes anything from a few seconds to a minute to do, and can make a world of difference in how a situation is handled – and how everyone involved feels afterwards. It is a simple 5-step process;

Step 1;        Recognize that you are feeling angry, stressed, or upset. Acknowledge to yourself how you feel. Give the feeling a word or description. If you can, write it down. If not, just speak it to yourself.

- Step 2; Decide to 'push the pause button' in your mind – much like you would push the pause button on a VCR. You are not 'stuffing it', just suspending it for a moment. Take a deep breath and, if you can, sit down. If not, just be aware of your body and try to let go of a little of the tension.
- Step 3; Take all your physical attention to your heart, and the area around your heart. Place your hand on your heart if necessary. Imagine breathing through your heart.
- Step 4; Think of something that gives you a feeling of appreciation, like a beautiful sunset or a special place you've experienced. Re-experience the feeling this experience gave you. Feel what it feels like in your heart and in your chest.
- Step 5; Enjoy the feeling. Breathe it. Holding that feeling, release 'the pause button' and ask yourself what better way you could look at or handle the situation. Listen to yourself. If appropriate, write down your insights.

Now, act on your insights.

Notice how you feel. Do you have more clarity of thought? Is your response more in line with how you would like it to be? Are you behaving in a more coherent way?

This process is love in action, it is a *HOW TO* of love. When the heart and the brain synchronize, - as they can only do most efficiently in a feeling state of love or appreciation - clarity and wisdom can flow. Love can thus be applied in daily life, practically and for every situation. Indeed, this process can help us to use love as the powerful force and tool that we now *know* it to be.

Although this technique may take a few minutes to do the first time, you will find that with practice, (2 or 3 times a day), you will soon be able to do it without stopping. Eventually, you will merely need to take your attention to your heart, and you will feel a shift. Personally, I have used it with hundreds of families and children, and I can guarantee it will work – as long as you do it! It is almost identical to the technique used by IHM in many of their research studies. There, they call it Freeze Frame. Similar methods have been developed by others, but until this decade there was little scientific evidence to back any of them up.

Science or no science, in the 30 years I have worked with children, I have never come across a tool that so effectively teaches 'emotional intelligence', that builds bridges between parents and children, and that has the potential of reversing the terrifying statistics we hear about too frequently. When we each discover that by simply using the feelings of love and appreciation that we are all capable of, we can handle our lives at our very highest potential, it is one of the most empowering experiences possible. Most important of all, it gives us hope, for the future and for the young. In the words of one young (and recently empowered) friend; "Love rules!"

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July 2010