



HAPPINESS

Discover the barriers to your relationship with your child and bridge the emotional gap between you both.

There is an almost tangible emotional gap which stands between some parents and their children.

How did this gap form?

In the beginning, parents and children share a bond that is so wonderful that it is extremely hard to imagine that one day this same child will be distant, uncommunicative and not so trusting of the parents he/she once adored.

So, if you and your child don't share that same close relationship that you once did, then don't despair because it is all very 'fixable'.

But first, let's look at why it happens and how it happens.

- The feeling of 'powerlessness' is part of the problem.

Many parents simply accept this 'gap' and the behaviours that exemplify it as 'normal' and actually no longer expect 'closeness' with their child. Other parents simply can't unravel the mysteries of their child's behaviours and because they cannot identify the problem, they feel helpless to change it.

- The feeling of helplessness is part of the problem.
- Loss of vision and focus on the relationship is part of the problem.

Parents often underestimate what is happening with their children and the sad thing is that the child is not mature enough emotionally to just tell a parent what they need and want. So they act out in an effort to communicate. Children are literally 'screaming out' all day long the sentiment of 'why don't you love me anymore?' and parents are deaf (and blind) all too often.

And the nature of children is such that even though they are scrambling for the right kind of attention, they would rather have the wrong kind, than none at all. And so the dilemma remains and deepens and the chasm widens.

Parents end up reacting to children's behaviours and believe it or not, children are 'reacting' to parental behaviours.

- The parent's behaviours have caused the child's behaviours.

Please notice that I have used the word 'reaction' when referring to the adults behaviours.

I want to point something out. If you are reacting to something you are simply claiming by your actions that you are helpless and powerless in the situation. Otherwise, if you

thought that you had some ability to exert power over the circumstances, if you had any control then you would 'choose' to 'respond' rather than 'react'.

- When a parent reacts instead of responds to their child, this is part of the problem.

Also at this point, I just think we should acknowledge that what feels to an adult like a power-struggle within the home is absolutely not that at all. Children don't want to be in control. They like boundaries (and rules even). They like knowing who is supposed to be doing what, and when. They really like to know that you are in control and that they are safe and secure.

The simple truth is that your child needs constant reassurance from you that they are

- Worthy
- Valuable
- Talented
- Kind
- Loving
- Precious
- Intelligent
- Beautiful
- And the list goes on....

And what I am suggesting is that the gap comes between parents and their children because parents don't fully appreciate the strength of the need to be constantly reassured.

It is like we humans go through our days looking for evidence to support our beliefs.

Imagine if by some horrible chance, your child begins to feel discouraged about their own abilities, or their own behaviours. Imagine if their view of the world became distorted, or worse yet (and as the case so often is) their view of themselves becomes distorted.

Stop right now and look at the world through their eyes

- Failing to see the world as their child sees it and this is part of the problem.

Can you imagine how it feels when they wait for hours for you to come home and you come in the door and you just want to take a shower and you are hungry and you don't have any mental energy left and you cannot cope with them on top of the day you just had. I mean, parents can forget to see what is needed...and they don't notice a child lose their sense of 'importance' and 'self-esteem'.

They don't feel the sense of despair that comes over the child, when for the last two hours they have been able to think of nothing else than what it will be like to see you and tell you about their day and to show you something they made or explain how something went wrong.

Now, as I said in the beginning we go through our days looking for evidence to support what we believe. And we believe what we focus on.

So now you have a child, through no fault of their own, still imbued with all the wonderful characteristics they ever had, but the thought has occurred to them that they are less than they are. They begin to find evidence of that in lots of different ways.

They criticize themselves for their forgetfulness, their untidiness, their selfishness and so on. They begin to see why you appear to not like them (remember, we are talking here about perspective, or viewpoint, not necessarily 'reality'). They lose self-esteem. They feel insecure in your love, because they feel undeserving or unworthy.

They can begin to notice who you do have time for. They see it as more evidence that they must be unworthy of your time, love and devotion.

Just understand one thing. If this is happening with your child, you are failing at helping them 'perceive' your love....and their worthiness.

The next thing that happens is that they begin to try different behaviours to see if you will notice them or look at them. This is why you see a child's behaviours deteriorating over time or escalating in the short term. They are simply caught in the cycle with the parents.

- The child perceives they are not important, worthy or valued.
- They lose esteem for themselves.
- They perceive that you value others.
- They feel insecure.

They try different behaviours to see if they can find one that results in having your attention.

- They want you to look at them. They want you to listen to them. They want you to react to them. They are so unhappy with what they perceive as your 'indifference' to them that they do things to get a response from you.
- The adult views these behaviours as 'naughty' or 'rebellious' and 'reacts' to them.

- The child perceives this as 'attention' and has at last achieved their main objective which was to move the adult from a position of indifference to one of emotion.

Can you see how the adult has now confirmed to the child that if they want their parent's attention, they need to behave a certain way?

Most adults fail to realize that they themselves have rewarded the very behaviours that disturb them.

- So parents reward the wrong behaviours and that is how the gap grows.
All that said what can a parent do then to restore the situation? Because by now, it should be obvious that it truly is the parent's responsibility and not the child's.

Understand that your child's perceptions are their reality.

Acknowledge and validate out loud and verbally to your child that you can imagine how a situation might look to him/her.

A good response to negative behaviours would be to identify them as the source of your displeasure. But you do not react to the negative behaviours. You respond!

Keep the perspective that you are in the driver's seat. You do not need to react to a child's behaviours. They need you to 'respond' and take responsibility and not blame them for the situation. Every minute can represent a clean slate for your child.

So let's recap the most important points:

- Parental feeling of 'powerlessness' is part of the problem.
- Parental feeling of helplessness is part of the problem.
- Parental loss of vision and focus on the relationship is part of the problem.
- When a parent reacts instead of responds to their child, this is part of the problem.
- Parental failure to see the world as their child sees it and this is part of the problem.
- Parents reward the wrong behaviours and that's how the gap grows.
- Parental reaction to kid's behaviours rather than response to them increases the gap.

And if all those things are true and if a parent is willing to focus on them, then they can expect to greatly improve the degree of happiness that they share with their children.

Instead of noticing what is undesirable and negative, make a concerted effort to 'notice' and 'focus' on what is going well, what is great and what is very much desirable.

Focus on the image of that wonderful relationship you either share now or once shared with your child. Remember the complete trust and happiness that your child demonstrated when they were 100% convinced of your love for them and their worthiness of that.

Focus on their view of the world to influence your responses to the many and varied situations that arise between you. Be your child's advocate and best friend. Be the parent that they need you to be, no matter what the circumstances.

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