



Parenting - Your Child is NOT Your Friend!

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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When individuals come to see me about parenting issues, I am often surprised to hear them state that they initially had children because they never felt loved. They go on to explain that they figured that if they had a child they would finally have someone to love them. Other parents have told me that the most important thing in the world for them is to have a friendship with their child.

Parenting requires that the adult is available and willing to meet the needs of the child in a healthy way. It is not up to the child to meet the emotional or social needs of the parent. Your child is NOT your therapist, "buddy", or partner.

Frequently, when I was a Child Welfare Investigator I would hear parents who did not meet the needs of the child or children. They would state that they loved the child and that their love was enough to raise the child despite the physical and emotional abuse or neglect that was occurring. Love is not enough to raise a child.

Children need parents who will take responsibility to help them grow and mature. This requires that they fulfill a number of roles. Five of these roles are:

1. Basic provider - Children need diets that consist of regular and nutritious meals. They also need appropriate shelter and clothing and should NOT have to worry about whether these things are being paid for or not. Financial problems should be dealt with by the parents and the child should not even know that there are difficulties.
2. Protector - Safety and security consists of freedom not only from abuse but also from any fear of being harmed. Ensuring that the environment is free from dangerous individuals or situations is vital for the child. As a parent, you need to do everything possible to prevent harm that might come to your child. This includes making sure that they have adequate and appropriate supervision. If your child tells you that someone is hurting them or threatening to hurt them, you need to listen and take action to eliminate any risk for the child.
3. Discipliner - This means that you need to have appropriate rules as well as logical and natural consequences for times when rules are broken. Punishment is not the same as discipline in that punishment usually harms whereas discipline trains. There are many courses that are available through health and educational systems which can help parents with this.
4. Role-model - "Do as I say and not as I do" is not an effective technique for parenting. Your child will find it confusing to hear you say "Don't smoke" while you are lighting up a cigarette. Fulfilling responsibilities in your life provides an excellent example for the children who are watching and learning from you.
5. Encourager - Every individual needs someone who will encourage them to develop skills and grow. When you attend a school parent-teacher interview or enrol your child in art classes because they are interested in this, you show that you care about the child and want them to enhance their abilities. (You may have to contract that they will attend the classes and do the required assignments before you pay the registration fee). Remember, it is their skills that you want to develop - not the ones that you wish you had.

Notice that I didn't state that one of your roles is to be a "friend" to the child. Friendship implies an equal relationship of give and take. If you are going to provide healthy parenting, you will need to give more time, energy and money than you ever receive from your child or children.

Yes, there are many times when you will be thankful and proud that you have a child but it is not up to the child to meet your needs. You will have to find other ways to get your own personal needs met.

Your job as a parent is to identify the needs of the child and then find healthy ways for them to be met.