



The Difficult Role of Parenting

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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For years I have had parents come to me asking about how they can change their children or improve their own parenting skills. Unfortunately, they often have the illusion that they can control their children and therefore orchestrate the choices the young ones make in order to ensure that their own goals for the child are met.

The truth is that you cannot control another person and if you think that you can it will only lead to feelings of frustration and disappointment. As the child ages and continues to make choices that seem unacceptable to the parents, it can become more and more upsetting and the relationship will suffer.

Some parents blame the child when s/he is not living up to their expectations. Others blame themselves, thinking that they have lost or never had the ability to influence the child.

Even though caring for an infant is demanding, at least you can physically put the child in a crib or playpen to get a break once in a while. Their unrelenting dependence on you might nurture the idea that you will continue to be responsible for every single detail throughout the child's entire life. Not true.

In adolescence, a teen often is torn between wanting to live as a child and wanting to live as an adult. It's kind of like having one foot on a pier and one in a canoe. This can be confusing and difficult for both parent and child.

By the time the child has become a young adult, the parents can often feel that they are left out of secrets that the child seems to be harbouring, disrespected in their roles and quite helpless when it comes to getting their offspring on what they believe is the "right track".

Unfortunately, there is little training that will help prepare to become parents and none of it is mandatory. In fact, most parents do not look for help until a problem arises. As difficult as it might seem to be, there is a need for all parents to learn how to let go as the child ages and eventually merely serve as a support and resource only when the child requests advice.

The bottom line is that work usually needs to be done with the parents more than with the child at all stages of the child's development... Strategies to help the child enjoy healthy and safe, feel loved and at the same time learn boundaries that foster respect are best taught when the child is young.

In adulthood, however, it is usually the parent who needs to learn to not be taken advantage of, handle their emotions and focus on their own situation rather than the choices their child is making.

Detachment is a condition involving emotional distance between parent and child. At its extreme, they are not emotionally close but instead live very independent lives.

Enmeshment, on the other hand, is a term used to describe a situation where individuals interweave their lives and identities so closely that they cannot function independently.

Neither detachment nor enmeshment is a healthy parent/child relationship condition. In fact, a healthy relationship requires that the parent and child function in the space between detachment and enmeshment. Learning how to make this happen begins when the child is

born and, over the years, requires wisdom and patience. Often, being the parent prevents one from having the distance in order to assess and change things in a positive direction.

Samuel Clemens, the author of Tom Sawyer, humourously suggested that when you have a baby you should put it into a large barrel with only a small hole through which you would feed the child. When the child becomes an adolescent, you should seal the hole!

This is not appropriate advice but does remind us that parenting is easier if you remember to laugh and hold onto your sense of humour.

Oh, and remember, the brain does not physically quit growing until a person is twenty-four years of age. Perhaps that is why some parents claim that as their child grew older they seemed to think that the parents became smarter!

If you are having problems trying to figure out how to have a healthy relationship with you child, try booking an appointment with a psychologist who specializes in family work. It's good to have support and the perspective of a professional to help you through a difficult time.