

What

Natural Child Project Website

WHAT IS ATTACHMENT PARENTING?

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Attachment parenting, to put it most simply, is believing what we know in our heart to be true. And if we do that, we find that we trust the child. We trust him in these ways:

- We trust that he is doing the very best he can at every given moment, given all of his experiences up to that time.
- We trust that though he may be small in size, he is as fully human as we are, and as deserving as we are to have his needs taken seriously.
- We trust that he has been born innocent, loving, and trusting. We do not need to "turn him around", to teach him that life is difficult, or train him to be a loving human being - he is that at birth and all we need to do is celebrate that, and support and sustain it.
- We don't have to give him lessons about life - life brings its own lessons and its own frustrations.
- We recognize that in a very beautiful way, our child teaches us - if we listen - what love is.
- We understand that if a child "misbehaves", instead of reacting to the behavior, we should always examine what has been taking place in his life: what stresses, frustrations or frightening, confusing, or difficult situations he has just experienced. We also need to examine whether we have brought about any of these experiences, intentionally or not. It is our job to be responsive parents, meeting the needs of our child; it is not the child's job to meet our needs for a quiet and perfectly well-behaved child.
- We understand that It is unfair and unrealistic to expect a child to behave perfectly at all times; after all, no adult can do this either. Yet behind all punishment is the unstated expectation that a child can and should behave perfectly at all times; there is no leeway.
- We see that so-called "bad behavior" is in reality nothing more than the child's attempt to communicate an important need in the best way he can, given the present circumstances and all of his prior experience. "Misbehavior" is a signal to us that important needs are not being met. - by us or by others in the child's life. We should not ignore that behavior any more than we should ignore the sound of a smoke detector. We should instead see "bad behavior" as an opportunity - an opportunity to re-evaluate our own behavior, to learn about our child's needs, and to meet those needs in the best way possible.

As Albert Einstein wrote, "Behind every difficulty lies an opportunity." This is true in general, but it is profoundly true in parenting. For example, if a child chases a ball into the road, that is an opportunity to teach him safety measures by practicing for similar situations in the future. The parent could ask the child to purposely throw the ball into the road, then come to the parent and report the situation. In this way, the real lesson can be learned: it is the parent who needs to spend more time teaching safety, not the child who should somehow have known this information, and obviously does not yet know.

Punishment is the most damaging response: it is unfair, upsetting, and confusing, and distracts the child from the learning that needs to take place. Instead we should give gentle, respectful instruction at the time the behavior occurs - this is exactly when the child can relate it to his life. In this way the best learning can take place.

Through attachment parenting, children learn to trust themselves, understand themselves, and eventually will be able to use their time as adults in a meaningful and creative way, rather than spending it in an attempt to deal with past childhood hurts, in a way that hurts themselves or others. If an adult has no need to deal with the past, he can live fully in the present.

As the Golden Rule suggests, attachment parenting is parenting the child the way we wish we had been treated in childhood, the way we wish we were treated by everyone now, and the way we want our grandchildren to be treated. With attachment parenting, we are giving an example of love and trust.

Our children deserve to learn what compassion is, and they learn that most of all by our example. If our children do not learn compassion from us, when will they learn it? The bottom line is that all children behave as well as they are treated - by their parents and by everyone else in their life.

Dr. Elliott Barker is a Canadian psychiatrist and the Director of the Canadian Society for the Prevention of Cruelty for Children. He describes attachment parenting as having these two facets:

- Being willing and able to put yourself in your child's shoes in order to correctly identify his/her feelings.
- Being willing and able to behave toward your child in ways which take those feelings into account.

In short, attachment parenting is loving and trusting our children. If we can do that, they will be able to trust us and in turn, trust others and be trustworthy persons themselves. The educator John Holt once said that everything he wrote could be summed up in two words: "trust children". This is the most precious gift we can give as parents.

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