

8 A's of Effective Parenting

Over the last 26 years of being a parent, I've learned a lot. One important thing I've learned is that parenting is all about relating.

When I say relating, I mean really identifying with and connecting with our kids. In *The 6 A's of Relational Parenting*, youth expert Josh McDowell shares six factors that play into good, relational parenting. I've used his 6 A's as the basis for my thoughts in this post and have added a couple more.

Here are the 8 A's of effective parenting:

1. Affirmation. When we affirm a child's feelings, it gives them a sense of authenticity. When our children are sharing their feelings or opinions, they want us to listen to them, identify with them and affirm them.

It would go something like this: Your son comes home and says, "Man! My math teacher made me so mad today. He said I wasn't trying." Your instinct might be to try to downplay the situation like this: "Oh, son, he probably didn't mean anything by it. Let it go." Or you might say—before you even address his feelings—"Now son, were you trying? Maybe he had a point." Or "You're a big boy now; you can't get so upset about things."

Those are all attempts to control or fix the situation. Instead try this: "Son, I am so sorry that happened. How do you feel about it now?" Then just listen, let him know you understand how he's feeling and thank him for sharing his feelings. In doing so, you are telling him that he can be real and authentic with his feelings and with you. Even when we don't agree with our children, we can still affirm their feelings and them as individuals.

2. Acceptance. When you give unconditional acceptance, you give a child a sense of security. This basically comes down to one principle that must be conveyed to our children: "I don't love you because of what you do or achieve; I love you because you're my child." Our love and affection should not be based on grades, behavior or achievements.

3. Appreciation. When we express appreciation, it gives a child a sense of significance. Appreciation is one of the most powerful motivators for right behavior in our kids. The more we "catch" our children doing things right and we express our appreciation, the more motivated they will be to behave better. You can express that appreciation by saying something like: "Thanks for telling me the truth about what happened. I know it wasn't easy, but I really appreciate the way you are owning and taking responsibility for your actions."

Appreciation can also be expressed by writing a short note of encouragement to your child. Here are "7 Notes You Should Write to Your Child."

4. Applause. When we applaud our children, it gives them a sense of confidence. As parents, we sometimes get so focused on instructing and disciplining our children that we forget to applaud them. Your applause can literally be putting your hands together for your child at their recital, their game or their school. It can also be with your words. These "6 Short Sentences Your Child Needs to Hear You Say" will help you get started. We must be bold in applauding our children.

5. Availability. When we are available to our children, it gives them a sense of importance. We can say all we want about how important our children are to us. But if we're not available to them, our words will ring hollow. Sometimes, our automatic response to our kids when they approach us is: "Not right now. I'm busy." But our children should come before our TV watching, our hobbies and our work. So when our kids come to us, our response should be to stop, drop and listen. Stop

what we're doing, drop to our knees and listen to them, hug them and play with them.

6. Apology. When we apologize to our children, it gives them a sense of trust. Over the years, there have been many occasions that I have apologized to my wife, Susan, and our five children. Fessing up about our mistakes, confessing when we are wrong, and asking for forgiveness is not a sign of weakness, it is a sign of humility and strength. Trust is earned, and one way to earn the trust of my children is for them to know that I am completely trustworthy and honest. Admitting my error and apologizing for it helps earn that trust. It shows them that I'm the real deal, not a guy who always thinks he's right.

7. Affection. When we show our children affection, it gives them a sense of lovability. All children want to feel like they are lovable. If they don't get love from you, they will get it somewhere else. Here are a few things you can do to show affection. Wink at your daughter across the dinner table. Give big hugs to your son. Develop a bedtime tuck-in routine for your children. Hold your daughter's hand. Have a special nickname for each of your kids. Wrestle with them on the floor. Give them piggyback rides.

8. Accountability. When we hold children accountable, it gives them a sense of responsibility and self-control. Children need the disciplines of responsibility and self-control to function successfully in life. As parents, we must create rules and boundaries for our children. Once those guidelines are set, we must be consistent in enforcing them.

What are some ways you can demonstrate these 8 A's to your children on a daily basis?

Mark Merrill is the president of Family First. For the original article, visit .