

Bonding With Your Son When You Feel You Have Nothing in Common

One of my favorite shows on television was *Parenthood*. Honestly, I was probably too emotionally invested in the show. I would talk to fellow fans about the characters like they were real people. It followed a family called the Bravermans. The show centers on the four grown-up siblings trying to figure out the ups and downs of parenthood. The oldest sibling named Adam is married with three kids. In the first few episodes, he and his wife, Kristina, come to find out that their middle child, Max, has Asperger Syndrome, which makes social interactions and communication difficult.

Adam loves his son and strives to be a great father. However, throughout the series, you see his struggle as he attempts to connect with a son who is different from him in every way. His interests are different, the way he looks at the world is different, his humor is different and on and on. Those kinds of barriers can be frustrating. You try and try, but just can't break through. Are you and your son polar opposites? Perhaps you have similarities, but you just have trouble connecting. If that is you, or you and your son actually have nothing in common, the following will help you connect more.

Change your Expectations

When you found out you were having a son, I'm sure you got a picture in your mind of what it was going to look like. You created expectations and couldn't wait to live them out. Those expectations need to be thrown out. It is a different picture and a different life. Max Dupree, the author of *Leadership is an Art* says, "The first responsibility of a leader is to define reality." The first step in building a good

relationship with your son is embracing the reality of who he is. You need to love the son you have, not the one you hoped he would be.

Meet Him on His Turf

Remember the movie *Over the Top* with Sylvester Stallone? It was about a father-son relationship, and the title song for the movie was called "Meet Me Halfway." Wrong mentality. We need to meet our sons on their ground. I heard an expert on Asperger Syndrome recently say that the kids who do the best are the ones who have parents that step into their world. I believe that's true of all kids. Don't pressure him to change. Take an interest in the things he loves, whether you hate those things or not. Play with him.

Learn His Language

You don't have to talk like him, but you have to work on understanding him. This is hard. It takes patience, discernment and the ability to ask a lot of questions. Assume good intent and read between the lines. Kids, preteens and teenagers have a difficult time deciphering their feelings and the reality of the world around them. That's where you come in. Ask questions like, "So when you say that you 'hate school' and that it is 'boring,' do you really mean you have a class you are struggling in?"

"Yes."

"I know what that feels like. Can I help?" Learn what he means behind what he says.

Failure is Not an Option

Gene Kranz, the retired flight director for NASA, wrote about the Apollo 13 crew whose ship had experienced a catastrophic failure. He wrote that that they were out of his physical reach, but they were never past the limits of human

imagination and inventiveness to be rescued. When it comes to our kids, we are faster, stronger and smarter. It's not their job to make the connection, it's ours. We need to make the connection. Use every gift and ability at your disposal. Ask your wife, if you are married, or brainstorm with friends to find ways to connect with your son. Remember the motto, "Failure is not an option." He needs you. Don't let anything stop you, especially frustration and expectations.

What have you done to connect with your son? {eo}

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