

Parenting Essentials: To Listen
To Love
To Set Limits
To Leave a Legacy

By: Linda M Callahan
MSW,LCSW

LISTENING

There's a lot about parenting that comes 'naturally' but what comes 'naturally' isn't often what works best or is best for that son or daughter. These next four articles will address the four L's of parenting: some thoughts on listening, loving, setting limits and leaving a legacy for your child/children and how you might be more intentional in your parenting.

How many of us thought we knew everything there was to know when we became parents for the first time? Probably not many, if any of us. No one can truly prepare us for what we experience as a parent. Parenting stretches us - it can bring out the best and the worst in us.

There are many wonderful parenting resources available to us: two of my favorites are Cline and Fay, Parenting with Love and Logic. They refer to the Authoritarian parent, the Helicopter parent and the Consulting parent with the Consulting parent being the most effective as we learn to give our children age appropriate choices so by the time they turn 18 they can face life's challenges. Another resource is Tedd Tripp's, Shepherding a Child's Heart. He talks about us getting a child to do the right thing but without his heart being brought along in the process, it can just be going through the motions. He offers practical strategies to capture our child's heart.

I believe one of our greatest challenges in communicating with our children isn't learning how to express our thoughts - it's learning how to draw out their thoughts. Our son was the youngest of three and being a 'talkative' family he often felt as if we weren't 'listening' to him. We can give lip service to 'listening' or we can make sure we're stopping what we're doing, making eye contact, focusing on the person. More often it was multitasking and trying to listen. Make time to focus on them.

Whether we agree as parents or not about that, if our child perceives that he or she is not being listened to, we need to 'pay attention' to that.

Gary Smalley, psychologist and well known author refers to this concept of 'honor' toward one another - if we listen, we'll be listened to.

One of our goals, as parents is not simply to have our child understand us - it's to understand our child. As we understand that individual child with his/her unique personality and temperament we will be better and more effective parents to that child.

Reverend Billy Graham tells of a time early in his ministry when he arrived in a small town to preach a sermon. Wanting to mail a letter, he asked a young boy where the Post Office was. When the boy told him, Dr. Graham thanked him and said, "If you'll come to the Baptist Church this evening, you can hear me telling everyone how to get to heaven. "I don't think I'll be there", the boy said, "You don't even know your way to the Post Office". Our perception or understanding isn't always accurate, is it?

My challenge to you this week is to ask your children - on a scale of 1-10 (1 being lowest, 10 being highest) how well do we listen to you? Ask and listen. You may learn something.

*Look for future articles related to Parenting Essentials.