



Focus on and Reward the Positive

By Karlene Forde

Have you ever wondered how you're doing as a parent? Although our sons are 22 and 20, and one is away at university, my husband and I sometimes wonder. Are we balancing being firm with allowing them the freedom to figure out their own paths? These questions naturally lead to doubt. Fortunately, we're able to talk about experiences we've had and self-improvement books we've read which remind us of things we can do to regain our balance.

My husband, our 20 year old son and I recently attended an intensive three-day money management workshop, which was about much more than money. It was also about family relationships; it helped us to reconnect as a family.

Our 20 year old artistic son, who also happens to have ADHD, was a student at a design school in Orlando, Florida, until last year when he decided that that program was not for him. As a result, he's been home since January 2008, working part time and continuing to draw and submitting his art on the web. While we enjoy having him home, we've sometimes wondered how else we can help him to figure out his path in life without stifling him.

This workshop helped us to expose him to some other approaches. Since he was often drawing, we thought that he wasn't listening, but he was. It was great to observe our son's interaction with other workshop participants and to see him light up when people complimented him on his artistic talents. The activities we worked on together for three days and nights helped us to understand each other better than before.

Living from a state of love and happiness and showing our children how much we appreciate them will accomplish a lot more than trying to force our views or wishes on them. When we demonstrate to our children that we trust them and their judgment, their confidence is boosted. Confidence leads to action, which eventually leads to success; and isn't that what we all want for our children?

Another experience that we had as a family took place at a dolphin show, at Sea World, in 2005. At the end of the show, my husband and I were so impressed with how well the trainers worked with the dolphins that we went down and expressed our appreciation to one of the trainers. What he told us sounded so simple, but makes a lot of sense. He said they focus on and reward the positive things the dolphins do; there are negatives, but they focus on the positives.

Nevertheless, with all the self-improvement tools we have available to us we sometimes fall into negativity, and those are the times when we have doubted our parenting skills. Thankfully, my husband and I like to walk and talk with each other, which often help us to gain clarity and to refocus our energies.

One day last week, while at work, I thought about how critical I had been lately of our 20-year old son, and I did not like the feeling. Remembering the dolphin trainer's words, I picked up the phone and called our son. I told him how much his dad and I appreciate having him home and how proud we are of him. I complimented him on several things he's been doing well. It's incredible how much difference those few words have made. I could hear the appreciation in his voice. Since then his attitude is more positive and the communication between us all is more open.

Focusing on and rewarding the positive things our children do, allow us to communicate with each other. Even if it's only one small positive, reward it. Remember that they will blunder, it's a part of life, and growth happens. Accepting our children, for who they are, as they are, demonstrates our support and unconditional love.

So, if and when you wonder about your parenting skills, or wonder if your children are going to succeed, remember these wise words: "Freedom is not worth having if it does not include the freedom to make mistakes." - Mahatma Gandhi. "I've failed over and over and over again in my life. And that is why I succeed." - Michael Jordan.

About the Author of this Article:

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