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BUILDING SELF-ESTEEM IN THE ADULT-CHILD SYSTEM

Chapter 31

HONEY, I LOVE YOU... BUT I DON'T LIKE YOU!

My sweetheart! I love you... so much... but... You're my darling... my sweet lovey baby, but... You're the sunshine of my life, but... my reason for living, but... my reason for being put on this earth!! But... you're making me absolutely NUTS! I love you but you can make me so mad. First, you do this, then you do that... then you do this AGAIN, and that AGAIN! When I think that's all under control, you come up with brand new stuff! You're so creative... so creative at taking simple and safe stuff, and making it exciting, messy... and dangerous!! And that look you give me when I tell you to stop... you know what I mean... that "duh... whatcha-talk'n-about? Bambi innocent look." Stop it! Just stop it! You're making me mad... you're making me not like you! You're making me feel like I betrayed you because I forget I love you sometimes and really really don't like you. And, that makes me feel like the worse person in the world... or, at least, the worse parent in the world!! Honey, I love you... but I don't like you! Aaargh! What's wrong with ME!!

Many loving parents get caught in this dilemma. They feel that loving their children must also mean that they must always like them as well. And, try as hard as they can, there are times when they get so upset and frustrated that they not only don't like them, they also forget they love their kids. Some parents find this so disturbing that they try to deny the reality to themselves and to their children. However, their children can still feel the frustration and anger. They often can see through the denials, and subsequently experience their parents being hypocritical. Or, if the children can't see through it, they become confused. Their instincts and experiences of not being liked is contradicted by their parents' insistence that they still like them. Remember, when the verbal and non-verbal parts of communication don't match, it is the verbal part that is normally dismissed as the lie, and the non-verbal communication experienced as the truth. "Mommy loves you always (even though my voice is getting shrill, my eyes are squinting, my jaw is set, and my body full of tension)." Forced to deny their experience as they are told (intimidated) by their parents, children begin to distrust their own perceptions. Denying reality always costs.

THE FANTASY PANTS

Many people have, what I call "Fantasy Pants" in their closets. Sometimes they are "Fantasy Skirts" or "Fantasy Dresses." They are the "Fantasy Pants" because it's a fantasy that you're ever going to be able to fit yourself in them ever again. Every once in a while, I have to replace my "Fantasy Pants" with a new pair, because they've gone delusional!! Denying reality will always cause pain and waste energy. Try and put those pants on... the 32 inch waist size on your 34 inch waistline. Pain and wasted energy! Why would people subject themselves to go through such agony? Usually, because they have an ideal self that is unreasonable and unattainable. "Hmmm, 48 year old man wanting a 24 year old man's waistline. Likely? Realistic? NOT!" (See articles V.1.7 Ideal Self vs. Real Self & V.1.8 Play You Like That for a more complete description of the ideal self). This grandiose ideal



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self asserts that the loving parents they aspire to be would always keep the love in their heart so pure that they would never lose that love even temporarily... much less actually not liking their own children. In other words, they decide that being a good parent means being a saint! Well, most parents aren't saints, and neither are their children! Being a good parent is not about being superhuman. It is about accepting your humanity and sharing that humanity with your children while honoring and fostering their humanity. And, a part of being human in human relationships (especially, with someone you are deeply emotionally invested in) is getting frustrated at, getting angry at, and even forgetting your love and like for those special people in your life.

DISTINGUISH LOVE & LIKE

It is important to let your child know that you will never fall out of love with him/her, but you do occasionally fall out of like with him/her. Parental love is always and unconditional (hopefully) at the deepest and most fundamental levels. With that love comes the desire and mandate to parent the child to become the best possible human being. This will often be difficult and frustrating. Children will not always be under control—certainly, not always under your control (if you have control issues, you sort of made a career error in having children!). When that happens, the stress of the moment may make you forget the love that ironically initiated the circumstances in the first place! This is normal and human. Accept your humanity, knowing that the core love will not be tarnished or forgotten forever. The love is always there deep down (sometimes, deep deep deep deep down at the moment!). While parental love is (or should be) always and unconditional, “like” can be transitional and much more conditional. It is OK not to like your children sometimes. Some people experience their parents disliking AND rejecting them, or disliking AND shaming them, or disliking AND abusing them, or some other hurtful combination. Such people may project onto their children the pain they felt as children. Normally, this is not the case. Such vigilant parents would actually tend to error in the opposite direction by denying the dislike and overcompensating for assumed harm. Disliking behavior or naming the behavior as “bad” may bring up intense anxiety. As children they may have been taught that their behavior was their essence. If the behavior was bad so were they. However, good people can make bad mistakes. Good people can do bad things. Good parents can parent badly at times. Distinguish between the essence of the child and relationship (who/which you love unconditionally) and the behavior of the child (behavior, which you can dislike or even hate). When you realize and accept that it is permissible and even normal to get mad at your child, forget for a brief period that you love them, AND even actually dislike them for a while, then you will not be disabled by one of the more disturbing words that can come out of your child. In fact, you will be able to seize upon it as a great opportunity to teach how to be upset and angry with boundaries. And how to dislike and still be civilized.

“I HATE YOU! I DON’T WANT YOU TO BE MY MOMMY ANYMORE!”

Occasionally, a child will be so upset with his/her parent that he/she may snap, “I hate you! I don’t want you to be my mommy (or daddy) anymore!” The parent’s reaction is often of absolute devastation. How could my baby be so hurtful to me? What have I



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done? What can I do? The child is so hurtful because somehow he/she has learned (from modeling?) that hurting someone when he/she is upset or hurt him/herself is appropriate. Normally, the parent has nothing more than discipline the child, set a boundary, or somehow disappointed him/her. Fortunately, the parent can and should do a lot. In fact, this is a wonderful crisis (danger & opportunity). The danger is for the child to learn hurting others as a way to express his/her own upset. The opportunity is to teach the boundaries between having hurt and appropriate behavior... between self-expression with ownership and vindictive attack. What should the parent do? First of all, discipline (probably with a scolding or a timeout possibly)!

“You’re on timeout! You’re on timeout because you said you ‘hate’ me... because you were trying to hurt me on purpose. You took my love for you to use to hurt me... saying you didn’t want me to be your mommy (or daddy) anymore. You are NEVER allowed to hurt someone on purpose. Yes, you were... are mad. That’s ok. It’s hard to remember that you love me and that I love you when you’re mad. You don’t like me right now. But hurting someone when you are mad is NEVER ok. Yes, you were upset. That’s ok. But it’s NEVER ok to try to hurt someone just because you are hurting too. You can say you’re upset. You can say you’re angry. You can say what you wanted... are disappointed. But you can’t be mean on purpose. You see, later on when you’ve forgotten that you wanted the extra cookie... or another 15 minutes of TV, if you hurt me on purpose, or even by accident, the hurt will still be there for me. As much as you are ready to make up or move on, the hurt will still be with me after whatever it was doesn’t matter anymore. And, that’s not fair. That’s not right. And, if you do it over and over... hurt me over and over, then I will have trouble remembering that I love you, and won’t be able to like you. I’ll be hurt too much. Some people do that all the time. And when they do, they hurt the other person so much that soon the other person can’t be around them anymore. He/she will just hurt too much. If you learn that it’s ok... if you think it’s ok to hurt someone when you’re mad, you will make people stop wanting to be with you. Because I love you even though I am mad at you right now, I need to make sure you know it’s not ok. Even as I am mad, I will not try to hurt you on purpose like you tried to hurt me because you were mad. So, for trying to hurt me on purpose, you’re on time out because you can’t with people when you think you can be mean to them. You’re not on timeout for being upset. Not for being mad. But for being mean on purpose. Mommy or Daddy may accept and forgive you, but in the real world people will punish severely for this. Sit here and think about other ways you could have shown that you were upset and mad.”

NOW POSSIBLY YOU CAN UNDERSTAND YOUR CHILD

Now possibly you can actually understand your child. These issues (Knowing Yourself, Being a Model of Self-Love, Taking Care of Yourself...First!, Being Emotionally and Physically Available, Being able to Separate, Distinguishing Love & Like) need to be resolved or addressed before a parent can have enough clarity to actually understand his/her child’s needs, moods, physical states, emotional states, temperament, environments:



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physical, social, emotional, familial, peer, and school. Otherwise, unresolved intrapersonal and interpersonal issues will continue to obscure that understanding.

Until you have the strong foundation in your own self-esteem and understanding, you cannot really understand your child. In the book, “The Wizard of Oz,” before entering the Emerald City, Dorothy and all other visitors and residents had to put on deep green glasses. With the green glasses, everything that she and everyone saw looked green no matter what their actual colors were. It was a trick of the Wizard’s to make every think that the entire city was made of green emeralds. Often there is a trick of childhood stress (and perhaps even trauma) that causes a grown child- now a parent to see everything in a certain light or tone. You must work to remove those childhood lenses. Your comprehension, until then will be distorted by the filter of your own issues, or you will not be able to accept the information that is given to you. Your child may tell you in his/her behavior and serene security that he/she is fine with a change, but if your childhood filters from your own neglect are in place then you will project anxieties into him/her irregardless. Or, your child may cry out for more structure and discipline, but your childhood perspective of discipline being harsh, punitive, and dismissive will prevent you from receiving the message. And if you don’t understand your child you cannot give him/her the support (parenting) he/sh needs. And, if you do... you will. Understanding also frees you from some of your guilt. And, understanding allows you to also like your child so much more.

This part is the beginning of building self-esteem as well as the last part of your foundation to build self-esteem. This is the ground floor. **THIS IS ALSO WHERE PARENTS USUALLY BEGIN BUILDING, RATHER THAN WITH THE FOUNDATION.** Unfortunately, since they may have skipped the foundation, they cannot build it properly. Remember how uneven and rough the ground was before you dug down into your childhood and life experiences). Just as a great dinner doesn’t begin with jumping to the cooking but begins with great preparation, great parenting begins with becoming a great (happy, secure, stable...) individual- YOU!

Now that the FOUNDATION for Self-Esteem has been established (or understood), next comes the BUILDING: Seven guidelines to Building Self-Esteem in Children.



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Chapter 32

I KNOW I'M NOT A BABY! BUT CAN'T I STILL HURT!?

*Skipping... running... jumping... whee! Fun...fun...whee! Skipping... running... jumping... What if I put my foot there? And, my other foot, there? And, then, swing my arms like... like this? Or...or... like that? And wiggle my bottom like that? Hee hee hee! Cool! Look at me! Look at me! What? Don't what? I'll what? Oh... oh...OH... OH...OH OH! Ahhhh! Help... **Help! BOOM!! OW! OW!***

-Stop it! Stop crying! That's what you get for climbing on that. Stop it! Stop crying! You're not a baby anymore!

But it hurts! OW! But...

-Stop it! You're not a baby! Don't be a crybaby!

But... but... it hurts! I know I'm not a baby, but... can't I still hurt!

GUIDELINES TO BUILDING SELF-ESTEEM IN YOUR CHILD

In the previous articles, we discussed at length at setting the foundation for building the Self-Esteem of your child- building your own emotional, psychological, and physical health. If that foundation has been set, you can now build the "house." You've done the hard part already. In real life, the foundation is **your** own self-esteem; it is something you should always be working on. That is the great challenge of life; the process of continual growth. It is also the great joy of life- to feel oneself constantly becoming more and more able and healthy. Unfortunately, many people who have had major traumas and stresses in their younger lives, suffer damage to their own self worth. Instead of addressing their own issues, they often compensate by seeking to build and rescue their child's self-esteem- to give to them the support and nurturing that was not given to them. They may be become disabled by their own issues to the point, that they helping their children becomes so much harder.

A mother (let's call her "Jean") who as a child suffered emotional and physical abuse from her parents, had sworn never to allow that to happen to her children. Her very feisty and very normal 2-year-old twins could be challenging at times. Despite their somewhat rambunctious energy, they responded very well to clear boundaries and discipline. Yet, constantly she doubted herself whether she was disciplining them properly, and most importantly, whether they were being harmed- even traumatized by her discipline. I focused her on the lively joyous energy of the girls; they looked anything but traumatized! They were the happiest kids around! What was she worried about? Not really about the girls, but worried that "little Jean" would be betrayed again, and this time by "big Jean." Only when she was able to recognize that the little girl she was who was abused by the parents she had, was not the two little girls she now had... that the desperation and



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abandonment she felt, was not the experience of her two little girls, could she focus on giving the loving boundaries and discipline the girls needed for their energy to stay appropriate individually and socially.

On the other hand, you have all seen (perhaps, been) the parent in the vignette at the beginning of this article. Often such a parent has suffered very similar abuse as “Jean.” However, his/her response may be different. He/she may find the child’s distress far too familiar just like “Jean,” but instead of trying to rescue or protect the child from the distress, would want the child to ignore or deny the distress- not for the child’s well being, but so the adult won’t fall into distress. Often a child’s distress brings an adult back to the despair and hopelessness, he/she had experienced as a child when his/her parent was hurtful or neglectful. Feeling with (having empathy with) his/her own child drags the adult back into his/her abyss of despair so powerfully, that the urge to shut off the despair surges forward, even at the cost of denying his/her own child’s distress- “Stop it!” This is quite dangerous as it fundamentally denies the child his/her emotions... denies him/her the reality being experienced.

If you have stabilized own emotional and psychological health, then you can start (if it isn’t you **still** must start! Just be sure to work on yourself simultaneously). First, you must build the framework of the “house”... of Self-Esteem. Everything to follow in the structure goes on the framework of validation.

1) VALIDATE YOUR CHILD- This is difficult to do this without understanding him/her. That was why it was so important to clear out your prejudices, distortions, ghosts, and other issues that confuse and obscure how you see and understand him/her. How can you validate your child- meet his/her needs if you do not really know what is happening to and inside him/her? Being sensitive to his/her needs is not the same as assuming he/she has the identical needs that YOU had when you were young; that would be projecting your sensitivity onto your child whether or not it applies (remember Jean taking care of “little Jean” instead of her own children?). Support your child when he/she has fears, insecurities, and doubts; this is not the same as supporting his/her fears, insecurities, and doubts. You are supporting the child when he/she has these anxious feeling. You can still address the logic of the fears (or the illogic)... still set boundaries about how to behave or not behave, but most importantly do not emotionally abandon the child while he/she is in distress.

Acknowledge the difficulty of the feeling and validate it must be hard to feel it. "You feel scared, huh?", "I understand... it's hard isn't it?", "It doesn't feel good does it?" "You must feel really rotten." Do not minimize or try to undo the bad feelings by explaining why he/she doesn't need to feel scared, or why there "really" isn't any danger, or telling him/her that they are or will be OK (this can be taken as they should be OK). Doing this invalidates the child just as much as calling him/her a "baby", or "silly", "stupid", and so forth. When we try to explain away the child's bad feelings, it doesn't work. In addition, we get frustrated at the child’s lack of reason (but that’s how children think!) We also get frustrated at the lack of reception we are getting from him/her...the imagined **lack of**



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respect, deference, and listening. This often has the effect of provoking **our** internal sense of inadequacy, impotency, insecurity, and ignorance. This can be quite frightening, especially since we have been trying to avoid these feelings... possibly, for years. This is where we tend to ask these loaded questions: Beware of trying or how you try to get explanations from your child for his/her behavior. Many statements or questions have both a surface and an implied underlying component. Be careful that the underlying component is not a dangerous accusation. For example, the simple question, "Why?" can easily have an underlying question of "What's wrong with you?" That underlying question is actually an accusation that "Something IS wrong with you!" (In a previous article, V.1.3, The Most Dangerous Question a Parent can ask the Child "Why did you do that?", I discussed this common and seemingly innocent question more extensively). Another dangerous implicit message underlying "Why?" or "How come you're scared?" or some other request for explanation, is that you must come up with a logical answer, or else you don't have the right to your feelings. In other words, you must justify yourself in order to have the feelings. Not surprisingly, this harmful communication comes up often with couples in therapy that I've conducted.

EXPLORATION & EXPERIMENTATION; STUDY & PRACTICE

Remember, let your child be a child. And, a child will mess up; in fact, will mess up and actually needs to mess up A LOT! The primary process of learning according to cognitive developmental theorist Piaget comes from exploration and experimentation, and that means having some explorations and experiments blow up in your face! The Chinese calligraphy for "learning" is two words written together to indicate the interplay between them creating the meaning: study and practice. While practice doesn't always make perfect (actually, practice makes for lots of mistakes while hopefully, moving towards greater proficiency), it is critical normally for learning. Study, including study of one's mistakes works in conjunction with practice to facilitate learning. A child needs to be allowed to mess up without being labeled or made to feel like a mess up. A mess up is hopeless; messing up is curable or transitory. Children need to understand this in order to learn and grow. Their adults need to understand this in order to validate children in their process.

When your child is in distress because of some "tragedy" or mistake, connect emotionally first. Validate the child in his/her distress. You can do this if you are emotionally available (because having taken care of your emotional/psychological health as part of the foundation to building Self-Esteem we discussed in earlier articles). The words you say are less important than whether you use touch, the tone of your voice, your facial expression, and body language to convey your concern and caring- NOT your problem solving skills (yet). Be sure that your child gets your concern and caring is genuine. Then, you can lead the child to his/her strength or his/her security in your strength and proceed with problem solving.

Continuing the metaphor of building the house, after the foundation (you) and with the framework established (validating your child), now you can add the first of many key elements to the structure.



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2) TEACH RESPONSIBILITY WITHOUT SHAME, BLAME, & FAULT-

Responsibility is about power and control. Respond + Ability = Responsibility. Children and adults, both need to learn how to take responsibility in their lives. Unfortunately, instead of responsibility, many people are taught instead that they should have shame, guilt, and feel at fault. Responsibility is positive. Shame, guilt, and fault, however, are about ones rotten inner essence. Our society often likes to blame. Many people, including people in positions of authority are not willing to take responsibility for the ills in our society. We confuse blame with responsibility. While we all assert and preach that everyone must take responsibility; one cannot take blame- it means one is a rotten person. Many adults have used the word, “responsibility” incorrectly and have contaminated it for others including their children. When does someone tend to talk to you about your responsibility? The problem is, normally when you haven't been responsible AND are about to get in trouble for it. “That was **your** responsibility!” is virtually always spat out as a damning accusation. Avoid blaming and shaming when interacting with or disciplining your child. You can do this better as you better deal with your own shame and guilt issues. It is hard to avoid blaming and shaming if you still blame yourself, feel guilty, or feel the need to be forgiven. Show/model responsibility and give/expect responsibility. Look for the process of responsibility and not the product of responsibility; looking at the product leads to failure and the blaming and shaming that come with failure.

SPLIT MILK THAT LEAVES NO STAINS

Your child runs into the room (he/she has been told not to run inside before), slips and runs into the table and causes the glass of milk to spill onto the table and onto the rug below. If he/she is to blame, at fault, and guilty of this horrendous act, then even if he/she picks up the glass, cleans it, refills it with milk, wipes the table dry, and cleans the rug so that there is no stain, a stain remains on him/her. The stain upon his/her character... upon his/her worth remains no matter how much care he/she takes not only in making amends for the mistake, but in ensuring that he/she does not make the mistake again. It won't matter. Many adults carry such stains from mistakes that their parents shamed and blamed them for as children. However, if the child was not blamed or shamed, but held responsible such enduring damage can be avoided. The child is held responsible for running in the house (you can allow a child to be a child, but that doesn't mean that you still don't teach responsibility), remains responsible for drying the table, cleaning and then refilling the glass with milk, and continuing so no stain stays on the rug. And, because he/she was held responsible and not shamed and blamed, there never was a stain upon his/her soul. AND, he/she continues to be responsible by taking care to prevent repetition of such a mistake.

You can create and direct opportunities for the child to have control and power, to be responsible, to solve problems, to choose without blame or guilt. When he/she does positive things, reflect back to him/her the good choices and the responsible behavior that he/she executed. When he/she makes mistakes, help him/her take responsibility by finding out how to problem solve the mistakes and make amends for the harm they may have caused, **FIRST!** Then, reflect back to him/her the poor choices and irresponsible behavior



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that he/she executed. The reason to focus on the problem solving first (after validating the distress) is to focus the child on affirmative processes- his/her power and control in the situation despite negative issues. The child is already feeling bad about messing up... already in distress, and would experience the “responsibility speech” as insensitivity or being punished... salt added to the wound. Part of the core of the distress is of having made a mistake and having no power or control over making it, nor of fixing it. As you validate the distress of messing up (and inner fear of being a “mess up”), you cannot help him/her undo the mistake, but can help your child address the distress of losing power and control by giving guidance and support to either fix it or make amends for it. How can you do this? You can do this if you are not overly drawn to or sensationalized by the mistake (the behavior) itself. How do you do this? You can do this if you can distinguish your love of your child from liking or not liking his/her behavior (part of the foundation to building Self-Esteem we discussed in earlier articles). The mistake or the behavior was not done “at” you... not done purposely “to” you. Of course, you don’t like it; you’re not supposed to like negative, hurtful, or disruptive behavior- purposeful or accidental. That why you teach... discipline... parent a child to recognize what should be done instead, what can be done now, what the poor choices were, and what better choices would be. And, why do you bother? Because you love your child. However, love is not enough. Work, introspection, health, growth, and... responsibility! are vital too.

Have you learned your responsibility as a parent? Or, do you feel blamed, shamed, and guilty? Can you make the distinction? I and others can honor... however you, above all must honor **your** distress at the mistakes you’ve committed. Also honor **your** distress over the feelings of powerlessness and loss of control. And, remind **yourself** of your continued responsibility- ability to respond with better choices and regain appropriate power and control as a good parent. AND, challenge **yourself** to look at your mistakes to take responsibility for them and to learn from them.



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Chapter 33

NO!! (YOU DON'T HAVE THE RIGHT!)

She's a fierce one, that Hilary. Always pushing it. Always gotta touch what you tell her not to touch. Hotheaded Hilary! The-touch-everything girl. I got my hands full with the dishes. What's she up to now? "Hey... Hey... Don't touch that!" She's pausing... she's looking at me... there's that little smile... no, no... she heard me... she knows I don't want her to touch it... that's why she's smiling! How evil!! "Hil-LAR-REE! Stop it!!" She's looking dead at me... smiling... moving her hand, slowly toward it. She's having fun messing with me! "HILARY, I said don't touch that! I know that you understand me... I know... hey, hey, HEY! I said... I said..." She touched it! She TOUCHED IT!! I KNEW she would touch it. Aaargh! Darn it! And, she's still looking me square in the eyes with that smug smirk on her face. She's enjoying this. She's messing with me! Well, I'LL SHOW HER!! I'LL SHOW HER WHO'S BOSS!! I'LL SHOW HER!! "YOU'RE ON TIME OUT! COME HERE! DON'T YOU RUN AWAY FROM ME! GOTCHA!!" Darn kid! Grab her tight around by the arms... sit her down on the bench! Sit her down with firmness... sit her down with anger... sit her down out of control... sit her down and hurt her with my grip on her arms and the force of her bottom on the bench... With fire in her eyes, Hilary looks up and snarls, "NO! Stop it!"

YOU DON'T HAVE THE RIGHT

This happens between an adult (perhaps, the parent) and a challenging child. It is not something an adult may be proud of. In frustration with her continued testing and acting out, the adult lost patience and forgot... lost the person he/she swore he/she would always be with young children. Hilary did not get seriously or even mildly hurt; she suffered no injury or bruise. But it did not matter. The adult was too rough with her. An adult who was three to seven/eight times as big as a small (admitted fierce) child betrayed the responsibility of the caretaker to the developing youngster. It is up to the individual and his/her real and ideal self to reconcile the mistake. When Hilary snarled, "NO! Stop it!" The adult (hopefully) was immediately stricken with guilt for what he/she had done. And, filled with shame... a fundamental betrayal of who to be for and with children. The adult needs to take immediate responsibility for what he/she had done, how it had gotten to that point; and, continue to take responsibility to make sure that it would never (if at all possible)- violate a child like this again. As stated in a previous article, responsibility is about learning from your mistakes as a parent (because you will make plenty!). Also, in an earlier article (V.1.2 Feedback, Frustration, and Self-Esteem- "You guys better be quiet! Or... Or...!!"), I maintained that making a mistake does not destroy children. It is when mistakes happen over and over in a pattern of behavior and interaction that they become damaging. If the overall pattern is of attention, nurturing, and appropriate discipline, then children can tolerate a parental mistake occasionally. The mistake becomes an opportunity for the adult to learn about him/herself and the greater complexity of the care-taking dynamic. (By the way, if you are still horrified at what the adult did... that is, be human,



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BUILDING SELF-ESTEEM IN THE ADULT-CHILD SYSTEM

and you still chose to condemn, there's not much I can say... about your self-righteous, moralistic, judgmental, and shallow insecurity that needs to put others down to boost your fragile ego! I could refer you to a number of therapists or ministers to work on this, but you wouldn't go anyway!)

When finished with an immediate quick process of shame and guilt to responsibility, the adult (hopefully) was struck by the implicit message... the powerful assertion of Hilary snarling, "NO! Stop it!" "You don't have the right!" "You," in other words, "no one has the right to hurt me!!" I told you Hilary was fierce. Without a doubt, she had many issues in terms of her behavior and how she affected the community of the classroom and school, and her family dynamics that needed to be worked on. On the other hand, her self-determination that she had the right be not be hurt... to not be abused was something she already had... and asserted! After the seven adult fundamentals to the foundation of building Self-Esteem, come the first two guidelines to Building Self-Esteem in Children: Validate Your Child and Teach Responsibility without Shame, Blame, and Fault (discussed in the previous article, V.3.12 I Know I'm Not a Baby! But Can't I Still Hurt!?). Hilary despite her intense combative personality already had internalized the lessons of the next guideline—expressed in part A and part B.

3A) TEACH THAT NO ONE SHOULD BE ALLOWED TO ABUSE HIM/HER- (including you!) Far too often, parents and teachers teach children to not let anyone abuse them, yet harm them with verbal, emotional, and physical abuse (if not even, sexual abuse) within their own homes and classrooms. A common response for many adults challenged by a Hilary would be embarrassed and rather than take responsibility, hide the embarrassment with greater aggression and intimidation against the child. Children are extremely vulnerable to the adults that care for them. They can be mistreated, abused, ignored, neglected, and arbitrarily and unfairly treated out of the view of others. Or, if such treatment were observed, other adults who decide to "mind their own business give often permission by silence. The more a person, people, or community is vulnerable to harm... the greater their dependence is on those they must trust, the greater the responsibility of the person, the people, or institutions that hold power over them. Children are such vulnerable people. As a society, we are not too far removed from a time when children were legally considered to the property of their parents, to do with as they saw fit, as they would do with their other property. Remember that the first child abuse intervention in the United States had no legal status per se based on any mandate to protect children from harm, but was done by officials who had to turn to an existing animal abuse law for legal justification! There still exists in many communities and families that same assertion that a family retains the moral right to physically discipline a child, including to the extent that severe pain and injury may occur. Or, to emotionally or psychologically humiliate or terrorize a child to change behavior, or whenever the adult's mood turns violently.

To grow up in a family where you not only experience abuse but are expected to accept it, perhaps to deny that it is abuse, but call it "discipline" instead, is to learn that you both deserve it and are powerless to stop it. The bully/abuser always make it a point to blame



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BUILDING SELF-ESTEEM IN THE ADULT-CHILD SYSTEM

the victim/abused for “deserving” the bullying/abuse (as was discussed in the previous discussions about the bully and victim dynamic). Someone who grows up in such a family becomes very likely to enter into and stay in relationships where they will allow their intimate partners to abuse them. They replicate the pattern of helplessness and abuse from childhood into adult relationships. Parents do not normally chose to abuse their children, nor intend to duplicate their own childhood trauma, or train them to enter into future dysfunctional relationships. However, in the frustration of their lives, especially when they have experiences with abuse and trauma in their lives (in particular, as children), adults can slip past the boundaries between strict and fair discipline set by caring parents, and arbitrary punitive violations committed by rageful out of control parents.

Adults, to be positive caregivers must acknowledge and admit their own errors. They must understand their own dynamics: what makes them frustrated, what are their needs, their issues with power and control, and so forth. They need to get out of their Twilight Zones so they can be emotionally and psychologically present for their children. Only if they can do this, can they empower their children to assert their right to be free from abuse—even from them! Practically speaking it can be very difficult... even impossible for most children to challenge their parents or teachers. On the other hand, some children and parents get out of control and the challenging becomes defiant and disrespectful; youthful passion and desires devolve into selfish and self-righteous entitlement. This makes it even more incumbent on the adults to be firm and fair, but also sensitive and nurturing in their discipline. It is important to find ways for your child to assert themselves even against your best judgments at times. Perhaps, that may mean letting them win some of the “smaller” battles or disagreements. Parents become over-controlling when all the battles are perceived as “big” and important to win. Children who don’t experience “winning” in the family become more prone to either rebel eventually, or accept domination and exploitation later. Let them tell you when you are wrong when you are wrong. Ya know, that does happen! Can your ego handle that? Some will read this and feel it implies that children be given permission to disrespect their parents and other adults. Obedience is not the same as respect. Silence is not the same as respect. Hopefully, readers will see this as a call for adults to respect children.

3B) TEACH THEM TO ALWAYS TAKE CARE OF HIM/HERSELF- “Always” is an unequivocal word—a powerful mandate. Co-dependent personalities are far from “always” caring for themselves. Such people always give up themselves in order to “buy” other people’s affection or cooperation. Or, to gain power (often, only an illusion of power). The co-dependent personality seeks his/her own happiness by denying his/her own needs (falsely, in a form of self-deception) in order to incur a reciprocal obligation by his/her target. This is not a true selflessness, but an admission of inability to control one’s own happiness directly. Unable to fulfill him/herself, the co-dependent manipulates the target who then “owes” the co-dependent. The target must then take care of him/her. Children need to learn how to always take care of themselves. Learn to ask them to take care of themselves. Teach themselves to ask themselves: “Is this good for me? Or, bad for me?” “I want this now, but how will I feel later?” “Is this healthy?” “Are the



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BUILDING SELF-ESTEEM IN THE ADULT-CHILD SYSTEM

consequences to me and others going to be good?” “How will this be for me now and later?” and other questions that prompt them to care for themselves. Even as you set limits and make decisions for them, be clear how the limits and decision serve them. From this “selfishness,” they can then learn how their needs can be met through, or can be compatible with meeting the needs of family, partners, peers, and community. Sometimes it is appropriate to give up your needs in order to balance the needs of the group (family, peer group, classroom, workplace, etc.). While this may sound contradictory to the mandate of “always” taking care of yourself, taking care of the group dynamic and social harmony is about taking care of yourself. Alienating the group and then being ostracized or rejected (sent into the wilderness, fired, divorced, and so forth) is not a good way to take care of yourself! Balancing individual needs and group needs involves a complexity that these principles can offer guidance for, but cannot be a specific blueprint for.

On the other hand, you certainly cannot possibly teach children to take care of themselves if your model is your sacrificing yourself continually for them! Do you let others (partners, family, bosses, colleagues, peers, authorities, children) abuse YOU? Do you take care of yourself FIRST? Have you integrated being the good caregiver with healthy selfishness? Are you a model of self-love (sometimes, eating the last cookie... or buying the kind of cookies you like!)? As you nurture yourself, you can more readily and honestly be selfless with them. You model how never allow others to abuse you, and how to take care of yourself first within a community context.



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BUILDING SELF-ESTEEM IN THE ADULT-CHILD SYSTEM

Chapter 34

YOU CAN DO IT VS. YOU BETTER DO IT!

This one... this one goes here. Hmmm... good. And this one goes... uh? here? no... here? Humph! Grrrr! It goes HERE!! This way... that way... Aaargh!

Keep trying, honey. You can do it.

This way? No, that way? Hmmm... Got it! Yes!! And this one goes... where? here? Umph! No... maybe... Grrrr! Where does it go? Aaargh! "I can't do it!"

You can do it. Try turning it again. See where the blue is?

Hmmm? Blue? Blue here too... turn... Good! Got it!! I know where this one goes. It goes... here! NOT! Grrrr! Humph! "I hate this puzzle!" SMACK!!

No, honey. I know it's hard, but it's not OK to hit the puzzle. You can do it. Try this piece. See the big round part? Can you find a hole that it fits? I know you can do it.

Hmmm? Big round part... big round hole? Maybe... here? Here? Yes! And, this one... here. And, this one... ahh... here! And, this the last one... ummm... here!! I CAN do it!!

Yes! You DID do it! I knew you could! Hip hip hooray for honey!

THE "BEST" IS TRANSCENDED

All parents want the best for their children. How they "encourage" and "support" them varies to a great deal and is often dependent on what they perceive is the "best" or, conversely the "worse" for their children. What is the "best" for your child? Each parent's definition of what is the best comes from his/her own life experiences, challenges, difficulties, and even their trauma and pain. For some, the "worse" is for their children to re-live the same pain they had endured as children. In the generation who grew up in the Great Depression, the "best" was defined by the need to compensate for the suffering created by the economic hardships of the times. Breadlines, assaults to one's dignity, financial desperation... fear, dominated the children's lives. As adults and as parents who suffered, the "best" may mean financial security. Emotional and psychological health and nurturing were overshadowed by the stress of basic survival uncertainties. The stress ignited painful and destructive emotional and psychological experiences. A perception of their parents "failure" (although, there had been no failure on their part, rather their being victimized by political and economic circumstances beyond their control) may drive such a parent to define the "best" in terms of anything that promotes financial acquisition and retention.



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BUILDING SELF-ESTEEM IN THE ADULT-CHILD SYSTEM

For a person who grew up in an emotionally barren home, the “best” may mean the unconditional emotional availability of one’s parents. I am always reminded of the client who had emotionally unavailable parents, on an overnight visit to her little girlfriend’s house. She recalled watching with envy and longing, her friend’s mother gently tucking her friend into bed, saying goodnight, and then giving her a gentle goodnight kiss on the cheek. And then being thrilled beyond words, when her friend’s mother came to her bed to tuck her in as well, wish her a good night, and give HER a gentle peck on her cheek- a simple act of affection that shone in contrast like a diamond amidst the coals of her desolate family experience. Twenty-five years later, this moment of caring still rang powerful and nostalgically in this woman’s life. For her, the “best” for her children was driven by her need to compensate for the emotional desert she endured as a child.

As a son of a Chinese immigrant family, the “best” as perceived and promoted by my parents had much to do with their experiences growing up in China culturally in a Confucian feudal society, during a period of political and economic turmoil and of ongoing warfare (late 1920’s and early 1930’s through the late 1940’s). On the other hand, my formative years were the 1960’s of socially activist Berkeley! Talk about a contrasting definition of the “best” as promoted by the progressive-radical idealism of those times! Reconciling their perceptions and teachings with my reality (Berserkeley, as it was often sarcastically referenced) became a major challenge of my childhood. For the children of the child (now adult) of the Depression, their conflict would be between their parent’s Depression (deprivation-defined) values and their current reality based upon their actual lifestyle, which often can be relatively financially secure and comfortable (normally and ironically, from the driven work ethic from fear and anxiety of their parents). Their definition of what is the “best” may evolve from and beyond the financial security they already have, while simultaneously being stuck in the financial insecurity that traumatized their parents. For the woman who’s kiss from her friend’s mother was so precious and sweet, her adamant nurturing of her children would probably give them an emotional security from which they can grow from. By gifting her children with this “best,” her children can transcend it (and not hunger for it as she did)- if she did not smother them. Compulsive loving, giving, and nurturing from this personal historical insecurity however, can cause problems too (for example, result in a failure to set appropriate boundaries and consequences for children). With a healthy integration of this parental love though, such children will have the emotional security to seek and define their “best” from it. They probably can risk emotional disconnection and abandonment in seeking other, additional, and higher forms of self-actualization more readily than their mother, from having a stronger core of self-worth from the unconditional love. They would have transcended their mother’s needs (in a very positive manner).

This is another reminder to not “give grandmother roller-skates!” In other words, what is desperately precious to you may not be precious in the same way to your children. Parents usually compensate for what they wanted but did not receive as children, by OVER-compensating in giving that to their children. And, as a result, eliminating any deprivation based longing for that. This is not to say that giving or promoting financial



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BUILDING SELF-ESTEEM IN THE ADULT-CHILD SYSTEM

security, or love, or culture is not appropriate or loving, but that intense urgency does not have to move into the next generation. When parents are clear in their own process (including their traumas and neuroses!), they progress so they can more readily follow through on the fourth guideline on building Self-Esteem in their children.

4) CHALLENGE / NOT PUSH; HAVE EXPECTATIONS / NOT DEMANDS- Parents sometimes push their children with demands that can be extremely stressful and sometimes individually and/or developmentally completely inappropriate. This happens when they develop rigid standards of behavior that have little or nothing to do with their children's actual needs or personality, but that have somehow been raised to a high (often moralistic) level through either personal experiences or the promotion of some authoritative "expert." The previous paragraphs give some examples of such personal experiences. The experts may be an author, a teacher, a minister, some political figure, in a book, from a magazine, on TV, and/or the movies. While many such people and sources often give excellent information, they are speaking to generalities and principles about "many" children, "most" children, or "a significant portion" of children. Many of these principles and concepts are excellent and soundly based (some are incredibly off the wall, judgmental and moralistic, or archaic!). However, even the soundest theories need to be examined for specific applicability to your specific, individual, unique, one-of-a-kind child! And, even if a theory is applicable to your precious one-and-only, how specifically and variably is it expressed in your child... and when? And for how long? Under what circumstances? Here we go with the children are complicated and thus parenting is complicated routine! Well, if they weren't complicated and parenting complicated, then maybe they wouldn't be children, but inert lumps of clay you can mold instead!

Base your expectations of behavior on child-centered appropriateness based on research and study, instead of adult-generated standards, adult-generated fear of failure, or your reaction to your own oppression as a child. Individualize all your and society's stuff to your unique being of a child. Accept him/her as unique and special and treat him/her so---individualize! Challenging and having expectations of a child differs from pushing and making demands of him/her in the respect for his/her uniqueness. To challenge someone, you need to find the edge of his/her comfort zone and discomfort zone. To challenge someone, you need to find the extreme edge of competence where secure competence moves into uncertainty about one's ability. When you push someone, you push not matter where they are. You are pushing them towards what may be highly uncomfortable or even what might be highly dangerous. You may be pushing them well beyond their capacity and competence. Such pushing pushes them into failure. Growth and learning happen at the edge of discomfort—not in the secure comfort zone, but also not in the zone of radically unfamiliar or foreign territory. The simple, familiar, and secure offer no challenge or growth opportunities (is even boring!) and the over-demanding prompts feelings of incompetence and creates overwhelming anxiety. Challenging differs from pushing in that the challenge to go beyond where one is, while pushing is force one to a specific spot no matter how dangerous it is and no matter how unprepared one is.



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BUILDING SELF-ESTEEM IN THE ADULT-CHILD SYSTEM

Expectations, especially expectations to try, to be engaged, to struggle imply encouraging children to be in a process of growth. Demands define the goals explicitly and punish one for not reaching them. Demands are achievement oriented while expectations are developmentally oriented. How is a parent to distinguish between challenging and pushing? Between expectation and demands? To challenge and have expectations, you need to be aware of and respectful of your child's individuality, developmental stages, and personality. You need to know your child... as completely as possible. Then, you can nudge, encourage, or bring them to their edge of discomfort to conquer new horizons and grow. And, be able to give them the appropriate support to handle the slight (not overwhelming) discomfort.

YEA DADDY!

Do you push your child to read? Or, do you challenge him/her to explore words, stories, and books? Do you demand performance to your standards? Or, do you expect your child to try... to have values... to consider new things? And, do you do all that whether or not he/she is engaged, in distress, joyful, or anxious? Do you provide the support his/her personality and aptitudes need? Or, do you provide what Dr. BigShotChildlessExpert says ALL children need? And, most importantly, do you model and live challenge and expectations in your life? Many parents push (uh... or "support") their children because of what they had not done or achieved in their own lives. They push their children to reach their potential because of their remorse and shame from not having reached their own potential. Sometimes parents act as if their opportunity to grow and excel has passed... that their responsibility to stretch is over or complete... that with their personal failure, they are then obligated to give up on personal growth and give 100% (or 150%!) to promoting their children's growth and success. At least, the next generation will "make it". Unfortunately, as much as they are invested in their children, they compromise their support by presenting a live model of stagnation and surrender. Several years ago, after four difficult years balancing a business, other work, and family with a Masters of Psychology program, I completed the degree, my first step towards a career change from education and child development to becoming a therapist. My wife and I decided to celebrate the milestone with a nice dinner with the family- our two little girls and us. When I told Trisha who was 7 years old at the time about going out, she asked me why. She had been three and her younger sister not quite one when I had begun the degree program. I told her,

"Remember, when you finished Kindergarten? You had learned a lot of things and worked really hard for ten months, and then you and your friends had finally finished Kindergarten. Remember how special that was? And, then everyone got together to have a special celebration because finishing Kindergarten is really great. Well, you know I've been going to a school for a long time too... four years... it was a lot of work and hard too. You remember me staying up late and studying? And being sleepy and tired? And, going to classes sometimes at night and on Saturdays? Well, I finished! And, now I'm a Masters program graduate... kinda like you were a Kindergarten graduate. I finished too, and we're going to dinner to have a family celebration for that!"



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BUILDING SELF-ESTEEM IN THE ADULT-CHILD SYSTEM

I'll always remember with great fondness as Trisha's expression transformed from curiosity to understanding, and a twinkle appeared in her eyes and big smile spread across her face, and she shouted out sweetly with a pump of her little fist, "Yea daddy!" As she grew over the years (presently, deciding on which college to attend) and we tried to challenge (not push) and have expectations (not demands) of her, it was not "challenge yourself although your dad didn't challenge himself... take these current expectations of ours to see if they can be yours too, even though dad was scared to have expectations." Daddy is not a hypocrite! Much more importantly (significantly, more important than any achievement per se of mine), she had a visible living model of challenge and struggle in daddy. "Go for it? Take a chance? Struggle for what you want? Do something hard? Stretch? **Sure!** Might be rough, but **Daddy** did it before, **I** must be able to do it too! It was hard for him, but he still did it. It may be hard for me, but **I can still try**... and maybe (probably?) do it too! I'm a can-do kid!" (Mommy has been quite a model of growth and courage too, by the way!) Both of our daughters are willing to be challenged and try to meet expectations. For this, we are happy. Better than that, is that as teenagers, they are willing to challenge themselves and have expectations of themselves.



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BUILDING SELF-ESTEEM IN THE ADULT-CHILD SYSTEM

Chapter 35

YOU'RE THE BEST... REALLY, YOU'RE THE BEST... REALLY...

You're the best. You have so much ability.

Thanks, Mom. Thanks.

Look how well you did in the last show. Your timing... how you remembered all your lines...

Thanks, Mom. Thanks.

The other parents noticed too... really, you're the best...

OK, Mom. Thanks.

I hope you realize how special you are... really...

Yeah yeah, Mom. Thanks.

You keep it up. I'm so proud of you. You're the best.

Uh... Thanks, Mom. Give it a rest. Thanks, already.

There's nothing you can't do. So smart... so talented...

Hmmm? How come she keeps on? Does she REALLY believe it?

Maybe she doesn't think I believe it! Or, SHOULD believe it!

There are times when parents and adults just overdo it with praise. They praise and praise and praise trying to build the Self-Esteem of children. However, as they praise they can also convey doubt... doubt that the children actually are worthy of the praise, and/or doubt that the children really believe it. In a previous article (V.1.4, Significance Meets Socialization & Frustration), I wrote about how when the people that are significant to you, find you to be significant as well build your Self-Esteem. Praise comes from this principle. However, just as there was more to building Self-Esteem than just significance, there is more to significance than just praising children. Frequent and undifferentiated praise can have an unexpected debilitating effect. Effusive praise can have the unfortunate effect of making people dependent upon the approval of others. If a child or a person becomes accustomed to... becomes dependent upon praise to motivate him/her to give honest effort, to have high standards of performance, and to achieve competency, then what may result is an individual who will not remain conscientious **if there is no one there to praise, to acknowledge, or to reward him/her**. Successful people have expectations (a strong ideal self) and seek personal effort, performance, and skills whether or not there is anyone else present to note it. Most of us can enjoy praise, but being dependent on it is dangerous.

HIDING THE "INNER FRAUD"

On the other hand, we recognize the danger of not praising children. However, to what degree should we praise? I can recall many a parent or teacher praising a child, repeating over and over how great he/she was or is. The child took the initial praise with some slight embarrassment. As the adult continued, the child became more and more uncomfortable. Some adults tell a child how much potential he/she has because he/she was not meeting it- a backhanded way to criticize in the guise of support. It is not



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BUILDING SELF-ESTEEM IN THE ADULT-CHILD SYSTEM

unusual for a child to be uncomfortable with praise for another reason. In fact, many adults have a fear that their “Inner Fraud” would be exposed. They fear they will be exposed as a fraud... that they do not deserve the praise and even adulation that they receive... and worse yet, that they have actually **fooled** everyone into thinking that they are competent, talented, and deserving. How do people universally acclaimed by appreciative and knowledgeable peers, friends, and family become consumed with such anxiety despite their great skills and outstanding performances? The Inner Fraud develops when a person gets praise from significant people, not to acknowledge competency or performance but as demands for competency and performance that is often outside the comfort zone... the normal range of functional and developmental ability of the individual. Along with such praise/demands is an implicit “or else” message, that failure to show competency or performance indicates ones inherent unworthiness. Terrified to expose such unworthiness to those he/she finds significant, the individual struggles mightily (often denying emotional and psychological health and developmental needs) to deliver... to meet the praise/demand. However, even as he/she is successful, the individual cannot celebrate the accomplishment in as far as he/she feels success has been achieved by the skin of his/her teeth or luck or deception. Any satisfaction in his/her achievement lacks depth or meaning, and is transitory. And, he/she fears that he/she will be exposed as a fraud any second. Worse yet, now others will expect it of him/her again! Since there is a danger of creating an “Inner Fraud” through demanding praise, the next guideline to building Self-Esteem in children is to be able to

5) PRAISE APPROPRIATELY- Is your praise really a demand for performance in disguise? Is it a nice (but insidiously sneaky and destructive) way to express disappointment? Is it sincere praise? False praise rings hollow to even little children. Praise for lousy effort is insincere and at it’s worse, reinforces the lousy effort. There are people who are sparse with praise who never or rarely acknowledge others effort, competency, achievements, or performances. There might be family models or cultural factors that limit or preclude praising children. In totalitarian societies, self-esteem, which is promoted by praise, is actually avoided, since it makes one stand out to be possibly harmed by those in power. However, in our democratic society, this cultural factor is not as relevant. Those who have suffered the lack of praise from parents often resolve to not to replicate such behavior, and easily and frequently praise their own children. However, some adults praise effusively and dishonestly for lackadaisical or careless effort. I have often seen children scribble onto a piece of paper with disinterest and minimal effort, then present it to a well-intended adult who then praises it as a work of art! The adult reinforces that mediocre effort and marginal investment will be accepted in the real world to come (elementary and high schools, college, and the adult vocational world). This flawed approach is based upon an assumption that a child will be devastated if he/she is not positively reinforced... that his/her self-esteem is so fragile that it must be supported with false praise... with lies.



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BUILDING SELF-ESTEEM IN THE ADULT-CHILD SYSTEM

IN THE REAL WORLD

As children move into the real world where no one loves them like their parents love them, they will expect treatment and expectations similar to what they had received from their parents. They will continue to expect praise for poor performance and low investment. To their surprise, others such as teachers, coaches, peers, supervisors, bosses, boyfriends & girlfriends, and spouses will reject rather than accept minimal and marginal effort and performance. They will be devastated (in being rejected), disabled (by having not acquired the skills or work ethics), and/or angered (from their sense of entitlement) as others care little or not at all about supporting their self-esteem; and care entirely about their performance or contribution on the job, in the classroom, or in the relationship. False praise can build up a false self that the child is aware of as being false, or accepts as legitimate although others reject it. Praise the process and validate the energy, if the process and energy deserve it. How do you do that? **You must know the child to be able to do this properly.** You must know what is developmentally appropriate for your child at his/her given age... and what is his/her individual capacity- his locus of proximal development (as was discussed in the previous article). How should you respond? What would be your goal? Is it just to criticize the child? Of course, not. **The goal of parental/adult praise should be to teach the child how to self-praise.** Consider responding in a different manner when a child presents performance that is clearly beneath his/her capacity (versus not meeting your standards!)... a drawing for example.

DO YOU LIKE IT?

The child asks, "Do you like it?" Children often have learned early how to fish for praise from adults. Many supportive adults may respond with the lie, "Oh, I really like it! It's so pretty. You did such a good job." Poor work becomes supported. Expectations of poor work being acceptable are created. The adult may instead respond by asking the child, "Hmmm... Do YOU like it?" If the child is sincerely self-evaluative, he/she may respond, "Well, I don't really like it," or "It's OK." Then the adult can prompt, "Well, there's some parts that are nice. Over here... and over here. I think you did a good job there. What do you think?" The adult is not only pointing out what is worthy of praise but also prompting the child to be self-evaluative. The adult can then add, "I think there are some parts that you can make better. Do you see them?" While there is an acceptance of the quality that exists, the adult also prompts the child to see where he/she can improve the quality of his/her work. If the child does see these areas and then is willing to work on them, he/she should be praised for the self-evaluation and the conscientiousness of wanting to improve. If the child has difficulty seeing these areas, the adult should point them out. If the child is hesitant to improve these areas, the adult should give honest feedback that the quality remains marginal without improvement. Depending on the circumstances, the adult may even sternly require the child to do additional work on it. Once the child has put the additional effort and work into his/her project, then the adult should prompt the child to praise him/herself, "What do you think now? How do you like how it looks now?" Hopefully, the child will be able to self-acknowledge and say, "I like it better now." Then the adult can respond with integrity, "I like it too! Good job." In other words, the adult



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should then praise BOTH the higher quality of the project and the child's additional energy in improving the project (that is, if the additional effort was sincere as opposed to cursory... again). "Aren't you glad you worked on it some more? I think it was worth it, don't you think? Tell yourself, 'good job!'"

Are you criticizing the child, or perhaps teaching him/her to criticize him/herself? Criticism in of itself does not have to be negative or harmful- it is the critiquing of performance or effort... it is not necessarily a **judgment** of the quality or inherent worth of the individual. It is when poor or mediocre performance is equated with an individual's poor or mediocre worth, or good performance is equated with an individual's high worth that criticism becomes dangerous. Criticism may be difficult to present in a nurturing manner if the adult is unaware or dismissive of the child's temperament and sensitivity. It is incredibly difficult to do well if the critic is not staying with the child's abilities. All criticism should include praise; validate effort and energy; be honest; be age and child appropriate. Criticism (perhaps, further defined as evaluation and feedback) should be toward extending the potential of the child- challenging at the edge of his/her potential, and not according to some outside standards. Socialization oriented criticism must be at the child's level of comprehension and relevant (that is, of a positive service) to his/her life. Self-criticism then serves the same positive purpose. And, self-criticism should then include self-praise for good effort, integrity, and performance as well. Many people however are comfortable about praising others but can only be negatively self-critical of themselves. They are unable to acknowledge their own achievements and positive qualities; they cannot self-praise.

BREAKING THE "RULE" OF FALSE HUMILITY

There is often a basic hypocrisy in our culture that on the one hand encourages the development of high self-esteem, and on the other hand, labels anyone who actually self-acknowledges (much less dares to verbalize) his/her own ability, a fathead! Sometimes in my workshop presentations including ones on developing self-esteem in children, I purposely provoke this contradiction in my audience by proclaiming that, "I am very good as a speaker. In fact, I am an excellent presenter!" While some participants laugh out loud, other might smile and nod in affirmation, but still others' mouths drop open in shock, thinking

"He broke the rule... you know... the RULE. The rule that says you must be humble... you must pretend that you don't have skills, abilities, or talents. You're supposed to be self-deprecating. Deflect any praise, deny any praise... not... not say you are good at something! Even though, you may have been working all your life to become good at it... even though, everyone else says you are good at it. Even though, I've been sitting in this room thinking, feeling that you ARE good at it... But, I'm supposed to say it... NOT you! And, then you're supposed to be humble and blush and... and... **You're supposed to build self-esteem in children... NOT ASSERT IT IN YOURSELF!**"



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The rule of false humility does not serve children becoming strong. If they cannot give themselves deserving praise and no one is around to give it to them, then there is no reward for positive behavior. Some people claim they do not need praise because, “Doing a job well is praise enough.” If that were true, then why do they so readily praise everyone else!/? And why are we so encouraged and pleased when we get praise? Doing a job well is praise enough, if you can self-praise when you deserve it whether or not anyone else can or will. Adults often need to be first to break the rule of false humility so that their children can see and experience the adults’ model of self-acknowledgement. Once again, the adults’ ability to love themselves gives a healthy model for children to love themselves. Teaching children to self-praise leads to the next guideline to building Self-Esteem in children.