

Ending Adversarial Parent-Child Relationships



Send him mail.



"Insight for the Young and Unrestrained" is an original column appearing every Thursday at Everything-Voluntary.com, by Gregory V. Diehl. Gregory is a writer, musician, educator, and coach for young people at EnabledYouth.com. Archived columns can be found [here](#). IYU-only RSS feed available [here](#).

Let's face it: odds are pretty good that the world isn't doing a very good job of preparing your kids to make their way through it. Young people today likely feel more lost and misdirected about their emotions, identity, and lifestyle choices than any other generation in history. The world is changing so fast that it can be exhausting to try to keep up with it. This is why it is so important to develop awareness and self-discipline early on in life.

Healthy relationships with children ultimately depend upon being able to see the world from their points of view. Dysfunction at home stems from a lack of proper empathy and communication. Parents see the world in a very different way than their kids do. This is completely necessary for helping raise and guide them from your many years of experience, but it leaves a major separation between your mind and theirs. This separation is why so many children do not see their parents as someone they really trust and like. These children see their parents, at best, as necessary evils who feed them at the cost of imposing restrictions.

It shouldn't be a struggle for control or a contest for superiority. It's about developing the openness to see the world through each other's eyes and treat each other with the respect you both deserve. This is the foundation to lifelong happy family relationships. If you are open to it, you'll find that your kids have just as much to teach you as you do them. Many adults lack the ability to think like children. Instead of guiding kids to find the right answers and make their own progress, they project their own "superior" mentality and experience. They don't even recognize young people as independent volitional beings. They try to raise children as if they were dogs that needed training.

There is no topic too dark or scary to cover in good parenting. Young men need an older influence they can look up to. They need someone who has traveled a similar journey to them and overcome similar hardships. They need a nurturing mother who demonstrates and teaches the power of feminine strength. Young women need an example of a caring

masculine figure who can give them the perspective and guidance of a battle-hardened hero. They will need an experienced female to see how they can be soft and vulnerable but voracious and powerful at the same time. These are fundamental factors in healthy human development.

The world is not ready to give children everything they need for healthy emotional development. Many of these children act out and create problems for themselves. Gifted and unusual children consistently find the social resources available to them inadequate for personal development. You must be willing to question many of your most basic beliefs about the best way to interact with your son or daughter and commit to being accountable for change if you wish to be the parent they need. You should be introspective and search for solutions to the problems you encounter with your family. Your goal should be to treat your children, no matter their age or your relationship with them, as human beings worthy of your respect. This is required if you are ever to expect the same level of respect and love from them.

Define Your Problems and Goals

Many people complain about the enormous number of problems they face at home without even being able to clearly articulate them. The main reasons people fail to make progress toward their goals is that they have not really realized what they actually want. It often takes a powerfully introspective (and sometimes confrontational) form of conversation and questioning to help people make the necessary revelations about what they need.

Identify Their Causes

Behind every surface level problem in family relationships or childhood behavior, there are fundamental principles at work. Some people never make significant progress with their relationships with their children because they spend all their time fighting the symptoms and never addressing what the real issues are. It's critical to always identify what the real issue is before attempting a solution.

Create a Practical Plan of Action

The inspiration to change can happen instantly, but in practice it takes time. Meaningful change has to come in realistic and measurable steps. Start by removing obstacles which stop you from reaching your goals. Obstacles can include certain people in your life, stressors, obligations in your daily schedule, emotional hang-ups, and a lack of physical resources. When the impeding objects are removed, you can start making a little progress every week in the direction you want to go.

Keep Yourself on Track

It's crucial to continually reassess your progress and the trajectory you've chosen. You may realize your goal has shifted in a slightly new direction. It is foolhardy to stick to an old goal in light of new awareness and desires. Regular coaching conversations ensure that clients do not fall back into old patterns of thought and action. It is important not to underestimate how hard it can be to change old habits after decades of practice.

There is no stress, no problem, and no pain which cannot be transformed into strength if a person adopts the right mentality. Through learning this discipline, the worst experiences of your life can become your most empowering lessons. When you apply this discipline to your family life and relationship to your children, you can put an end to the unfortunate stereotype that parent/child relationships must always be adversarial.

Of course, the further along your children are in their development and the longer they've spent viewing you as a necessary evil instead of a protector, the harder it will be to reverse the trend. This does not mean it's impossible. Total paradigm changes can happen at any age, and if your mind is still plastic enough to make the shift then certainly theirs will be too when you provide the space for it. You'll be sparing them the fate of a lifelong nagging hole in their lives from a poor parental relationship, and they'll be far less likely to pass this hole onto their own kids someday.