

Treating Children as Individuals

Guest column by Sara Dawkins. Sara is an active nanny, as well as an active freelance writer. She is a frequent contributor to Nannypro.com. Learn more about her here.

Being born in the late fifties and being raised by my dad who was a product of the world around WWII and the Korean War was somewhat difficult. He was the kind of dad who believed in children being seen but not heard. We were all alike in his books and we all were treated equally. With the same discipline being dished out to each child no matter what the disposition and individual needs of that particular child were. It made it rough growing up. He had determined in his mind that we were not going to be like him since he had been raised in a home where he was spoiled, being the only son in a relatively wealthy home during a time when most were doing without. We were certainly not going to get anything special or get any extra help because of what had gone on in his childhood. He did not have a clue that all children were not alike and that we were indeed not *him*.

I grew up with two siblings and each of us was very different in our personalities. What worked for one in the way of discipline did very little for the other. There was one strong-willed child, one handicapped child, and I was extremely introverted. I am sure my dad was not knowingly or willfully trying to sabotage our individual lives, but without knowing our individual bents he was not helping us to grow up as healthy, productive adults. I know that on my part being strictly and harshly punished did me absolutely no good. I was an easy going child anyway and had an easily broken heart. This form of punishment only served to push me even further inside myself which caused me no end of problems in my teenage years as well as into adulthood. The strong-willed sibling became an angry and hard person as they got older. Not knowing a child and what works for their particular personality can be detrimental.

Having this background has helped me in my parenting because I am the type of person who can use the mistakes of the past to create a better future. It is not enough to just say, "I will not do what my parents did," you must also get to know your children's hearts. Not all of us are able to do this in our lives and so we should keep this in mind when parenting our children.

I myself have two children who are opposite in almost every area of life. They are different sexes, different personalities, and are driven by different motivators. One needs little motivation to produce great results and one can be motivated until you are blue in the face and still it will not get you far. Only God truly knows these little hearts and minds but it is up to us as parents to lead these little ones on the best path for their individual personalities. We must remember that they are individuals and not clones of our

personalities. Just because they came forth from our loins does not mean that they will be like us. They will learn the same customs, the same culture, the same values, the same ideals even, but they will not come out thinking and acting just like their parents or their siblings.

My children are older now and I found myself making mistakes when they were in their teens, particularly when it came to the privilege of driving. Remember, driving is a privilege which should only be given to those who are emotionally and mentally ready for it. I actually had to insist that one of my children learn to drive because they were so timid and frightened by going out on their own. I was afraid the wait would seal the deal of them never driving. When the other child became of age they were excited to drive and I believed them equal to their sibling in maturity but quickly found out that it was not the case. Something I should have seen in their personalities that I missed. They got a taste of freedom and ran with it, like a rabid animal! Not a good decision on my part.

It is really hard to recognize this as a parent sometimes. We think that because we think in a certain way about things that our children will automatically think that way also. I am not talking about belief systems or family values here, I am talking about likes and dislikes, being laid back or being extremely active, being easy going or stubborn, and all the personality traits in between. Are they the type of child that takes advantage of situations or do they maintain their self discipline even when you are not around? These traits do not make them the right or wrong kind of person but they are what make them an individual. We as parents need to see these traits and be able to guide them into self control, perseverance, and being able to discipline themselves to stay on the right track.

It is not only for the sake of discipline that you need to remember your child is an individual but for the sake of their imaginations and interests and goals in life. Every one of us as adults have different ways of achieving our goals and seeing our desires come to fruition. Children are no different; they need help in discovering their special talents and how to achieve them. You, as an individual, know that you can not achieve your goals and desires the same way as even your spouse and yet we expect our children to be just like us and we raise them accordingly.

God created each and every one of us as completely unique and special in our own way and it is important that we remember this when raising our children. You can raise them to be just like you and in many cases this works out beautifully for a child. But you may never know the great potential that is in that young child's life unless you discover what makes them tick and how to stimulate their imaginations and creativity. Get to know your children in their heart of hearts and do not simply think of them as extensions of yourself. You will raise a child that is complete and whole and fully themselves and they will be so very grateful to have been raised by someone with such insight and great love.