

SEE IT BIG, BUT KEEP IT SIMPLE (FOR PARENTS)

By George M. Graham Jr.

Stephen R. Covey, in his book The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People, refers to human nature as being four dimensional. He identifies the four dimensions as body, mind, heart, and spirit. As parents, we should endeavor to address our children's needs and wants in each of these four dimensions of human nature. This will help our children to become well-balanced and more prepared for all aspects of life.

In my previous article, I talked about all children having basic needs and wants that must be addressed in order for them to be able to grow, develop, and become successful. In this article, we will specifically be looking at some of the basic positive, practical practices that parents can implement to help their children. These practices, along with those that will be shared in the next several articles, will address ways of impacting the four dimensions of body, mind, heart, and spirit.

Before we move into the positive, practical practices, I would like to focus on the first hurdle that parents of children with disabilities must overcome. It is the hurdle of the initial discovery that their child has a disability. Parents may experience one of many possible emotional reactions to this discovery. One of the factors that may impact their reaction may be the severity of the disability and/or the type of disability the child may have.

Parents may become increasingly aware of something being different or unusual about their child. They may observe that their child is struggling academically, or behaving in a fashion that would be considered as beyond the ordinary type of behavior, or possibly the child may have something physically going on that is obviously not quite right. When they are finally able to find an answer to their growing concern, some parents experience the emotional reaction of being very relieved.

It is not relief in knowing their child has a disability, but they are relieved to finally know the cause of the problem they have observed. This scenario can be compared to a person who has been suffering certain physical symptoms and is not sure what may be the cause of the symptoms. The person may spend hours being worried and concerned about all the possible things that could be wrong. Once the doctor makes a diagnosis and the cause is known, the person has a feeling of relief. Sometimes it is the "not knowing" that causes a great amount of stress and concern. Even if the illness may be serious, it is finally having an answer and knowing the cause that can reduce the stress and concern.

For other parents the reaction can be that of the emotion of grief. They may initially ask themselves questions like: Why is this happening to me? What have I done to deserve this? Why is this happening to my child? We have all had to deal with grief to some degree or another. It can be compared to what you may have experienced when you have lost a loved one. This can cause deep emotional wounds, and a person cannot experience real happiness until the wounds are healed. Therefore, it may entail a process of moving through the five stages of grief.

The first stage is the stage of denial, when you are in disbelief and experiencing numbness to the situation. The second stage would be anger, when you are blaming others for what has happened. The third stage is bargaining, when you are begging, wishing, and praying for this situation to change or be different. The fourth stage is depression, when you are in a depressed state and experiencing sadness and/or crying. The fifth stage is acceptance, where you can finally come to terms with the situation and move on.

It is possible that parents may experience some overlapping or a combination of these stages at the same time. Another possibility is that they may become fixated on one stage for an extended period of time before being able to move through the process. In some very extreme cases, parents may get stuck in one of these five stages and never be able to overcome that stage. In any of these possible scenarios it is important to remember that it will take time for the healing process to occur.

No matter what may be the reaction to the initial discovery of their child having a disability, parents come to the point of saying, “Ok, now what do we do?” They will need assistance in seeking out help and support for their child.

Even as important as getting help for their child, they will need help and support for themselves. There are many organizations and support groups available to parents that can assist them to find help and get the support they need.

Parents need to know that there is always hope! They need to know there are others who understand, who empathize with them, and who care! They need to know they can get help for their children and themselves. They need to know there are steps that they can take to help their child!

One of the most basic positive, practical practices that a parent can implement is to ensure that their child gets sufficient sleep. Unfortunately, in our hectic, fast paced society people tend to forget the importance of sleep. Research has documented the seriousness of sleep deprivation and the impact it has on adults as well as on children.

Many children simply do not get the proper rest that they need. Their little bodies need time to rejuvenate and restore themselves while they are sleeping. It has been proven that chronic sleep loss can contribute to some serious health problems as well as contribute to irritability and behavior issues.

There are differences of opinion as to what constitutes the proper amount of sleep that an individual needs. It is true that it may vary from individual to individual. However, many sources agree that children ages 3-6 need from 10 to 12 hours of sleep per night. Children ages 6-9 need approximately 10 hours per night. Children ages 9 through their teens need approximately 9 hours per night.

It is amazing the difference that can be observed when a child is getting the proper amount of sleep on a consistent basis. They can perform better in every way. More importantly it will improve their quantity and quality of life.

Another important positive, practical practice is to ensure children are getting a nutritious, healthy diet. It is imperative that children get the proper foods that will help their minds and bodies grow and develop! Children will benefit from eating healthy foods such as fresh vegetables, fresh fruits, fish and fish oil (those with plenty of omega-3 fatty acids), and nuts and seeds, just to name a few.

There are those who recommend that whenever possible, it is best to endeavor to purchase organic foods. This is another topic where there are differences of opinion. However, there is indication that the chemicals that are used to deter insects from attacking fruits and vegetables as they grow could have a negative impact on our bodies. There is evidence that toxic chemicals affect the central nervous system which includes the brain.

There is a strong indication that sugar, processed foods, and preservatives can have a negative impact on your child's physical and mental health. Research documents the effects of sugar on children's behaviors. Parents should consider removing, or at least cutting back on sodas, candy, cakes and other processed foods that may have a lot of chemical preservatives.

Diet does have a very strong impact on the brain and other bodily functions. Again, the research documents that some children will develop allergies to food additives which can cause allergic reactions like hyperactivity, difficulty in concentrating, and difficulty in staying focused. These are just a few of the possible symptoms that can develop from toxins, chemical preservatives, and food dyes.

While we are on the topic of healthy diet, I would like to point out the importance of drinking water as well. Water plays a major part in all of our body's functions. When we are appropriately hydrated, we think more clearly, we are better able to fight off sickness, and our body's systems can function more properly. Research on the brain indicates that one thing that can help students to perform better on testing is to hydrate the brain. Drink plenty of water!

Unfortunately, students with disabilities often suffer from low self-esteem. Another positive, practical practice is that of helping your child to develop a healthy self-esteem. Children need to know that they are loved and accepted just as they are. They need to know that they have within them everything they need to be successful.

Parents should teach their children to think positive thoughts about who they are and what they can be. One of the best things that children can do for themselves is to develop a positive mental attitude. Parents can help their child to do this by first setting a good example by the way they act, speak, and live. By setting a good example, children will have a role model to follow. If a parent has any doubts that their child does watch and listen to their example, I recommend that they take time to observe how their child walks, talks, and acts. It can be a real "eye-opener."

One way parents can help build their child's self-esteem is to never be critical of the child and never be sarcastic towards their child. Criticism and sarcasm will only hurt and destroy a child's self-esteem. Also, do not try to compare them to someone else, especially their brother, sister, or another neighbor's child. Each child is an individual. God did not make us to all be the same! Being different is what makes each of us unique and special.

Children need to feel good about themselves and who they are. They need approval and support from their parents. Wrap your every thought, action, and word in love for your children. When they see it, hear it, and feel it, they will experience your love, approval, and support.

When you take time to think about and compare the lifestyle of today's families to that of families of 25 to 30 years ago, there are certainly many amazing differences. One of those differences is that children today are surrounded by multi-media to include such things as computers, cell phones, video games, e-mail, web-surfing, and multiple televisions in the home.

Of course there are advantages to having availability to many of these different technologies. Unfortunately, there are some disadvantages as well. One disadvantage is that children today are not getting outdoors and getting the benefits of fresh air, sunshine, and exercise. As a consequence there is a national trend towards obesity, and part of this is due to our sedentary lifestyles and not getting sufficient exercise.

Therefore, another positive, practical practice that parents can employ with their children is to ensure they are taking time to enjoy the outdoors and getting exercise on a consistent basis. Exercise helps to build strength, endurance, and flexibility. It promotes and develops gross motor and fine motor skills. It helps the blood to circulate throughout the body by taking much needed oxygen to the brain.

Not only does exercise help to make you healthier physically, but also it contributes to being healthier mentally and emotionally. Exercise can provide relief for built up stress, frustration, or even anger. It is amazing how a brief walk out in nature has a way of soothing the soul.

In bringing this article to a close, I would like to share one more positive, practical practice that parents can utilize to help their child. The importance of children having the opportunity to socialize and interact with other children, as well as adults, cannot be overemphasized enough. Children need this interaction in order to be able to develop appropriate social skills.

This can be accomplished easily enough by getting the child involved and participating in community programs, team sports, scouting, or through activities at a local church. Children, just like adults, need attention and need to be recognized. Being accepted by others outside of the family can help to provide children with what they need to develop self-confidence and appropriate social skills that they will utilize the rest of their lives.

These are just a few of the positive, practical practices that parents can implement with their children. Certainly there are many more that can be helpful as well. It is my hope that these suggestions will be helpful, even if it's just for the purpose of stimulating the thinking process.

Until next time – I wish you success on your quest to Becoming Your Best!