



The Parent Page

Spring 2014



Parental Acceptance:

Helping Your Child Develop a Positive Sense of Self

By Kathy Eugster

Parents play many important roles in their children's lives. Some examples are caregiver, protector, teacher, disciplinarian, and nurturer. When we are in our nurturer role, we provide unconditional love and affection to our children. We provide emotional warmth. We become empathetic supporters of our children, striving to understand their inner worlds. Supportive, warm, nurturing interactions between parents and children are extremely important for children's healthy development.

Part of being nurturing as a parent is being accepting of your child's feelings, thoughts, and experiences. This is called "Parental Acceptance" and it goes a long way towards healthy interactions between you and your child.

Acceptance is Not Agreement

Acceptance is not the same as agreement. Acceptance means acknowledgment and understanding of someone's experience. You can accept what a child is feeling, but not accept the behaviour the child is showing. "I can see you are really angry, but you cannot hit." You can accept a child's point of view, but still maintain your rules and limits. "Yes, I understand you don't think it's fair that we can't go to the park now and your friends are going to the park, but you need to come with me now because I have some chores that need to be done."

It is important to distinguish between the responses, "Yes, I understand you," and "Yes, I agree with you." Often there is

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confusion between the two, but the meaning behind each response is completely different. You can only respond to someone sometimes with the message, "Yes, I agree with you." However, you can always respond to someone with the message, "Yes, I understand (or am trying to understand) you," even though you do not agree.

How Can You Provide "Parental Acceptance"?

"Parental Acceptance" means showing empathy towards your child. Here are the steps to follow:

Step 1. Watch and Listen

Watch your child's facial expressions, body language and behaviours. Listen to what your child says and to his or her voice tone. Provide your full attention to your child and try to enter your child's world. It helps to detach yourself from your own feelings, thoughts, and opinions at this time.

Step 2. Think

Take some time to think how your child might be feeling or thinking. Strive to identify your child's feelings (happy, excited, proud, bored, curious, brave, sad, angry, frustrated, worried, scared, hurt, tired, etc.). Try to understand what your child might be thinking. What might be his or her perspective or point of view? Try to figure out what the meaning is behind what your child is feeling, saying or doing. Here are some questions you can ask yourself: "I wonder how he is feeling? What is she thinking? What is he trying to tell me? I wonder why she is doing that?"

Step 3. Respond

Respond to your child by acknowledging his or her feelings and thoughts. Do this without giving suggestions, advice, disapproval, or criticism, without minimizing or discounting your child's experience, or without distracting your child from his or her experience. The message sent to your child needs to be "Yes, I understand you, I hear what you are saying, I notice what you are feeling." It is important that your child understand that YOU understand and respect his or her experience.

Examples of how you could respond to your child include:

- "it seems like you're feeling _____ because _____"
- "I understand"
- "it sounds like you _____"
- "so what you're saying is _____"
- "that sounds like _____"
- "yes, uh-huh"



- "mmmmmm"
- "I see"
- "ohhh"

What Are the Results of Parental Acceptance?

Your child will develop a secure sense of self-identity and positive self-esteem. As a parent, you are a mirror to your child. If your child sees you as accepting and valuing of her, then she will be able to accept and value herself.

Being accepted by you allows your child to feel safe and secure. Your child will feel free to explore his or her world and express himself or herself to you without fear of your disapproval. This will encourage the development of healthy and assertive communication skills in your child. Your child will become more open with you and feel comfortable talking to you about many things. Conversations will be easier. Perspectives will be shared.

The parent-child relationship will become stronger and closer. Your child will perceive you as an interested, empathic supporter as opposed to a critical, demanding authority.

You are modeling empathy for your child so that your child will learn to be empathic towards others.

By being accepting of your child's strong negative feelings, the intensity of these feelings will decrease.

The Difference Between a Child's Inner Self and a Child's Behaviour

It is important to distinguish between a child's inner sense of self as a person and a child's behaviour. Parents need to pro-

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vide unconditional love and acceptance to a child's self as a person (which includes a child's feelings and thoughts), but do not need to accept all of a child's behaviours.

When a child understands that a parent accepts and values him or her as a person, including feelings and thoughts, and independent of behaviour, the child will internalize this acceptance and valuing, leading to a positive internal sense of self (positive self-esteem) with a core belief for the child that "I'm okay" rather than "I'm not okay." This is extremely important for any child.

The Difference Between Parental Acceptance and Parental Teaching

It is also important to be clear about the difference between Parental Acceptance and Parental Teaching. Both are important for parents to engage in. Acceptance means watching and listening to your child and reflecting, acknowledging, and respecting what is felt and experienced by your child. Teaching means giving information, explanation, ideas, suggestions, directions, limits, corrections, or cautions to your child or assisting your child in some way to learn a new task or to solve a problem.

What often gets in the way of Parental Acceptance is the need that parents often feel to teach their children appropriate behaviours or skills or to correct them in some manner. Instead of accepting their child as he or she is, they jump in quickly to try to change their child. Of course, teaching and setting limits for children are important roles in parenting, and should not be overlooked. But, we must be careful to balance teaching and correcting a child's behaviour with acceptance of the child's self as a person. Teaching, corrections, suggestions, and advice can be overdone, with the result that children may believe their parents disapprove of their self as a person rather than just their behaviours. When this happens, children start to doubt themselves and may internalize a belief that "I'm not okay" or "I'm okay only if I behave a certain way."

Conclusions

Parental Acceptance can be more easily viewed as a parent's attitude towards a child rather than as specific behaviours by the parent.

Parental Acceptance means the ability to acknowledge what your child says without trying to change it. It means listening to your child and not responding with your point of view, with advice or suggestions, with problem-solving strategies, or by making a lesson out of what he or she said. It means not responding with disapproval or criticism.

Parental Acceptance means having respect for your child's point of view. It means acknowledging his or her feelings without trying to make things better or discounting his or her point of view. It requires tolerance of a different point of view. It means you believe that your child has something worthwhile to say. It means you are able to allow your child to have his or her own point of view.

Parental Acceptance has a significant influence on the healthy development of your child. When you engage in Parental Acceptance, you are sending the following very positive messages to your child:

- I am interested in what you are feeling and thinking because I care about you
- I would like to understand what you are experiencing
- I respect what you are feeling, thinking and experiencing
- You are important to me and I enjoy being with you

A child receiving these messages from a parent has an incredible advantage in life, not only for current healthy childhood development, but also far into the future for optimal functioning in adult life.

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BC Housing

Rental Assistance Program

The Rental Assistance Program provides eligible low-income, working families with cash assistance to help with their monthly rent payment.

To qualify, families must have a gross household income of \$35,000 or less, have at least one dependent child, and have been employed at some point over the last year.

To apply visit www.bchousing.org

Family Fun!



Mother Goose

Every Tuesday from April 8 to May 27
1551 Salisbury Avenue, Port Coquitlam
10:00 am - 11:00 am

The Tri-Cities Infant Development Program has partnered with the YMCA Child Care Resource and Referral to offer this group experience for parents and their babies and young children 0-3 years. This free program introduces adults and children to the pleasure and power of using rhymes, songs and stories together. A snack will be provided.

Spaces are limited! Please contact Marieke Vandenhende at 604.525.6123 to register.

Tri-Cities Healthy Kids Fair

Thursday, April 24
9:30 am - 12:30 pm
Pinetree Community Centre
1260 Pinetree Way, Coquitlam

Community organizations will be available to provide parents of tots and preschoolers with information on safety, health, literacy awareness, recreation and other community programs. Admission is FREE.

www.tricitiesecd.ca

Hunt for Spring

Tuesday, March 18
11:00 am - 3:00 pm

Burnaby Lake Regional Park
Meet at Burnaby Lake Nature House,
4519 Piper Avenue off Winston Street

Search for signs of spring, make a ladybug craft, plant seeds and roast marshmallows. This is a free event for children of all ages. Allow an hour to complete.

www.metrovancouver.org

May Day Festival

Friday, May 2

The Festival kicks off at 7:30 pm
Port Coquitlam Recreation Complex

Enjoy the Port Coquitlam community's May Day celebration, which includes a whole week of fun-filled activities including outdoor concerts, community showcases, May Pole dancing, amusement rides, the kids Toonie fun run and the May Day Rotary Parade on May 10th.

www.portcoquitlam.ca

23rd Annual Fingerling Festival

Saturday, May 3

11:00 am - 3:00 pm

Port Moody Recreation Centre and Noons Creek Hatchery
300 loco Road, Port Moody

Celebrate the release of the salmon into Noons Creek with a fabulous environmental festival that is visited by people of all ages. Bobs & Lolo will entertain with two concerts at 11:30am and 1:30pm. Kids help make up a bucket brigade and they help release 40,000 young chum salmon from the hatchery into Noons Creek for their four year journey in the Pacific Ocean. Donations are gratefully accepted.

<http://noonscreek.org/>

Queens Park Petting Farm

Victoria Day to Labour Day

10:00 am - 5:30 pm

6th and McBride, New Westminster

The Queen's Park Petting Farm is a unique opportunity for children to learn about and have direct contact with a wide assortment of common farm animals. The farm attendants ensure a positive and educational experience for all! Admission is by donation.

Spend the day! Visit the adjacent playgrounds and spray park.

www.newwestpcr.ca