

Communicating Our Values and the Role of Peer Relations-Part 1

Hello and welcome back to our sixth installment of our tips for families! This time we are going to look at communicating our values to our children and the role that peers play. As this is a fairly large topic, it will be divided into two segments.

According to both Dr. Sax and Dr. Neufeld, a parent's job is to communicate and instill values in their children that they find important. What one family chooses to emphasize could be different than another family. Generally, there are no "right" or "wrong" values. What are examples of values? There is a huge range but some examples include: work hard at something every day, family comes first, be kind to others, saving money for the future is important, physical fitness is important, follow the word of God, and learn to do things for yourself instead of relying on others. Again, these are just some examples and you may choose to instill many values. In today's era of parenting, the task has never been more difficult. Parents have less family around them with this task, teachers are faced with increasing pressure to teach curriculum as opposed to values, and popular culture is something we can't seem to avoid.

Sax writes in his book that parents are often afraid that if they tell children what to do, they will end up doing the opposite as a way to rebel. However, research shows that this is not true and more of a myth than anything. Research clearly shows that children who were raised by more permissive parents are more likely to get into trouble as adults with alcohol, drug abuse, anxiety and depression. This does not mean, however, that parents need to act as unkind dictators! Leading with confidence and authority is different than being harsh, unloving and completely inflexible. Sax calls the ideal method "just right" parenting. In this case, parents show unconditional love and support but make it clear that there are rules and boundaries. These are generally not up for negotiation.

Neufeld uses the analogy of "mother duck" in his work. The idea being that Mother Duck always leads, shows the ducklings what to do and lets them know when they are not doing something appropriately. Mother Duck is confident and leads by explicit example. Looking at television, a few families from the 80's sitcoms may come to mind now as good examples. Think back to *The Cosby Show* (yes, we realize that Bill Cosby is in a lot of trouble these days!). It was always clear on that show that the parents were in charge and they were not afraid to lead the children. Neufeld acknowledges that as parents, we may not always feel like we know what we're doing but we must not let our children in on the secret.

Sax says that teaching values means leading by example and explicitly showing children what to do. So, if you're trying to instill the idea that we should learn to do things for ourselves, you may do this by teaching your child how to cook and expecting them to assist you in meal preparations. If you're teaching that it's important to be kind to animals, you may do this by volunteering at a shelter and expecting your child to volunteer with you. Sax says that we don't teach values by necessarily just preaching; we do it by showing them what this looks and feels

like. Asking, "How would you feel if" unfortunately does not actually instill the value attempting to be taught.

Parents often say that one of the greatest challenges is going up against the influence of peers and that peers matter greatly to their children. This is a reality that has become part of North American culture and one that Gordon Neufeld is especially passionate about. So how do families compete against friends, social media, the Kardashians and Kanye West? This will be the continuation in part 2!