

lead to our children and not go the easier, softer way of relying on television to put them to bed. We need to tell our children our favorite stories, the ones that made a difference to us. We must be as careful with their story diet as we are with their food. It is all ingested.

We can sit at the dinner table and tell our children, especially the older ones, our stories, our experiences, our mistakes, our strengths, our hopes and dreams to help them put down more than breadcrumbs on their path through the woods. They may not appear to listen, but they may surprise you and quote you when you least expect it.

It is no coincidence that Buddha offered his wisdom in parables or that Jesus was able to tell the most powerful stories. We can use inspiration to tap into the imagination of young people. That is the resource of today's world.

When a Child Speaks to You About YOU!

by Dr. Robert Gerard, © 2000, Coarsegold, California

Children consistently give us feedback and insight. Are we, as parents, listening when our children speak? Are we ready to accept their insight, petition, or humble plea? What did the child say? Did we fathom their intent? Probably not.

Several weeks ago while driving with my nine-year-old daughter, Samara Rose, I informally asked her, "How am I doing as a parent?" She giggled and said, "You're a silly man." Several days later while having a snack together, she confided in me about a very sticky situation. I gave her my viewpoint and a few suggestions. Shortly thereafter, she approached her mother and wisely spoke her truth. What I witnessed was innocence in action, carefully and lovingly spoken. Her message made a difference.

The messages children bring us present themselves subtly. The "kids" don't know how to frame a statement. A dilemma they face is fear of rejection from the parent when expressing their truth. What if the parent does not believe him/her or give the child the "time of day"? Their remarks to us are like torpedoes. These messages bring love, although some messages are also very challenging.



Remember when you perceived your mother and father as all-knowing: agents of authority and mysterious knowledge? Well, so do our children. The caveat, however, is that within them, freedom still prevails. Topping that, they still possess the courage to say what is in their hearts. These qualities are, however, very fragile and can be smothered by unthinking parents.

Children possess the gift of feeling our emotions at the core level. What makes their parents happy or unhappy cannot be hidden from a child. At an instinctual level, they have the power to say what is true because they have no rules, no inhibitions to protect. Thus, there's a natural tendency for the child to speak what they see. When the parent doesn't want to hear the truth, they can easily deny what the child attempts to say by overpowering the little one.

When a child delivers a message to a parent about that parent, how can the adult improve his or her listening skills so that the child is not shut down? Some of the following hints may serve you well. Give them a try. Test them. Do this out of the love of the relationship between you and your children.

Imagine talking heart-to-heart and eye-to-eye with your children 95 percent of the time!

Here are some helpful hints that have worked for me and for the clients I have worked with:

1. Be aware of your children's behavior when they hang around you. This may be a sign that they want to share something intimate with you and are waiting to feel safe.
2. Stay extra alert if your child is approaching you. Face them often and observe their facial expressions. Honor and welcome their presence.
3. Listen carefully and completely. No interruptions. Encourage them to speak thoroughly about whatever is on their mind. Be patient. If you hear even the slightest notion that they are stating something about you, take a deep breath and realize: "This could be a message from God."
4. When your child is ready to talk, make sure you are in a safe and comfortable place. It is best to have everyone sit down at a small table. Adult height signals power. Encourage the child to continue with the dialogue.
5. Don't turn the questions back to the child. Justification and defensive behavior crush the child's confidence. There's no need to protect yourself.
6. Ask for clarification. A parental trick is to doubt the child's intent in order to change the topic, thus confusing the child's stream of consciousness.
7. Ask the child if she or he is finished. A good idea is to get them to offer resolution scenarios for you as input.
8. Thank the child for their honest comments and insights. Give them credit for confronting the big guy (i.e., you).
9. Talk in a normal tone of voice.
10. Your WORDS and ACTIONS are important. Be consistent.
Do not, I repeat, do not back down from what you committed to do. Most parental damage is caused by short-circuited communication. The child-parent relationship crumbles when communication deteriorates.
11. Soon after the child has said her or his piece, they will feel relieved. Their attention will soon shift and PLAY would be next in line. It's great if parents can join in letting the child know that "eve-

rything is OK." Parents will also need to take time to reflect on the messages they have just received.

12. Parents must recognize that children born since the late 1980s possess a special gift: they have a deeper understanding of Love and the feeling of knowing God's Divine Plan.

13. As a final thought: Time has quickened in this new millennium. Events occur rapidly. Information overwhelms us. Who then can best offer you guidance? Wisdom from our children is priceless!

Children love to have time with parents on their terms—playing, running, drawing. They desire to know their boundaries and how to please their parents. They do not like any form of separation. They despise pain and shiver from fear. Imagine what a child's mind and heart goes through when they realize that one or both of their parents is distancing themselves from them. I urge every parent who reads this article to reflect and examine how they communicate and LISTEN to their little ones. Double check if you are justifying, ignoring, or defending yourself against what the child presents to you. Make a strong commitment to allow your child to speak and express his or her truth. You'll be amazed at what you hear, and thank God for it, too. ♥

Robert Gerard is a spiritual healer with a Ph.D. in Spiritual Psychology. He is the founder of Oughten House Foundation and the author of several books. He is a widely sought after speaker.

The cover of this issue was designed by Helen Michaels, © 2000, St. Paul, Minnesota. This is the "Earth Mother" who nurtures all our children with love and joy!

