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## RAISING PSYCHOLOGICALLY HEALTHY CHILDREN

As a parent of three lovely adults and as a presumptive parenting expert, I am supposed to have a great answer to the question: **what is the best advice you can give about raising psychologically healthy children?** However, I must admit that nothing I have read or yet written satisfactorily answers that question.

Yes, I have written about keeping one's mind on the ultimate goal of parenting — the **development of a positive identity and healthy character in one's children.**

I have written about **accepting one's children as they are; setting and enforcing consistent rules, limits and routines; encouraging your children to become self-directing choice-makers.** And I have suggested that all of this be done within an atmosphere of kindness and learning.

I have also frequently said to my patients that the most important attitude in raising children is **simply to enjoy them.**

I have urged parents to **be emotionally regulated with their children.** To never discipline their children when agitated or angry. **Modeling emotional steadiness** is critical in instilling the same emotional steadiness in their children.

And I certainly never tire of repeating that **parents may make all the errors in the encyclopedia of parenting mistakes as long as they correct those mistakes and acknowledge and apologize sincerely.**

But all of the above admonitions and encouragements are not quite enough. There is still one key piece missing. Perhaps this missing piece is the most important piece. Perhaps it is the piece I never read about or ever put into writing. It is the piece I undoubtedly got from my own parents, even though they made many parenting mistakes with me.

The missing piece is this: never, ever, proceed in a way with your child that would be considered disrespectful if you proceeded in the same way with a friend. Just don't.

You don't always have to come up with the correct parenting method. You don't always have to be patient, kind and loving. Most of the time, yes. But not always. But, always strive to be respectful of your child as a thinking, feeling human being, even if they are acting insanely.

**By respect I mean always speak and act towards your child as if you have the utmost esteem for them. Period.** This means being critical, shouting, blaming, whining, accusing, rejecting are all out of bounds for you. **You may be truly and rightfully angry with your child, but it is HOW you address and approach the child with your anger that matters in the long run.**

You may be called upon to set a limit, to not allow a certain behavior by your child, to speak to them firmly about unacceptable behaviors. That is part of your job. But the way you speak to your child should be characterized by enormous sensitivity to their experience of you. It is tempting to focus on their

bad behavior or on your upset. **But blaming them for upsetting you will cause you to forget that they are listening to the tone of your attitudes towards them far more than to the words of correction you are giving them.**

**Your child must walk away with the conclusion: “I made the wrong choice,” rather than the conclusion “my parent is really mad at me,” or “my parent doesn’t really like me,” or “I’m a bad boy or girl.”** The former leads the child to learn how to choose more wisely, even if it takes a very long time. The latter leads to damaged self-esteem and resentful, oppositional, acting-out behavior, even if you get compliance in the short run.

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