



Teaching Children the Value of Being Still.

“Be still and know that I am God.” Psalm 46:10 (NIV)



Children need time to be still, time for ‘just being.’ Modern day society is filled with every conceivable gadget and toy to entertain the child. Computer games, ipods, tablets and smart phones, with their associated APPS, are the new toys of today. Indoor adventure play parks have sprung up over the last twenty years to provide a place to take little ones on a wet day. They are filled with children screaming, running about, shouting...having fun. They are noisy, energetic, lively places to be. Yes they are pleasurable, what child can resist the excitement of flinging themselves at all the apparatus available to them? What parent can resist the temptation to have their child entertained while they have five minutes to themselves?

Yet, more than ever, children need to understand the value of stillness. They need to find delight in the quieter activities: looking at a book, colouring a picture, making mud pies in the garden, listening to a story. They need to understand the value of being able to use their own imaginations and make their own entertainment. They need to understand that entertainment is not something you can demand on tap. They need to learn to take control of their own lives rather than have every source of amusement available to them as and when they want it. Yes, at times, it doesn’t hurt them to be bored. Sometimes it is out of stillness and boredom that great theories are developed. What if Isaac Newton had not been still enough to watch an apple fall from that tree in the orchard!

Worryingly, depression and mental health disorders amongst children have increased over the last few decades. The increase in children who are admitted to hospital because of self-harm has increased by 68% over the last ten years (Young Minds). There are many theories as to the cause of the rise of depression and mental illness in children: societal pressure, family instability, peer pressure, cognitive theories which include negative thinking and perceptions, the rise of social media and cyber bullying....the list goes on. Twenge et al (2010) suggest that increases in psychopathology amongst American college students were largely due to a shift towards ‘extrinsic’ factors e.g. materialism and status and a shift away from ‘intrinsic’ factors such as, community, meaning and philosophy of life and affiliation. What then will learning the value of stillness give to our children? It will teach them to listen to and observe the world around them. It will teach them to work things out for themselves and how to take control of the opportunities within their reach. It will teach them to question. It will give them a sense of God’s creation and being part of that wonderful creation, essentially, a sense of belonging. Ultimately that sense of communion with God and His creation will give a child His peace and install in the child some of the ‘intrinsic’ factors which Twenge suggests are missing in today’s children.

Young children are not normally ‘still’ people. As parents we need to teach our children how to be still. This can prove difficult if we are not still people ourselves. Times set aside just for doing quieter activities together; reading a story, doing a puzzle etc. may seem like an inconvenience to a busy parent but it is what a child ultimately needs. Simple things, like a walk together can teach a child about the world around them. For an older child; it may be the time they feel they can disclose worries and concerns. Giving a child time to be still will also give a child a sense of their own value. Being still



with a child will help them to feel they are valued by their parents. It will give them a sense of their own significance and self-worth.

So the next time it rains why not resist the temptation of the indoor play park and instead don wellies and rain-coats and go out and stamp in all those puddles and watch how the rain makes patterns on the ground. You never know you may be inspiring a great theorist of the 21st century!

References:

Twenge, J. et al. (2010). "*Birth cohort increases in psychopathology among young Americans, 1938-2007: A cross-temporal meta-analysis of the MMPI.*" In press, *Clinical Psychology Review* 30, 145-154.

www.youngminds.org.uk

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