



Understanding Children Course

1. Aim



It has been said, 'Aim at nothing and that is what you will get.' Children don't bring themselves up. We know that if we neglect a young child physically, he would die – but it is all too easy to not really be sufficiently aware of our child's emotional and spiritual needs. The results can be equally disastrous. So we must ask the question, 'What are we aiming at for this particular child?'

How would you sum up your aim for your child?

You will see from the questionnaires that each child is unique – and yet there are patterns that help us to home in on who that child really is. We can think of those underlying temperament patterns as blueprints – rather like the drawings that a builder works to as he constructs a house. If we know the blueprints we will work with the child to help him recognise and use to the full his own particular set of building materials.

As we work through each of the sections in this course we will bear in mind our child's particular characteristics in the different situations we consider.

2. Environment



For a child to be himself and to live in the whole of who he is, he has to feel safe. Remember that each child has at least two temperaments – our task is to help them feel so secure that they can be as comfortable in their introvert as in their extrovert.

For that to happen, parents need to be comfortable in their own skin and at peace with themselves and each other.

How would you describe the atmosphere in your home?

a. A good marriage

The best gift we can give our children is our marriage. A child looks on and sees the way his parents relate and knows he is loved. Many children are brought up by a single parent. In that situation the parent's relationship with other significant adults in his or her life can contribute to the child's overall sense of security. Especially important is the parent and child's relationship with God as Father. A

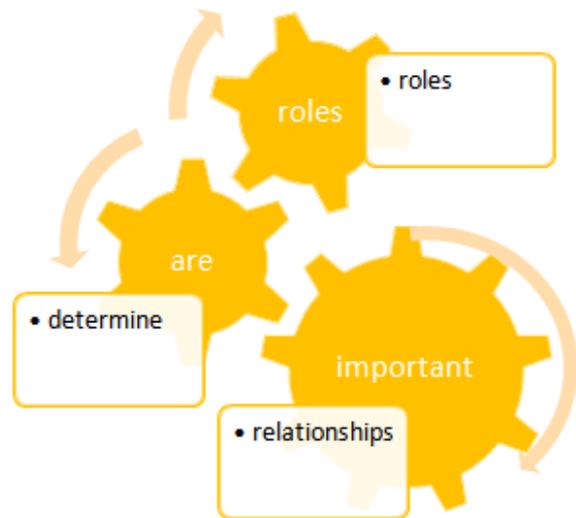


strong marriage creates a context in which a child can feel secure and in which he discovers his value, dignity and identity. It is in the home that a boy learns how to treat women and a girl how to respond to men.

b. Proper roles

Where there are muddled roles there will be muddled relationships.

Father should be the 'loving leader' who earns the respect of his family and gives clear direction. The children will know where the ultimate authority lies but also know that Dad and Mum work together for their good. When parents understand their roles and are comfortable in them then the children feel secure and happy.



a. Who takes the lead in your home?

b. Does Mum take the lead because Dad won't – or because Mum insists on doing so?

c. If your children are asked at age twenty, 'who was the strongest emotionally – Dad or Mum?' what would their answer be?

d. Dad – does your son come and talk to you – or does he always go to Mum? If he does always go to Mum, why do you think he does so?

e. Mum, when appropriate, do you say to your son or daughter – 'go and talk to your Dad'? If not, why not?

f. Have you really 'left' your parents or are parents and in-laws confusing the roles in your family?



3. Involvement

a. Everyday Structure

As a good parent, you will be involved in many aspects of your child’s life. We will start with the overall structure of family life.

a. Are you satisfied with the pattern of your daily programme?

b. In what ways could that pattern improve?

A well-structured programme helps build security for the children. We are going to look at some of the key components in that daily programme.

b. Meal Times

Aim to enjoy at least one meal together as a family each day.



a. What are your meal times like?

b. What do you feel about them?

c. What would you like to change?

Meal times can be an opportunity to learn:

- that being together is a joy
- social skills: politeness – good manners – e.g. ‘please and thank you’
- consideration of others – wait for each other before starting
- communication skills – meal times are opportunities to talk together as a family – share the day’s events, thoughts and feelings – making sure that no-one gets missed out, only one person is talking at a time and understanding what matters to someone else.
- appreciation of the cook

Don’t allow TV to become a poor substitute for cultivating these qualities at meal times!

How do your children’s temperaments show themselves at meal times?



c. Bedtimes

a. Do your children have good bedtime patterns?

b. Are you satisfied that your children go to bed at the correct time? If the answer is no, what is the reason that they are not in bed when you think they should be?

c. How settled are your children at night?

Sleeping patterns reveal a lot about a child. Anxiety and fear show themselves in restless sleep. Find out what is causing the fear – e.g. exams, a bully, a situation at school, disagreement with a friend, a TV programme, confusion, any unresolved conflict, an unpleasant occurrence or image. Make bedtime as organised and restful as possible as this makes it easier for a child to share anything on his mind. The quality of bedtime will affect the quality of sleep.

Some children do not need as much sleep as others, but still keep to regular bedtimes even if you allow the child to read or do some other restful activity. You should not be expected to keep the child amused. It is important to distinguish between the child who needs less sleep and one who cannot sleep. Loss of sleep can cause irritability and poor health.

If you have good bedtime patterns, when you do exercise flexibility, those times are remembered as being very special.



As children grow a number of factors will determine when you begin to stagger bedtimes, including:

- opportunity for 'special' time with older child
- able to give full attention to each child as they prepare for bed
- value of acknowledgment of seniority within family – this gives the older child his place.

How do your children's temperaments show themselves at bedtime and in their sleep patterns?



d. Play

a. What do you think is the purpose of play for a child?

b. What have you learnt about your child through his play?



It is easy to be unaware of a child’s play world yet this activity has enormous bearing on the expression and development of character and personality. In the early years play is a major part of a child’s life.

A child’s play is an opportunity to learn:

- co-ordination skills: – balancing, stacking, recognising and playing with shapes.
- learning skills – counting, colours, reading, increasing vocabulary, telling the time.
- social skills: playing with others – sharing, listening, manners ‘please,’ ‘thank you,’ ‘may I have...’. Not having to hold centre stage. Not shouting to be heard – saying ‘excuse me.’ Respecting direction from adults; respecting need of parents to get their tasks done and to have their own conversations.
- the value of toys and possessions. Teach tidiness and clearing up. Don’t be afraid to remove some of your child’s precious toys if you have boisterous visitors!

It is their opportunity to relax – and your opportunity to get into their world. They will express themselves freely in their play and will therefore not only express their personalities but their emotional needs as well.

Watch for obsessive play – something has to be finished – everything has to be just right, perfect. Be aware of play that excludes others. Don’t



allow the child to

develop his own little world. In other words, all the characteristics of each child can be seen clearly in play and that therefore becomes a wonderful opportunity for training.

Play can quickly become the way in which a child tries to meet emotional needs – even to the development of an unhealthy fantasy world. Play then becomes an escape from the real world. It is essential that the parent becomes aware of what is going on, redirects the child’s play into healthy channels and ensures that the emotional needs of the child are adequately met in family relationships. Watch out for



imaginary friends, over-attachment or absorption with particular characters – anything that has the mark of retreat from reality. A good story rightly involves the imagination – make sure your child’s imagination doesn’t run away with him so that the lines between fantasy and reality become blurred. If that happens, as they grow older, you will have to discern whether your child’s interest in books is a genuine interest in literature or an escape from reality.



It is important that each child has a hobby or special interest. The wider his experience of life, the better prepared he is for the future. The negative and positive aspects of a child’s play are usually carried over into hobbies, sport or art. Be aware of any of these activities which make it easy for the responsibilities of life to be avoided.



Music plays an important role in a child’s play. It is fun and creates an excellent context in which to learn rhymes, rhythm and even times tables! Children respond to music; it can be exuberant or calming, exciting or soothing. It awakens a child’s natural desire to sing. Children love to hear Daddy or Mummy make up a song about them and their day, reminding them of the fun things they have done as well as taking the opportunity to let them know how wonderful and precious they are.

together, e.g. being a good family members, playing by others who are different in etc.. Games and sports are the child’s temperament most clearly. The avoided to always allow a cope well with losing, or to situations.



Family games – indoor and outdoor – are not only great fun but opportunities to learn loser, involving young the rules, interacting with temperaments and ability often the arena in which and character is seen temptation must be child to win who doesn’t skirt around challenging

If a child is under pressure, this comes out in the way he conducts himself in sports and games. Sensitive handling, and giving opportunity to talk things through afterwards, can turn potential disasters into relationship-building encounters.



Children learn by copying so this will come out in a child’s play. They are observers and pick up what goes on around them all the time so watch for attitudes and behaviour they have seen in playgroup, or watched on TV or absorbed from their favourite DVD. They will copy siblings – and parents! You may find dollies and teddies fighting – or crying – or telling each other off! You can pick up the major influences at work in the lives of your children when they are at play.



There needs to be a balance in the way that play time is spent. Show him the value of playing by himself. Avoid the need to feel you have to entertain a child all the time. Some parents, especially those who struggle with self-worth, could find it difficult to insist on their own need to get their work done. Parents can feel guilty for not engaging with the child all the time but they must get on with their wider responsibilities otherwise family life and relationships can disintegrate. Create a structure in which the child understands that he must entertain himself so that Daddy and Mummy can get their work done and everyone will be happy. There are times when a child will spontaneously play with what he enjoys but at other times it is necessary to give direction and ‘set up’ your child’s play. If not, the child will get bored, drift around, make trouble for himself or others - or go into his own world.

How do your child’s temperaments express themselves in his play?

What changes could you make to your child’s play, bearing in mind his temperaments, which will:
a. discourage what is unhealthy

b. encourage what is healthy

e. Exercise

From the time a baby emerges from the womb, muscles are stretched. The process continues with the obvious delight of a nappy being removed, the freedom that crawling brings and so on. Exercise is



healthy and normal and should be encouraged as a natural part of each day. A tired body means a good night’s sleep. Exercise develops the body’s systems and is very therapeutic – especially if your child has an active mind! Children need a minimum of sixty minutes of physical activity every day to be healthy.

Introduce your child at the earliest age to the fresh air of the big outside world. Even putting baby in the pram gives him – as well as the parents – good, healthy exercise. Couch potatoes start off as small seed potatoes! Monitor TV so it isn’t allowed to be the easy opt-out for outdoor activity. Parents can set a good example by being active themselves.



Some children express themselves more physically than others. It is vital that they have regular opportunity to ‘let off steam.’ Rough and tumble games with Dad provide physical contact, and all children enjoy parental participation in their exercise. If they see us involved in their



fun and games they will know that we will be with them in their muddles.

Again, be aware that exercise can become obsessive. Seek to understand the emotional needs that are being met when this happens as well as encouraging a broader view of life and different forms of exercise.

Are you satisfied with the amount of exercise that your child is getting?

Which temperament expresses emotions physically?

f. A healthy environment

We show what we think of ourselves by the way we groom ourselves. If proper hygiene is taught, parents are communicating to a child that they are worth keeping clean. An untidy environment can lead to an untidy mind and chaotic emotions.



If your child knows how to take pride in personal appearance, this will spill over into taking care of his room, possessions, and later his own homes and properties. Whilst some children are fussier than others, obsessive interest in any form of cleanliness can indicate emotional needs or stress.

Hygiene routines: parents are responsible for instilling in their children the need for healthy routines in this area of life.

i. Daily personal hygiene – going to the toilet, washing hands, cleaning teeth, brushing hair, general cleanliness and taking pride in his appearance.

ii. Hygiene in the home – general cleanliness and tidiness. Clearly the parent has responsibility for this but don't lose the opportunity to train your child in these important areas:

- kitchen – storing, preparation and disposal of food.
- bathroom and toilet – cleanliness of paramount importance.
- bedrooms – tidiness, fresh air, value of personal belongings.
- general – hanging up coats, taking off dirty shoes, clearing up after himself, valuing other people's property. This can be done from toddlerhood onwards.
- garden – remember this is your shop window!



Let your child know that tidying up is part of his play time. It teaches him to get on with the unpleasant things in life – and not simply leave them to someone else. It is easy for well-meaning parents to



convey the impression that they are there to do the donkey work while the child enjoys himself! It is in the play time and tidying up that healthy attitudes are developed.

a. On a scale of 0-10 where 0 = none at all, how would you rate your child's tidiness and cleanliness?

b. Do you think you expect too much or too little of your child in this area?

Which temperament do you think is more likely to become overly fussy about cleanliness?

g. Chores

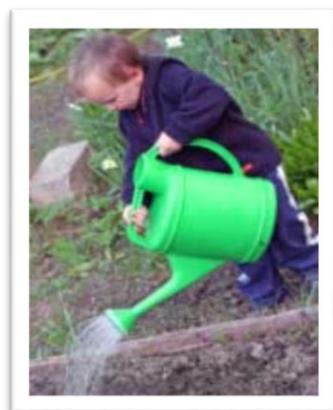
You might be tempted to do the chores yourself but if you do, you deprive the children of four major benefits:

i. Acquiring a sense of responsibility.

Expecting children to help with chores teaches them that they have responsibility as part of a team. It undermines the notion that parents are there to provide for their every pleasure and instead instills into them that if you want something out of life you have to put something in.



When chores are allocated for a period of time, your child learns to take responsibility without being reminded. Allocation of chores must not be seen as the sum total of your child's helpfulness. Encourage the ability to spot the need and offer help.



According to the age of your child, let him increasingly take responsibility for seeing a task right through. Don't cramp him with constant intervention.

ii. Job satisfaction

Achieving even the simplest tasks brings its own rewards. You can tell your child how wonderful he is but the sense of achievement and satisfaction derived from a job well done takes his appreciation of himself to a new level. His feelings of competence and self-esteem are greatly enhanced. A child needs to be needed.

It is important to get the balance between giving a task that is so difficult that your child becomes discouraged or, on the other hand, robbing him of the satisfaction of tackling an assignment that will really stretch him. Understand what a child is capable of at different ages. For example, there is no



reason why a four or five year-old cannot help make his bed, empty wastebaskets, bring in the mail, clear the table, help weed a garden or water flowers. A six or seven year-old can sweep floors, set and clear a table, help make and pack lunch, keep their bedroom tidy and pour their own drinks.

iii. Team work

Working as part of a family team teaches the ability to accommodate, negotiate with, and support, other family members. A child learns that if he offers to help make the picnic or get games ready for the family outing, then everyone gets finished sooner and there is time for more fun together.



iv. Learning skills

A child picks up skills by simply being involved in everyday tasks – from a two or three year-old putting shoes away or feeding pets, through to an older child learning to mow lawns or fix a puncture. A very young child is learning while having fun as he matches clean socks or puts things in their right places.

There are very few areas of life around the home in which your child cannot be involved. Some examples of chores are as follows: preparing meals, baking, bringing in fuel, washing up, emptying the dishwasher, housework, gardening, cleaning his bike and Dad's car. When a task is completed look for what has been done well and encourage your child in a sense of achievement. When a job is given, make sure the tools are near at hand. Teach care of the tools. A job is not complete until the tools are put away and the clearing up is done.



Keep the task manageable. A younger child will need a simple task without too many steps or parts to it. Try to avoid correcting his work. If you have to, do so with real discretion. It is worth investing in child-sized brooms and gardening tools to make real involvement possible.

There is no need to offer pocket money in exchange for doing chores. Rather, send the message that all family members are expected to help keep the household running smoothly. If you pay then you will find yourself in some heavy financial negotiations as your children will know they are on to a good thing! Reserve financial rewards for extra-tough tasks like cleaning out the garden shed or painting the garage.



Remember that children will copy your attitude to work. If they see you getting involved - not complaining – and doing your best, then they are more likely to have a positive attitude.

A study was done by Harvard University to investigate juvenile delinquency. They discovered the common factors that lead to success in life. They studied four hundred and fifty six boys from Boston



who were from a variety of backgrounds including: various races, diverse socio-economic settings, different educational levels, and divorced or married parents. Success was defined as having a happy marriage, a well-adjusted family life, and the ability to maintain a good job. After forty years of study the researchers concluded that the common factor among those who succeeded in life was being required to do chores as boys. Those boys who learned to work as children were able to transfer the character traits and skills they developed by doing these chores, into their marriages, homes, and jobs.

The family that works together grows together. Are you doing jobs that your children could or should be doing? Are you following the patterns of your parents without thinking through what is best for your family? Of course it is easier to do it yourself – and quicker – but your child misses out.

Do you think you have got the balance right in the amount of chores you expect your child to do? If not, what is the reason?

h. School

a. Do you know how your child is really getting on at school?

b. How frequently does your child talk out anything he needs to from school?

Which temperament do you think will take most naturally to school?

i. Preparing

Before going to school your child needs:



- to be able to express himself sufficiently to be understood.
- the basics of eating and hygiene – e.g. table manners, using cutlery, using the toilet and washing his hands
- to be able to dress himself (a very young child before going to nursery might need some help). To avoid possible humiliation he should be able to do his own buttons or Velcro straps.

How well should you prepare your child with writing and reading? Visit the school and ask the teacher about the school policy on this. What would the teacher like the child to know before they attend school? It is no good sending him to school able to do all that the teacher wants to teach him to do. He will soon be bored and frustrated!



Having said that, it is worth sending him to school with at least a few basics such as knowing his colours and being able to:

- count
- hold a pencil or paintbrush

ii. At school

Our children spend so much of their time in school that we need to make ourselves aware of what is going on. Most schools encourage parental involvement and we can support our children by:



- encouraging them to reach attainment targets – e.g. read a few pages each day, getting involved with their homework – but not actually doing it!
- attending parents' evenings
- involvement with school activities – helping in plays, fetes, outings, PTA
- other ways of being involved – classroom help or consider standing as a governor
- liaising with your child's teachers as often as you need to.

Always be positive with your child in schoolwork. Don't compare him with your other children or others in the school. Encourage him in his strengths and support him in what doesn't come so naturally. Investigate loss of interest or decline in output in any particular subject.

BACK TO SCHOOL



Watch for changes in behaviour, sleep patterns, eating and attitude. Be aware of what he brings home from school. Establish good communication with him. He may not always want to talk as soon as he gets in but create the opportunity at some point during the evening and certainly before he goes to bed. It is essential that he talks out and resolves all the issues from the day. Be aware of dynamics on a Sunday as his weekend comes to an end and school looms on the horizon.

Some children look forward to school and soon become disillusioned. Be aware of tiredness and irritability as your child struggles with a new and demanding environment.

When your child is angling for a day off, how do you respond? Judge each situation on its own merit. If he has simply collapsed, teach him to keep going. Are his symptoms the direct result of a particular anxiety or fear at school? Discover the cause of the fear. If he is ill give him ample time to recover. Very occasionally you will know your child is simply exhausted and needs the refreshment of time at home, with mum – and quiet. The noise and dynamics of school can be draining – especially on a sensitive child.

Be supportive of the teacher and as objective about situations as you can. You may instinctively take the child's part but it is important to get the big picture. When your child is right let him know you believe him.



j. Spiritual



We must never underestimate a child's spiritual capacity. He has the simplicity of heart and mind to enter the kingdom and absorb its truths (Mt 18:2).

At what age can a child become a follower of Jesus? A very young child is covered by his parents' faith but there comes a time when he makes his own choice. It will vary with different children but there will be a 'right time' for each child. A three year-old is perfectly capable of having his own simple faith. Talk openly about the importance of making his choice; encourage him to do so – but without pressure or coercion. It is all too easy to let the Sunday School teacher have the joy of leading your child to Christ. Why miss out?

Be involved in his spiritual growth and grow with him. We teach our children so many things but do we train them to:

- Know God
- Love God
- Serve God
- Worship
- Pray meaningfully
- Understand the Bible
- Live life in the Spirit
- Use the gifts
- Grow in faith

Do we worship as a family? Develop the habit of reading the Bible and singing to the Lord together. Do we encourage or just command our children? Do they feel we are with them in their walk with the Lord? Are we open with our children about our own failures? Do they feel safe to express theirs? Are we aware of the spiritual input good or bad through school? Do we believe that teenage rebellion resulting in broken relationships is inevitable (Proverbs 22:6)?

Dad, it is your job to bring up your children in the 'training and instruction of the Lord' (Ephesians 6:4). Mums have an enormous influence in our children's lives but Dads must not abdicate this important responsibility. We are planting seeds in our children's lives all the time – what will those seeds grow into? (Deuteronomy 4:9-10; 6:4-9; 11:18-21; Psalm 78:5-7).



a. If you are a Christian, has your child also taken that step?

b. If not, have you spoken to him of the need to do so?



c. Is Dad seen to be the 'loving leader' in the family?

d. Is trust in God at the centre of family life?

4. Outward Expression



We have thought of our aims for each child, the environment we bring them up in, our involvement with them in the everyday things of life. We turn now to their ability to give proper outward expression to who they are.

Each child has energy and the capacity to use that energy to be creative or destructive. A child fully involved in life will express that energy through their own personalities. It is our task therefore, as parents, to help the child to be involved in life and to train him to express himself constructively.

a. Involvement

Does your child:

a. stand and observe rather than participate?

b. pretend not to hear?

c. have his own little world into which he retreats in order to avoid family life and responsibilities?

d. constantly fiddle or sucks his thumb or a cloth?

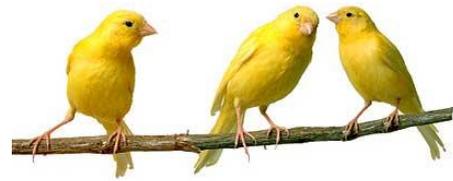
Which child is most likely to not get involved?

We know from our own experience that we are not likely to express ourselves if we feel that the 'atmosphere' is not right or that we will not be understood. We must therefore understand our children as individuals and create an environment in which they can be themselves.



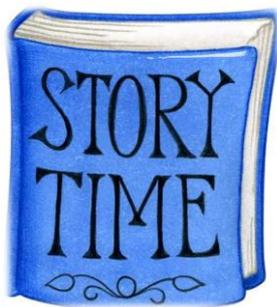
b. Communication

A young child’s adventure of discovery in this big world is an exciting experience for both parent and child. It provides the perfect environment for the parent to train the child to develop his communication skills, including talking clearly.



Points to note:

1. Use ‘point and say’ games – i.e. point to a table and encourage the child to tell you what it is. Children learn by repetition.
2. Don’t allow a child to point and grunt. If he doesn’t ask for something by name then he doesn’t get it! Especially be aware of children born into a larger family as siblings quickly pick up what gestures mean and the learning process can be short-circuited.
3. Words come first, phrases and sentences later. Keep communication simple but clear.
4. Use descriptive words – e.g. ‘a yellow flower.’ Use words accurately and increase the descriptiveness and precision of those words – e.g. find an alternative to ‘nice.’ Constantly increase your own vocabulary by looking up the meaning of words and, at the appropriate age, encourage your child to do the same.
5. Use new words in context so that the child’s vocabulary is constantly stretched but the explanation of those words is contained in what you say.



6. Looking at books together not only increases the child’s vocabulary but develops emotional bonds.
7. Avoid baby words – i.e. call a horse a ‘horse’ – not a ‘gee-gee’ or else he will be laughed at when he goes to school.
8. Talk to your child in a normal voice. You will build respect.

If we fail to teach our children to communicate adequately with us we make it all too easy for them to develop a communication system of their own. They will talk to their toys, use gestures, little laughs etc. If we teach our children to talk to us when they are little they will talk to us when older.

The introvert child particularly needs the contact with the real world that talking gives else the creativity is stifled, the child becomes inhibited and an intelligent child appears to be backward.

Some children are over-talkative. This energy needs to be channelled into other things. They have active minds that sometimes need slowing down. Ensure that their play matches their mental ability – e.g. would the little girl be more settled reading than playing with dolls?

As our children grow they must be able to share their inner hearts with us. It is vital that they know they can be completely open with us and that we will understand and accept them. How deep is our communication with our children?



There are five levels of communication:

1. Cliché level
2. Reporting facts
3. Sharing ideas, evaluations and opinions
4. Sharing of feelings
5. Openness and honesty

Many relationships go no further than 3, but it is in 4 and 5 that we give ourselves most meaningfully. Our marriage is the foundation of our home. If our marriage is characterised by openness and honesty then our children will also be open in their relationships.

a. What is your child's reaction to you when you try and communicate with him?

b. How clearly does your child communicate – for his age?

c. What do you do with a child who refuses to communicate?

d. At what level do you and your child communicate?

5. Understanding Discipline – shaping the will with wisdom

a. The need for discipline – Eph 6:1-4

Many parents have failed to take responsibility for authority in the home. This leaves children insecure and uncertain. They will struggle to 'obey *their* parents in the Lord...' and to 'honour *their* father and mother...'. The Bible makes it clear that, when relationships are right within the families, then a nation is secure. It was George Bernard Shaw who wrote, 'Perhaps the greatest social service that can be rendered by anybody to this country and to mankind is to bring up a family.' Readers' Digest May 2009.



i. If children do not learn to accept authority at home they will have difficulty with authority throughout their life – school, college, university and employment. Failing to grasp this important lesson early in life will make it difficult for them to learn to submit to God and to accept the circumstances that God allows to come to them. The absence of parental authority makes it harder for the child to establish his own inner and



outer disciplines, to build and maintain healthy relationships and to generally reach the goals he sets himself.

ii. Discipline is necessary in order to allow each family member to occupy, function and grow in their respective roles. Lack of discipline allows one member to overshadow or even dominate another. This stunts growth and can eventually cause mental and emotional problems.



iii. Being creatures of space and time, we depend on limits being set for our sense of security. Failure to establish and enforce these limits in a child's life creates deep insecurity and bewilderment. Numerous tests have demonstrated that well-loved, yet justly-disciplined children are more likely to go on to mature into more emotionally healthy, productive and secure adults than those who grew up without boundaries.

b. Discipline Issues

i. Rules without relationships = rebels. This raises the vital issue of connecting with your child. Those of you who have completed one of our courses will understand what is meant by 'your introvert must connect with your child's introvert' – or, to put it another way, there must be a heart to heart connection.

- that the parent knows himself anything within him to himself to his child.
- that the parent knows his understands why this life in the way he does.

When these are in place, our children can become totally positive.



This implies two things:

well, therefore will not allow prevent him from fully giving child and therefore particular child responds to

relationships with our At the core of our

through the experiences of life together. In a family that joy is multiplied! Family enables a child to know he is loved for just being here; which in turn enables him to be who he is; and when he knows who he is then he will know what he is called to do.

This is so positive that it is worth fighting for. You are there, as a parent, to ensure that this wonderful experience is not missed. If your children sense that you are genuinely fighting for something that is so good, and clearly what is ultimately in their best interest, then they will be on-board. This is what is involved in discipline. It is the removal of all that would spoil and the cultivation of all that is good. It is teaching a child to pull the weeds out of his garden so that the beautiful flowers can be seen and enjoyed. Discipline is never an end in itself – or the result of a need to impose ourselves

on others - it is in order to bring out the best in, and for, another person.



ii. It is difficult to tell children how to live if they don't see it modelled in us. That is not to say that we shouldn't teach our children properly because we feel guilty or know we have failed. Teach them what is right because it is right – and even as you ask something of your child, make sure you are asking it of yourself.

iii. The object of discipline is not to break the child but to shape the will. Although 'foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child' (Prov 22:15), it is also true that there are many qualities within that child that need drawing out and developing – not breaking. It is an attitude that resists authority and wants its own way that is being challenged because that is what spoils all the good.

iv. Parents:



Agree together on the standards expected in the home.

Definite limits have to be clearly accepted by each parent. Establishing Biblical standards doesn't mean simply rules and regulations but attitudes.

Communicate these limits clearly to each child so that you are satisfied that the child understands. If the child is old enough it is helpful to explain the reasons for the limits thus establishing that it is love that sets them.

Work out beforehand various options for punishment. This is essential in order to avoid blurting out unreasonable threats in the heat of the moment that are either disproportionate or impossible to carry out. It is important to have several options in mind. For example:

- being sent out of the room
- being deprived of something they would enjoy – e.g. TV programme, outing, special time.
- having to sit still for a set time – possibly using 'naughty chair'.
- find 'weak points' in school work or creative work (e.g. music practice) and give them extra work.

When thinking through the options, bear in mind that:

- when one child is disciplined the whole family is affected.
- the closer the punishment can be to the misdemeanour, the quicker the shadow lifts.
- Each child is different. What is meaningful punishment for one is no hardship to another.
- The punishment must 'fit the crime'. A child may behave badly and say things he shouldn't when under pressure, and another time may act and speak out of wilful defiance.



v. Punishment must be meaningful. The punishment must achieve its aim or you will lose credibility. Children do not appreciate parents being 'soft' on discipline.



vi. A distinction must always be made between normal childishness and wilful defiance. Every growing youngster needs space in which to discover, learn, make mistakes and experience all the other things involved in growing to maturity. Deliberate disobedience is another matter.

vii. There are times when 'mercy triumphs over judgement' and a decision to punish is very occasionally reversed on the basis of a genuine change of heart – but these occasions must be rare. It is better to have not told the child that he will be missing the treat, or whatever, rather than to change your mind.



c. Final considerations

We are on a journey of discovery as we train up our children. Keep one step ahead in your personal growth. When you fail, as you will, if appropriate go back and apologise. Don't be discouraged. Every day is a new start with God.

a. Do you and your partner discuss and agree on your disciplines and course of action?

b. How does your child respond to discipline – e.g. fight it, run away, hide?

c. How do other family members react to a sibling's discipline?

d. Are discipline situations resolved satisfactorily within your family? If so, what normally brings resolution?

e. When the situation is resolved do you discuss with your child the reason for the discipline?

f. Do you show your child complete warmth and acceptance after the discipline?

g. Do you have difficulty disciplining your child? If so, do you know the reason?

Can you see how your child's temperaments affect the way he responds to discipline?



Want to know more?

About the author:

John has been in Christian work for over thirty five years. During that time he has been involved in many aspects of church life but has always had a desire to help people understand themselves and equip them to build meaningful relationships. He has counselled hundreds of people over the years and developed courses that provide help with, and insights into, the practical challenges that people face in everyday life.

John has been active in his local community as Chair of Governors of a local school and as a magistrate. With others, he currently leads Halesworth Community Church. He is married to Merle and they have six children – four boys and two girls – and eight grandchildren.

Website:

If you have found this course helpful you may want to follow up with some more informative material. Visit: www.halesworthcommunitychurch.org for articles on a variety of aspects of 'Understanding Children' as well as information on 'Understanding Yourself' courses.

Contact:

Feel free to write to me via the [contact page](#) on the website or directly to: j.sparkes@btinternet.com

John Sparkes

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