

BUILDING TRUST WITH CHILDREN

In my last article, I shared some ideas with you on helping your child in building self-confidence. We talked about suggestions which you as a parent could do to aid in your child's development of a healthy self image.

Today I would like to share some thoughts on an equally important part of the relationship between you and your child-- building a high level of trust. The earlier it begins the more powerful the trust becomes.

You can easily argue that without trust love is difficult to establish with another. Trust is one of the pillars of any relationship.

I've taken some time to research this topic to see what the experts in this field had to say. Here are the five themes running through my findings.

First, if you want your kids to trust you, you need to practice what you preach. Sounds simple and easy enough to follow right? Wrong. We all see parents tell children to do one thing but then fail to do it themselves. We are all guilty.

I often catch myself telling my children the right way to do something when I know that I often do it differently. As they have grown older and bolder they challenge my position with the response, "why should I do it if you don't." It's hard to argue.

Another easy to say but sometimes hard to follow rule is "tell them the truth." In an age appropriate way be honest when discussing things with your children even if they are unpleasant. This helps children to develop the right mindset from which to draw their own conclusions and act accordingly.

Take politicians and our government for example. We have become increasingly ineffective because everyone has stopped telling the truth. It is run by adults who have forgotten, or who are afraid to state the obvious. Every position or response has become a political “gotcha game” that gets little if anything done.

Wouldn't it be better when one is at fault just to come out and say it? I like the response, “I made a mistake” or “you're right I misjudged the situation.” It becomes very powerful without being judgmental. Both parties feel better and they move on with life.

Making threats is the third common thread that I found. Threats don't work. In fact they often only inflame the situation and make it worse. The child gets angry. You get angrier. We have just taught them what not to do.

Don't be surprised when they threaten you later in life. As adults I think we bear the burden to make conversations civil. None of us like to be threatened. But we all do it when we get mad.

I'm not talking about explaining to a child the good or bad consequences for certain behavior. This approach is fine. But it needs to be spelled out in a constructive tone beforehand.

For example, Steve was allowed to have his friends over because he first cleaned up the yard as instructed. Or Judy was not allowed to watch her favorite TV show, because she failed to clean up her room as instructed. In both of these cases the children knew the consequences in advance and the parents were right in following through on them.

Another way to establish trust is according to the experts is to “listen” to your children. All of us know, even in our early years, when a person is not listening to us. Listening shows a child that we value and respect what they are saying.

It shows that we care about their ideas, feelings, and emotions. A child is much more willing to trust a parent that listens to what they have to say. Not listening is telling the child “I don’t really care.”

Finally, never break a promise. Nothing shatters trust quicker than not following through with a promise you made. Once a child sees that you do not keep your promises they won’t believe you in the future. And they won’t keep their promises either. You begin to lose your credibility which leads to a breakdown in trust.

If circumstances surface that keep you from honoring your commitment let your child know beforehand that the situation has changed and the reason behind not keeping the promise.

It’s not easy to follow these simple suggestions. We have all violated them at one time or another. Sometimes simple rules are the hardest to follow.

Practice what you preach, tell the truth, don’t make threats, listen, and don’t break promises. If we just keep these simple rules in mind we can establish trust with our kids for a lifetime.