

What is Connective Parenting?

By Bonnie Harris

Parents all over the planet want their children to grow strong, independent, and able to stand up for themselves. Most of us would say that we are committed to teaching them this. As long as children do what we say. But what happens when they don't? *How can that be? Children should do what they are told, and I should be able to make that happen.*

Tougher measures from parents provoke even more resistance from kids, and power struggles erupt daily. The frustrated parent loses patience and control and spirals downward in a direction never anticipated.

Connective parenting puts a different spin on the relationship. Yes, we moms and dads are our children's first and most important teachers, but we are also students of our children as well. Parent and child are in a relationship, and relationships must always look both ways. Reciprocal learning is constant.

Do you want your children to have the following traits?

- learn accountability for their actions
- take responsibility for themselves
- be respectful and kind
- learn appropriate behavior from the world around them
- contribute to the world from a strong foundation of self-confidence?

These five components of Connective Parenting form the crucial foundation for raising connected parents:

1. **Unconditional acceptance of the child provides a strong foundation for self-confidence.** Connective parents understand that children come into the world whole and ready to absorb—but on their own time schedule and with their unique way of learning. We gain the greatest understanding of our children by listening and watching each child's developmental process. It is in this place that children thrive and a parent's influence is strongest.
2. **Respect teaches respect.** The connected parent acknowledges and is considerate of her child's agenda whatever it is. She sees that what is of interest to her child is just as important to him as what is of interest to her. Emotions and desires are always acceptable and acknowledged even when the objects of interest cannot be granted.
3. **All children** (all people, actually) **want to do the right thing** and will do so as long as they can. If the child is not in a receptive state, she will not learn. In other words, she must want to learn and hear what is being taught. It should never be assumed that just because she is your child, she will do what you want. Resistance means that she is *having* a problem, not *being* a problem. There is an obstacle in her way of doing what she knows is right. It is that obstacle that must be addressed in order for behavior to change.

4. **Behavior provides clues** for a parent to understand what is going on with his child; what it is that provokes his child's behavior. There is an underlying need that results in unwanted behavior. If the behavior is addressed with rewards or punishments, that underlying need is missed, and the behavior must get louder and more dramatic in an attempt of the child to be heard. Behavior should never be taken at face value.
5. **Punishment is never effective.** Even consequences, the "pc" word for punishment, are usually threats and lay conditions on behavior...."If you don't do..., you can't do...." Connective parenting relies on problem solving and conflict resolution to truly hold a child accountable and responsible. When threats and blame are not used, defensive behavior is unnecessary and the child is free to see the true consequences of his behavior, state his side of the story and work out a compromise that works for all involved. Again, it is about the relationship. If your spouse speaks rudely or ignores you, you wouldn't threaten to take his cell phone away or prevent him from playing golf this weekend. You would attend to the relationship.

Connective Parenting does not rely on the easy methods of parenting—the old standbys. It requires accountability on the part of all parents to understand why both we and our children react the way we do and to put in the work necessary to maintain a strong, respectful relationship. Is there anything more worthwhile?