

## Healthy Emotional Communication with Your Children/Teens

(Friday, March 18, 7-9:30PM)

**Introduction:** We will be discussing the importance of validating your child's feelings in order to help him/her feel seen, heard, understood, accepted and loved. We do this by empathizing with her/his feelings, while still holding her/him to the boundaries (limits/expectations) you've set.

- A. Help your children and teens feel seen, heard, understood, accepted and loved
- B. Help your children identify their feelings
- C. How to validate your children's feelings
- D. A Word on Feelings - We only have this moment
- E. Own our own feelings and reactions
- F. Avoid invoking guilt
- G. Avoid manipulation
- H. To still set clear expectations in spite of their feelings
- I. How to balance Nurturance and Frustration Tolerance in parenting
- J. Practical ways to keep the communication channel open, especially as your children become teens and young adults

### A. Help Your Children and Teens Feel Seen, Heard, Understood, Accepted and Loved

- We all want to be seen, heard, understood, accepted and loved.
- God sees, hears, understands, accepts and loves us unconditionally.  
<http://linrathe.blogspot.com/>
- Children are from God, we are stewards of His children. Our children belong to God, not to us.
- We need to see that each child is a unique reflection of God's own glory, thus, our job is to help bring out God's unique glory in each child *instead of* trying to mold our child after our own likeness.
- Get to know your child as an unique creation from God, regardless of how similar s/he might be to you. S/he is still an unique and SEPARATE individual apart from you.
- Be mindful to not project your own character traits, likes and dislikes onto your children: respect your child, but do not worship him/her.
- Help your child to voice what his/her preferences are, but you be the parent who makes the final decision. Do not give your child the message that s/he is the boss of the family. You and your spouse are the boss, and they are the children.

### B. Help Your Children Identify Their Feelings

- We first have to be aware of our own feelings.
- Recall when we were children/teenager and how we felt: powerless, wronged, trapped, defenseless, misunderstood, hurt, rejected, abandoned, neglected...

- When you see your child acting frustrated or angry, help him/her to identify the feeling so s/he could put words to the feelings, thus better identifying them. We can do this by:
  - Role-modeling for our child what we think they might be feeling by their behavior and say, “It’s frustrating that...” Or: “Feeling impatient the computer isn’t re-booting fast enough!” Or: “Why is it taking so long! Frustrating!” Or: “You’re hungry and don’t want to wait for the milk to warm up!”
  - Use humor in empathizing with your child’s feelings: “We want food! We want food! We want it now! We don’t want to wait!” (in a sing-song tone)

#### C. How to Validate Your Children’s Feelings

- In order to help our children to validate their feelings, we need to be willing to “go there” with their feelings by being in touch with our own feelings...without identification, we cannot empathize with others.
- Acknowledge and Join your child’s feelings in the moment ***without explaining why you did/said what you did/said***, in the moment. At a later time, explain your reason.
- Invite your child to tell you more, how you’ve let him/her down or upset her/him.
- ***You know you have succeeded when your child is able to tell you their negative feelings (without being disrespectful through insults or curse words), AND able to tell you their positive feelings toward you. It is a sign of emotional intimacy when one can say EVERYTHING (entire range of feelings) toward one another, WITHOUT ACTING ON the negative feelings.***
- After validating your child’s feelings, still hold her/him accountable to the limits you’ve set as a parent (i.e., “I am such a killjoy, not letting you go on the internet to play before you finish your homework! You still have to finish your homework before you can get on line...the sooner you fully complete your homework, the sooner/longer you’ll get to go online to play...”).
- We would validate the feelings without explaining ourselves in the moment in order to validate the child’s feeling. However, sometimes we can slip in the reason as we validate the feeling (i.e., A father picked up his 18-months-old to prevent her from walking on broken glass without stating why... “Daddy didn’t want you to hurt yourself stepping on the broken glass, but he didn’t tell you why he picked you up. That felt frustrating!”)
- ***Side Bar: To help your child to not lie or keep secrets from you, VALIDATE his/her feelings WITHOUT LECTURING him/her IN THE MOMENT.***

#### D. A Word on Feelings - We Only Have This Moment

- Feelings are not logical, rational, sensible, nor objective.
- Our emotional life is made up of MOMENTS.
- Don’t play the tape (1 Cor 13:5), or write the script (“Do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear. Life is more than food, and

*the body more than clothes. Consider the ravens: They do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom or barn; yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds! Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? Since you cannot do this very little thing, why do you worry about the rest?") Luke 12:22-26.*

- Each moment ends.
- We need to stay in this moment. The more we are able to stay in this moment, the better chance we can build a better future.

#### E. Own Our Own Feelings and Reactions

- Feel our own feelings and separate our feelings from others' feelings.
- Acknowledge our own feelings and not project them onto our children.
- When we are upset, verbalize and take responsibility for our own feelings, instead of accusing or attacking our children (i.e., "Mommy is feeling frustrated and impatient because Mommy is tired and having a bad moment. I am not being patient with you right now and just need you to cooperate and finish your homework so we can get to bed").
- Apologize when we are in the wrong. It demonstrates us taking ownership/responsibility for our own actions.
- **Strive to AVOID reacting any of these three emotional ways:** 1) Retaliation; 2) Crumble from fragility; 3) Withdraw and become distant. **Instead,** Validate your child's feelings and ask how else have you "failed" them as a parent.

#### F. Avoid Invoking Guilt

- Feelings of powerlessness, being misunderstood, wronged and un/under-appreciated are normal feelings parents would feel. It can be tempting to "guilt" our children into cooperation. But it can instill sense of guilt and shame that causes them to pull away and hide (lie and keep secrets) from us.
- 2 Corinthians 7:10 ~ "Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death." Work on Conviction, not Condemnation.
- Avoid saying: "I am disappointed with you." Instead, say: "I am feeling frustrated with you..."

#### G. Avoid Manipulation

- Children soak up what we do versus what we say; "Values are caught, not taught."
- Avoid Controlling our children through emotional blackmail. (i.e., "If you really loved Daddy, you'd do this...")

- Instead, be upfront with what behaviors/attitudes we would like to see and “negotiate”/delineate positive and negative consequences to their behaviors/attitudes. ***We will discuss this further in “Practical Discipling workshop on April 19<sup>th</sup>)***

#### H. To Still Set Clear Expectations in Spite of Their Feelings

- While we validate our children’s feelings, it’s very important that we still hold them to the boundaries and expectations we have set for them. ***We will discuss this further in “Practical Discipling workshop on April 19<sup>th</sup>)***

#### I. How to Balance Nurturance and Frustration Tolerance in Parenting

- Healthy child-rearing requires both nurturance and training our children to grow in their frustration tolerance.
- Saying “No” (without being an authoritarian) in a relationship help us have a closer relationship, as the two parties would have to learn to negotiate/communicate with one another.
- ***Help your child to integrate her/his Superego, Ego and the Id so s/he can be emotionally healthy.***

#### J. Practical Ways to Keep the Communication Channel Open, Especially as Your Children Become Teens and Young Adults

- Keep in mind your ultimate goal: *For your teen and young adult children to be able to share their thoughts, feelings and life with you.*
- Seize the opportunity to be your child’s **friend** when s/he opens up to you. **LISTEN, and do NOT lecture.** *Kids are like timid turtles who’d retreat back into their protective shells quickly when they sense disapproval or a lecture coming.*
- Strive to have monthly one-on-one dates with each of your children where the child has quality time with you and feels s/he has a voice and is seen and heard by you. (Set a time frame and budget for the date. Your child gets to decide on which activity you two will be doing, and s/he gets to be the “boss” on that date with you: whatever s/he says goes. I.e., s/he can change the rules of a game you two might be playing. Over time, you can socialize your teen how to negotiate being on a real date with his/her peer ~ teach him/her to negotiate common activity after you and your child have spent countless dates where s/he was the boss with you.)
- As your child grows up, your relationship with him/her needs to change: it’s no longer “Top-Down” relationship, as it becomes more and more as “friends/peers,” while the parents are still parents.

#### **Effective Communication Skills:**

- “It takes two to communicate: The Speaker and the Listener.”
- The message the Speaker wants to communicate isn’t necessarily what the Listener hears. So, check in with your child what message s/he is getting from what you are saying in the moment. (When your child verbalize his/her version of what you’re saying, validate his/her feeling, and then explain what you are trying to say.)

**Five Basic Tenants of Effective Communication:**

1. Validate each other’s experience and perspective (the Parable of the Two Blind Folds).
2. Agree to disagree.
3. Use the phrase: “I feel...” instead of: “You did...”
4. Avoid hyperboles of: “You always” or, “You never.”
5. Practice Listening Check.

**Resources:**

1. *Loving Ourselves So We Can Love Others (Blog)* <http://linrathe.blogspot.com/>
2. *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality:* <http://www.emotionallyhealthy.org/product-category/free/>
3. *Dare to Discipline:* <http://www.amazon.com/The-Dare-Discipline-James-Dobson/dp/0842305068>
4. *Boundaries with Kids:* [http://www.amazon.com/Boundaries-Kids-Children-Control-Their/dp/0310243157/ref=sr\\_1\\_8?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1458095640&sr=1-8&keywords=boundaries+dr+henry+cloud](http://www.amazon.com/Boundaries-Kids-Children-Control-Their/dp/0310243157/ref=sr_1_8?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1458095640&sr=1-8&keywords=boundaries+dr+henry+cloud)
5. *Boundaries with Teens:* [http://www.amazon.com/Boundaries-Teens-When-Say-Yes/dp/0310270456/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1458261674&sr=8-1&keywords=boundaries+with+teen](http://www.amazon.com/Boundaries-Teens-When-Say-Yes/dp/0310270456/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1458261674&sr=8-1&keywords=boundaries+with+teen)
6. *Blessings of a Skinned Knee:* [http://www.amazon.com/s/?ie=UTF8&keywords=blessings+of+a+skinned+knee&tag=googhydr-20&index=stripbooks&hvadid=83541566309&hvpos=1t2&hvexid=&hvnetw=s&hvrnd=13611674024406351634&hvpone=&hvptwo=&hvgmt=b&hvdev=c&ref=pd\\_sl\\_5tuh3ajyr\\_i\\_b](http://www.amazon.com/s/?ie=UTF8&keywords=blessings+of+a+skinned+knee&tag=googhydr-20&index=stripbooks&hvadid=83541566309&hvpos=1t2&hvexid=&hvnetw=s&hvrnd=13611674024406351634&hvpone=&hvptwo=&hvgmt=b&hvdev=c&ref=pd_sl_5tuh3ajyr_i_b)
7. *Strengths Finders 2.0:* [http://www.amazon.com/dp/159562015X/?tag=googhydr-20&hvadid=71136362316&hvpos=1t3&hvexid=&hvnetw=s&hvrnd=13496259472522645420&hvpone=15.29&hvptwo=&hvgmt=b&hvdev=c&ref=pd\\_sl\\_3wexjuz7xq\\_b](http://www.amazon.com/dp/159562015X/?tag=googhydr-20&hvadid=71136362316&hvpos=1t3&hvexid=&hvnetw=s&hvrnd=13496259472522645420&hvpone=15.29&hvptwo=&hvgmt=b&hvdev=c&ref=pd_sl_3wexjuz7xq_b)