


Conscious



Parenting

by "H" Hanson

How often have you heard that
raising children today is much more
difficult than in the past?



For as long as I can remember, I've heard this proclaimed by parents, especially when dealing with teenagers. Actually, the years of growing into adulthood have challenged parents and teenagers in every culture throughout the ages and it's part of the journey through life. Conscious parenting is about raising your level of awareness and watching the unscripted play in which you and your kids are participants. We dance together and teach them while being students ourselves. It's a wonderful opportunity to evolve as spiritual beings, all linked together by Life's plan.

I am blessed with four beautiful children, all in their twenties and well on their way to making their unique contribution to humanity. I was known as a "liberal" parent during their teenage years. While some adults would comment on my lack of rules, others would admire the close connection we had and I was often asked about my methods of parenting. Looking back, I now recognize two powerful forces that directly influenced me as a father: my childhood experiences with my own parents and my adult spiritual practice.

I was raised in a household where there was little real communication. My parents were well-intentioned and followed the patterns of their own upbringing. Feelings were generally not expressed because no one knew how. Although they were affectionate to a point, outbursts of frustration and anger combined with alcohol were commonplace and we were expected to figure the facts of life out on our own. I had nowhere to turn when I faced the fears of childhood and puberty. Somehow, I was propelled to adopt the opposite approach and more than anything else desired to be close to my kids during the tumultuous teenage years. In order to help our children ride the wave of the current shift in human consciousness, we must let go of the old and embrace new, meaningful ways of parenting. I'll be sharing my insights of parenting teenagers in this article, although what I've learned applies to younger children as well. I also want to acknowledge the unique challenge of raising children with special needs. I

have dear friends who have been given kids with various disabilities, and I honor them and all parents who walk this road hand-in-hand with their children.

What follows is what worked for me.

Communication

The underlying principle in successful parenting is communication. All relationships require open and flowing exchanges of love, emotion, and ideas. Younger kids are naturally wide open and want to share everything they experience. The blockage in our connection to them is within us, the parents. Our own childhood programming, the pain, fear, and guilt that we carry around can shut down the channel of communication with our teens. For instance, as a child I was very musical and at 13 years old I remember detesting my father standing behind me when I practiced the piano. During evening practice, he would stand there leaning on the mantle with a martini in his hand watching every note I

Conscious parenting is about raising your level of awareness.

played, correcting my mistakes, and trying to live vicariously through me. I wanted desperately to tell him to stop but I felt uncomfortable sharing this with him. He was just acting out his own father's pattern, totally unaware of my feelings.

Today, most kids would let their father know exactly what they felt in a similar situation. But how would you as a father react? Could you step out of the way and actually hear what your teen was saying or would you be stuck in frustration or anger, unable to communicate effectively? It's very possible that you could have turned this same experience into an opportunity for deeper love and growth with your son. Perhaps you would have heard his request without any inner resistance and then listened from another room or kept an ear on him while doing chores around the house. Later you could talk to him about his playing by beginning with a question about how he feels his practicing is progressing. After years of not having a two-way connection with my parents, I clearly recall making the inner commitment to one day having great communication with my own children. Real parent and child sharing can only happen if we truly listen to them.



Listening

Listening is different than hearing. We hear peripheral sounds all the time without really listening to them because our attention is focused elsewhere. Listening to our kids is about giving them our undivided attention with a quiet mind and an open heart and receiving what they're trying to communicate. This may not involve words. Sometimes it means listening to their body language or actions.

Again, the issue here is with us, not the kids. As we grew up, our minds became identified with our personality, indoctrinated by our culture and preoccupied with protecting our false self (ego). The numbing chatterbox in our head became too loud for us to listen clearly. Thus, our thoughts often whiz by with commentary, questioning, and defense while others talk to us. Adult minds generate thoughts primarily with language and memory of past experiences, while children use pictures and metaphors to create thought forms. There is no background noise invading their clear perception of sight and sound. But by the time the teenage years roll around, they too are caught in a wheel of repetitive thought patterns, almost all of which are ego driven. I found, however, that teenagers are still very open and ready for clear boundaries and insight from parents and mentors. How then do you return to true listening and receive their messages? First, become aware that you're not listening. In other words, the next time you speak to your child or anyone for that matter, observe the "little me" in your head chatting away during the conversation. By watching yourself, a space is created between that voice and the real you, the silent listener. You have just raised your level of consciousness. Then cultivate your desire to really listen to what is being said. No labeling, no inner discussion, just simple openness to the child in front of you. Catch yourself and concentrate on their words. If you practice this, you'll hear amazing things coming from them. Your ability to respond will then take on new meaning in your relationships with those amazing beings in your life.

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