

## Can We Afford Not To Trust Our Children?

How often are you able to confidently take action or change course in your life? Are you clear about what you need to do in order to get what you want? Do you feel confident in your parenting? From decisions about major changes in career or home, to small, seemingly insignificant actions, we doubt, resist, question, debate, seek counsel, obsess, worry, procrastinate, deny and sometimes cause ourselves major illness. Imagine how it would feel to completely trust yourself, your intuition, your capabilities and your own journey. Imagine how it would feel if you could trust that the way will always be made clear, even if waiting for the answer to come is what needs to be trusted.

Most of us have long ago lost touch with our instincts. We compare ourselves to others, doubt our abilities and wait for external signals to tell us—what? We are quicker to believe that it can't be done rather than trusting that it can.

An inability to trust oneself can lead to addictions, since it is the food, the control, the alcohol, the drugs, the sex that will, if not provide the answer, at least keep the anxieties at bay. Many of us do not become addicts, yet we can easily become immobilized or overwhelmed with decisions or tasks we do not feel competent to make. Where does trust come from? How can we learn it? How can we stop the "...but what ifs..." from taking over? Many adults spend thousands of dollars and years in therapy, meditation retreats, personal growth workshops, and self-help books to find the answer. I believe the answer lies in our childhoods.

How often did your parents trust you when you were little, let you decide when you were hungry or full, hot or cold? Were you brought into discussions as an important member of the family? Were you ever given the message that you actually might know what was best for you? How early were you able to decide about events in your life and experience the consequences of those decisions without someone either bailing you out or blaming you?

Our childish sense of wonder and awe was more often squelched than encouraged, our mysteries and fears overprotected and our fantasies reined in. We were told to act like a grown up, not to be silly and to stop making so much noise. We were given messages that our laughter, play, spontaneity and babble were annoying or inconvenient. Our taste in music and clothing was looked on with disdain. More often than not we felt a nuisance or a burden to our parents. Our play soon turned to work, our fantasies died with childhood, our spontaneity became organized, our curiosity turned to skepticism, cynicism and doubt. Is it any wonder teenagers seek pleasure in alcohol, drugs and sex when they don't know who they are?

We can stop this cycle and treat our children more like the people we hope they will be. That means encouraging their ideas, opinions, and input, which may make life frustrating at times. Many children get

the message they aren't trustworthy when they think their parents will not listen to them or believe them. From infancy we teach them to listen to us instead of themselves. We don't answer their cues out of fear they will become spoiled or will try to run our lives. This doesn't mean let them call the shots. Balance of needs is essential for the development of respect and cooperation. But when do we ever turn the tables and listen to what they have to tell us? When it's cute? How about when they say something we don't want to hear like, "You're not listening to me" or "It's not fair."

When your child comes home from school complaining about a teacher or a friend, even saying, "I hate her," do you listen and allow more complaining and bitterness to come out or do you stop it up saying, "We don't talk like that. I don't want to hear you say such things. That's not nice." When we refuse to listen, they stop talking. We think we're teaching a good lesson but in fact we're pushing them away. An "I hate her" at home doesn't mean disrespectful behavior at school. In fact the opposite is more likely. If your child doesn't trust that you will understand, that's where apathy and rudeness begin. After the complaining is out and heard, then problem solving can begin. "How do you think you can let your teacher know how you feel and still be respectful? What would you like her to know? Do you want my help?"

By truly listening, we teach our children that they matter. That's when they cooperate, feel motivated to do well and continue to come to us for advice.