

## **The ABC & D of Nurturing Your Kids**

*By Jim Burns, Ph.D.*

Parenting today is no easy task. I understand from my own experience the challenge of keeping the many areas of our kids' lives on the radar screen so that we can help guide them into becoming healthy adults in every possible way: spiritually, physically and emotionally. Here is an easy to remember, ABC & D approach to nurturing you kids.

**A. Affirmation.** An affirmed child is a secure and confident child. Most often, the difference between kids who make it and kids who don't is one caring adult. Even if you struggle with your teenager, I challenge you to believe in them! Most teenagers suffer from low self-esteem – and I almost always see this in cases where teens struggle with their parents. Kids with low self-esteem tend to become irresponsible. They make poor decisions socially, in regards to drugs and sexuality – and academically. Kids with low self-esteem often act out rebelliously with their parents. Their move to a lower standard of behavior is often due to the way they perceive of themselves. Parents can make a huge difference in helping their teenagers become responsible by affirming them, praising them and believing (even in the midst of struggle) in the person they can become.

**B. Blameless Love.** Kids are going to mess up at times – it's part of their 'job description.' When they do, they don't need to be condemned by their parents. Rather, they need to know they'll be loved and accepted (although they'll have to live with the consequences of their actions, of course!) When your teen has wronged you, forgive them. Restore them. Move on. (See the story of Jesus and Simon Peter in the Gospel of John as an example of this.)

**C. Connectedness.** This is a big one for me personally! Kids need to feel connected to their parents. Your children regard your presence as a sign of caring and connectedness (even when they don't seem to do so!) Utilize the "Power of Being There." This sounds so simple, but don't underestimate the positive message you are giving your kids by watching those games, driving them all around the county or being with them in one of the hundreds of other ways you are present in their lives. You don't have to be present with your kids 24/7, but your presence gives them a greater sense of security than almost anything else you can offer them. All studies on positive family living tell us that meaningful times families spend together are well worth it. Soccer moms: it's worth it! Dads who leave work early to watch the game: it's worth it. Single parents: as tired as you may be if you continue to find the time to go on special outings with your kids, you will reap the benefits now and later in your family life.

**D. Discipline.** Clearly expressed expectations and consistent follow-through produce responsible kids. The purpose of parental discipline is to teach responsibility. Unfortunately, for many of us parents, our primary objective is evoking obedience instead. And, to be perfectly honest, most of us try to do the "discipline thing" when we're upset, tired, or frustrated . . . really in no shape to do so. Okay – so where do we begin? Well, for openers,

recognize that good parenting involves training our children in the areas of choices and consequences. In fact, the guiding force for parenting is found in Proverbs 22:6 – “Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it.” Keep that promise in mind at all times when you are sticking to your strategy and you won’t be disappointed. When it comes to molding your children’s lives through discipline, our kids need us always to show respect, even in the midst of tension. We can disagree with our children and still be able to communicate. All relationships have conflict, but a relationship between two people whose spirits are open to each other can take the conflict in stride and work through it in love.

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