

To Raise Children Right, Be a Parent, Not a Friend

by Janai Lowenstein, M.S.

When deciding to be a parent, certain attributes create optimal results. A parent has the responsibility to guide, nurture, discipline and love. When a parent trades that role for being a friend, the development of a child can be less than optimal.

A friend is someone who is liked and trusted but does not assume full responsibility. When a child's needs for responsible parenting are not met, needless suffering occurs.

Picture a baby. The parent figure meets all needs. Slowly, the baby learns to walk. Motor development allows her to begin testing the environment, using her hands, self-feeding, exploring and interacting. Brain development allows her to begin thinking for herself. Initially, parents provide physical protection and support. The same is needed for mental and emotional development, which is the framework for helping the child develop a conscience.

Children without a conscience don't contribute to society, don't love themselves or others, are abusive, and subtract from society's resources.

Guiding, nurturing, disciplining and loving are seeds in a parent-child relationship that require consistent and creative care. It's hard. It's worthwhile. Everyone grows. Replacing parenthood with friendship means parent and child operate in a parallel fashion. The child's needs for guideposts to experience success in life aren't met.

Short- and long-term goals weave themselves into a parent-child relationship dance; lack of such goals creates an awkward experience. Here are some sample goals parents can have for their children, along with some supportive actions:

Goal: Accountability. Parent consistently offers boundaries with consequences for inappropriate choices, helping to develop child's conscience. Appropriate choices deserve positive feedback. Talks things through.

Goal: Self-respect. Parent guides child to make choices that create health in mind, body and emotions. Violation of a child's private space causes self-abuse and lack of self-respect.

Goal: Reliability. Parent is a steady influence with daily responsibilities; helps child with goals.

Goal: Confidence. Parent spends quality time with child, who learns he is worth spending time with.

Goal: Contentment. Parent and child spend unpressured quality time together reading, star gazing, taking nature walks, etc. Child learns gratefulness.

Goal: Responsibility. Parent assigns chores to children which tell children they are needed and their caring counts.

Goal: Self-care. Parent provides consistent discipline which teaches child she is important enough to care for.

Goal: Trustworthiness. Parent is honest. Keeps his or her word. Doesn't break promises.

Goal: Safety and secure. Parent creates security through safe, loving touch, firmness in discipline and boundaries.

Goal: Feel liked. Parent and child laugh and play together, share, listen, respond, communicate.

Goal: Self-control. Parent practices peacemaking and relaxation techniques, and models them.

Goal: Feel loved. Parent hugs, forgives, apologizes, shares kind words, shows interest, is available, receives child's offerings, disciplines consistently.

Goal: Perseverance. Parent focuses on having joy in the process.

Define your parenting roles. Declare values you want for your child. Successful parenting is the greatest investment, giving vibrancy to children's lives and hope for the world's future. Successful parenting can lead to successful friendship as your child matures.

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Website: www.cliving.org/kidrelx.htm

Original publication date: 03/24/2001 – The Register Guard, Eugene, Oregon