



Parenting Successes

"Families are the compass that guide us. They are the inspiration to reach great heights, and our comfort when we occasionally falter."

Brad Henry, Governor of the U.S. state of Oklahoma

Aims for this Session

- ✓ Share how the teachings from the previous step and the assignment have helped you and your family this week
- ✓ Understand that by trusting everyone we are much more likely to have success
- ✓ Embrace and understand the principle of letting go
- ✓ Realise the power of commitment
- ✓ Recognise the dynamics of an alpha child
- ✓ Know the value of saying 'No'
- ✓ Reclaim our gifts of leadership
- ✓ Allow ourselves to be loved.

Introduction

We start this Step with that big issue that plays on the mind of any caring parent, the issue of trust. Then we move on to explore letting go, another vital lesson for parents. These are two of the most important dynamics to learn about and we hope that you find this Step helpful.

Parenting and trust

It is impossible to script how to be a good parent; there is no list of do's and don'ts that will guide you to having a perfect family. There are just too many variables involved and too many possibilities to make a magic formula possible. Our recommendation is that we learn about trusting ourselves to handle whatever comes up, not to avoid difficult situations, but to confront them in the knowledge that eventually the outcome will be good even if we have some rough stuff to get through. This is the power of trust.

We can invest our thoughts in trust. The opposite of trusting is worrying and the greater the worry the less the trust. When we are worrying about our children we have lost trust in the situation and actually our worry puts our kids in danger because what we fear (and so worry about) is what we attract.

Exercise 8.1 Trust



In the group take a few moments and discuss this principle using your own life examples.

What do you most worry about your children doing?

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What would you most like to trust about them?

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It is important not to confuse trust with naivety. When we are naive, we hide our head in the sand about what is going on and then act surprised when we receive a fearsome boot on our backside; we are in denial and are hiding from the presenting issues. Many of us give up on trust after such an incident but that was never trust in the first place. When we trust we start by recognising there is a problem; we see that something needs to be handled and it will most likely get worse before it gets better but what trust really is, is the total belief that it will work out OK in the end. Trust is the belief in your own ability to learn, to change, and to have the courage to handle whatever needs to be handled in a mature and wise way. Trust gives you confidence and trust will get you through any situation. Trust and faith are

the same and we all have faith in something; you may as well include yourself in that faith.

Tip: As our children grow up they experiment. They will experiment with sex, with video games, with drugs (most likely), alcohol, with cigarettes although that is slowly becoming less likely and they will hang out with questionable friends. So learn early on not to worry but to trust. Sociological studies have shown that the more you tell your children not to do something, the more interested they become in doing it.

Once when my wife was away and our daughter was 16 she asked if she could go and visit some school friends in a rough side of town. She would do her homework first then around 10 pm would go out. I asked her to be back around midnight and to call immediately she arrived at the home of her friends so at least I would know where she was. She left at 10 and there was no phone call. I started to worry with all the possibilities flashing across my mind. I even saw myself in the dock in court being asked by an incredulous judge, "You mean to say you did not know where your 16 year old daughter was?" Finally I remembered about trust. I realised that much of my worry came from my behaviour when I was a young man and I started to clean that up by forgiving myself. The phone rang and it was my daughter, deeply apologetic and heading home.

Jeff Allen

The extent to which we do not trust is the extent to which we try and control and the more we try and control our children, the more we get into a fight with them. Control leads to power struggles because we are always trying to change the other person while we are unwilling to learn and change ourselves.

Exercise 8.2 Share your worries



Share with your buddy what you worry about and then speak about how you intend to approach the situation from now on.

Tip: As you recognise that your mind is starting to worry, notice how it just goes on and on with little or no improvement. At this point of awareness, stop yourself and make that choice to stop worrying and start trusting. Start having faith in yourself to handle whatever situation may arise and bring it all to a positive conclusion. Then let go and get on with your life.

You might need to do this a thousand times but just remember your worrying does

not help, in fact it puts your loved ones in danger. When you worry your thoughts are going towards a specific scenario. You are investing your mind-power poorly, and attracting the very thing you fear. Try and resist getting caught in the trap where you worry and feel guilty about the fact you have been worrying; just let it all go and choose to learn from it.

Parenting and letting go

We have spoken about expectations and demands and the way through this trap is to learn the lesson of letting go. We can let go of our expectations, and we can let go of how we think it should be. Don't exclude your children and be willing to ask for their participation in family decisions and events.

Even at a very young age you can have a heartfelt talk with your children. They feel everything in the family and there are no secrets we can keep from them, from where we hide the Christmas present or the blue videos or magazines to how we feel and what is going on in our significant relationships. They know it all.

I remember coming home one day after a business meeting that I thought had gone really well. I had entered into a partnership with two others on a particular business venture and my son asked me what I was up to. I told him proudly I had just started a new business partnership and with whom. He knew both other people and after only the briefest of pauses he looked at me and said, *"Dad, do you really know what you are doing?"* He was about 13 and he was right; it turned out to be a really tough business relationship that ended in tears and I paid for that poor decision for years. The lesson here for me was about letting go of the idea that I had all the answers, or at least more than my 13 year old son.

Jeff Allen

We also need to get more used to the idea of letting our children go when they have matured and it is time for them to get on with their lives. As Kahlil Gibran says in *The Prophet*, *"You are the bows from which your children as living arrows are sent forth"*. They have come to go further than us and holding on will not help. We can always give support and love but they do need to live their lives. One of the great outcomes of letting go is that it brings everything and everybody back into right relationship. When we are holding on it means everything has to be at our agenda, the way we believe it should be, and we don't allow for other possibilities.

Exercise 8.3 Letting go



Choose which letting go exercise you would like from the following;

1. If you have a child leaving home or entering a new phase of his/her life – imagine trusting them enough that they would be able to handle this new stage and then let go of them. Let go of needing to manage them or control them. Imagine them maturing and experiencing the excitement of this new stage in life. Imagine them meeting the challenge and learning whatever they need to learn, in whatever way is best for them.

Be aware of how you feel; there may be a sense of loss or grief as you let them go. Recognise that this loss or grief has more to do with how you feel than with their success.

The grief will heal as you put your intention on their happiness and their success.

2. Becoming a parent is a big step yet sometimes we have hidden feelings of loss about how life was before we became a parent. Often as children we felt trapped in our family growing up and then we left home and felt free. However as we now start a new family there can be times when those old feelings of being trapped come back and we yearn for freedom again. If this is the case take a moment and write down any feelings in this regard now.

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Are you willing to let go of these feelings? Would you make that choice now?

Tip: If you try to hold on to anyone or anything you create levels of sadness and feelings of loss in your life which eventually lead to depression in one of its many forms. If you feel loss in your life it means you have not completed a lesson or cycle and you are still holding on to something or somebody who is now in your past. Each time that you let go of someone or something your life will move forward, you will move to a new cycle. If you embrace the principle of letting go of the past, then the new cycle will bring you the next steps in your life.

Commitment

Having children is one of the biggest commitments we can make in our lives.

I remember how ignorant we were of how different our lives would be after the arrival of our first child. We made a number of assumptions and then basically got on with what we wanted in our lives. We had no idea of how to adjust which did lead to a lot of pain and re-adjustment. It was a steep learning curve and in hindsight most of the pain came from our reluctance to change, our lack of commitment to

the process of becoming parents.

Jeff Allen

Caring for a child is a massive undertaking and it requires massive amounts of commitment. As in any relationship commitment is a powerful tool which is required not once but thousands of times. Commitment means we are unwilling to allow the distance to grow between us and the people around us. We commit to keep up the contact, to make the relationship more important than any of our pain from the past and we are willing to keep moving forward in our lives.

Many of us, especially the emotionally phobic, view commitment as the first step towards slavery. We think that we will totally lose ourselves, we will have no time or space for us. So we withhold part of ourselves and this starts to create a distance between us and the people around us. This separation becomes the underlying reason for seeing parenting as a burden, as a loss of freedom. But the solution here is not the separation, not pulling away. Instead the solution is our willingness to remain in contact and remain intimate with our children. It is paradoxical; the more we commit to this relationship the more sense of freedom we feel and the more we withdraw the greater our sense of burden and duty.

Exercise 8.4 Commitment



Take a moment and fill in the first percentages that come to your mind in the space below.

How much do you feel being a parent has been a burden to you? %

How much do you feel you had to sacrifice to become a parent? %

How committed do you believe you are as a parent? %

If you have been honest with yourself the percentages should all be around the same amount. Any success in any area of our lives calls for a minimum of 100% commitment. 95% is a failing grade when it comes to commitment. We know it is often against our instincts to commit fully but why not try it and watch the results?

In commitment what we do is totally give ourselves to the partnership, to the relationship, to our child. We choose them with the full extent of our mind, and we give up all our escape routes, we give up everything that we have used to keep some separation. Would you take a moment and do that now?

Tip: Commitment is a powerful transformational tool. One act of pure commitment can take us over a mountain range of problems. Now see the person or situation before you without censoring any parts and with your whole mind choose them. As you claim them, you commit to them in their entirety.

Alpha child

The trouble that I see people getting into the most, especially with sensitive people like ourselves, is that we don't want our children to get injured like we got injured. We take such great care that we don't injure the kids, that we don't disappoint them, that we do whatever we can do to keep them from crying, and what happens is that the balance of the family gets out of whack. Human beings are pack animals, like dogs and wolves and meerkats. And the family is the pack. And for everything to work well in the pack you have an alpha male and an alpha female. If you have a good strong alpha male, and a good strong alpha female, everyone is happy. And everything works.

But with our generation we have started being so careful with our children because of our judgments on our parents. I'm so invested in not being like my parents, I'm going to be loving and nurturing. So with all this special care too much permissiveness can happen, and it ends up that the kids are in the alpha position. When the kid is in the alpha position, nobody is happy. Everybody is miserable, because a kid in the alpha [position is a tyrant. They are nice when everyone is doing everything they want. But when people don't do everything they want, heads roll. Your friends don't want to be around you and your kids because your kids are so obnoxious. Not only do you suffer, but your kids suffer, because they are scared. They don't know how to be the boss of the family. They don't have the wisdom that that job requires. They don't have the experience and the know-how to guide the family, and they get frightened, they don't feel safe.

We don't want to be above our kids, and we don't want to dictate to them, so what we do is give up the alpha position which is just the leadership position. You can be in a horizontal relationship with someone and still be their leader. You can be in the leadership position and still be a friend. Be your child's genuine friend while still being their leader. There are a lot of decisions that only the leaders should be making. If your child is raised to be a tyrant, they are not going to have a happy life. To me, this is the most important challenge in parenting these days.

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Exercise 8.5 Alpha child



Who has Alpha tendencies in your family? Does this create friction or have you stepped into your leadership and maintained your ability to be friends with your family? Discuss in the group for about 10 minutes.

Saying 'No'

Think of the last time you said “no” to your child. How did you feel? If you felt bad or uncomfortable about it then it means you are carrying some guilt about yourself or about being a parent. As a parent, it is important not to respond from a place of guilt about anything that has happened in the past because feeling guilty keeps you stuck, it keeps you withdrawn. Your guilt keeps the whole problem locked in place and is replayed in your mind to make you feel guilty again and again. When you feel guilty you are an ineffective parent. If you feel guilty, you need to learn a lesson and then move on. If you feel guilty when you don't respond by saying “yes” to every request your children make then there is some forgiveness you need to do to release the guilt and bring yourself fully back into your place as a loving caring parent who has the courage to say “no” when necessary.

There has to be balance. There is tremendous value when your children see you as their friend, their ally, someone who naturally does what they can to help and support rather than just say “no” without a good reason. At those times when you do need to say “no”, it is best to explain your reasons, such as “right now there is something I need to do for myself” or “no, I am just too tired right now to do that”, or “it's not practical because . . .”.

Discuss briefly in the group if anyone has examples of saying “no” effectively or ineffectively.

Tip: If you learn to practice the principles of effective communication and you express yourself with love and inclusion you will be able to say anything to anyone. When you establish a connection the other person hears it with a right-mindedness and they will learn instead of reacting. Get the connection right and the rest will be easy.

Leadership

We all want our children to grow up and take their place in the world, to shine as a star and be a natural leader. A leader is someone who fully embraces who they are and then shares

that with their family, their friends and with the wider world. That is what we want our children to be like when they grow up.

Needless to say, there is one small catch: how are our children going to learn to be like this? The answer is they will learn from you, from us. We must first learn the lessons of leadership for if we refuse then at some point so will they because our children follow us as we followed our parents.

Remember what you were like as a child , when you were in primary process? Not the immature parts but the fun, the naturalness, the spontaneity, the courage, the generosity, the altruism and the naughtiness. Those are our leadership qualities. All that energy, all those qualities, we had those as children and the willingness to win those back and then share them is what leadership is all about. Your gifts are different than the gifts of other members of your family, but as you become willing to give these qualities again, others also become willing to give their contributions, their gifts. Then our relationship with our children becomes a co-creative relationship which is a source of happiness.

Exercise 8.6



Take a moment and think back to your childhood. What were you like? Write down those good qualities that you remember

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Are you willing to win those qualities back? Would you have the courage to be like that again? When was the last time you had fun, when was the last time you were totally spontaneous, not withholding your remarks? Those attributes have not gone anywhere, they are still within us. It is up to us to win them back and not get trapped by the feelings of self consciousness or embarrassment. It is a choice; what would you choose now?

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STEP 8 - Parenting Successes



Now sit opposite your buddy and for the length of at least one song imagine that your buddy represents one of your children. Energetically give to them the qualities that you have identified as part of your leadership; as you share those qualities which are naturally 'you', bring them to life. Feel the gifts grow in you and in your child.

Ensure that both buddies have a turn.

Love

Our children learn to love by being loved. There is only one way any of us learn to love and that is by letting ourselves be loved. So many of us really love our children, in fact many of us would die for our children, but would you want your child to die for you?

Love is not about dying, love is about life and living. Life and relationships are about learning how to give and how to receive, how to love and how to be loved. It is possible, even probable, that everyone on this course truly loves their children, but how many of us have allowed our children to love us back? Where is that flow of appreciation, that flow of gratitude, that flow of compassion, of all the qualities that make up love, coming from them to us as well as from us to them?

Exercise 8.7 Visualisation



Close your eyes, put your feet on the ground and relax, take a few deep breaths and relax within yourself then imagine your child or children standing before you. (Pause)

Imagine your child takes a few moments to express to you his or her desires and wishes for their life. (Pause)

Imagine your child telling you what kind of life they would like to have, what kind of experiences they would wish for, what kind of family they would love to have when they grow up. Imagine them telling you what is important to them in their lives. Take a few moments and allow yourself that communication. (Pause)

Notice how much they have loved you and allow all your defences down for a minute as you let that love in. (Pause)

We often feel unappreciated, we feel a lack of gratitude from our children. But is that true or have we been blocking their appreciation? (Pause)

Today we could open to them, allow them to love us and communicate back no matter what we think about ourselves. Take some time now and allow yourself to feel that love and connection with your children. (Pause)

When you are ready come back to the room and open your eyes.

Within the group share your thoughts and experiences about this section. Share what you appreciate about the group.

Conclusion

No matter how good our relationships are with the significant people around us, they could always get better and we need to keep learning and growing. Good relationships do not just happen; in fact if we do not learn and grow then our relationships usually falter. Remember everyone is doing the best they can in any situation and people only start to do better when we are willing to give to them in some way.

Assignment

During the time you spend with each child each day, practise appreciating your child. There is always something to appreciate about them and, as Mark Twain said, 'you can live for a whole month on a compliment'. Notice that it feels just as good to give a compliment as to receive one.

Before the next meeting tell your buddy what you appreciate about him or her.