

Teaching values to our children is a lot like helping them to develop self-esteem. Words and verbal lessons are not enough. Children mimic what they see. As actors in a play, they continuously try on different roles to see how they fit. This life rehearsal process allows them hopefully, to become individuals whose core contains the best of their past experiences and inherited traits.

No one ever said that being a parent is an easy job. But don't be alarmed. If you can realize and accept the responsibility of parenthood, you can lead the kind of life that will enable your children to develop a solid sense of values.

A few tips might be helpful in teaching values to your children.

- ✓ **Don't try to be a perfect person.** Children need to see that it is okay to make mistakes and to struggle with conflicts. It's not the struggle that poses a problem, but rather the manner in which you behave. For instance, if you question the existence of God in a dignified and thoughtful dialogue, your children learn respect and tolerance. But if they hear you berate and denigrate the beliefs of others, their spiritual leaders or religious symbols, your children learn prejudice and intolerance.
- ✓ **Don't try to be mistake-free.** Everyone makes mistakes and that is okay. There is enough pressure to do everything "right" in the world. As parents we need to show our children that mistakes do occur. We want them to know that it is okay to make mistakes and that owning up to those mistakes is important. Too often society preaches that we should take responsibility for our actions but then acts in a contradictory manner. Blaming the victim is a good example of this hypocrisy and it is very evident in the sports world. Take the Latrelle Sprewell incident, which occurred during the 1997/1998 season. Mr. Sprewell was a player on the Golden State Warrior professional basketball team who got into a scuffle with his coach. He physically attacked the coach, grabbing him by the throat. This action resulted in his being suspended by the Warriors and the NBA for one season. In his apology, he said that the coach had been provocative and, in essence, had caused him to lose control. In fact, he sued the team and the NBA for loss of his salary. For children who look up to professional athletes as role models, Mr. Sprewell's actions suggest that, yes he did the wrong thing but the coach's behavior gave him permission to respond in a violent way.



The coach's behavior may have been inappropriate but Mr. Sprewell chose to respond in an inappropriate way that should not be condoned. Secondly, Mr. Sprewell's response suggests that he should not be held accountable for his behavior. Remember that the children observing this behavior are very much influenced by what they see. Sometimes, we make mistakes and need to admit them and suffer the consequences.

- ✓ **Try to have your actions consistent with your words.** This is a critical element in your child's development. They will observe everything that you do and critically evaluate it in order to eventually try it on and see how you do to try it on, eventually, and see how it fits. If lying is not a value that you want to convey to your child then be careful not to lie when a salesman phones your home.
- ✓ **Try to have your actions consistent with your words.** It is much more beneficial to speak candidly about why you are not interested in something than to create a story about it or, worse, to ask your child to lie and say that you are not home. It may seem like a small thing but it can pack a big wallop.
- ✓ **Maintain an open climate for discussing everything.** Children need to feel that they can discuss anything with their parents without the fear of punishment or negative judgment. This is probably the most difficult of the tips because none of us wants to hear that our children may not agree with or accept our values. However, remember that their questioning is an attempt to understand and not necessarily go against our structure.

Children need the opportunity to try new things but, in the process, they may tap into some of our own unresolved conflicts. Stifling this process will only encourage them to move away from the values that you want them to accept. Giving them the opportunity to question, however, will keep the dialogue alive and open.

Remember when you as a parent accept that you have a tremendous impact on your children, you can make this impact positive and truly constructive.