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Validating vs. Indulging Children's Feelings

By Margaret Paul, Ph.D.

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Title: Validating vs. Indulging Children's Feelings

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Web Address: <http://www.innerbonding.com>

Word Count: 851

Category: Parenting

VALIDATING VS. INDULGING CHILDREN'S FEELINGS

Margaret Paul, Ph.D.

I grew up at a time when children's feelings were not important. I was supposed to go along with the program without complaint, regardless of how I felt. If I was upset about something, my mother generally responded with, "Don't be ridiculous," while my father just ignored me. Many of my counseling clients had similar experiences in their growing-up years.

Those of us on a personal growth path don't want to do the same thing to our children. We want our children to feel safe in expressing their feelings. We want them to know that what they feel matters to us, that their feelings are important to us. The problem is that sometimes children use their feelings to manipulate their parents, and parents sometimes get confused between validating their children's authentic feelings and indulging the feelings intended to manipulate.

All feelings are not created equal. As parents, we need to learn to discern the difference in intent regarding our children's expression of feelings. Authentic feelings are generated by life experiences, such as the loss of a pet, difficulties with friends, problems with learning, and so on. These feelings

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need to be attended to with caring and compassion. Manipulative feelings are generated by thoughts such as, "I want attention," "I want new clothes," or "I have a right to have whatever I want." The expression of these feelings need to be ignored, or the child needs to be told that we don't like the complaining, so that we are not indulging our children in using their feelings to manipulate.

Joanne is struggling with her 6 year old daughter, Rachael, regarding this issue of feelings. "I don't want to squash her feelings the way mine were squashed." However, Rachael has learned to use her feelings to control Joanne. For example, Rachael often cries bitterly in the mornings while getting dressed for school because she can't seem to find the right combination of clothes. Joanne then spends lots of time trying to help Rachael and mornings have become a nightmare. The same thing happens regarding food. If Joanne doesn't have the food Rachael wants, or doesn't like the meal Joanne has prepared, Rachael often complains and carries on. If Joanne and her husband Dan want

to go out alone for dinner or with friends, Rachael is outraged at being left out. Joanne consistently validates Rachael's feelings by saying things like, "I really understand how you feel," or "I really understand that this is important to you."

However, in continuing to attend to Rachael's feelings and giving them a lot of her time, Joanne is indulging Rachael and teaching her to use her feelings as a form of control. In addition, Joanne is not helping Rachael learn to manage her feelings rather than dump them on others. Just because we feel something doesn't mean we need to act on the feelings. As adults, just because we may feel like having a ice cream for breakfast, doesn't mean we indulge ourselves in having it. Just because we feel like sleeping in when we need to go to work doesn't mean we allow our feelings to determine our behavior. Just because we feel like punching someone in the nose doesn't mean we do it. Hopefully, we've learned to acknowledge and release our feelings without letting them control us.

The same needs to be true with our children. We need to learn to comfort our children's authentic feelings, such as the pain over the loss of a friendship, while not giving much attention to feelings expressed to control. When Joanne takes responsibility for fixing Rachael's feelings, Rachael does not have to learn to take care of her own feelings. Joanne needs to walk away from or ignore Rachael's tantrums and complaints when they are about things like her clothes or food. She needs to let Rachael know that, while she understands her feelings, Rachael also needs to learn to accept things as they are. Accepting how things are is part of learning to manage feelings.

If Joanne wants Rachael to grow up with good values, she needs to not give energy to issues such as the clothes. Indulging Rachael in thinking the right clothes are so important is not good for Rachael. Indulging Rachael in controlling whether or not she is included in adult activities is also not good for Rachael. Rachael needs to learn to accept things even if she doesn't like them - we all need to learn this. By indulging Rachael's manipulative behavior through giving all her feeling so much importance, Joanne is creating a child with entitlement issues.

Before we can help our children manage their feelings in healthy ways, we need to learn to manage our feelings in healthy ways. If you are indulgent with your feelings, your children will learn to do the same. If you are using your feelings to manipulate others, or allowing other to manipulate you with their feelings, your children will learn this from you. One of the best things you can do for your children is to

become a role model regarding taking personal responsibility for your feelings.

Margaret Paul, Ph.D. is the best-selling author and co-author of eight books, including "Do I Have To Give Up Me To Be Loved By You?", "Do I Have To Give Up Me To Be Loved By My Kids?", "Healing Your Aloneness", "Inner Bonding", and "Do I Have To Give Up Me To Be Loved By God?" Visit her web site for a FREE Inner Bonding course: <http://www.innerbonding.com> or <mailto:margaret@innerbonding.com>

Children And Divorce

By Stephen Kreutzer

A recent statistic shows that almost half of all marriages end in divorce. Divorce is difficult for everyone involved, but maybe the hardest on children. Most often they experience many feelings that they do not understand. They go through a range of emotions and need their parents to understand. If you are going through a divorce getting to understand how your children are dealing with it is important.

When parents divorce they often put their children in the center of arguments and a game of emotional tug of war. To avoid this sort of thing parents need to work together. Even though their marriage is over they are still parents together. The child needs to understand many things about the divorce. Parents need to keep in touch with their children and understand the many feelings they may be having. Older children, especially, can go through periods where they act out as a way to cope with the divorce. Many times children feel the divorce is their fault. They may worry about the future and how to deal with other events, like parent's day at school. Both parents need to show the children that they can work together and not fight. At the same time it is important to let the children know that you are not getting back together. Establishing some sort of family structure is a necessity to help children get back to "normal".

Children will react different depending on their age. The following list explains a little about each age group and how they react to divorce.

Age 3-5: Regression to a more infantile state, problems sleeping, fear of separation

Age 6-8: Fantasies of parents getting back together, open emotions

Age 8-11: Anger, treat one parent as good the other as bad, take a caregiver role

Age 12-18: Depression, violent actions, judgmental of parents, develop anxiety about own relationships

Learning to help your children cope through divorce is possible the most important step in the divorce process. Children have no choice in the matter and may feel completely left out if their feelings are not recognized.

Stephen Kreutzer is a freelance publisher based in Cupertino, California. He publishes articles and reports in various ezines and provides divorce resources at



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