

## ***Parenthood (11): Making Mistakes***

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**I**t goes without saying: parents are going to make mistakes in raising their children. Harsh words may be spoken out of anger or frustration; punishment may be meted out unfairly; the child's side of a disagreement may not be adequately considered. While such behavior is wrong and should be corrected, parents should not fear that such mistakes will do irreparable harm.

The responsibility of a child's development is so great that some parents become intimidated to the point of paralysis, afraid to act for fear of making a mistake. But children are surprisingly perceptive and understanding. They will recognize when a certain response is out of character and are always ready to overlook or forgive. Did we not do the same with our own parents?

The greater danger to a child is not the occasional mistake but chronic maltreatment. *Chronic* neglect, *chronic* harsh language, *chronic* injustice will surely ruin a child's self-image and undermine the bridge of communication and respect between parents and children.

It is vitally important that parents express love for their children day in and day out. And it's not enough to simply *do* things for them; we must *tell* them we love them. In making it verbally and actively clear that children are objects of supreme love, parents buy "insurance" against the inevitable errors of judgment. Filial love is powerful and not easily or quickly broken.

Additionally, some parents mishandle problems not for fear of making a mistake, but through concern for mistakes they have *already made*. Many people bring a lot of baggage from their past into parenthood. A tendency is to hide their own past mistakes behind a facade of self-righteousness, thus creating distance between a parent and child. Another parent might refuse to correct the behavior of which they were guilty in earlier years.

This is usually done out of fear that past mistakes will rob the parent of moral authority. A child may protest, "Well, if *you* did thus-and-such, then you have no right to tell me not to do it!" This is the bookend to, "How do *you* know? Have *you* ever tried it?" Kids are smart; they try to get you going and coming.

I believe it is best to own up to one's own mistakes and then say, "I *do* understand because I've been there, and I'm trying to spare you the pain and guilt I've carried around for years."

Parents, don't be held hostage by the fear of mistakes past, present or future.