

Gifts We Can Give Our Children: The Freedom to Make Mistakes

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As we begin 2019, I would like to offer a series of articles about gifts that we can give our children. For some of these gifts, you will see immediate evidence in your relationship with your child. For other gifts, the impact may not show up until far into the future.

Imagine that you are an athlete and as your trainer, I'm concerned that you might overexert or injure yourself during training. Each time you show up for a practice session, I do all the exercises and routines. I spare you a lot of sweat and pain, but when it is time for you to perform in a competition, you will discover that you are not prepared. In fact, I have crippled you.

Our children need to gain their own experience, wisdom, strength and confidence through making their own choices. If we make their decisions for them and rescue them when they make mistakes, they will not learn the important skills needed for their future. Of course, as parents we need to be available to encourage, support, guide and challenge our children as they develop these skills. Let's think for a moment about different parenting styles.

Love and Logic Parenting describes three basic parenting styles. The helicopter parent hovers, protects and rescues his/her child from any kind of harm. In doing this, such parents don't allow their child to fail or make mistakes. Helicopter parents steal the learning opportunities in the name of love.

Drill sergeant parents bark orders and expect blind obedience. They can be heard saying, "Do it or else." This style of parenting often uses punishment as a consequence. Punishment breeds resentment and keeps children from pausing for self-examination of their mistakes. Drill sergeants are great in a battle but difficult as a parenting model.

Consultant parents allow their child to experience the natural consequences of their choices. By asking guiding questions and offering suggestions, they help the child find a solution and own the problem. Instead of telling them what to do, consultant parents help establish time frames and guidelines within which to work, allowing the child to be responsible. Children who grow in responsibility also grow in self-esteem, a prerequisite for achievement and happiness in the real world. Consultant parents have discovered that it is key to model the kinds of characteristics that they want their children to inherit.

God gave each of us considerable freedom and that includes making mistakes. Failure and success are two sides of the same coin. The older the child gets, the bigger the decisions become and the graver the consequences of those decisions. It is wise to allow our children to make many mistakes when they are young and the consequences are "affordable." As painful as it is to stand by and allow our children to learn through the natural consequences of their choices, this is the price that we must pay in raising responsible children who grow into amazing young adults.