

Parenting Inside Out: 4 Principles to Create Peace

Suna Senman
July 12, 2013



Suna Senman

Have you noticed how all babies are born as harmless, simple love bundles, and adults are a mixture of kindness and iniquity? Between birth and adulthood, a child goes through a process of growth greatly impacted by parenting. To attain a world of respect, harmony and peace, we must raise our children into adults with those traits. Parents may have a greater ability than they are aware of to form responsible world citizens in the midst of countless outside influences. According to a recent international survey focused on how technology influences children, 85% of young adults report that their greatest influence on their life perspective comes from their parents — not the outside influences. Historically, several experts presented “outside-in” methods of parenting creating today’s adults, and the state of the current world. As mindfulness becomes a more acceptable concept, “inside-out” parenting — parenting that starts from the state of being within the parent may move us into a more sustainable, peaceful world.

Inside out principle 1: Love yourself before attempting to love your child.

The unconditional love that a parent has for him/herself is the love he/she can give to the child. The disconnection or connection to the authentic self within the parent will determine the level of connection with the child. Since you can only give what you have, if you accept and love yourself, you can be accepting and loving to your child. If you are ashamed of yourself, you will give shame to your child. With honesty, acknowledge the person that you are now, recognizing that you are also growing. Being who you truly are, naturally, with your range of abilities and quirks, allows your child to accept himself and mature naturally into his potential.

Your child is dependent upon you and needs your support to develop recognition of self. Showing awareness of and being naturally genuine and accepting towards yourself, others and your child empowers your child to live sincerely. The love and acceptance from the first adults that a child experiences writes the program for how the child connects to the world. “Parenting is all about connection. It’s about how to relate to your child when your child makes a mistake. That depends on how you relate to yourself when you make a mistake,” explains. Coly Vulpiani, healing practitioner and founder of Parallel Realities. Your attitude towards yourself may be the hugest impact on your child’s self-image.

Inside out principle 2: You are not here to teach your child. Your child is here to teach you.

Before being taught to judge and categorize, a child has an open, observant mind. They see raw, pre-interpreted reality. Adults use reasoning, interpretations and explanations to dress up raw truth to appear to be something else, and then believe the fabrication. So, when an adult tells a child, “I’m not mad. I just don’t like that you mess up the floor I just cleaned. That’s why I yelled,” children get confused with the contradictions to perceived reality. “Children do not care how you feel. They care that you know how you feel.” Anya Mann of Life Coaching Magazine explains the child-teacher dynamic: “A lot of us: parents and grandparents — are not congruent, and the child will call us out on it.” Many times when adults, including parents and teachers, feel that children are being disruptive, they tend to see the child as a problem. Adults with the flexibility to observe themselves and the systems that they created can learn from the children around them. Children remind adults of simple, pure truths, and consequently connect us to our authentic selves.

In addition, what the parent sees as a needed lesson for the children may be primarily the lesson for the parent. Vulpiani explains, “You are focused in on the child but really that child is there to bring up something in you that you need to look at in yourself.” Taking the example above of the parent who is upset at the child who created a mess on her newly-cleaned floor, observe the focus of the parent. The parent reacts to the child’s disrespect of her work (cleaning the floor). A mindful parent can use her own reaction to take a look at and learn how she fails to respect other’s efforts. Perhaps she’s not recognizing the child’s endeavor or her husband’s labor. With awareness of how we are connected with one another, we can see our own reflection in others, and then see where we can improve ourselves.

Inside out principle 3: Discern Praise

Simply telling a child that they are “good,” “talented” or “the best” disconnected from their efforts can be counterproductive to your child’s achievement. Yet, “process praise,” which is focused on effort empowers a child to confront and overcome challenges according to a report from a collaborative study done by The University of Chicago and Stanford University psychology professors. General descriptions of a child as “intelligent,” “strong,” “capable,” etc. lead a child to believe that these are fixed traits, whereas connecting a child’s effort and accomplishment to qualities conveys to the child that these traits can be improved with effort.

Self-identity is fluid, and develops with process praise. Identity builds upon one’s self-confidence, initiative and purpose. Understandably, positive feedback on attempted feats ameliorates self-esteem, thus builds more self-confidence and willingness to take more initiative. Judgment conversely restrains.

In the same vein, discerning praise in your inner dialogue as a parent supports your expression to your child. Practice “process praise” on yourself regularly and avoid judgment. Instead of telling yourself what you “are,” which is static, focus on what you do and give yourself credit for attempting a new feat. Simply attempting to guide your child in the next phase of development is a huge endeavor that holds no failure with sincere effort. You create many unnoticed accomplishments each day. “We don’t acknowledge each other in the world enough,” declares life coach, founder and author of Insightful Player, a character-building program for youth, Chrissy Carew. Mindfully accounting these small actions builds a stronger self-identity that will empower you to support your child with his growth.

Inside out principle 4: Stop doing and sit still.

Accomplishing many small feats with mindful accountability gives a positive self-identity. Silent, quiet-mind dreaming, however, allows us to visualize where we want to go. Exerting the willpower to resist an activity amidst the many temptations we have today is developing a muscle that can be our greatest contributor to success. “Poor self-control correlates with just about every kind of individual trauma,” Dr. Roy Bauermeister writes in his book, *Willpower: Rediscovering the Greatest Human Strength*. Modeling self-control to resist activity can offer your child the skill of resisting temptations. Balance activity with the type of quiet mindful awareness needed to plan meaningful direction.

When stress becomes high, often, the best thing that you can do for your child (and yourself) is to practice doing nothing: meditating. The more people I interview, the more I find that the common denominator in successful people is a meditation practice. Vulpani says, “Zen [meditation] practice returned me to the place of peace within myself. Meditation is about just being still.” It requires discipline to still the mind and body in a world that never stops with news that never ends and smart phones that have no limits. The decision to do nothing, whenever possible, is as important as the decision to act whenever necessary.

Parenting is the process of connecting, from adult to child and vice-versa. As the parent, you are responsible to guide your child, which in turn requires guiding yourself. Parenting inside-out directs the focus of your love and effort from your child back to yourself, so that you empower your child through sincerely being your authentic self. The magic with the parenting connection is that both you and your child grow together, toward harmony, joy and peace.