

SANDY'S

"PARENTING TRUTHS"



Having successfully parented two (plus a borrowed) children and taught parenting for twenty-eight years, I have developed what I call my truths.

TRUTH 1

The most important job you will ever do in your life is to successfully parent your children. You can trash a business, co-trash a marriage and live with yourself; but as the architect of a human being's life you want to do the very soundest, the best job you can do. You will watch your children the rest of your life. Isn't living with the knowledge that you did the best you could do worthy of an investment right now.....of your time, your heart and your soul?

TRUTH 2

Children are asking two primary questions:

1. "How does the world work? How can I be successful here? How can I be safe here? How can I love and be loved, here?" I don't know about you, but now that I am in my late 60's, I'm still asking myself some of these questions—and that is the job—teaching your child how to live successfully.
2. "What is power and how do I use it? " When you have chased a young child around all day, or had a series of confrontations with an older child where your authority was constantly challenged—the question you tend to ask yourself is, "Why is he/she trying to drive my crazy?" Notice your body language when you ask this question—you are in your "get even" stance. Most likely, you have built up so much anger that the next tiny incident will turn you into an erupting volcano.

Instead: Think, "Boy, he/she is asking a lot of questions about power today, isn't he/she?" Power. A child is CONSTANTLY asking, "Is this how I use power? By virtue of your actions, you are constantly answering that question, yes or no. A child who is whining sees that the parent is getting increasingly angry. Why doesn't the child stop? It is very powerful to blow an adult off of being calm, cool and collected. The small child can't think these thoughts, but somehow understands that "I won this power struggle, didn't I?" Power. A child is constantly asking, "Is this how I use power?"

SANDY'S "PARENTING TRUTHS"

PAGE 2 OF 4

TRUTH 3

You teach most by what you model. You can talk forever about telling the truth, but if your child's discrepancy detector (and they all have them!) picks up a lie, that child decides that lying is ok. If you drink alcohol to "chill out", when your child becomes an adolescent and needs to chill out, who will he/she follow? If you make a nasty comment about someone, your child is listening. You teach everything by what you model. You teach a child how to use power by the way you use power. Model love, truth, being respectful, integrity—your children are following—you!

TRUTH 4

When you scream and yell at children, they cannot hear you. We all have a primal fear of sudden loud noises. If a parent runs into a room screaming at his/her children, each child immediately forms a small smile on his/her face and each child's eyes get glassy. The parent increases the volume, yelling at the child to reveal what he/she was doing a minute ago. A second element has now set in—fear. Fear cuts off one's ability to think and reason. Therefore, the child, who knows that he/she was doing something a minute ago, can't access that information. As the child's fear increases, access to the answer that will calm the parent down is denied. When you scream and yell at children they cannot hear you.

TRUTH 5

Your children are constantly asking, "Do you mean it?" Say what you mean, mean what you say and follow through—consistency is a key to successful parenting.

TRUTH 6

Treat children the way you would want to be treated. Yes, I'm talking about the Golden Rule, and how many of us live it? "Put your napkin in your lap! Stand up straight! Don't pick your nose! He's not very good in school. She isn't pretty but she's so smart!" Are these things you would say to your friend—and still have a friendship? Children who are treated with respect learn to be respectful of themselves and others.

SANDY'S "PARENTING TRUTHS"

PAGE 3 OF 4

TRUTH 7

Teach your children that they are responsible for their choices. Having spent several years working with at-risk students in junior high and high schools, I am certain that teaching your child to take responsibility for his/her choices is vital to that child's success as a human being. Instead of ranting and raving when a child makes a poor choice ask, "Tell me about your choice to steal something from the store." Listen! If the child says, "They dared me to do it!", respond with, "And you chose to steal. You stole something. You got caught and you will serve the consequence." Learning to live in a more responsible way comes from receiving rational consequences, not from punishment. Give children choices: "You are at choice right now, Scott. Either go and wash the car right now as we agreed, or you will not be driving the car this weekend." (Teen starts to walk out of room in middle of your talk) "You are at choice right now, Kathleen. Stop and finish this conversation with me or meet me at 8:00 tonight." (Why 8:00? That is when their favorite TV shows begin.) "Would you like a grilled cheese sandwich or a tuna sandwich for lunch?" (When the child gives a third choice, whining, repeat your choice over and over and over. The rational consequence in this example is that the child gets to hear your boring diatribe until the child chooses to choose one of your choices!)

TRUTH 8

Teach children how to think for themselves. It is important that children are invited to think through their own problems. Your child comes to you saying, "I told Todd I'd play with him on Saturday and Matt just asked me to go to a baseball game with he and his father. What shall I do?" Instead of laying the judgment/guilt trip that was laid on you by your parents, ask, "What are your choices?" When the child states the possible choices, write them on a piece of paper. Then list the positives and negatives of each choice. The child can make a rational decision when all the facts are on the table. The difficult thing to do is to let the child make what you perceive to be the "wrong" choice and suffer the consequences of that choice. The child may not lie, cheat or steal in order to have his/her way; in matters of integrity, the parent may need to intervene.

TRUTH 9

Come to terms with the fact that there is no such thing as a perfect parent and more than once, you will be totally off base in your choice of how to handle a problem. A perfect parent does not exist. If you could be perfect, who would model how to make a mistake and redeem yourself, how to fail and go on, how to say the thing that hurts someone and go back and clean it up, and how to totally lose it? Being human is the great gift to give your children. A human being who is humble, willing to learn from mistakes, and who is loving, is the person your children will learn to be if you model those qualities. Get used to the idea, you will totally mess up more than one of your parenting moments. If you are in the learning game and choose to tell the truth, your children will respect you and learn from you that which they need to know in our imperfect world.

SANDY'S "PARENTING TRUTHS"

PAGE 4 OF 4

TRUTH 10

No two children are the same. There is no "them" (the boys) or "they" (the girls); there is an individual child who is different from any other human being that has ever existed or will ever be born. Unique! Therefore, it is important to remember that the thing that "works" for one child may not "work" for the other child. Don't walk in YOUR moccasins when you look at your child, walk in his or her moccasins—look at the child through the child's eyes. Some children need more attention than other children. Some children need more help than other children. Some children need more nurturing than other children. Some children totally break the mold in terms of being like the rest of the family; we call these children "black sheep". It is often the "black sheep" child who helps to change the world in a more positive way. Honor differences. Celebrate uniqueness. Cherish each child.

TRUTH 11

Love your children every single second they are alive. In my parenting seminars I always say, "If I were mature enough to say one thing and go home, it would be this: Never, ever take your love away as a way of motivating or controlling your child." When I've worked with at-risk students, the commonality they share is that they were raised with conditional love, "Mom/Dad loves you when you are a good girl/boy." Whether spoken or not, the child assumes that to be "bad" is stop being loved. "Yes, I am upset that you let your bicycle roll off the cliff. Yes, there will be a consequence." Love is ever-present. Angry, irritated, frustrated, super-annoyed—you still love your child. This love becomes the emotional armor with which the child protects him/herself through the increasingly difficult process of growing up. Unconditional love. Never, ever take your love away from a child for any reason.