



Becoming a Loving Parent

Being a Happy Parent - Part of Good Parenting

By Dr. Margaret Paul

Do your children see you as happy and peaceful, or do they see you as angry, depressed or overburdened? Learn how important it is to good parenting for you to learn to take emotional responsibility for your own feelings.

When you were growing up, did you ever wish that your parents were happy? Did you feel safe when they were happy and peaceful?

My mother was rarely a happy person. Most of the time she was anxious, angry and felt overburdened, even though I was her only child. She rarely laughed and was often upset with me or my father. Clearly, she made both of us responsible for her happiness, and we consistently fell short.

I would have given anything to have a happy mother - a mother who knew how to take responsibility for her own happiness and pain. I would have loved to have a mother who showed me how to take loving care of myself instead of showing me how to be an unhappy martyr.

Often, in my counseling work with parents, I ask them if their parents were happy. Most of the time they say no. I ask them if they wanted their parents to be happy and invariably they say, "Yes, I would have loved it." Yet these same parents are not taking responsibility for making themselves happy now. They are acting just like their parents - anxious, angry, depressed, withdrawn, resistant or compliant. They are controlling with each other or with their children in the same ways their parents were controlling.

"As parents," I say to them, "it is your responsibility to learn how to make yourselves happy so you can be role models for your children. How can your children learn how to take emotional responsibility if you don't? Right now, you are role-modeling being a victim of your circumstances instead of being an emotionally responsible adult. You are using your anger, upsets and unhappiness to control your children, or you are putting yourself aside to take care of everyone but yourself. How can they learn to take care of themselves if you are not taking care of yourselves?"

Many parents take care of externals: they keep the house clean, they are on time, they pay their bills and they earn money. Some parents even take care of their physical health by eating well and getting

enough exercise. But many parents fail to take care of their emotional wellbeing.

Taking care of your emotional wellbeing means that you recognize that you cause many of your own feelings with your thoughts and actions. When you think and behave in ways that are unloving to yourself or others - that are not in your highest good - you will be unhappy. When you think and behave in ways that are loving to yourself and others - that are in your highest good - you will be happy. Your positive or negative emotions are often the result of your own thoughts and actions.

If you operate from the belief that how your children act, or how your partner acts, or how your external life is, causes your happiness or unhappiness, then you are operating as a victim. As a victim, your happiness is dependent upon others doing what you want them to do and on getting the outcomes you want. If this is your belief system, then you are teaching your children to be victims.

Taking emotional responsibility means practicing Inner Bonding - staying tuned in to your own feelings, and immediately shifting your thought process and actions when you are feeling negative feelings. It means that you learn to access a spiritual source of inner guidance to help you know how to take loving care of yourself. You need to learn to turn to your spiritual guidance to help you think the thoughts and take the actions that are true and in harmony with your soul, rather than operating from the false beliefs that cause you pain.

Do not kid yourself into thinking that as long as you are there for your children you are being good parents. You also need to learn to be there for yourself so that you can be a happy and peaceful parent.

Loving Yourself, Loving Your Children

By Dr. Margaret Paul

**Are you attending to your children but ignoring yourself?
Discover the importance of attending to your children's
feelings and needs while also taking care of your own
feelings and needs.**

Think about this for a moment: Is it really possible to love your children without loving yourself, or to love yourself without loving your children?

The answer is a resounding NO!

If you are ignoring yourself to take care of your children, this is not loving to your children or to yourself. While being there for your children is very important, it is equally important to role-model for them what it is like to take responsibility for your own wellbeing. If you take care of your children but do not take care of your own feelings and needs, they will not learn how to take responsibility for their feelings and needs. They will grow up either expecting someone else to take care of them, or they will care-take others while ignoring themselves - just as you do.

On the other hand, if you are narcissistic and just attend to what you want, ignoring your children's feelings and needs, you are not being loving to yourself or your children. You cannot possibly end up feeling worthy and valuable within yourself when you are self-centered and ignore your children's needs.

If you are approving of your children but judgmental toward yourself, your children will likely learn to be judgmental toward themselves. You are their role model, and they will likely learn to do what you do. If you treat them well but treat yourself badly, there is a good possibility that they will learn to treat themselves badly, no matter how loving you are with them.

If you want to be a loving parent with your children, it is essential that you also learn to be a loving parent with yourself. This does not mean that you ignore your children's needs in favor of your own, or vice versa. What it does mean is that you learn to create a balance between taking care of them and taking care of yourself. While this is not always possible, especially with infants, it is certainly a goal to aim for.

This may mean that they don't always get what they want just when they want it - once they are old enough to play by themselves. It means that sometimes you say things to them like:

"I need some time alone for myself now and you need to play by yourself for awhile."

"We (you and your spouse) need some time alone together right now, so you need to find something to do."

"I'm on the phone and this is important to me. What you want will have to wait."

"Daddy and I (or Mommy and I) are talking about something that is important to us. Please don't interrupt us right now."

"I need to go to sleep early tonight because I have to get up early for an important appointment, so please do not make noise and wake me up."

As a parent, you need to learn to respect your own feelings and needs as well as those of your children. By consistently practicing Inner Bonding and learning to honor your feelings and needs, as well as theirs, they will learn to take responsibility for their own feelings and needs while also respecting and honoring others' feelings and needs.

Many people have been taught that taking care of their own feelings and needs is selfish - that they should just be there for others. This is a false definition of selfish. We are being selfish when we expect others to give themselves up for us. We are being self-responsible when lovingly take care of ourselves while also caring about others.

You serve your children well when you learn to stay tuned in to their feelings and needs as well as your own. You have a good chance of raising caring and personally responsible children when you practice Inner Bonding and learn to care about yourself while taking loving care of them.

Parenting Yourself When You Have Small Children

By Dr. Margaret Paul

Have you noticed that if you do not take care of yourself, by taking time for yourself, you are much more irritable with your mate and children? You cannot be a really good parent while forgetting about your own feelings, needs and wellbeing.

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There's no doubt about it - parenting small children takes a lot of time. So much time that it's very easy to forget about your child within. Yet you cannot be a really good parent while forgetting about your own feelings, needs and wellbeing.

Have you noticed that if you do not take care of yourself, by taking time for yourself, you are much more irritable with your mate and children? Whether your job is being with your children all day, whether you work outside of the home, or whether you have a job in your home and also tend to your children all day - you need to take time for yourself.

When my children were small, it was challenging to find the time for myself. I worked at home, tended to my children, and had very little money for household help. Yet if I didn't have time to myself, to read, take a bath, do creative stuff or just stare at a flower, I had a hard time being a patient, loving and fun mom.

What I did at that time is seek out adolescents who loved playing with little kids. I hired them (for not much pay - they were delighted to earn a little spending money and get to play with children as well) to play with my kids while I was in the house taking time for myself. After an hour or so of restful or creative time, I was filled up enough within to be able to give to my children. When I didn't take this time, my own inner child would feel unloved, unimportant and resentful.

A part of good parenting is letting your children know that their needs are neither more nor less important than yours. In the past, children were supposed to be seen and not heard and were given the message that adults were more important than children. In more recent times, many children are given the opposite message - that their needs and feelings are more important than adults'. Neither message is based on the truth of the equality of each soul. For children to understand this equality, parents need to role-model loving their children and loving themselves - not one at the expense of the other. If children are taught that adults are more important than children, they learn to be caretakers, putting themselves aside in deference to others. If children are taught that children are more important than adults, they learn to be brats, demanding attention and not caring about others. This is just one of the reasons why it is so important for parents to take responsibility for caring about themselves - for lovingly parenting the child within.

It might be helpful to imagine that you have an actual child that lives inside you. You are the mom and dad for this child. You are the only one who can feel and hear this child's needs and who can take action on behalf of this child. You already know what happens if you ignore the needs of your actual children. In some way or another, they will act out until they get the love and attention they need. The same is true for your inner child. Our inner child, which is our feeling self, can even cause us to be sick if we don't pay attention to him or her. Your inner child lets you know when you are not being loving to him or her through anxiety, stress, anger or resentment. When you are feeling these feelings, instead of looking outside yourself for the cause, do an Inner Bonding process, looking at whether or not you are lovingly parenting yourself. Practicing Inner Bonding is one of the best things you can do for yourself and for your children!

Parents - What Kind of Role Model Are You?

By Dr. Margaret Paul

Good parents are role models to their children - of honesty, integrity, courage, passion for life, healthy conflict resolution, and personal responsibility for their own feelings, needs and physical health.

Are you being the person you want your children to be?

Many parents today really try to be better parents than their parents were. They attempt to be there for their children - to listen to them, support them, spend time with them, as well as hold and nurture them. Their children grow up feeling loved and valued by these loving parents, yet often these same children struggle as adults in many areas of their lives. I have numerous clients who tell me that they had wonderful parents who truly loved and nurtured them, yet these clients are struggling with their work, their relationships or their lives in general. Why is this?

The common issue is that their parents did not provide adequate role-modeling for them - of taking personal responsibility for their own feelings, needs, and physical health. They did not teach them through their own behavior how to take good care of themselves, physically or emotionally.

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What are you teaching your children through your own behavior? Do you role-model following your passions, or do you spend your spare time watching TV? Do you role-model taking good care of your health, or do you smoke cigarettes, eat badly and get little exercise? Do you have a spiritual practice that is meaningful to you and that moves you into your heart, or do you stay mostly in your head? Do you have a process for managing your conflicts with others, or do you tend to withdraw, get angry, resist or comply, as a way to control or avoid conflict? Do your children see you avoiding life's difficulties with alcohol, drugs, gambling, spending, TV or other addictive behavior, or do they see you learning from life's challenges? Are you boring, because you just try to be safe and maintain the status quo, or do you extend yourself and take appropriate risks, resulting in aliveness and vitality?

A client of mine was recently struggling with the lack of passion in her life. I asked her if her parents were passionate about anything. "No," she said. "They smoked constantly, drank beer and watched TV. They were nice to me, but they were both sick a lot, and both died at young ages. I never saw either of them excited about anything." This woman, in her late forties, had no idea how to discover her passions, and her life felt dead to her. Her husband had expressed a lack of interest in her because he actually found her to be boring, and was no longer sexually interested in her. This is what brought her to work with me.

Let's take the role-modeling a little further. Are you honest, or do you let your children think it's okay to withhold the truth, or even lie outright? Do you role-model integrity, or do you behave in ways that you would not want announced in a newspaper? Do you stand up for yourself, or do you let others walk all over you? Do you tolerate abusive situations, or do your children see you take action in your own behalf?

It's very important to realize that, while being there for your children is vital, it is only half of good parenting. The other half is being there for yourself, with honesty, courage and integrity. It's not enough to treat your children with love. You need to treat yourself with love as well, if you want your children to grow up knowing how to take loving care of themselves.

If your parents did not role-model treating themselves lovingly, the chances are you don't know how to do it for yourself. Treating yourself lovingly is a learned skill. The Inner Bonding process was developed

specifically for this purpose. The best thing you can do for yourself and your children is learn these six powerful steps and practice them on a daily basis. Your children will naturally learn how to take responsibility for themselves - for their health and emotional wellbeing - as you learn to do this for yourself. Give yourself and your children the gift of the joy that comes from truly loving yourself!

The Courage to Be a Loving Parent

By Dr. Margaret Paul

Do you have the courage to risk loving yourself - and encountering your children's uncaring behavior?

Most of us really don't like it when someone is angry at us. We don't like it when people go into resistance to helping us when we need help, instead of caring about us. We don't like it when people withdraw from us, disconnecting from us and shutting us out. We don't like it when people make demands on us and do not respect our right or need to say no. Many of us will do almost anything to avoid the soul loneliness and heartache we feel when people treat us in angry, resistant, demanding and uncaring ways.

It takes great courage to stay loving to yourself and others when faced with others' angry and closed behavior. It especially takes courage when the people you are dealing with are your own children. Yet, unless you have the courage to come up against your children's anger, resistance and withdrawal, you may give yourself up and not take care of yourself, to avoid their uncaring reactions. The more you deny your own truth and your own needs and feelings, the more your children will disrespect and discount you.

Your children may become a mirror of your own behavior, discounting you when you discount yourself, disrespecting you when you disrespect yourself. The more you give yourself up to avoid your children's unloving behavior toward you, the more you become objectified as the all-giving and loving parent, who doesn't need anything for yourself. When you do this, you are role-modeling being a caretaker.

On the other hand, it is unloving to yourself and your children to expect your children to take responsibility for your well-being. It is unloving to demand that your children give themselves up to prove their love for you and to pacify your fears. It is unloving to demand that they be the way you want them to be, rather than who they are. It is unloving to set limits just to make you feel safe as a parent, rather than limits that support their health and safety. When you behave in this way, you are role-modeling being a taker.

The challenge of good parenting is to find the balance between being there for your children and being there for yourself, as well as the balance between freedom and responsibility - to be personally responsible to yourself, rather than being a taker or a caretaker.

Your decisions need to be based on what is in the highest good of your children as well as yourself. If your child wants something that is not in your highest good to give, then it is not loving to give it. If you want something for or from your children that is not in their highest good, then it is not loving for you to expect it. It is loving to support your children's freedom to choose what they want and to be themselves, as long as it doesn't mean giving yourself up. Your children may not learn responsible behavior toward others, when you discount your own needs and feelings to support what your children want. Your own freedom to choose what you want, and to be yourself, should be just as important to you as your children's freedom and desires.

On the other hand, if you always put your needs before your children's, you are behaving in a self-centered, narcissistic way, which limits your children's freedom. You are training your children to be caretakers, to give themselves up for others' needs and not consider their own.

The challenge of loving parenting is to role-model behavior that is personally responsible, rather than being a taker or caretaker. This is your best chance for bringing up personally responsible children. However, you need to remember that you cannot do everything "right" as a parent, that your children are on their own path, their own soul's journey. They will make their own choices to be loving or unloving, responsible or irresponsible. You can influence their choices, but you can't control them. They have free will, just as you do, to choose who they want to be each moment of their lives. All you can do is the very best you can to role-model loving, personally responsible behavior - behavior that supports your own and your children's highest good.

