Positive Parenting/Staying Connected: Building and Nurturing a Loving and Intimate Relationship with Our Child

As first-time parents with demanding careers, my husband and I have always agreed that the most important priority for our family is to build and nurture a strong bond and intimate relationship with our two year old son.

As each of us have been fortunate enough to grow up in close-knit families with parents who loved us unconditionally, we are very keen to provide a similar experience for our child. Without detracting from our desire to encourage positive behavioural traits and also instil in him a strong moral upbringing, we do want him to learn from a very young age that his Mummy and Daddy loves him “no matter what”, that our love for him is never dependant on how well he performs at school, or whether he excels at sports or music – we simply love him for being “him”.

In other words, we want him to understand the concept of “unconditional” parental love and to provide him with a nurturing, encouraging and supportive family environment. Having been beneficiaries of such a parental approach, we are firm believers that this is what made us who we are today and believe too that such an approach would be essential in assisting our son to develop a strong moral compass, self-confidence and to grow up as caring, open minded, positive thinking and assured child.

We have come to realise all this is much easier said than done. Afterall, we are only human and after a hectic day at the office, it often requires “super-human” mental strength and tenacity to come home and explain calmly and patiently to your two year old child why he cannot have chocolate ice-cream for dinner / should not pull the cat’s tail or otherwise attempt to terrorise it / cannot finger paint over the dining table/living room walls / cannot go down for a swim at the pool in the club-house at 9pm at night (and of course the list goes on and on…).

Nevertheless, through a lot of trial-and-error (and occasional sweat and tears!), we have discovered the following “habits” which seem to work well for our family:

- Maintain daily physical connection

  We both make it a point to connect physically with our child every day through lots of hugs, cuddles, kisses and tickles (and when this is reciprocated it is sweet and rewarding in a way words cannot describe!).

- Consistent use of positive language
When we talk to our child, we try our best to use positive words and to provide him with constant encouragement, such as saying “I love you”, that he is “such a clever boy” and so “special” and “precious” to Mummy/Daddy.

We also try to remember to pay particular attention to our choice of words, for example, replacing “no!”, “stop!” or “don’t!” with alternative words such as “be gentle” or “indoor voice please”.

- Empowering our child to make choices / positive reinforcement

We also try to frame certain undesirable behavioural traits or anti-social behaviour and consequences as a choice for our child – for e.g. “it’s ok to cry but perhaps you would like some alone time in your room to do so” as a means of discouraging such behaviour rather than looking to rely on overt punitive measures.

Good behaviour on the other end is rewarded by praises such as “good job!” or occasionally, more tangible rewards (such a piece of strawberry cake!) with the objective of associating such behavior with positive outcomes.

- Creating “special time” together

Despite our busy work schedules, we make it a top priority to enjoy “special time” together with our child each day, for example, through bedtime story telling, bath time, family mealtimes, games and arts & crafts activities. During these times, we always try to avoid any interruptions (e.g. no blackberry/laptops/mobile phones) to ensure that we only focus our attention on our child alone.

We also make efforts to set aside time during weekends for excursions with our child to the beach, a library, a park, a children’s concert or even just the supermarket.

- Empathy and emotional support

It can be difficult at times for us as adults to fully understand the “logic” and mindset of a two year old child. For example, why he “must” drink his orange juice out of his blue cup and not the red one, or why he “must” wear his yellow shirt (which has not been washed and has a ketchup stain on the front) and not the green one (which is perfectly clean and ironed). Other fears can be more understandable, such as anxiety over...
starting school (without mum and dad!), feeling apprehensive or nervous about new environments and meeting new people.

Nonetheless, we always try as much as possible to acknowledge and empathise with our child’s emotions, to try to view things from his point of view and to offer him support and encouragement where we can.

Consistent with the theme of empathy, we also endeavour to draw clear limits and boundaries for our child while expressing understanding for our child’s requests, for e.g. “I know you really want to play with that toy car but it’s not ok to grab it from Peter, let’s play with this puzzle together whilst we wait for your turn...”.

Ultimately, every child is different – which may in turn necessitate adjustments in approach, but we have certainly found the above “habits” / “practices” useful in building and maintaining a positive relationship with our child and in reinforcing positive behavior and do hope that our experience would be helpful to fellow parents.

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