

Making Connections with Your Children

With all of the demands put on parents and children, having the ability to connect and then reinforce the connections with your children becomes increasingly important and harder to do.

As parents, you are the most important influence on their lives. A healthy and balanced parent-child relationship provides a model for children to use when forming relationships throughout life.¹ This is a particularly challenging task for the parents of children with brain injuries as their demands for parental time and attention increase. Their need for additional assistance may become overwhelming.

As children go through developmental stages, they present with different needs. During the early years, parents spend a majority of their time teaching and playing, reading, care giving and talking with their children. This is a time of rapid brain development when children soak up information and change quickly.

By the time a child is in early elementary school, parents spend less time with them partly because a child is in school, and also because children are developing their own friendships or may be involved in sports and other leisure activities. Although the time spent may be less, parental influence is still very strong.

When you have a strong foundation of care with your children it makes the transitions into each developmental phase easier. A child may also find it less difficult to request help in the times that they will need it. Adolescence is particularly challenging, and both teens and parents may require extra assistance with their relationships during this time.

There are things that we can do to influence our children in positive ways. Every parent has an interaction style that may have to be modified. The style used may be learned through the influential people that have raised us or from books that we have read. There are times in which we want to blame poor interactions on our children (and sometimes



they deserve it!), but it is always good to examine our own parenting styles.

DIFFERENT PARENTING STYLES

Four different parenting styles are described and their potential effects on children.

Authoritarian: This is a restrictive and punishing style in which the parents demand that their child follow directions and respect work and effort. The authoritarian parent places firm limits and controls on the child allowing little verbal exchange.

Children of authoritarian parents may be anxious about social comparison, fail to initiate activity, and have poor communication skills.

Authoritative: This style of parenting encourages children to be independent but still places limits and controls on their actions. Extensive verbal give-and-take is allowed, and parents are warm and nurturing.

Children of authoritative parents are typically socially competent, self-reliant, and responsible.

Neglectful: This parenting style involves a parent that is uninvolved in the child's life. This style of parenting leaves the child feeling that almost all other aspects of the parents' lives are more important than they are.

Children whose parents are neglectful usually do not do well in social situations. They show poor self-control and do not handle independence well.

Indulgent: This is a style of parenting in which the parents are usually very involved in their child's life but do not set limits on them. Children of indulgent parents typically do what they want to do and get what they want.²

Children of indulgent parents may have difficulty in respecting others or controlling their own behaviors.



Making Connections with Your Children *continued*

Parents do not fall into a pure style, but it is worth doing a self-assessment as well as asking a trusted source regarding our styles. There usually are opportunities for improvement or change. In connecting with our children it is important to be as honest with ourselves as possible.

There are other ways in which we can improve our relationships with our children. Some things to remember include:

- Try to lose labels when discussing your children. Sometimes we think of our children in a certain way because it is easy to categorize a behavior. For example, a child may be the “clumsy” brother or the “perfect” big sister. These labels are hard to break and may define a child. Although it may be harder for parents, it is better for children when you take time to define the behaviors rather than use a label. Thank your children for helping others or displaying a kind or thoughtful gesture. Rather than focus on a negative interaction, look for positive alternative behaviors to highlight—no matter how small.³
- Set time limits on TV, video games or computers for your children and yourself. Although most people have a favorite show or video game, it is important not to let that get in the way of communication. There are multiple ways to do this. The least expensive and easiest is to talk with your children. Talking is essential. Communication should be frequent, open, and respectful. Try to be approachable even when the topic makes you uncomfortable. If your children think they cannot talk with you, they make seek out another resource who does

not share your beliefs and values.⁴

- Engage in some of the activities that they enjoy. You do not have to be a sports star to shoot a few baskets. Cheering your children on can be an important reinforcer for a positive behavior.

A child who has a traumatic brain injury may have disturbances in communicating. Parents of such children will likely have to alter their communication styles. It is also important to provide attention to non-injured children as they may feel that they do not get their fair share of attention. Some things to remember when working with children with injuries are to:

- Speak slowly and clearly
- Repeat information as necessary
- Watch for signs of frustration. Take time to cool down or “chill” before overloading a child or adolescent with too much information or worse yet—losing your temper.
- Teach other family members the best way to connect with the child who is injured.
- Ask other families members for assistance so that you do not “burn out” in attempting to provide care and attention to all family members.
- Locate services for your children outside of the home to assist in care.

Remember that you are the most important role model that your children have. They learn from you and want your approval. By modeling honesty, your children will also learn to be honest. If situations become too difficult, remember to consult a professional.

The world is changing rapidly with more information available to our children than has ever been possible. When there are bumps in the road, a solid foundation of communication will be the basis for remaining connected. ❖

References:

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- 2 “Parental Influence in the Life of a Child”
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3 "6 ways to connect with your kids"

<http://www.supernanny.com/Advice/-/Family-life/-/Relationships/6-ways-to-connect-with-your-kids-.aspx>

4 "Connecting With Your Child: "Mom, dad, meet your child"

<http://www.behavior-contracts.com/connecting.htm>

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