

Parenting “the Right Way”

Parenting Strategies –January 2010

Copyright © 2009 by Kay Kimball Gruder, SuccessfulCollegeParenting.com

My clients frequently ask me if they are parenting “the right way”, and I often respond by saying, “there are many right ways.” I am certain that you can think of friends who parent differently than you do and their approaches seem to work well for them and for their children. If you parent more than one child you are likely aware that you are using more than “one way” or one approach to reach common goals. While raising my stepson and daughter I used to say that I was parenting across the span of a decade, because the age difference between the two is ten years. In one moment I would be conversing over a cup of tea with my nearly adult stepson and in the next moment I would be a customer in my daughter’s make-believe restaurant; in both instances though I was intent on connecting with my children.

Many of my clients who ask if they are parenting “the right way,” are experiencing what I refer to as a “parenting rut” – feeling dissatisfied about the quality of the interactions that they have with their children and often feeling frustrated with the outcomes of their parenting efforts. They inherently know that there must be another way, but in our automatic-pilot world, they often have not taken time to explore, consider and integrate other successful models for parenting that exist. I often share the example of a person being in a traffic jam. One person might be in the habit of enjoying the extra time to listen to talk radio or a favorite CD, while another person in the same traffic jam might be in the habit of being significantly stressed. The traffic jam is really a “neutral” experience and it is the emotions and perhaps even creativity that one brings to it that shapes the experience for the specific individual. This is also true in our parenting. We regularly have the opportunity to bring creativity and new approaches to our parenting, but once our children are well into the school-age years we seem to do this less and less. We read fewer parenting books, attend fewer parent meetings at our children’s schools and access fewer parenting

resources, but our parenting challenges continue at a pretty steady pace with sometimes great intensity.

With New Year's fast approaching, think about the concept of a New Year's resolution. What is it designed to do? To help us break out of old patterns and to reinvigorate us as we try a new approach to change an old problem or habit. How often have you or the people you know made New Year's resolutions about their parenting? Consider thinking about what you desire to do differently or better in your parenting this coming year.

While there are clearly many right ways and successful approaches to parenting our pre-college and college-aged children, I have observed characteristics and behaviors that are common to parents who generally feel positive about their parenting skills and effort. They:

- parent in ways that are consistent with their values;
- parent with clarity around decisions – having formulated reasons;
- consistently provide a sense of follow-through;
- anticipate situations that might arise and give thought to how they will parent through them;
- have an openness to approaching situations differently;
- possess a desire and dedication to expanding their parenting resources and strategies;
- maintain an awareness of when an approach is not working and have the ability to make a shift to a new strategy;
- parent in a less reactive mode more of the time than not;
- employ strong communication skills;
- have the ability to watch their children struggle a bit, while providing support around issues and challenges;
- have developed an ability to shift from what was or has been to what is and the potential for what might be.

Even when we consider ourselves good parents, we can benefit from dedicating time to think about our parenting and to gain different perspectives by talking with others about our parenting challenges, approaches and options. It is true that we know our craft well, having parented our pre-college and college-aged children into their teens. It is also true that when people are really good at what they do they commit to a continual development of their skills, inventory their successes, identify what they seek to learn, and call upon others who can lend support and new knowledge. So I invite you to take time to set a parenting goal or two for the coming year and to map out possible next steps. Giving attention to your parenting will likely enliven your parenting spirit, expand your skills, and engage your children in new opportunities for growth and development.

“If we always do what we've always done, we will get what we've always got.”
Adam Urbanski