

Dr. Conte's Four Cs of Parenting

I wanted to title this article, "Parenting Skills Made Easy," but I wholeheartedly believe that would be a misnomer, because almost anything that has the word "parenting" in it cannot also be "easy."

Parenting is one of the toughest jobs on the planet. In fact, one of the most honorable jobs in the world is to parent well. Parenting can draw desperation out of even the best of us, so it is no wonder why it is often discouraging when the latest trend in parenting emerges, only to find out a year later that the experts were off base.

Dr. Conte's Four Cs of Parenting may sound like a new fad in parenting skills, but in practice, the Four Cs are simply age-old wisdom phrased in modern day language. When parents follow the Four Cs, both their lives, as well as their children's lives, change. Though the Four Cs are not difficult to understand, they are by no means easy to implement. The Four Cs are Choices, Consequences, Consistency and Compassion, and each is as important as the next, and none can be left out of effective parenting.

CHOICES

As the ancient adage goes, "Give a man a fish and he eats for a day, teach him to fish, and he eats for a lifetime." so too is it with parents providing options for their children. Teaching children how to make choices early in their lives is one of the best gifts parents can give, because the simple fact is that the earlier children learn to be responsible for their choices, the more likely they are to make responsible decisions later in life. Children are empowered when they own the decisions made, and empowered children are more confident and have higher self-esteem. That's

right, when children are given choices and learn to take responsibility for their actions, they get a sense of how the world really is, and that is empowering for them.

Some have argued that children are not responsible enough to make their own choices, and those people are right — partially. Children need to make their own choices in order to learn to be responsible. Some parents will say that they do not want to give their children the choice to not listen to them; however, the fact is, children do have the option of not listening to their parents: and that is OK as long as the parents take responsibility to see to it that effective consequences are given when their children do not listen.

CONSEQUENCES

Most people will not touch a hot stove. The reason: they know they will be burned. If people know that an unwanted consequence will follow an action, they are significantly less likely to perform that action. If, for example, we really believed that every single time we drove over the speed limit we would get an expensive traffic ticket, then most people, most of the time, would not drive faster than the speed limit. The truth is, however, that most people are in a hurry to get where they are going, and have experienced that more times than not when they speed, they do not get a ticket — so they keep doing it. And so it is with children.

If they believe that their parents will not likely follow through with what they said they would take away, then the children are likely to continue not listening. Once children know for sure that when their parents say they are going to give them a consequence they always

do, then they will make different decisions.

CONSISTENCY

Parents start off having a tremendous amount of credibility with their children. As long as what parents say remains consistent with what they do, they get to keep that credibility; however, if what parents promise their children is not followed up on, then parents begin to lose credibility quickly.

For example, imagine that a mother promises to take her son to the playground if he behaves in the supermarket, then, after he behaves well in the supermarket, she fails to take him to the playground — that mother just lost some credibility with her son.

Likewise, imagine that Kaia, a 3-year-old girl, picked up a remote control and put her arm back as if she is about to throw it to the ground. Imagine still that her mother says, "Honey, put the remote down. You can choose to throw it and you won't be allowed to watch cartoons later, or you can choose to put it down now and you will be allowed to watch cartoons later." Now picture that Kaia decides to give the remote a good toss even after hearing her mother provide her options. If her mother does not follow through with taking away the cartoons later, then she just lost some credibility with her daughter. The more often our words do not match our actions, the more credibility we lose.

Consistency is likely one of the most difficult aspects of parenting because so many things get in the way of being consistent. For example, in the case of the mother above providing the option for her child to throw the remote and lose cartoons, consider that she is

exhausted from a hard day's work and really needs a half an hour to rejuvenate — sitting her child in front of cartoons for a half an hour could be helpful. The real problem with that is if the mother gives in for convenience now, she will lose credibility, and essentially teach her child that when she says something, she does not mean it. A great rule is that parents must be consistent with what they say if they want their children to see them as credible, but that rule can be thrown out the window if parents do not act out of compassion.

COMPASSION

The fourth and final C is compassion. Compassion absolutely cannot be left out of parenting. Children learn what they watch much more than what they are told, which is especially why parents need to be consistent and not just talk about being consistent. If we want to raise compassionate children, we must constantly act out of compassion. A parent's job, after all, is to help children learn about, and live in the world. If we step back and think about it, every interaction we have with our children teaches them something about the world. The question to ask our-

selves is: if a camera were on us constantly and then we were to review tapes of what we did, what would we teach our children every day?

The key to being compassionate with children is to be non-attached to implementing the consequence. Non-attachment to implementing a consequence means not getting angry with children for what they choose. For example, if Kaia from our above example decides to throw the remote, then her mother can respond compassionately with firmness, "OK, I'm sorry that you chose to throw the remote, but now you may not watch cartoons later." Then, when Kaia cries, her mother, responding from the four Cs would reply with a hug and love, "It's OK that you are sad with your decision. Sometimes we don't make good choices, but since you decided to throw the remote when I told you not to, you absolutely cannot watch cartoons today." And if Kaia continues to cry, her mother could say, "I love you very much honey; I am not mad at you at all. You just have to learn to listen when I tell you to put something down."

From the four Cs, Kaia's mother is able to

provide Kaia with choices (throw the remote or do not throw the remote), consequences (either be allowed to watch cartoons if she does not throw it or not be allowed to watch cartoons if she does throw it), consistency (despite Kaia's crying, her mother does not give in), and compassion (Kaia's mother tells her that she loves her and does not raise her voice).

The Four Cs of parenting are the perennial essentials of being a good parent; they will not wear out in a year or two or even a millennium, and they constitute what every parent intuitively knows about parenting — and now they are packaged in a way that will be easy to remember. ✽

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(kids in waiting)



Charles, 16, loves to cook and wants to be a gourmet chef when he grows up. He is a great help to those in need and doesn't mind the challenge of a little hard work. Charles enjoys playing and collecting cards, likes gardening, and is a fan of playing pool. He likes horses and wouldn't mind being in a home where there are other children.

Charles is in his freshmen year. He would benefit from academically supportive parents. He is attending counseling at this time, which will need to continue after placement. If your family is interested in this hard working young man, we urge you to inquire. Financial assistance may be available for adoption related costs.

For Utah children, only homestudied families from all states are encouraged to inquire.

This is a **LEGAL RISK ADOPTIVE PLACEMENT**. In a legal risk adoptive placement, it is expected that the family will eventually adopt the child, even though the birth parents' rights have not been fully terminated at the time of placement. For more information, contact The Adoption Exchange at (800) 451-5246. Child ID 96369