

I TRUST YOU

BY CHIP DELORENZO, M.ED.

I trust you. What other three words carry such weight and meaning? Even the words *I love you* don't seem to carry the same depth and power. Maybe it's because we hear *I love you* so often, and the words have lost their power. Maybe it's because we live in a culture where there is very little trust, in both children and adults. Maybe both.

I remember vividly, as a child, many instances where adults put trust in me. A teacher believed me when I told her the truth. My father taught me how to use the mower when I was 10. My parents gave me the keys to the car to go to the movies with a friend soon after I got my license. I was given responsibility for other students when I was in military high school. The people I worked for in high school gave me responsibilities that impacted their business. I remember these instances vividly today, decades later.

The experience of demonstrating trust in someone has power. It communicates many things: you are capable, you are intelligent, I have faith in you, and you can do it (even if it's scary). I heard and felt all those message in the above personal examples. Feeling those messages had a powerful impact on me, and caused me to make positive and healthy decisions about myself and my capabilities that have lasted a lifetime. It caused me to step up and want to take more responsibility, and gain more trust.

Can you remember moments in your life where someone put their trust in you? How did it feel? What decisions did you make about yourself or what you would do when they demonstrated trust in you? What did you do? How did you do?

As a parent, I hope that I am communicating messages of trust to my children. Children feel good about themselves when adults put trust in them. Children do better when they feel better. Putting trust in children means allowing them to make their own mistakes, to fail sometimes, and to struggle. It means that we have to truly believe in their ability to be resilient and to navigate challenges, to figure things out themselves, and to ask for help when they need it.

But, trusting kids isn't easy. They make bad decisions sometimes. They misbehave sometimes (which might include lying or sneaking). They are sometimes over-confident. We have our own fear of failure or embarrassment that sneaks in, and we take their accomplishments or struggles personally. It's really easy to approach our children with caution, skepticism or even mistrust, thinking that we're staying one step ahead of them to keep them safe and successful. While it might make perfect sense to us that showing trust in children will help them thrive, growing up is a messy business, and it doesn't happen without some scrapes and bruises.

How then, can we learn to demonstrate trust in our children while they are right in the middle of this messy growing up process? Here are some thoughts to consider:

Nurture Independence

What are your child's strengths? What do you know that they can do well? Watch them carefully for a week, and then give them some responsibilities that they don't currently have. Start with something that will allow them to feel important. For instance, if you notice that your child is able to get dressed

mostly by themselves. Allow them to pick out their clothes the night before and get dressed without you the next day. If you have an older child who is handy, ask them to fix something in the house. Each child comes with a set of talents and gifts, just waiting to be opened. Rediscover them, and let them explore their capabilities. When the newness wears off (and it will) a responsibility, simply reply, "That's something that you can do yourself," or "I know that you don't want to do that, but I can really use your help." Children are built to take care of themselves and to help, and doing so helps them feel connected and important.

Take Time for Training

The more you take time for teaching and training, the better you will get to know how capable your child is. Taking the time to show your children how to take care of themselves or help the family takes time, and presence. Understanding that *staying with* children when they first learn to do a job is a job in itself will save lots of frustration.

Start by teaching them to do things that you can let go of, and will not cause you stress if they're not done perfectly. I have yet to teach my children how to vacuum out my car. I have a possibly unnatural attachment to the thoroughness with which I like my car vacuumed. So, I do it myself. However, I don't mind letting other jobs get done imperfectly, so those are the jobs I teach my children.

Let Them Figure it Out

Learning is messy! After children learn how to do something, let them figure out the problems they run into. Struggle is OK. *If you take away the struggle, you steal the victory.* For instance, if you teach your child how to mow the lawn, and the mower stops, let them figure out that it has run out of gas. You might guide them with a few questions, but let them know that you trust them to figure out the problem. If children aren't given the chance to solve problems, how will they learn to solve problems?

Allow Your Children to Ask for Help

Be careful not to rescue! Again, it's OK to struggle, to make mistakes, and to fail sometimes. How else would we learn and grow. If children don't learn to fail gracefully and constructively when they are young, what will that look like when they are older and the stakes are higher?

Stop, before you jump in when you see that your child is struggling with a problem. Chances are that they will either figure it out, or ask for help. Learning to ask for help is an important life skill, and is empowering. When adults jump in too quickly it sends the message, "I don't trust you to figure this out yourself," or "You don't have to ask for help, I am right here." But, someday we won't be right there, and then what?

Use Encouraging Words

Here are some powerful phrases that provide encouragement and allow children self-reflect rather than become dependent upon adult praise:

"Thank you."

"I appreciate your help."

"You did it yourself."

“How do you feel about _____.”

“You worked very hard.”

“Congratulations.”

“It looks like you achieved your goal.”

Until next time...