

SHOW FAITH IN ME

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Take a moment to think back to your own childhood: Do you remember a time, as a child, that an adult had confidence in you? How did it feel? How did you respond? What decisions did you make about yourself?

Children are always thinking, acting and making decisions about who they are and what they will do. Despite our best efforts, it is not possible to get in there and make those decisions for them. All we can do is create an environment that supports a child in making healthy decisions about themselves and for themselves.

When I was 19 I joined the Air Force after almost failing out of my first semester of college. I was a capable student, but not motivated academically, and certainly not certain as to why I was in college. It was a confusing time, and I had very little confidence in myself or in what my purpose was. A few months after basic training the Air Force sent me to “Technical School” to learn how to be a Crew Chief on fighter jets. Crew Chiefs are given the overall responsibility of inspecting, overseeing maintenance and doing general maintenance on a specific aircraft. After tech school I was assigned to a base on the East Coast, and began working on the flight line. I was responsible for an aircraft for 8 -10 hours per day, given responsibility that very few 19 year olds are given outside of the armed forces. I was also lucky enough to work for Master Sergeant May, who showed an incredible amount of faith in me, and other young airman, and expected a lot from us. What happened was that I began to feel a sense of confidence in myself that I had never felt before. I felt capable, needed, and I had a sense of purpose. I was well trained, trusted to be responsible, and held accountable for that responsibility. In a short time, I enrolled at a nearby university and finished my bachelor’s degree in 3 year, while working full time in the Air Force, and graduated third in my class.

The above experience shaped me, and who I became. The environment around me helped me to make decisions about myself that were healthy, and build a deep sense of confidence in myself and my abilities. Conversely, I have also had experiences where adults around me did not have high expectations for me, did things for me that I could do for myself, and didn’t hold me accountable for my actions. And, while some of those experiences felt good at first (like eating a chocolate bar when you’re hungry), they left me feeling lethargic, unmotivated, and with an unwillingness and a lack of confidence in myself to overcome obstacles and adversity.

Too often, we pamper and rescue children without intending to. In an effort to help them, and not see them suffer discomfort, adults often jump in and over-help, doing for children what they can do for themselves. Alternatively, we also hold children accountable for what they haven’t been taught to do, and criticize them for not knowing or understanding something that seems so obvious to us.

As a parent, what I took from my experience in the Air Force was that I blossomed when others had faith in me. They showed faith in me in two ways: First, it was assumed that I was capable to learn a skill that required me to assume a lot of responsibility, but not more than I could handle. While I might not have known that I was capable, they knew that 19 year olds could be taught to be capable. Second, I was given responsibility for what I was taught and held to high expectations. This meant that I had to work hard, and work through adversity because I was responsible for something very important. I was needed, and felt significant.

When we show faith in children and young adults we create an environment where they develop confidence, courage and faith in themselves and their abilities. In order to show faith in children it is really important that we understand what they are capable of, developmentally. For instance, did you know that you can teach a 20 month old child how to put silverware away! I do now, after a friend of mine posted a photo of her grandchild sorting silverware into the proper sections of the silverware drawer, on a stool. I also found out that my 11 year old can drive a motor boat on a lake independently after some lessons. One of the best ways to begin to see what our children can do is to observe other children and other parents. Watch them. See what other children are doing that your child might be able to do. Also, watch what other parents do for their children that they can do for themselves. Watch the children's reactions, and their behavior. What decisions might they be making about themselves and what they will do?

In my experience that I recounted about the Air Force, was that there wasn't anyone there to rescue me when I had difficulties. It was assumed that I would seek out the answer and work through a problem. As a result I began to learn how to work through adversity, get help when I needed it, and to solve problems. Now, as a parent and an educator, I try to create an environment at home and at school where our children have the freedom to make mistakes and problem solve without rescuing, lecturing or fixing. This means, of course, that they also need to have a lesson sometimes on how to accomplish what it is that they are being held responsible for working through.

Showing Faith in Our Children

1. Take time for teaching. Find tasks or responsibilities that are developmentally appropriate and challenging (children love challenges) for you children. Do the task yourself, and break it down into "bite sized" pieces so you can show your child one step at a time. If they have difficulty mastering the series of steps, then show them the first few, let them master that part of the job, and then show them the next series of steps when they are ready.
2. Instead of rescuing, or fixing things when you see your child having difficulty, allow them to work through it. Say, "I know that you can handle this, I have faith in you."
3. Allow children to exercise their disappointment muscles. Like us, children learn through their experiences, positive and negative. Have you ever learned an important lesson through a disappointing experience? "Failure is the key to success; each mistake teaches us something." ~ Morihei Ueshiba
4. Be sure to show empathy and understanding when a child experiences difficulty and disappointment. Kind and firm at the same time is the key to successfully showing faith in someone else. "I know that you're really disappointed. I would be too. I have faith in you that you can figure this out."