

How To Get the Best
From
Your Children

Patricia Downing

with
Larry Downing

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About the Authors

In writing this book, we have drawn upon our many years of working with teenagers and their parents, as well as our own life experiences - both professional and personal.

Pat is the mother of two wonderful grown children and she is also a grandmother. Many of the insights in this book came from her personal experiences and successes as a mother.

Background:

Our previous experience includes counseling teenagers and their parents, social services, group facilitation and grief counseling. Through the years, we have developed expertise in conflict resolution, mediation, and inter-personal communication.

Work with teenagers:

In 1997, we created an effective program for troubled teenagers in Asheville, NC.

Through our "Smart Choices" Program, we worked with several hundred teens and their parents. With group sessions, one-on-one counseling and family mediations, we empowered the teens to create successful lives and helped families to communicate more effectively.

Through that work, we came to realize that, in order to help children and teens, the most important thing we can do is to help their parents learn to interact with their children in a more effective way.

That led to the writing of the book *Feel Good Parenting: How to Use the Power of Your Heart to Create an Extraordinary Relationship With Your Child*.

This book was written as a companion book.

All the ideas in this book are offered with love. They come from our own experiences, so we know they work for us and others. If you're willing to use them in your own life, we believe they will transform YOUR relationships as well.

Happy journey,

Pat and Larry Downing
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Table of Contents

Introduction:	1
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Chapters:

1. Communicate With Love, No Matter What is Going On	3
2. Provide a Good Example in Everything that You Do	6
3. Encourage Them to Express the Best of Who They Are	10
4. Find Lots of Ways to Show Your Love	13
5. Nurture Their Spiritual Life	16
Post Script: How to Use the Ideas in This book	18

Introduction

This book is a supplement to:

Feel Good Parenting: How to Use the Power of Your Heart to Create an Extraordinary Relationship With Your Child.

This book explores practical ways to apply the principles taught in *Feel Good Parenting*.

If you have not read that book, you can get a copy at www.feelgoodparenting.com/ebook.html.

You will learn how to use the powerful love connection you already have with your child to transform your relationship. As a result, you will know how:

- to feel loving, positive energy every time you are with your child,
- to maintain those positive emotions even if your child is out of control, and
- to inspire your child in such a powerful way that he will be more peaceful and cooperative

Once you understand the power of feeling good, and you are deliberately practicing being in your heart and feeling your connection with your child,

it is important to find ways to express that powerful love energy.

Your home can be a nurturing, loving place -

a place filled with joy -

where your children are accepted as they are,

and they always feel welcome.

Your family can be a safety net,

the place your children want to come to,

no matter what is going on in their lives.

When your interactions with your children are positive,
they will enjoy being with you and,
they will respond by being pleasant and cooperative.
They will also be more receptive to discipline and guidance.

This book explores several ways that you can effectively bring out the best in your child and help each child:

- to become a happy, responsible, successful adult,
- to develop his own identity, and
- to discover his passion and unleash his potential.

**You CAN draw out the best from your children, but first,
you must give them the best of yourself.**

You can do that in many ways:

1. Communicate with love, no matter what is going on.
2. Provide a good example in everything that you do.
3. Encourage them to express the best of who they are.
4. Find lots of ways to show your love.
5. Nurture their spiritual life.

Chapter 1

Communicate With Love, No Matter What is Going On

You might assume that your children know you love them,

but how much more powerful it is to tell them. Often.

And to show them.

In fact, the telling is meaningless without the demonstration of the love in the way you interact -

how you talk to them,

how you listen,

how much time you spend with them -

and perhaps most important -

the way you FEEL about them when you are with them.

They will pick that up more quickly than anything else you do.

So it is very important to be in your heart before you spend time with them, so you will always bring with you the welcoming energy of love.

The way you communicate is very important.

Words DO matter.

We've all heard, "Sticks and stones will break my bones but words will never hurt me."

I think you would agree that this statement is not true.

Your children take your words very seriously, and we all know how painful the words of others can be.

To this day, I remember the little knot in my stomach and the pain of the words I heard from my first grade school mates: "Fatty Patty," OUCH!

All children need to be acknowledged and affirmed.

They need to hear words that are nurturing and encouraging, not those that destroy their self-confidence and love of life.

That is one gift you can give them.

Your children need kindness - especially from you.

Kindness is not weakness. It is strength.

And receiving kindness from you teaches your children how to be kind to others.

Blaming your children, labeling them, judging them -

these approaches do not work.

They cause children to shut down, to stop believing in themselves.

Kindness creates a more open, trusting communication in the family.

It creates an environment in which true learning can happen.

People are more important than things:

In the course of every childhood, things get broken.

Let's make sure our children are not among them.

I can't remember how many times something of value in our house was dropped or knocked over - and lay broken on the floor. It happens.

The way we respond to an accident may seem insignificant to us, as adults, but our children take every word from us seriously.

The way they think of themselves comes from us.

We must always remember:

People matter. Things do not matter in the same way.

Of course, we need to teach our children to take care of their belongings and to respect other people's belongings. That will help prepare them for living in the larger world.

But accidents do happen.

I have seen parents berate their children for accidentally breaking something. I have heard words so devastating that I have wondered what long-term affects they would have on the child's deeper feelings about himself.

I know the words from my playmates stayed with me through my adolescence. For years, I thought of myself as fat, even when I wasn't. And I felt very inadequate because of it.

The opinion of our parents is even more powerful.

The Power of a Word of Encouragement

We never know which of our words will have the greatest impact on our children. Thinking back on my life, I remember a few conversations with great clarity, even decades later.

One conversation changed the direction of my life: I had been an average student, earning mostly C's, not thinking of myself as very smart.

Then, in 6th grade, I had a teacher, Mrs. Turner. I don't remember much about her, but I do remember that one day she complimented me on a paper I had written. Then she said something that completely changed the way I thought about myself.

She told me that I was one of her best students.

From that day on, I thought of myself differently and I had a more positive attitude toward my school work. Soon I was an Honor Roll student.

We never know what impact our words will have.

Let's use them with love and wisdom.

Chapter 2

Provide a Good Example in Everything You Do

Model the behavior you want from your children.

You are the most powerful example they have. Everything you do is saying to them:

"This is the way to behave."

So be aware of what you are teaching them.

If you want them to talk to you with respect, YOU need to talk to THEM with respect.

If you want them to be kind, YOU need to be kind to THEM.

If you want them to be patient and calm, YOU need to be patient and calm.

You can find many ways to create a positive example for your children:

Conversations:

The way you talk with your children teaches them how to talk with you and others.

You can teach them to be courteous and respectful by being courteous with them,
not just with other people.

Use "Please" and "Thank you" and be considerate of their feelings.

If you yell and scream, if you interrupt them, if you talk down to them,

They will think that is the way for them to talk to you and to others.

They deserve the same consideration you give to others and you want for yourself.

And the pay-off is that you will have children who are pleasant to have around.

So everyone wins.

Appreciation:

The more you express your appreciation for your children and for things in your life, the more they will learn to appreciate others and to feel good about their own life.

How they feel about themselves affects everything they do - from the way in which they interact with others to the direction they will choose for their lives.

Appreciation leads to self-esteem.

There has been a lot of discussion about the value of self-esteem. I have even heard it said that some teenagers have too much self-esteem, which is why they behave in such destructive ways.

I do not understand the psychology involved, but I suspect that children and teenagers who are acting out with cruelty and insensitivity are not those whose parents helped them to feel good about themselves.

Self-centeredness is not the same as self-esteem. It may even be the opposite. Children who feel good about themselves do not feel the need to force other people to notice them.

Recent studies have shown that most violent teenagers had a history of being put down and disregarded. Their eventual acts of violence came from anger and rage, and were possible because they had not learned to value other people.

What we receive, we learn to give to others:

- When we receive kindness, we learn to be kind.
- When we are taught to value ourselves, we also learn to value others.

Let's be sure that our children know that we appreciate them and feel good about themselves.

Apology:

I'm not sure why this one is so difficult.

One of the most powerful things you can do in a relationship is to apologize when you have been wrong.

An apology does not say: "I'm a terrible person."

It says: "I was wrong or I made a mistake, and I want you to know that I know it."

It also says: "I know what I did hurt you, and I'm sorry for that."

An apology is a way to act with integrity and to put the incident behind you -

not ignoring the other person's feelings, but acknowledging them.

When you apologize with sincerity, every one wins.

Apology teaches your children to accept responsibility for their actions.

It is never complete until you have offered to put things right.

If something was broken, perhaps you can fix it or replace it.

If someone's feelings were hurt by a harsh word, you can talk about it and re-establish good feelings by words that are positive and affirming.

You can help your children learn this valuable skill by apologizing to them when it is appropriate.

I remember times when I needed to apologize to my children - usually because I had raised my voice in anger or frustration.

I always apologized afterwards - even if I had had good reason to be upset with them.

But I calmed down first.

Then I apologized and told them that I was wrong to yell at them, because I loved them, and that was not the way I wanted to treat the people I love.

We would then go on and talk about whatever the issue was that needed to be addressed.

After my apology, they were always more open to hearing what else I had to say.

With practice, apology becomes easier - and if done with sincerity, it will transform your relationships.

Forgiveness:

The other side of the apology coin is forgiveness.

We are all human.

We all make mistakes.

We all disappoint each other.

We can take offense at things that are said or done that hurt us.

We can criticize and condemn and judge each other.

That is our ego speaking.

Or we can get back in our hearts and forgive each other,

so we can spend our time and energy appreciating and enjoying each other.

By expressing forgiveness, by accepting a sincere apology,

we reconnect with the other person.

You can help your children learn how to apologize by receiving their apologies graciously.

Perhaps something was broken. You can let them know that accidents happen and ask them how they might avoid a similar accident in the future.

By using each incident to teach rather than to criticize, you will help them to become compassionate, responsible adults.

Chapter 3

Encourage Them to Express the Best of Who They Are

Our children have ideas of their own - good ideas.

They have talents and interests and deep thoughts to share with the world.

As a parent, you have the power to help your children to find their voice, to discover their passions and learn how to share them with others.

If you provide a safe place for them to express themselves,

they will learn to speak up and to use their talents.

This will give them confidence and help them discover and express the deeper desires of their hearts, which may lead to their finding the things that they are passionate about, the things that, in years to come, will lead them to a fulfilling life.

If you discourage them by being critical of their ideas or their early artistic offerings, they may decide that they have nothing of value to offer. That could lead them to shut off that wonderful, creative part of their being. It could also lead to a loss of confidence.

Even if that has already happened, it is never too late to turn it around.

1. Encourage your children to share their ideas.

Listen to what they say. Let them know you value their input. Include them in decisions. Ask what they think about things.

2. Expose them to the creative work of others.

Read stories to them, even before they can speak. They will understand long before they can tell you. And read with expression - let the stories come alive for your children.

Read poetry. Children love the rhythm and sounds of poems. There are so many good books of poetry for children. My children's favorites included Ogden Nash, A.A. Milne and Shel Silverstein.

When they are old enough to talk about the story or poem, you can ask them what they thought about it - what they liked or didn't like - and how it made them feel. Then it will become more than a passing entertainment. It will be a doorway into their own inner world. It will show them that other people's ideas can help them learn about themselves and their world.

Listen to music with them, and don't be afraid to dance around with them. Children love rhythm and melody.

3. Encourage their creativity.

Provide opportunities for them to try different ways of expressing themselves - through art, music, writing.

Then honor their offerings.

Ask them to tell you about their art.

Display their work where you can see it.

This will show them that you appreciate what they created and will encourage them to continue to develop their talents and explore that well of creativity within them.

Children enjoy expressing themselves. With a little encouragement, they will jump right in with enthusiasm.

To encourage their creativity, you can:

- Create a space for them to work- their own table or any flat, hard surface.
- Provide paper and crayons, colored chalk, paint (when they are a bit older), and other materials.
- Put up a long strip of paper (continuous computer paper is great) on a wall, so they can create a mural.
- Play music and dance with them, allowing them to move to the rhythm.
- Provide instruments such as drums and rattles, so they can participate.
- Make up stories or poems or songs together.

You can start, then encourage them to add the next line. Rhyming is fun, when they are old enough, but not necessary. See what excites your child.

- Add your own ideas.

Children find great joy in self-expression.

I remember one little girl who came into the waiting room of a doctor's office one day. She was about three years old. And she was singing a delightful song about how happy she was.

When she stopped, I asked her if someone had taught her that song.

"NO," she said. "I made up it." (Yes, I am quoting her exactly.)

Her joy at being alive just filled the room. She was such a good example for me. She was filling her world with a song from her heart.

If only we could all remember how to do that.

Express appreciation for all the offerings from your children.

Make no value judgments about their work.

Do not say that it is good or not good.

Thank them for their effort - and for the gift.

Chapter 4.

Find Lots of Ways to Show Your Love

Smile at your child when she comes in the room.

That tells her you are glad to see her, that she is special to you.

Have fun together: That says: "I LIKE being with you."

One of the most powerful ways of showing your love is spending time with your child.

Let your child choose what the two of you will do - at least some of the time - even if it means playing in the mud together. Staying clean is not a primary objective. Having fun and sharing with him as he discovers his world are much more important.

My son, David, was born with an amazing ability to build almost anything he set his mind to. Even as a very young child, he would sit for hours with his wooden blocks or Legos.

We spent many hours together on the floor of his room, constructing fanciful cities and castles, robots and space ships and cathedrals - whatever his imagination could come up with. Those are special memories for me, and I know that time together strengthened our heart connection and helped him to learn skills that serve him very well today.

Create adventures together, starting when your child is very young. Notice the things your child notices and delights in. She will help you to see your world in a new way.

I remember taking my children for walks and letting them go to the things that interested them. They saw details that I had never taken the time to look at - bark on a tree, individual flowers, the way their reflection rippled when they put their finger in a puddle. Every day was a new adventure - and every day, I discovered more about my world along with my children.

Schedule time to be with each child alone, if you have more than one child.

One-on-one time is different from time spent as a whole family.

That says to each child: "You are important to me."

Put time with each child on the top of your priority list:

With two children, I used to do something special with each one every other week. They got to decide what we would do, within limits, and I had the fun of stepping into their world with them.

David is a quiet person - not inclined to talk about what he is thinking or feeling. For several years, our bi-weekly ritual was to go for a hike in the morning, then end up at our favorite restaurant for breakfast. We also went camping together, and had some wonderful adventures.

I discovered that when we were out on a mountain or sitting by a camp fire or hiking in the forest, we could talk more easily. Perhaps it was because we were more relaxed. Perhaps being in nature helped us to feel more connected. Whatever the reason, I always looked forward to our times together, and they are still among my most precious memories.

Create family rituals. They add structure and stability to a child's life, and they give children a feeling of security and a sense of belonging.

In the family that I grew up in, we always kissed each other when we parted and when we came back together. We still do. It is a way to feel connected and loved. Even when we disagree with each other, that ritual reminds us that we have a foundation of love and support.

Each family creates its own, unique rituals. Rituals can include such things as:

- special breakfasts on the week-ends,
- special holiday meals and birthday dinners,
- hugs when you part or come back together,
- grace at the table.

Bed-time rituals might include:

- reading stories, from the time your children are very young,
- prayers,
- remembering loved ones not there,
- saying I love you,
- kisses and hugs,
- special words that you say every night.

Use little reminders to strengthen your feeling of connection.

There are so many little things you can do to remind your children that you are thinking of them:

- Put a note in their lunch box.
- Send a joke or a cartoon in their book bag.
- Leave a note on the bedroom mirror or tucked away in their drawer.
- (Add your own ideas.)

Include your child in your activities.

Children enjoy helping.

Bake cookies together and let him shape and decorate them. Let her stir the cake batter. Let him drop the pancake batter onto the griddle. Of course, let them lick the beaters when you've finished mixing the cake batter or whipping the cream. (Does anyone still whip their own cream?)

The important thing is to have fun together and to create good memories. Those memories will serve all of you for the rest of your lives.

Chapter 5

Nurture their spiritual life

It is important to remember that we are all spiritual beings. At the moment, we happen to be having a human experience.

Like the rest of us, our children are on a spiritual path. It is important to honor that by giving them opportunities to experience and to express that deeper, inner part of their being and to express their deeper wisdom.

There are many ways to support your children's spiritual path.

1. Help them develop a relationship with God - (however you name the higher power in your life):

- Say grace before each meal and allow your children to express their gratitude.
- Say prayers with them at bed time.
- Attend a worship service together - and then encourage them to tell you their thoughts.

2. Encourage a sense of wonder:

- Notice the beauty of the world around you and mention it to your children.
- Spend time in nature and talk about what they notice, how they feel.
- Allow yourself to be in awe and wonder.
- Express your appreciation of the blessings in your life

When my children were very young, I did not want them to be afraid of their world. I wanted them to appreciate the power and magnificence of nature.

Whenever we had a thunder storm, even when they were very young, we would sit by the window and watch the storm together.

When thunder clapped or lightening flashed, I would clap my hands and say "YEA! Wow, that was a good one!" or "That was beautiful!" Soon they got the idea and they were joining in the celebration. And to this day, they both appreciate, rather than fear, thunder storms.

- Encourage quiet time, so they can develop the habit of going within:

I believe our children are already in touch with their inner being. We don't need to teach them how to do that.

You can encourage your children to honor that deep connection by:

- providing opportunities in their day for quiet reflection,
- teaching them to listen to their own inner guidance, and
- . - encouraging them to talk about their spiritual experiences and ideas.

How to Use The Ideas in This Book

Review the ideas in this book.

Choose 2 or 3 that appeal to you - that you can use now.

Add some ideas of your own.

Make a list of things you can do now to increase the feeling of connection with your child.

Make a commitment to yourself to follow through and actually DO them.

As you begin to see the positive results, I hope you will be encouraged to try other ways of opening those lines of communication and adding to the positive energy that will grow in your family.

Have fun!

This book is a supplement to:

Feel Good Parenting: How to Use the Power of Your Heart to Create an Extraordinary Relationship With Your Child.

In *Feel Good Parenting*, you will learn:

- how to turn conflict into harmony in 3 easy steps.
- how to feel good about yourself and your children more of the time.
- how to be more peaceful and relaxed and help your children to do the same.
- how to get your children to WANT to cooperate.
- how to communicate with your children even when they will not listen.
- how to get answers from them, even when they will not talk to you.
- how to transform every situation with 4 powerful words.
- and so much more.

To learn more, you may go to <http://www.feelgoodparenting.com/ebook.html>.

As you fall asleep every night:

Feel your powerful heart connection and

send your child a silent greeting of love and appreciation.

Sweet Dreams.