

## **Perspective in Parenting: What is it, and Why is it So Important?**

I have found that it is easy to become flippant in our casual conversations and routine activities, because they are...well, casual and routine. And we all do it - we all fall prey to complacency from time to time, in both word and deed. It's not something I think we should beat ourselves up over, but we should make sure to take the time regularly to remind ourselves of what really does matter in our lives and how deeply we feel about them. Because without recognition of the true value of things in our lives - in other words, without perspective - we would never be able to reconnect with those things and would end up losing them in the long run. Perspective is indeed a key component of connection, because it is the ability to see things for their true worth and value on a consistent basis. When we lose perspective, regardless of how long we lose it, we run the real risk of not putting our time and energy into what truly matters and thus losing the connection we have to those things and people that matter most.

Which begs the question: Why does a lack of perspective cause disconnection? Good question.

It may seem self-evident, but value is a matter of opinion. As the old saying goes, one man's trash is another man's treasure. Which is just a folksy way of saying that we all do not value things the same. Take cars for example. I'm a "point A to point B" kind of guy, personally. I don't really care much about what my car actually looks like, and I'm not into the latest gadgets and gizmos. I care about gas mileage, safety, ownership cost, resale value, longevity, reliability - you know, "practical" stuff. This is primarily because I see a car as a means to an end, that end being getting me from one place to another in the cheapest way possible. That is why I own a small, fuel-efficient, plain little car that will last long enough to be my son's first car if I take reasonably good care of it. On the other hand, I have friends who see a car as a part of who they are as a person. It's a statement of what makes them unique. These friends put literally thousands of dollars into mere cosmetic enhancements alone, to say nothing of performance enhancements. I kid you not when I say that they spend enough on their cars to fund a year of college tuition. It's hard for me to relate to, but I do understand it to an extent, because I have my idiosyncrasies, too. I don't even want to talk about how much money I have spent over the years on musical equipment. I've been told it's a waste of money. I guess some people just don't understand the value of a custom-built electronic bass guitar with an abalone-inlaid fretboard,

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piezo acoustic pickups, and a custom paint job. (This is about the time my wife rolls her eyes and shakes her head, with an annoyed grin on her face.)

The point is that value is a measure of what gets more of us - more of us in the form of our time, our thoughts, our energy, our actions, our money, and so on. Perspective is the ability to keep those many things that compete for our time, our thoughts, our energy, and so on in proper order - or in other words, it means we have our priorities in line. And while all of us have a few somewhat frivolous things in our lives that we value - after-market parts for cars, or custom bass guitars, for example - there are a few universal priorities, things that should be tops on our lists regardless of time, circumstances, age, and so on. In my opinion, one of those should be our families.

When faced with this line of thinking, many people say themselves “Of course I put family first. They are the most important thing in my life. I work, I provide, I do everything for them. I would give my life for my family.” And I get where they are coming from. You can bet your life that if one of my children needed a life-saving surgery, I would part ways with my bass in a heart-beat to help pay for it.

But what happens when things are more casual? For example, when my child needs a little more time before going to bed to have me read to him and simply play with him during my favorite show? Maybe we say to ourselves, he’s being a bit needy, and it’s not THAT big of a deal if he misses one night, is it? We ask ourselves these little, seemingly meaningless questions all the time. And I agree. In isolation, one moment is not a big deal; it’s a drop in the bucket. But these small questions, asked subconsciously over the span of a lifetime, end up defining our relationships far more than the big question of whether we would sell our possessions to afford a surgery, or what have you. It is the consistent and persistent ability to see the value of things in the moment-to-moment flow of the day that truly defines our relationships. And this is why perspective is so vital. If we only have perspective during the big moments, when things are at a “do or die” level of intensity, then we are totally and completely missing the big picture - or in other words, we really don’t have perspective. And we eventually disconnect from those things because we have lost sight of their value and they have become commonplace to us. Things that are common tend to get very little of our time, energy, and focus. After all, how valuable is something that is common?

And that’s the fundamental issue: What do we value when it really counts - not during the catastrophic events of our lives, but during those day-to-day, mundane times of our lives? We’d all like to think we truly value what we are supposed to, namely our families and children. But is that the case? To help you answer that

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question honestly, I am providing a simple list of self-assessment questions. If you ask yourself these questions honestly, it can help you really think about your relationships with your children. I challenge you to really consider these questions, and answer them with brutal honesty. You will know if your perspective is lacking by the end of it, if you are being honest with yourself.

When you are at home, does your mind wander easily? If so, what do you find yourself thinking about?

What type of things do you classify as “legitimate emergencies” that take you away from family time? Are you relieved when there is an emergency of this kind?

If you did not have children, what would you do with your life? Do you resent not being able to take your life in that direction because of family?

Do your children have to compete with other people or things to get their fair share of your time and energy? For example, sports on television, the computer, work, etc?

Does your spouse nag you to spend more time with the kids? Does he/she have a point, but you don’t want to admit it?

When you speak with your children, is your heart not really in it? Is the discussion superficial, and lacking in real focus and sincerity on your part?

Do you make promises to get kids “off your back,” and then break them later if you just don’t feel like fulfilling what you promised? Do you even forget what you have agreed to, because it was made with such insincerity?

Is being at home with the family your “default,” or is home simply one of many places you go? If so, what is your “default” - a bar, work, a friend’s house, the store, somewhere else?

Is discipline the main time that your children get your full attention?

Do you find yourself only spending time with family when it is convenient for you? Do they get your “leftover” attention, meaning they only get time with you after you have done everything you wanted to do first?

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Do you genuinely enjoy the company of you family, or do you endure it? Do they seem to always be trying to find things you want to do, to entice you to get involved or to find a way for you to enjoy it?

Do you mock your wife or children when they are not around? (We all joke around. I am not talking about good-natured humor. I'm using the word mock very intentionally here.)

Do you fight with your spouse excessively in front of your children? Do you find yourself forgetting they are even there while you fight?

Do you blame your kids for your bad moods?

Do you find yourself indulging your children out of guilt?

Do you use your children to fulfill your friendship needs, and thus neglect the “hard work” of parenting, such as enforcing rules or holding them accountable for their behavior?

When issues are brought up regarding the time you spend with family, do you always seem to have a “good excuse” worked out to explain your absence or lack of availability?

Do you lie about your activities or whereabouts in order to sneak time away from family?

Do you see gifts and greatness in your children, and do you acknowledge their unique contributions regularly - or does it take something “big” to get your attention?

Do you prefer one child over the other? Does it show?

Do you regularly tell your children you love them, and do you specify why you feel that way?

Do you know your children well enough to name favorite colors, foods, and so on?

These question are just to get the juices flowing for you mentally. I encourage you to cultivate an attitude of accountability by reflecting on these issues regularly. Hopefully you are in a place to truly consider how much of yourself you are giving

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to your children when it really counts - during the mundane, day-to-day flow of our daily lives - and are willing to take action to correct your thinking and choices if you find yourself lacking. I can speak from experience that doing so may not always be easy, but it is most definitely worth it.

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