

## Taking Your Kids Perspective

by Mark Brandenburg MA, CPCC

"As a child, the critical eye of my father seemed to follow me around wherever I went." (Arthur C. Clarke)

It's quite easy for most parents to look at their kids with a critical eye. And why not? There's a lot riding on the outcome of your kids' development. There's the nagging worry that you're not doing your job well enough and that your child will develop "problems." There's also the fear of being judged as an incompetent or uninvolved parent by others. And there is the relentless presence of your children, making mistakes by the truckload while you watch.

They do make mistakes. Lots of them.

And you have a number of choices about how you respond to those mistakes and how critical you are of your kids. Let's consider some different ways of looking at this issue to see if we can get some perspective:

### *A Different Angle*

If you're a parent who's really honest with yourself, you'll acknowledge that much of the judgment and criticism that you have towards your kids is really your own critical judgment about yourself. It's usually easier to be critical of your kids than to turn the spotlight on yourself, isn't it? If you're not careful as a parent, you may run the risk of "teaching" your kids low self-esteem through your criticism and judgment of them.

### *Doesn't seem fair, does it?*

Parents who see their kids as capable and whole, on the other hand, will find far fewer opportunities to be critical of their kids.

There are other reasons why you should be more understanding with your kids. One reason is to consider what it's really like to be a child. For instance, can you imagine the formidable combination of having a brain that's not yet able to exhibit emotional control and living in a house where you're constantly told what to do by your parents?

Think about it for a minute. How many times do our kids get told what to do each day? How do you handle getting told what to do all the time? It's a wonder that kids respond as well as they do.

### *How About Teenagers?*

How about your teens at home? They certainly should be able to respond better to parents based on their experience, right? Not according to a recent study by the National Institute of Health.

A large study of teenagers found that as the brain develops, it trims away excess cells so that what's left is more efficient. One of the last parts of the brain to complete this process is the prefrontal cortex, which controls planning, judgment, and self-control. Many teen-agers have not experienced the "maturation" of this part of their brain.

"[Adolescents] are capable of very strong emotions and very strong passions, but their prefrontal cortex hasn't caught up with them yet. It's as though they don't have the brakes that allow them to slow those emotions down," said Charles Nelson, a child psychologist at the University of Minnesota.

Researchers say this may help explain the often irrational behavior of teenagers: the mood swings, and the risks they're often too willing to take.

"If I walk into a class of kids who are 14 or 15," said Nelson, "those kids have a level of brain maturity that just does not map onto the kinds of emotional decision- making that a lot of those kids are being asked to make by teachers and parents. Added Nelson: "The more teachers and the more parents that understand that there is a biological limitation to the child's ability to control and regulate emotion, [the more] they might be able to back off a little and be a bit more understanding."

It can be quite easy for us to judge our kids harshly. But when you can begin to enter your child's world and consider the developmental limitations that exist, the call to a kinder and gentler way is undeniable.

Your kids will continue to make mistakes.

Your job is to stay calm, love them, and gently show them a different way.

And to be thankful that your kids are here to challenge you to become a more patient person.