

How to Survive Parenting – Child Development

By Mike Witzky

Being a parent is not a simple job. It requires that we grow as our children grow. Remember saying, “I’ll never do that when I’m a parent” I do. Some of those things I now (as a parent) realize weren’t the best ideas. Others, I have carried with me and do put into practice. I have four children ranging from 17 to 27 years old – 2 boys and 2 girls with a boy – girl – boy – girl spread. Two are from my first marriage and two are from my current one. I tell you this just so you know that these ideas come from a mixture of my clinical training and real life experience.

We need to keep in mind the ultimate goal of parenting. Some day we are going to see our children turn 18 and begin to see them leave home, enter into the work force or seek advanced education. Some will begin to look at starting a family of their own (although I feel this is too early). As parents we have a responsibility to prepare them for that time by making sure they have the skills necessary to make independent decisions and live with the consequences. If we shelter our children and never allow them to experience some of the complexities of life – they will have little preparation to make those decisions when they turn the magic age of 18. On the other hand if we allow them to do whatever they want with very little guidance or direction they will not only have numerous problems during their youth but they will also carry this pattern into their young adult life.

One of the more important concepts I learned from my clinical studies that applies to parenting is in the area of the developmental phases that children pass through as they grow up. We have all heard the saying “You can’t walk before you crawl.” This is a commonly used analogy and identifies that there are many things that we do that require building on prior learning. This is a key concept in child development. It not only applies to children’s physical development but to their emotional and cognitive development.

Potty training is a good example. You don’t try to potty train a baby less than 1 year old, they physically haven’t developed the ability to control this body function and mentally they aren’t ready to understand the concept. But, let’s get into some of the more difficult issues that face us as parents.

Children learn most by example. In their first years the home environment is generally where many of their early learning come. This is why the principal “Do as I say not as I do” never works. I also don’t like the saying used all too frequently when a child asks why they can’t do something “Because I say so.” If we can’t explain to our children why we don’t want them to do something, maybe we need to rethink our decision. In all of my 27 years of raising my children I never said that to them. If I didn’t have a good reason for my decision maybe I needed to rethink it. That is not to say that there won’t be decisions that you make that your children aren’t able to understand due to their age but it is still worthwhile to explain your reasons to them, some day they will have the ability to understand. Believe me there were times when it would have been easier to just use that phrase than to take the time to explain my decision but if my goal is to prepare my children to be good decision makers than they need to have an explanation.

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If you think your child may benefit from professional assistance, please go to the “*Find a Service Provider*” section of the BHG Web site <http://www.bhg.org> to locate a behavioral healthcare agency in your county.

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