

TRUSTING OUR CHILDREN

What is it they say about grand parents and grandchildren? That they get along so well because they have a common enemy – the parents!

Whilst there is some truth in that, being a grand parent has its advantages, grandparents can take all the care in the world with grandchildren but at the end of the day they can hand the child back to the parents. It sounds like an easy job but being a grandparent is a vital role in a grandchild's life.

The duty of care and responsibility for grandchildren goes a lot further than playing and having fun, although that's a pretty good start. As grandparents we have an opportunity to teach, learn, impart wisdom and knowledge, nurture and love unconditionally.

I spoke to children of all ages in researching for my books, *Making Dreams Come True* and *Life Smart*. These young people told me many things they want and need from the adults in their lives and here are some of the things they told me they crave from their parents and grandparents.

Listen to me and acknowledge my feelings. Actively listen, be there. Look at me, face me (no matter what my age) and give your undivided attention to me. Show me by your body language and attention that you care about me and what I am saying.

'The thing I love about talking to my Gran is that she listens to what I think. Even though she was born in the dark ages, she still listens'.

Vanya, 13

Acknowledge my feelings. Tell me you are trying to understand how I feel. You may not agree with my point of view, but try to understand the way I feel.

Look for the positive in me. Use the 80/20 way of seeing things. At least 80% of what I am doing is positive and on track, 20% is learning. Focus your attention in that order, 80% of the time catch me doing thing right and reinforce my positive behaviour with praise or expressions of love.

On average less than 20% of the time I am learning and making mistakes, (it just feels like more sometimes) so only correct me 20% of the time. This balance will encourage positive behaviour in me and will help me to understand how to alter the behaviour that is not appropriate.

When I am constantly reminded of my 20% without any of the positive reinforcement, pretty soon it becomes 80% to 100% of the behaviour, just by way of how you are reinforcing it to me.

Focus on the behaviour you want from me, focus on what you want me to do more of. Look for things we can agree about, don't pick at my mistakes and problems.

Care for yourself as a person. It is important to care lovingly for yourself, this is the

strongest example I can ever have. Keep nurturing your own self esteem as adults. It is difficult to help me if you are not prepared to build your own base of self-value and self-esteem first.

Give yourself clear positive self-talk most of the time about yourself and about me. The 80/20 rule works best if you are prepared to do it with yourself first. The way you behave around me is the strongest influence on me you will ever have.

"If you feel bad about yourself and say bad things to yourself and about yourself, then people will treat you that way."

Nina, 16

Speak the truth to me. Sometimes this is hard because you may not even know the truth yourself or you may want to protect me. Tell me the truth, don't hide anything for my own 'good'.

Send me love, not worry. Support me while I learn. Stop trying to shield me from the pain of living, I have to get there sometime, let me make my own mistakes. This provides a safe environment for me to learn. Encourage me to learn to trust my intuition. Encourage me to trust my feelings, they are usually right. Trust *my* inner wisdom. You know what is right for you; please listen to me when I feel the same way.

'I never listened to myself enough. I always thought other people, family, friends, teachers, knew better than I did. Then I started to listen to my feelings and my intuition and I realised that I was the best person to solve my problems for me.'

Rachel, 18

Respect my privacy. I need space to be alone sometimes. I need my own junk, my own things and these things you may not approve of. Please let me have my individuality.

Make time to spend with me. Take time out to have with me one-on-one. I need to have a relationship with you that is just us.

Have a life of your own outside of me. Let's enjoy our time together but don't make me the centre of your existence; it is not healthy for either of us. Cultivate your interests and balance your life to achieve your own goals and let me achieve mine.

*Your children are not your children.
They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself.
They come through you but not from you,
and though they are with you yet they belong not to you.
You may give them your love but not your thoughts.
You may house their bodies, but not their souls,
For their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow,
which you cannot visit,
even in your dreams.*

*You may strive to be like them,
but seek not to make them like you.
For life goes not backward nor tarries with yesterday.*

You are the bows from which your children as living arrows are sent forth.

Kahlil Kibran

Written for The Over 50's magazine July 2003. Some of the above material is drawn from Vicki Bennett's' book *Life Smart – Choices About Friendship, Family And Future*. Vicki is an author, corporate trainer, artist, and grandmother.