

A Spiritual Approach To Parenting

by Sherrie Wharton MA, OTR/L

“What’s your screen name, cell number or e-mail address? Let’s IM each other, put me on your buddy list.” I hear children talking like this all the time. We live in a world with mind and spirit numbing technology. The world is fast paced, electronic and colorful but separates us from our inner essence. Children lose themselves in computers, television, x-boxes, play stations and cell phones, disconnecting further from their higher selves.

Children and adults are busy with technology and life. Since parents are overwhelmed juggling their hectic lives, it’s harder to foster children’s inner spiritual development. Dual career families are common. Their time and their schedules have to be orchestrated. Completing everything needed per day is stressful. Carving out time for yourself is rare. As a result of being swept up with the busy pace of living, you go through life anesthetized. Society does not encourage you to be awake, live consciously. Despite busy lives, children need parents as beacons of light helping steer them toward their blossoming spirit.

I am an Occupational Therapist (OT with Master’s Degree) who has used spiritual approaches to parenting. I have 18 years pediatric experience and am a Master Instructor of Integrated Energy Therapy® (IET).

Here are my suggestions for helping children reconnect with their inner spirit:

- ☞ Decrease exposure to technology
- ☞ Evaluate schedules
- ☞ Model and encourage: access to feelings and untapped strength
- ☞ Practice sacred listening

Reducing Technology

Limit the amount of time daily on the computer and TV.

Replace this time with children meditating five minutes per

day. They would also benefit from wrapping up in a blanket and reading, creating a quiet space using a bean bag chair or pillows with a `tent` like a blanket draped over, soaking in a bubble bath, playing games, hiking, walking a dog, engaging in sports or recreational activities (ie. basketball, skating, tag, etc.). These activities help calm children. Encourage children to develop their creative skills (e.g. painting, playing with clay or a musical instrument, creative writing or movement, crocheting, computer programming, etc.). Even more important than excelling is the joy and increased self-esteem from participation. An early skill can sometimes lead to a career. However, more often, the benefits are constructive use of time, nurturing friendships, stress reduction, and bolstering self-expression.

Assessing Schedules

Evaluate if your child's hectic schedule is causing too much stress. Reduce the number of activities if necessary. Also, when choosing activities with your child, consider whether it helps him/her connect to his/her higher self and boost confidence. Be selective. One way parents get support with their spiritual journey is by classes such as yoga, meditation etc. Children can benefit from these types of classes as well. They also provide positive outlets for stress reduction and strengthen healthy bodies.

Setting An Example

It's easy to go through life asleep but deeply dissatisfied. If you, as parents, awaken from your slumber you reveal your own magnificence, truth, power, and intuition. You serve as role models to your children. Virginia Satir, a renowned Family Therapist explains that parents need to be congruent with their own feelings. Sometimes children observe you upset. If they ask if you are, answer honestly but details are not necessary. This develops a child's sense of trust and intuition.

Teaching Your Children

People can yell or misdirect their energy and not reveal what's under the surface. Encourage your children to identify and

connect to their authentic feelings. To foster this concept ask questions that elicit feelings such as, "What is your gut reaction?" This develops intuition. "How do you feel about this situation?" This teaches them to value their opinion instead of seeking the approval of others. Ask them to tune in quietly and take their time before responding. Rather than burying, stuffing or numbing feelings, allow them to rise to the surface. Give permission for your child to cry and hold a sacred space for his/her feelings. Invite children to acknowledge all their emotions both light and dark. Concealing feelings squelches power. Teach them they have strength. They can face difficulties they didn't know they were capable of tackling such as peer pressure, the stress of tests, team tryouts etc. Remind them to trust their intuition and ability to make decisions. Be creative. Seeing them as competent, even when the waters are rough, accesses hidden strength and connects them with their inner spirit. Use a variety of tools. When my son was young, we would brainstorm through roll playing all different ways to handle bullies on the school bus including using humor to parental intervention. Now there are wonderful library books and web sites on the topic of bullying. In coping with peer pressure, what has been beneficial for my daughter, is fostering open communication and encouraging expression of her feelings. What I have found particularly useful for myself, family, adults, and children, is incorporating an energy technique called Integrated Energy Therapy® (IET). IET is founded by Stevan Thayer. Energy sessions help heighten awareness of feelings and clears blocks. Recognizing your feelings connects you to your power and inner strength.

Sacred Listening

Listening does not mean indulging your children's every request. Not at all. It means hearing them and coming up with respectful solutions. It is important for a child to know the value of what they say and share. This can be achieved by being heard and acknowledged. Try to carve at least 10 minutes each day just to listen empathetically. When listening, suspend judgments or the urge to advise (unless requested).

Just acknowledge feelings expressed. Taking time to create a sacred space of listening can help a child access his/her inner resources.

Connecting Through IET -an energy technique

In our bodies emotions get stored and blocked by stress, fear, and self-limiting thoughts. IET removes stuck energy and brings the body back to its natural state of balance and joy. I have found IET both personally and professionally effective. Therefore, I am privileged to teach a 2 1/2 hour workshop where children learn IET. Parents are also welcome to attend. Some of the benefits of IET include: recognizing your feelings, accessing inner strength, transforming stress into positive energy, connecting to your special angel, tapping into inner glory and unlimited potential. Through participation in this workshop, children learn a technique called, The HeartLink Process. This powerful and simple tool is a way to send and receive love from the angels. Mastering this process helps children deal effectively with many stresses such as test taking, team tryouts, overcome fear from nightmares and send positive energy to those in need. I give each attendee a 14 page well illustrated IET for Kids book to take home as well as a certificate of completion. At East Norwich Therapeutic Wellness Center I combine Occupational Therapy and IET. In addition, I give one on one IET sessions for adults and children in the office, home or by phone. You can reach me at 631-421-0502 or through e-mail at actionnow@optonline.net.

Within each child is a rich reservoir of resources and inner beauty. What a privilege to nourish every child on their journey.