



# Parenting Mindfully

Parenting Techniques to Help Improve Caregiver-Child Bonding

By Monica Ramirez, LCSW

# What is the Caregiver-Child Relationship and How is it different from Parenting?

- ▶ Caregiver-Child Relationship: Refers to the bond between an individual caregiver and an individual child/teenager.
  - ▶ Bonding is the process of establishing a strong attachment with another person. Or simply said: the process of developing feelings of trust and affection for another person.
- ▶ Parenting: Refers to the process of child-rearing.
  - ▶ The process includes maintaining support for a child's emotional, physical, intellectual, and social development.
    - ▶ A component of the caregiver-child relationship.

# So how is Mindfulness related to parenting?

- ▶ Mindfulness is the act of being intentionally present-focused and aware, without judging the given moment one is in. When you combine mindfulness with parenting, it calls for the parent to remind themselves, as often as is needed, to stay focused on their interactions with their children (in play, in discipline, in communication, etc.).
- ▶ When we practice awareness in our interactions with our children, we open ourselves to hearing/truly seeing, connecting with, and understanding our children. Thus allowing ourselves to build relationships that are reciprocal and bonded.

# The Components of Mindful Parenting

- ▶ Honoring our children’s “sovereignty”.
  - ▶ Here, sovereignty is viewed as one’s “true nature” and their ability to be who they truly are.
  - ▶ Children, like all people, have inner worlds that impact the way they experience their environment and relationships, impact their interests/needs.
  - ▶ This ultimately urges us as caregivers to be open to learning about our children’s inner world, to encourage self-development, and to nourish respect for the differences we may share.
    - ▶ However, this does not mean that we as caregivers should give children everything they want or bend to their every demand. Rather, it becomes the caregivers’ responsibility to teach children the balance of nurturing their sovereignty while also respecting the sovereignty of others as well as teaching them to navigate the world around them in appropriate/respectful ways.
  - ▶ Ultimately, parenting becomes about building a relationship with your child that encourages open communication and an interest in getting to know who your child is.

# Positive Caregiving Strategies that Promote Mindful Parenting

- ▶ 1. “Connect and Redirect”
  - ▶ Learning to respond to emotional needs with your “right brain” (emotion) to assist with emotional regulation before moving on to using your “left brain” (logic) to redirect.
    - ▶ What is required here for a caregiver is the ability to stop (avoid reactivity) and become aware of what your child or teenager is trying to tell us?
    - ▶ When your child/teenager has a big emotional reaction to any situation, instead of reacting or attempting to correct, you can attempt to assess and address their emotional needs at that time. Are they angry, scared, sad, etc.? Do they need validation, reassurance, comfort, etc.?
      - ▶ Stop and listen to what is being said and how it’s being said. Then reflect what you heard back to your child/teen to allow them to clarify if needed. By doing this you are demonstrating yourself to be emotionally available encouraging dialogue over reactivity.
    - ▶ Once there is a return to calm, you can then switch to “left brain”. What was the original situation that caused the reaction? Does it need to be addressed in this moment? Does a time to discuss anything need to be scheduled for later/another day?
      - ▶ Be clear about what is expected and decided.

# Positive Caregiving Strategies that Promote Mindful Parenting Continued....

## ▶ 2. Use Clear and Specific Praise

- ▶ Rather than focusing on what your child is doing “wrong” focus on what your child is doing right.
  - ▶ Make an effort to increase your awareness of your child’s positive behaviors. Keep a look out to catch your child/teenager doing good acts/or behaviors that you would like them to do more (such as cleaning up after playtime).
  - ▶ Use praise to reinforce the behavior.
    - ▶ The keys to making praise effective is timing and clarity.
      - ▶ Be sure to praise the child during or as soon as they have completed the identified behavior.
      - ▶ Be specific about what you are praising (e.g., thank you for cleaning up your toys after you were done playing).
      - ▶ Use a positive and encouraging tone.
      - ▶ It may feel weird at first but consistency is key!

# Positive Caregiving Strategies that Promote Mindful Parenting Continued....

- ▶ 3. Use Quality Time
  - ▶ Despite how straightforward this may seem, there are key elements to keep in mind when using quality time in mindful parenting.
    - ▶ Choose activities and topics of conversations that your child is interested in, engage your child when appropriate in choosing the activity/topic. Their input matters!
    - ▶ Avoid distractions (put phones away, maintain eye contact, etc.). Be present so that you can be engaged!
    - ▶ Balancing between frequent but short quality time and infrequent but long quality time.
    - ▶ Frequent but short:
      - ▶ Can be done daily or weekly.
      - ▶ Can be as little as 10 minutes.
      - ▶ Examples: car rides to school, dinner time, etc.
    - ▶ Infrequent but long:
      - ▶ Usually pre-planned
      - ▶ Examples: trips to the movies, going to the park, etc.
    - ▶ Use this time to enjoy your child's company! (Stay aware as best you can of your phone use during this time).

# Positive Caregiving Strategies that Promote Mindful Parenting Continued....

- ▶ 4. Show affection
  - ▶ This is the act of showing your child that you care for them. It's important to note that affection can be shown in different ways (verbally, physically, with actions, etc.).
  - ▶ In order to show affection in the context of mindful parenting, you as the caregiver will have to be aware of how your child receives different forms of affection. When you hug and cuddle your child or teen, do they easily reciprocate or do they seem to avoid that type of affection? Does your child or teen seem to seek verbal messages of love? How does your child/teen show you affection?
  - ▶ It's important to remember that the way you express affection will need to change as your child gets older, transforming into opportunities for you to model healthy ways to show affection across the lifespan.

# Positive Caregiving Strategies that Promote Mindful Parenting Continued....

- ▶ 5. Be consistent and intentional with your own self-care
  - ▶ Believe it or not stress that is experienced from parenting and all that parenting entails, when chronic and not dealt with, can cause burnout.
    - ▶ Parental burnout: Experiencing chronic stress from your role as a caregiver to the point of becoming overwhelmed with your role as a caregiver, becoming emotionally distant from your children, and feeling ineffective as a caregiver. When untreated, parental burnout can lead to child maltreatment/abuse.
  - ▶ As hard as it may feel, it's important to prioritize self-care/"you time".
    - ▶ Maintain regular participating in activities that recharge you. Maybe that's a walk around the block every evening, maybe it's listening to upbeat music while you get ready for work, maybe it's calling a loved one on the phone while on an errand to share ideas/or vent, maybe it's reading book for 20 minutes. Whatever it is, it's important to maintain your well-being and to model that for our children.

# Suggested Resources:

- ▶ Everyday Blessings: Mindfulness for Parents - Myla Kabat-Zinn and Jon Kabat-Zin
- ▶ Every Parent's Family Workbook - Carol Markie-Dadds, MPsychClin, Matthew R. Sanders, PH.D., Karen M.T. Turner, PH.D.
- ▶ Parenting from the Inside Out - Daniel J. Siegel, M.D., and Mary Hartzell, M.Ed.
- ▶ Peaceful Parent, Happy Kids: How to Stop Yelling and Start Connecting - Dr. Laura Markham
  - ▶ Ahaparenting.com: <https://www.ahaparenting.com/parenting-tools>
- ▶ The Whole-Brain Child: 12 Revolutionary Strategies to Nurture Your Child's Developing Mind - Daniel J. Siegel, M.D., and Tina Payne Bryson, PH.D.
  - ▶ The Whole-Brain Child Workbook: Practical Exercises, Worksheets and Activities to Nurture Developing Minds - Daniel J. Siegel, M.D., and Tina Payne Bryson, PH.D.

# References:

- ▶ Kabat-Zinn, M. , & Kabat-Zinn, J. (1997). *Everyday blessings: the inner work of mindful parenting*. New York. Hyperion.
- ▶ Markie-Dadds, C., Sanders, M.R., & M. T. Turner, K. (2000). *Every parent's family workbook*. Milton, Queensland. Triple P International.
- ▶ Mikolajczak, M., Brianda, M. E., Avalosse, H., & Roskam, I. (2018). *Consequences of parental burnout: its specific effect on child neglect and violence*. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2018.03.025>
- ▶ Sanders, M. R., & Ralph, A. (2006). *Teen triple p family workbook*. Milton, Queensland. Triple P International.
- ▶ Siegel, D. J., & Bryson, T. P. (2011). *The whole-brain child: 12 revolutionary strategies to nurture your child's developing mind*. New York. Bantam Books Trade Paperbacks.

# About the Presenter/Therapist

- ▶ Monica C. Ramirez is a Psychotherapist and Licensed Clinical Social Worker. Monica obtained her Master of Social Work degree from the University of Southern California and has extensive experience working in community mental health and private practice. Monica specializes in working with people who are navigating through difficult life transitions and has worked with an array of symptoms including anxiety, depression, relationship issues, parenting issues, trauma, grief/loss, as well as more severe diagnoses. Monica is currently practicing at So Cal Therapy Center and feels honored to work with individuals from all walks of life in their pursuit of personal growth.