Strengthening Relationships with your Kids

As a parent, you have an opportunity to enhance the level of trust and quality of communication between you and your children, particularly as they approach and go through their teen years.

**Building a “Home Court Advantage”**

One of the ways to do so is by creating a “home court advantage” for your kids. In sports, a home court advantage means that the home team has the support of fans and the comfort level of being in familiar surroundings. In your family, you can build this same feeling of support and comfort.

Your goal is to instill a sense of safety, support, and belonging. In doing so, your son or daughter will be comfortable knowing he or she can turn to you for help, even during tough times.

A big part of establishing a home court advantage is recognizing the values and beliefs that the family lives by. If they’re not talked about, then a child will make assumptions about what they are and these assumptions aren’t always positive. A family’s values, beliefs, and traditions are a constant through good times and bad. They’re a fall-back, a guiding light, for your kids to help them make the right decisions even when you’re not around.

At SuperCamp we follow eight key values, which we call the 8 Keys of Excellence. The Keys are Integrity, Failure Leads To Success, Speak With Good Purpose, This Is It, Commitment, Ownership, Flexibility, and Balance.

Many schools use the 8 Keys as their character development training. There’s even a program called “Communities of Excellence” for schools and individuals.

Whether or not your family adopts the 8 Keys, it’s a good idea to provide guidance to your kids using a set of principles that all family members follow.

**Understand Before Trying to be Understood**

Another aspect of building a home court advantage is continually striving to improve communication within the family.

Sometimes parents don’t get a clear picture of their child’s experiences because the information is filtered through their own adult points of view. Don’t try to solve problems before fully understanding your child’s perspective.

Kids, particularly teens, may think – Mom and Dad don’t understand me, they have no idea what it’s like to be me. Teens don’t yet have the emotional strength as adults. As a result, they can go from happy-go-lucky to making snippy comments or having sulking bouts.
When parents see these sudden changes in behavior they want to take action, to fix it. But, often times, these well-intended actions to make things better only makes it worse.

So, instead of fixing it right away, try to initiate a conversation. Start by trying to pick a time when you think your son or daughter will be receptive to having a conversation, for example, when you’re in the car together.

When you are able to engage your teen, be attentive. Listen more and talk less. If you seize the moment by launching into your side of the conversation, chances are your teen will perceive it to be a lecture and either tune out or get argumentative. Ask questions, then be calm and wait for an answer. Be calm and wait. Try to break down an issue, concern, or topic into smaller parts, so you can ask a question that is fairly easy for your teen to answer. If you get too short of an answer say, “Tell me more.” Eventually, you will draw your teen into a more relaxed conversation.

When you are listening, make a conscious effort to listen to understand versus listening to manipulate. A useful communication tool is OTFD (Open The Front Door), which stands for observation, thoughts, feelings and desires. Here’s how it can be used to start a conversation with your teen about how the economy or a situation within the family is affecting them:

“I know there is lot going on right now. I think some of it might be affecting you. I’m concerned that you’re concerned. Let’s chat.”

This technique is simple and effective because it tells your teen why you want to initiate a dialogue.

Adolescents are smart. They’re aware of what’s going on in the world, from the economy to terrorism. The most important thing you can do is to talk with your kids. Talking helps kids grasp how we’re feeling in general and how specific issues, such as the economy, are affecting your family today and your plans for the future. This is not a place for us to share doom and gloom – but thoughtful sharing about what’s real for you and your family.

It can be helpful for your kids to know that with turmoil and crisis comes change. Share that research shows that with crisis people, including young people, are breaking through and becoming more creative and innovative. This information allows you to move the conversation into a positive direction.

Also ask and encourage your kids to share their feelings, their questions, and what they know about these issues.

These conversations give you the platform to address taking ownership of the future versus being a victim to events and circumstances we don’t control.
Become a “Super” Model

An important facet of how we teach new life skills at SuperCamp is through modeling. Throughout each program, our staff models the desired behavior.

One of our foundational principles is that “Everything Speaks,” meaning that every action and reaction sends a message. That’s why it’s important for our staff to lead by example.

It’s important for parents, as well. What you can do within your family is model how you want your kids to act and behave with your actions and words. Be aware that in addition to your direct interaction with your kids, your behavior with your spouse and friends are seen and heard by your teens. Even casual remarks can be exaggerated in your kid’s mind, especially when they don’t know the background, which means they may take something out of context.

A conflict resolution technique we teach and model at SuperCamp that you could model in your home is the Four-Part Apology. Disagreements happen and situations arise frequently where an apology is necessary. Too many times an apology is not given or it is done in such an off-handed way that the person receiving the apology feels it wasn’t sincere. As a result, bad feelings linger and rifts between two people, often two friends or family members, widen rather than disappear.

The Four-Part Apology lets the two parties deal with the issue in a thoughtful and supportive manner rather than in an angry or defensive way. Here’s how it works:

1. Acknowledge  Take responsibility for your actions and behaviors using “I” statements, such as: “I acknowledge that I hurt your feelings with what I said.”

2. Apologize  Acknowledge the “cost” to others and if unaware of the “cost” ask: “I apologize and I realize it may have hurt our relationship.”

3. Make it right  Deal with the consequences of your behavior: “I want to do something to help maintain our friendship. What can I do to make it right?”

4. Recommit  Make a commitment to appropriate behavior and commit to not having the same behavior again: “I agree to Speak with Good Purpose.”

When a situation arises at home where you could make things right by offering an apology, give the Four-Part Apology a try.

Summary

Building strong relationships with your children is hard work, but it’s worth it. The benefits can be seen in everything from the social skills your children develop in their teen years to the confidence they gain in school and in extra-curricular areas by knowing they have the support of their family behind them.