



EARLY CHILDHOOD MENTAL HEALTH CONNECTION

MOVING LIVES FORWARD

YOU PRESENCE IS YOUR PRESENT

The time you spend with your young children NOW will be like precious jewels embedded in their minds forever. If you think about your first memories, most likely they involve a moment in time, a special time with a loved one or maybe just a sense – the smell of dad's shaving crème, the smell of grandma as she rocked you or remembering the first bedtime story mom read to you. On the other hand, we seldom remember if our room were full of toys. If we remember one special toy, it is usually tied to a special relationship with the gift giver.

The key importance of this is that your presence is what forms the bond that they will need as they grow older. As they grow up, friends become a big part of their world and because they have that bond with caregivers, they will rely on that. Quality (not quantity) time then is less, but that strong family bond that was formed way back before they even walked, is what may keep them safe from the many trials and temptations they will be exposed to in our world.

The easiest, most beneficial way to spend quality time is SO simple: **JUST LISTEN!**

I know, you say 'I already do that.' If true, good for you. Indulge me and ask yourself these questions as a simple self-assessment. First step, put yourself in the eyes of your child. Really, this is important. Now ask these questions:

- 1) Should I bend down to their level?
- 2) Should I stop doing what I think needs done first?
- 3) Am I really hearing what they need me to hear?
- 4) Should I repeat or clarify what they are telling me?
- 5) Am I talking with my adult voice and words?
- 6) Can I just let myself listen for as long as they need?

*In a nut shell, when you think that your child is interrupting your work,
REMEMBER, THEY ARE YOUR WORK!*

Now the good news is that children are entertaining, creative, and full of energy. Those wonderful qualities are often missing in the adult world. Let yourself go – who knows – you may be taken on an adventure with them. Don't we all need an escape from reality more than ever.

For those kiddos in pre-school and kindergarten, they have entered a whole new world. School has become their first interaction with the world outside their safe, comfortable home world. Their brains are developing at rocket speed. Think about your first job. Were you not anxious to share that experience with someone who cared? Think about your present job. How often do we need to process our day with someone – and yes, those "not so good days."

Letting your child process his day, validates his day and setting this pattern for him will be well worth your time when as a teenager, he or she needs to share what happened that they do not know how to handle. Think of 'listening' as building a foundation – one of brick and not sand. That foundation is a vital fortress throughout their lifetime.

In closing, a short lesson in the *Stages of Attachment* because of the importance of knowing that children who develop an attachment to at least ONE caregiver know that the caregiver is dependable which creates a secure base for the child to then explore the world.

Cheryl's Corner of Caring

It takes a big heart to teach skills to little minds.

Pre-Attachment Stage: (Zero to Three weeks) This stage does not show any particular attachment to any caregiver. The infant displays his needs and this naturally attracts the attention of the caregiver to respond.

Indiscriminate Attachment Stage: (Six weeks to Seven months) This stage is where the infant begins to show preferences for primary and secondary caregivers. They will develop trust for secondary caregivers, but will respond more positively to the primary caregiver.

Discriminate Attachment Stage: (Seven to 11 months) At this stage, infants show a strong attachment for one specific caregiver. They may show anxiety when separated from that individual (separation anxiety) and can even display some anxiety around strangers.

Multiple Attachments: (After nine months) Children begin to form strong attachments with other caregivers beyond the primary attachment figure.

Children who are securely attached as infants tend to develop stronger self-esteem and self-reliance as they grow older. These children also tend to be more independent, have social relationships, and perform better in school. So, take that first easy step, "JUST LISTEN."