

A Book Review of Relational Parenting

Relational Parenting (Moody Press, 2000) is a book by Dr. Ross Campbell in our church library. By way of introduction, Josh McDowell has written in How to Be a Hero to Your Kids, that *relational parenting* was a key ingredient in building bridges with one's children. Dr. Campbell's book contains many insights and more novel concepts about parenting, especially parenting teens.

Here follows a brief summary of each chapter in the book. You may want to obtain a copy of Relational Parenting to get a clearer picture and more details of what Dr. Campbell is saying:

Chapter One: "Two Approaches to Parenting." Here Dr. Campbell differentiates between *reactive parenting*--responding primarily to what kids do (punishment-oriented parenting)--and *proactive parenting*--dealing primarily with what kids need.

Chapter Two: "How Did We Get to Where We Are?" In chapter two, Dr. Campbell points to Behavior Modification and the ensuing punishment trap as a major culprit in contributing to failures as young people move into their teen years.

Chapter Three: "The First Foundation Stone: NURTURING LOVE." In chapter three, Dr. Campbell describes ways to show unconditional love, also called keeping your child's emotional tank filled. One way to give continuous love is through loving eye contact. A second way to demonstrate unconditional love is through physical contact. A third way to help your child feel fully loved is through individual attention.

Chapter Four: "The Second Foundation Stone: TRAINING AND DISCIPLINE." Dr. Campbell says that children do not obey willingly because they are supposed to do so, but children, for the most part, obey purposefully because they feel loved.

He says that the main cause of misbehavior is an empty emotional tank. He gives five ways to control behavior: (1) requests (positive), (2) commands (negative), (3) gentle physical manipulation (positive), (4) punishment (negative), and (5) behavior modification (neutral).

Chapter Five: "The Third Foundation Stone: PROTECTION FROM HARMFUL INFLUENCES." Dr. Campbell suggests that young people should be trained to have integrity by the time they are seventeen years old. He gives the basic ingredients of integrity as: (1) telling the truth, (2) keeping one's promises, and (3) taking responsibility for one's behavior. He also suggests taking time not only to share our values with our children, but also to explain how we arrived at our values. Dr. Campbell recommends that we take time to listen to our children and to teach them to recognize the difference between their thoughts and their feelings. He says that many people act on their feelings without having thought through where their actions would lead. He also says we should use "I" statements to express our feelings, while remaining pleasant and giving the reasons for our opinions, so our children will learn by example over the years. Another suggestion Dr. Campbell makes is to anticipate and prepare our children for events that will be occurring in their lives in the near future and in the more distant future, correctly identifying the situations (euphemisms are not helpful here). Finally, Dr. Campbell offers the ideas that we should look for teachable times and should work toward releasing the children, as they are able to handle more responsibility.

Chapter Six: "The Fourth Foundation Stone: TRAINING IN ANGER MANAGEMENT." Dr. Campbell says that mishandled anger is at the root of most problems in our individual lives, in our homes, and in society. He says that the first requirement in anger training is to keep our children's emotional tank full. The second requirement in anger training is to encourage our children to verbalize their anger pleasantly, resolving the anger with the person at whom they are angry, or finding ways to resolve it within themselves. He says that we cannot train our children in anger control until they first express their anger verbally. Another form of anger in early teens is passive-aggressive behavior, the subconscious determination to do exactly the opposite of what the authority figure wants. Some ways to direct this passive-aggressive stage can be done through strenuous physical activities, such as rope courses, mountain climbing, biking, and team and individual sports. Dr. Campbell suggests the following steps to help a child express his anger in a positive way: (1) Let him know you are not going to condemn him. (2) Focus on the things he did right. (3) Help him understand how he can express his anger more positively the next time. He also

suggests that we model and teach forgiveness--giving up the right to get even, perhaps with a little time to cool off, and with the Lord's help. Finally, Dr. Campbell recommends that we refuse to dump our anger on our children.

Chapter Seven: "The Media Versus Parents." Dr. Campbell suggests that we can use the media as a means to train our children to deal with all parts of society. Also, he insists that we do all in our power to prevent our children from being desensitized to the unhealthy messages and influences in society by carefully monitoring our children's access to TV, The Internet, videos, video games, movies, and magazines.

Chapter Eight: "Training Your Child Spiritually." Dr. Campbell summarizes the research on the development of children by stating, "Start early. Be involved positively. Realize that patterns of feelings and emotions are developing during the child's early years and adolescence." He recommends these ways to prepare our children to mature spiritually: use stories and events as springboards for discussions about spiritual things; talk about our own experiences, especially about our experiences with God; demonstrate forgiveness (intimacy comes from resolved conflict); emphasize optimism about the present and the future with God in control.

Chapter Nine: "Fear, Anxiety, and Depression." Dr. Campbell says most parents face four progressive fears: fear of what is going to happen to our children in this threatening culture; fear of our child's behavior and anxiety about disciplining him; fear of the child himself; and fear of teenagers in general. He says that the best environment for a child is a home where the parents are relaxed, where the atmosphere is laid-back, upbeat, restful, peaceful, and loving, with a good dose of humor thrown in. He mentions that anxiety and depression are becoming more common in our society, and they lead to complications later in life. Here are some symptoms of depression: (1) shortened attention span; (2) decreased concentration; (3) daydreaming; (4) boredom; (5) decreased energy; (6) misbehavior; (7) long-term sadness; (8) anger; (9) anxiety; and (10) withdrawal. He suggests that depression should be treated by a doctor as early as possible.

Chapter Ten: "Motivating Your Child." Dr. Campbell shares that contrary to what most people believe about themselves, the course a person's life takes, and the

decisions he makes, are largely determined by subconscious motivations that are below the surface of his awareness. He says that if children have positive feelings about taking responsibility to do the right thing, they are well motivated. He observes that most people have a difficult time meeting their obligations because they have been motivated in childhood with excessive pressure, rewards, threats, punishment, or guilt. These people, he says, have never been taught to be motivated for the simple joy of feeling good about a job well done, or about pleasing or helping someone else. Instead they respond to motivations that are selfish and self-serving. On the other hand, it is possible to teach by example to be relaxed, uplifting, dedicated, pleasant, and consistent when we simultaneously keep their emotional cups full. Dr. Campbell remarks that, regarding school work, two persons cannot take responsibility for the same thing at the same time. He says that one secret in motivating a child, and keeping her motivated, is to allow her to take the initiative. When she takes the initiative, she is taking responsibility. When she takes responsibility, she is motivated.

Chapter Eleven: "Questions and Answers About Being a Proactive Parent." Dr. Campbell offers these suggestions: Look for every opportunity to make physical contact with your teenage son or daughter. Older children should have input into discipline decisions. He offers other suggestions in his book [How to Really Love Your Teenager](#). When you are angry but restrain yourself from talking in an unpleasant way or yelling, you are displaying meekness. Remain pleasant but firm when you display your power. Positive guidance to good behavior is far superior to negative punishment for poor behavior. Cyber Patrol (800-828-2608, www.cyberpatrol.com) is the best overall web site blocker, although somewhat complicated. Making friends with your children's friends lets those friends know you care about your children's welfare and theirs. Use classic black and white films, possibly recorded from TV, to offer ethical or moral lessons to children. Having time of laughter, excitement, and fun with our children is fantastic. We share experiences, create memories, and bond together.