

Commentary...

Watch and observe

By Edie Jones
Columnist

In the January 29 issue of *The Nugget* there were two excellent articles addressing the concerns of parents as they wade through the difficult job of raising their children. One was Michael Luftig's commentary on the benefits of strength-based parenting and the other was by Charlie Kanzig as he shared his experience as a school counselor exploring emotional and mental wellness in kids.

Both emphasized the importance of positive involvement by parents in their kids' daily lives.

It is often the case that parents are perplexed and confused as to when to interfere in a situation and what they need to do. We hear a lot about allowing kids to make mistakes so a child can benefit from the lessons of the situation. I have often shared this philosophy with parents.

While I agree with the merit of this approach and encourage it to be used whenever possible, I also know it's important for parents to be knowledgeable about what to expect at certain ages and stages and to seek help when they are unclear in what to do. There are times parental intervention is important.

Following up on Michael Luftig's recommendation of looking for the strengths in their child, I applaud the positive note of this technique. It is so easy to spot the areas of irritations in our relationships with our children that we often overlook their strengths. I once had a parent say to me, "Edie, how do I help him stay under control without stifling his spirit?" This is an excellent question, and not an easy one to answer.

A good starting place is to become a great observer; watch your kids, get to know them, and then, honoring whom that person is (not the person you wish they were), look for and build on their strengths. As Dr. Luftig said, "If you are experiencing friction with your children due to your attempts to stamp out their character flaws, consider using a strength-based approach to parenting. You are likely to find that spotting, explaining, and appreciating your children's strengths will bring you closer together, increase cooperation, and ultimately will accomplish your goal of preparing children to live happy, responsible adult lives." It is often unnecessary to even bring up the unwanted behavior.

The same approach is what Charlie Kanzig was

talking about. Watch your kids, really get to know them, know what is expected at their current age, and use that as your guide. If you don't find an answer for behaviors you are seeing, don't be afraid to ask for help. Charlie reminds us that it is "important to understand what to look for when it comes to children's emotional/mental/behavioral health."

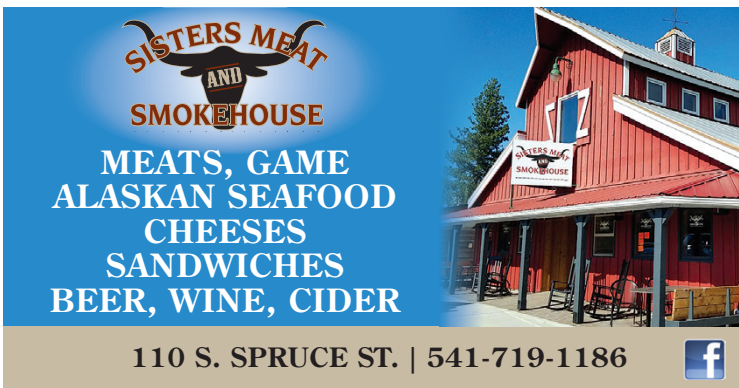
You may be wondering how you can know what to expect. We hear a lot of ideas about each age group that are not backed up by fact and are often confusing. There are many avenues for help. I just Googled "What to expect behaviorally for middle schoolers?" and "A Guide to Your Child in Middle School" popped up (easy to read with good explanations). When I put in "ages and stages," I found places to look for 18 months, 36 months or just plain "development." Putting in "the high school years" at first only produced a definition of the freshman, sophomore, junior and senior years. However by scrolling down, I discovered "Your Child's Development: The High School Years." Go searching. I think you will find much that will be helpful.

For parents of younger children, here are a few

books I believe you will find helpful. "Brain Stages: How to Raise, Smart, Confident Kids and Have Fun Doing It," by Patricia Wilkinson and Jacqueline Frischknecht, PhD is an easy, enjoyable read. It is a very practical, hands-on book that will help parents understand what to expect, grade-by-grade, from kindergarten up to middle school. My own book, "Raising Kids With Love, Honor and Respect," has an extensive section on the ages and stages of infants, toddlers and preschoolers. Any of Daniel Siegel, M.D. and Tina Payne Bryson, PhD books will give you the current information on what to expect with brain

development of children. Take a look at the shelves in bookstores and you'll find many.

In addition, seek out classes such as those taught by the Central Oregon Resource Center and groups like Together For Children, now providing programs in conjunction with Sisters Park and Recreation District. And don't forget the experts in our schools, your child's teacher and the school counselors, principals and nurses, all professionals with much training. They are eager to help you learn as much as you can about your child, no matter what their stage of development.



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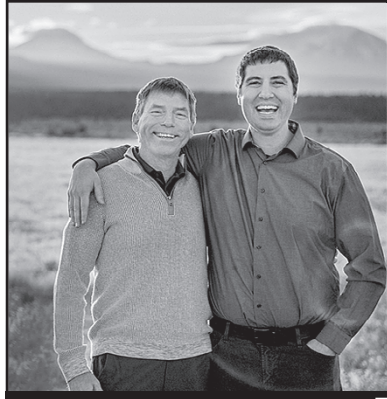
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