

Healthy Family Healthy Child Program: Like father, like son as role models

By Megan Morley, HFHCP Social Service Advocate

In many ways, the parent/guardian-child relationship is a very complex one and among the complexities is the occurrence of role-modeling. It is said that the parent or guardian is the child's first teacher; knowing this, it would make sense that a parent's behaviors would mold the child into his or her adulthood.

How much of this parental modeling do children really take with them as they grow? In our last article, I researched and wrote about the impacts of yelling at and around our children. In this article, we will go into the process of role-modeling and the ways it can affect our children.

In our society we hear many common sayings around role-modeling, including, "Like father (mother), like son (daughter)," "Do as I say, not as I do," even "Practice what you preach." Which one of these should one follow as a parent?

In this article, I will present several ways in which role-modeling to our children can have a tremendous affect on their outcome to adult life. We will look further into the ways in which children may or may not pick up on several behaviors. These behaviors can shape a child's outlook on life and consciously or subconsciously help him or her make decisions for better or for worse.

Psychology

A child's psychology feels the impact of the child's environment. That is, if one believes children are "little scientists," like the cognitive developmental theorist

Jean Piaget might say, and that nature and nurture each play a significant part in a child's development.

If one believes this to be true, it would seem reasonable to assume that a child's outlook on life can be developed by the child's observations and interactions with one's parental figure(s).

In the study *Linking People's Pursuit of Eudaimonia and Hedonia with Characteristics of Their Parents: Parenting Styles, Verbally Endorsed Values and Role Modeling*, developed by Veronika Huta, the idea of role modeling and developing a child's way of living is displayed by measuring a sample of children to determine if their parents made an impact by teaching them to be eudaimonic (one who seeks to develop ways to improve oneself) or to be hedonic (one who seeks enjoyment, comfort and pleasure) both leading to happy, healthy lifestyles.

This study found that parents who were highly responsive and consistent with rules had children who were more likely to have a eudaimonic view. The study consequently found that parents who physically modeled eudaimonia had children who grew up seeking to make themselves better and parents who physically modeled hedonia had children who displayed well-being to find enjoyment in their life.

This study displays just one example in which a parent's psychological outlook can help lead his or her children to a greater well-being. Once these psychological ideas are developed in a child, it is very hard to stray from them.

The same idea can be seen, unfortunately, in negative ways as well. This may be one cause for those who may have been abused as a child who try to seek out a partner who shares similar abusive qualities as their parent or guardian, as it is routine and comfortable in the person's psyche.

Relationships

Another major aspect to parental role-modeling is relationships, including modeling of communication, aggression and relationship adjustment.

The study *Parents' Marital Status, Conflict and Role Modeling: Links with Adult Romantic Relationship Quality* found that children with married parents later developed relationships that were high in relationship adjustment, high in dedication, low in negative communica-

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tion and low in physical aggression compared to those parents who never married. This displays that parents who can model a healthy relationship can inherently teach their children the same.

Interestingly, the study also shows that children of parents who were married but have divorced also showed higher levels of relationship adjustment and lower levels of physical aggression than those whose parents were never married.

It was also found, however, that although those children whose parents never married showed the lowest relationship quality, those children with divorced parents claimed their adult relationships as being the most conflictual and to have viewed their parents' relationship as being a bad relationship model.

The impact of parental role modeling of relationships can influence how those parents' children build their own relationships, not just romantically but in every other relationship they have with another person. This is an occurrence that can be completely molded by the relationship the parent has with the rest of the family, his or her friends and with the child.

A child can learn to be passive, aggressive or in-between. The child can grow into an adult who is very good at communicating by learning to watch his or her parents and the ways in which they handle themselves in various situations.

Children also can learn negative relationship characteristics through watching their parents, such as children who come from families with domestic violence. According to the text *Adults with Witnessing Histories: The Overlooked Victims of Domestic Violence*, children who were in families where domestic violence occurred have been known to experience

depression and anxiety, lowered self-concept, aggression, cognitive distortions, impaired social competence, school-related problems, somatic problems and post-traumatic symptoms.

Some children even pick up on these abusive characteristics themselves as adults from living in a violent home and these characteristics become a part of their own adult home. These children develop a reduced sense of interpersonal functioning and in these relationships it is often found that the child who witnessed abuse will develop mistrust, low self-esteem, fear of abandonment and anger.

While developing, a child can absorb the nature of the household and these things are difficult to change once in place in the child's mind. Even prior to childbirth, children can be affected by the relationship of the parents and those around the pregnant mother.

In traditional Native ways, it was said that a mother ought not to be angry or stressed as these characteristics are sure to become prominent in the expectant child after childbirth. Parents teach their children how they should be treated and how others are to be treated by their own relationships. This could be a very beautiful and positive thing or it could be disastrous.

Life Choices

Alcohol and drugs in parental role modeling can sometimes feel like a never-ending battle within the psyche of a parent and what is best for the children.

Some parents, especially those deep into using alcohol and drugs, may state that consuming alcohol and drugs in the presence of their children, or even just in the same home, is not damaging because it directly affects the parent and not the child. Unfortunately, this idea is inaccurate. Because the parent is the child's primary teacher, when a parent or a guardian is involved in these behaviors the chances of children partaking in similar behaviors as adults is dramatically heightened.

The study *Disparate Outcomes for Adjudicated Delinquent Youths* found that parents abusing substances is a family-level risk factor that increases the chances that a child will engage in delinquent behaviors. It is also stated that children in homes where substance abuse occurs are more likely to experience inadequate parental supervision and support, and there are more parenting disruptions, such as child removal, rehabilitation, etc.

An additional study titled *Childhood Predictors of Adult Substance Abuse* also found that parental substance abuse was a big indicator in predicting if children would become substance abusers in their own adulthood. Interestingly, it was also found that males are more likely than females to abuse substances, as females are more likely to be more socially mature.

This same article also explained that families that display frequent conflict and are involved with child protective services are another predictor of a child abusing substances as an adult.

See Healthy Family, con't on next page.

SILETZ ELDER'S HONOR DAY

SAVE THE DATE

When: April 4, 2013

Registration Check-in: 9 a.m.

Activities: 10 a.m. until 3 p.m.

Where: Chinook Winds Casino

All Tribal Elders and spouse OR care giver have been invited to the Annual Circle of Friendship Siletz Tribal Elders Honor Day. No children and families please.

HONOR DAY WILL PROVIDE: LUNCHEON, BINGO, DOOR PRIZES, GOODIE BAGS AND ENTERTAINMENT

Registration due by Feb. 28, 2013