



## WHAT'S IMPORTANT TO KNOW ABOUT KIDS

### **Children learn who they are in childhood**

A child's self-image forms primarily from their parents (or caregivers). It's as if we hold up a portrait of the child to the child. Ideally the portrait would be: you're loving, enjoyable, capable, and intelligent even as you're still learning and growing. If we see a toddler as independent or difficult, this is how he will see himself. If we see a teen as capable or lazy, this is how he will see himself. The child sees himself as we see him. Many of us saw a self-portrait of "good but not good enough," and we continue to see ourselves this way. We can hold a positive portrait for our children instead.

### **Children learn what relationship is in childhood**

As an infant and throughout childhood, a child notices how his caregivers respond to him. It's as if the child is asking himself, "What is a close relationship like? Is it easy or hard? Can I relax and be myself? What is communication like?" From his experiences, the child creates a definition of relationship. The ideal relationship is that a child can be his whole, authentic self and receive unconditional love and respectful communication. Many of us didn't have this relationship, yet we can provide it.

### **The child is the care-receiver in the parent-child relationship**

In a healthy parent-child relationship, we nurture the child's life and we don't need the child to be or do anything for us. It's a caregiver and care receiver relationship unlike any other. In this relationship, we take full responsibility to care for ourselves, including our mood, self-control, patience, and life fulfillment. We fully care for ourselves, and we also care for our young without expecting them to make our job easy.

### **Kids are immature and have immature behavior**

Kids are like a house being built; they are in progress of growing. We shouldn't be surprised and upset that the plumbing and painting aren't done yet. We generally expect mature behavior all day and kids aren't there yet. The immature brain lacks self-control, emotional regulation, social skills, self-organization, self-awareness and all of the *executive functions* that regulate behavior. Children will develop these over time with support and role modeling.

### **Children need emotional safety and emotional support**

Emotional safety means we shelter children from overwhelming fear, shame, and pain. Emotional support means that we expect kids will have the full range of human emotions -- even the hard ones, like anger -- and we don't leave our kids to face them on their own. Our emotions have a purpose and it's important that kids not shut them down. Many of us did not have the emotional safety and support we needed. We can provide a different experience for our children. Love is being there for the whole person.