

Tenet #7: Be Irrationally Crazy About Kids

The Deeper Cut:

Have you ever noticed how some adults seem to be kid-magnets? Children seem instinctively drawn to them, as if they can intuitively sense something special about these grown-ups. Even the shy ones seem more willing to take a chance. What is it, we wonder, that makes these people so magical with kids?

Dr. Urie Bronfenbrenner, a Russian-born developmental psychologist and co-founder of the Head Start program, captured this special quality when he stated: "Every child needs at least one adult who is irrationally crazy about him."

What does it mean to be "irrationally crazy" about youngsters? It does NOT mean ignoring their faults or excusing their bad behavior. Irrational craziness means focusing on possibilities during problems, seeing opportunities when faced with obstacles, and maintaining hope when kids feel hopeless. Children respond to adults who see the best in them, because it allows them to see the best in themselves.

Development of Self-Worth

When children are born, they have no intrinsic sense of self-esteem. The seeds of worth are planted in the first vital weeks and months as infants come to rely on comforting touches and consistent sustenance. As they grow into toddlers and young children, they learn to see their own value through the smiling eyes and loving arms of their parents, grandparents, siblings, and other family members. When they begin to attend school, they extend this focus to



approving teachers and other important adults outside the home, looking for evidence of their essential competence and lovability. By age five or six, many children have formed a semi-permanent sense of self-worth. Later, they'll look to peers and partners to validate (or sometimes counteract) the messages they received earlier in life, but the foundation of self-confidence or self-doubt has by then been well established.

Irrationally Crazy Adults

So it is that children, whether holding a positive or negative sense of self, are drawn to irrationally crazy adults. We are big and strong and smart and capable and safe, but different than so many other adults. We come down to their level, and actually see them. We play, laugh, and act silly, just as they do.

We admit our mistakes and correct theirs, but we do it without judging, condemning, or

denigrating. We don't confuse them with angry smiles when we're upset, or lies that we're fine when they can see otherwise. Instead, we show our feelings without taking them out on others.

And we genuinely like them. Even when they're crying and unhappy, or spiteful and misbehaving, or tired and cranky, we still like them. We may not like their behavior, but we still like them.

So when they look into the mirror of our eyes and see themselves reflected there, they feel about themselves what we feel about them: endless hope and positive regard.

"I Am Worthy"

Some kids have been fortunate enough to be born with an easy temperament, and early on made a secure attachment to trustworthy parents. To children raised with encouragement and affection, our presence is a joyful validation of what they've always believed: "I am worthy."

But not all children have been so fortunate. Some have been born with difficult temperaments, or raised in conditions which created an anxious attachment to their caretakers. Or perhaps they have been so deeply criticized, controlled, or neglected that they developed deeply held doubts of their worthiness. For these children, the uplifting presence of an irrationally crazy adult is even more vital. When big, strong, loving grown-ups see them as capable, competent, and worthy,

that tiny seed of self-worth, so long undernourished, may begin to sprout and grow.

Summary: Kids learn to see themselves through the eyes of those they love, as well as those they fear. Children raised by harsh or negligent parents often see themselves as essentially unworthy, and then act out in ways that validate this negative self-image.

However, even one "irrationally crazy" adult can make an incredible difference. A trusted teacher's belief in them can lead them to more fully believe in themselves. An inspirational coach who sees their potential can encourage them to risk possible failure in pursuit of a goal. A caring counselor can make it safe to discuss vulnerable feelings they would never expose to others.

Every child deserves to feel worthy of love, and irrationally crazy adults who are able to find likable traits in the most challenging kids often make a lasting difference in their lives.

Dr. Steve Parese is a former special educator, crisis counselor, and university faculty member, currently an international speaker and trainer. He is the author of the crisis intervention program "Therapeutic Aggression Control Techniques" (TACT2), in use since 1997 with thousands of staff around the nation. For more information, please connect by email at SBParese@aol.com, or visit the website at <https://www.tact2.com>.