

## Parenting Our Sons

(How to be a sensitive, secure parent to your son)

### Introduction:

Several weeks ago, Wayne shared videos made by specialists in the field of parenting. One of those specialists was Dr. Gary Sibcy. The video intrigued me and I purchased and read his book Why You Do the Things You Do, the Secret of Healthy Relationships which he co-wrote with Dr. Tim Clinton.

Dr. Sibcy has a Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology. He is a licensed professional counselor and marriage and family therapist at Piedmont Psychiatric Center in Lynchburg, VA. He has done extensive research on attachment theory.

I read the book with the intent of finding out my attachment style and how to develop a more secure attachment style to improve and enhance the relationships I have with others. Not only was I able to learn about this, and begin implementing the interventions recommended by the authors, I also discovered how parents can raise children to be secure and have secure attachments and relationships. The information I am presenting draws heavily from the authors' findings and their book.

The parenting I am about to describe reflects the natural order of things and come easily to those who have secure relationship styles. The mind-set necessary to raise secure sons (and daughters) consists of four guiding principles: vision, training your child in the way of love, emotional learning, and sensitivity.

These guidelines are principles that help organize your parenting style. The advantage of principle-based parenting is that "when you see the 'why' [of what you do as a parent], you are likely to do the 'how'." (Taking Charge of ADHD: The Complete Authoritative Guide for Parents, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. By Russell Barkley)

### Discussion: Parenting Secure Sons (and Daughters)

#### A. Vision:

Prov. 29:18 "Where there is no vision, the people are unrestrained..."

Our vision, our goal for parenting organizes and directs us even during stress and turmoil. Parenting is not for the faint of heart. You feel stress; you feel absolutely lost at times; you feel confused. It is never easy to figure out what our sons need from us. We need to parent with the end in mind.

Where do we want to see our sons in 5 years? 10 years? 20, 40 years? Judgment Day?

#### B. Training your son in the way of love:

"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." This is the first and greatest commandment as Jesus told the lawyer who asked in Matthew 22:37ff. "And the second is like it, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets."

Effective parenting lays the foundation for our children to walk in the way of Christ and keep His commandments. The is what "Train up a child in the way he should go" is all about. We're to train our sons to love to be loved.

Our sons need to:

Believe they are worthy of love—God's and yours

Believe relationships are warm, pleasurable and safe

Believe they can trust others to respond appropriately and promptly to their needs

Have the ability to regulate and manage their negative emotions

Have the ability to live within limits

Have the ability to deal with frustration, loss and failures and to actually grow stronger from such experiences

Have the ability to solve social problems effectively--using words rather than aggression or social withdrawal.

These seven goals need to be reflected on, asking yourself how you are relating to your children and whether you're making progress towards these goals.

C. Emotional Learning:

Guard against becoming a reactive parent. Be proactive. As parents, we need to prepare our sons to respond to chaos and pressures that impose themselves into our sons' lives in a balanced, emotionally healthy way. Sons learn about themselves and others during times of emotional intensity.

D. Sensitivity:

Be attuned to your son's needs. Notice, I said 'needs', not 'wants'.

\*Promptly and Effectively respond to those needs. It takes time and energy to understand these needs if you do not see them immediately. See the world through your son's eyes.

\*Be aware of your son's *changing* needs as he develops. For example, the needs of your 3 month old infant son are far different from the needs of a 1 yr old or 3 yr old, etc.

Sensitive parents teach their sons how to work through and overcome life's challenges. Sensitivity is about helping your son achieve comfort, whether physical, emotional or spiritual.

Sensitive parenting assumes a fussy child is uncomfortable in some way...hungry, too hot, too cold, have a dirty diaper, fearful, etc. and that the child needs soothing. Prompt and appropriate response equals the child learning how to calm down and his felt needs are considered important.

Insensitive parenting assumes a fussy child is misbehaving or being manipulative trying to get own way. These parents feel the best thing to do is ignore or punish the behavior. This approach usually backfires. The child does not learn to calm down, and becomes very vulnerable to negative moods later in life. The child's view of himself and others is generally negative. "Something wrong with me...I'm not worthy of love! And I cannot count on others when I need them!" These sons are more likely to have behavioral problems, have fewer intimate relationships with peers, and a less-than-intimate relationship with a future spouse. Also, your son will be more likely to turn to *things* for comfort which, in some cases, can lead to addictions, instead of turning to people or ultimately to God.

E. Finding Balance:

Good parenting can be compared to good coaching. Support **and** challenge lead to growth.

A sensitive coach holds his players accountable for their actions at the same time teaching them how to improve their game...build their skills to accomplish the players' and the team's goals.

Insensitive coaches harp and on what the players are doing wrong without giving them the instruction and tools to help them improve and advance so all can reach their goals.

Some ask if responding to all these needs won't spoil the child. If you respond beyond the NEEDS of the child it may indeed. We're talking here about needs the child has to grow into a mature, well balanced man. Hovering (helicopter mothers) mothers are not an asset. They thwart growth and make sons feel inadequate to succeed on their own.

- F. Parents with a secure relationship style are sensitive and continue to respond as children mature. These parents set limits and encourage independence.

Parents with avoidant relationship style (or one of the other insecure relationship styles), are insensitive and become annoyed by their baby's bids for comfort. They encourage independence prematurely...letting child cry for hours; only hold child when there is a specific reason to, such as changing a diaper, feeding, etc. These parents seldom derive pleasure from cuddling and cooing. Parents with this insensitivity can be controlling, having rigid feeding schedules. They can be controlling about how emotions are expressed. Negative emotions must be kept to self. Happiness is demanded. Will reject child's bids for comfort and ignore and criticize.

Children raised in this way realize that if they need comfort they are on their own and they cannot count on anyone else to respond to their emotional needs. No secure base is found in their parents.

- G. Simple concepts to use to help promote secure relationship patterns in your sons/daughters:  
The T-Factors

- 1) Temperament: your child will most likely fall into one of these four or a combination of them
  - a. Easy—pretty even tempered, often laid-back. Easily get into feeding and sleeping patterns and adjust well to new situations. Usually stable moods. Good attention level.
  - b. Difficult—often grumpy and fussy. Tend to retreat from new situations. Hard to get into any kind of schedule. Easily distracted. Often activity level is too intense for the situation. Mood is generally negative.
  - c. Slow-to-warm-up—less active and find it hard to warm to new situations and people. Moods usually negative, esp. in new situations, but when situation becomes more familiar, or as people become more familiar, they can be pleasant and engaged.
  - d. Mixed temperament—some kids have a unique blend of two or all three.
  - e. The more mismatched you and your child's temperaments, the more easily difficulties arise. What really matters is not whether your temperament and your child's match, but how well you adjust to your child's temperament. Instead of criticizing and rejecting your child because of his temperament, acknowledge it is different from yours and set behavioral limits and be sure your child always know you love him. Accept him for who he is and how he is wired and make your words warm and kind.
- 2) Time
  - a. Your son needs quality *and* quantity when it comes to sharing time with you. Don't just be there physically—be involved mentally. Not on your iphone, etc. To him, you are saying that he is not as important as other things you do.
  - b. On the flip side, do not overinvest, putting in so much time with your child that it stifles independence and growth. Feeling they have to constantly entertain their children. Give your child breathing room
  - c. Set boundaries on your time. Make time for you and your spouse. Have date nights at least twice a month. Take care of yourself, too.
- 3) Touch

- a. Researchers have different conclusions as to how many touches a day are good for a child, some say 11. One expert says that 100 touches a day would be better! High fives, wrestling, hugs, stroke of the head, squeeze of the hand, butterfly kisses, etc., etc., etc. Snuggle, rock, sing...enjoy your child. Relationships are nurturing and secure is communicated in these ways.
- b. Don't be one who needs to touch and touch and touch. May cause your son to pull away in order to protect his private space. Respect that. Never let touching your children be a substitute for hugs you should be getting from your spouse. Don't make your son feel responsible for hugging you to make you feel better.
- c. Pay attention to your child's cues. Some have very sensitive skin. Adjust your behavior in accordance with your child's reactions.

#### 4) Teaching

- a. Read Deuteronomy 6:6-9. Teach our children God's truth at home, when we walk, ride bicycles, ride in the car, at bedtime, when they get up, etc. His truth provides safety!
- b. Teach your son how to handle negative emotions. Handle them, not pretend they do not exist. Set limits on how they behave when upset and teach ways to manage feelings and solve problems. Children who can deal with their negative feelings are more open to the gospel and more willing to be involved with spiritual activities. Teaching your child how to deal with negative feelings will help prevent a huge percentage of possible behavioral problems.

#### 5) Tenacity: the ability to stick to something even in the face of stress.

- a. We have this as mothers. We fail at times, and often fail horribly, yet our tenacity brings us back to our vision and our commitment to see our children grow up healthy and whole.
- b. Be committed to a healthy belief system. Teach child to grow from adversity. Look at things through heaven's eyes (cf. John 13; John 14:1-6)
- c. Set boundaries: the rules and roles that form the undergirding of family. Rules are firm but not too rigid. Discipline, not punishment, is appropriate to the situation, is immediate, and is consistent and never administered in anger.
- d. Open communication: all family members need to feel comfortable talking with one another about good stuff and difficulty stuff. Healthy communication is honest, clear and direct and the goal is to understand one another. Work to see each other's unique perspective. All this helps your child have empathy and to apply the 'Golden Rule.'

#### Closing:

God gave you your son, and He wants to work through you to make that son more like Him. God has a plan for your son. Are you helping your son on that path and to see his place in God's plan? Be an instrument of God's love and an agent of hope in your son's journey. In this way, you will not provoke your son to wrath (cf. Eph 6:4).

I borrowed heavily and unashamedly from:

Dr. Sibcy's and Dr. Tim Clinton's book [Why You Do the Things You Do, the Secret to Healthy Relationships](#). I highly recommend this book as a help to see your own attachment/relationship style so you can be a secure person and have secure relationships.