

Parenting: Teaching The Other 3 R's

Recently I read an article by Dr. T. Berry Brazelton, a well-known American pediatrician. In it he talked about the "Other 3 R's" that are involved in bringing up children. (So what are the first 3 R's? Reading, wRiting and aRithmetic – the 3 R's they get in school).

Dr. Brazelton suggested another set of three R's - Respect, Responsibility and Resilience. In preparing our children to deal well with life we have to equip them emotionally not just academically. Many parents focus a lot of attention on ensuring that their children do well academically but do not put the same effort into preparing their children to be emotionally healthy adults. So using Dr Brazelton's other 3 R's what can we learn about helping our children be ready to deal with all facets of life?

Respect. We need to teach our children respect for others and for self. We do this by being respectful to them. We tell children not to shout, to say "please" and "thank you", but as parents do we shout at them and speak to them without using the good manners we would with an adult? A child who is treated with respect will be more respectful of others. With younger

children we teach respect for others by helping them to take turns and to share their toys. With older children, we can talk about how they react to people who are different from them. Again we have to remember that if we model intolerance of others, they won't take in our talk about treating others with respect.

Responsibility. Most parents recognize the importance of having children assigned daily chores. However some see this as just a way to get children to help out so that the parent is not overburdened. While that is true, doing daily chores helps a child learn important life lessons. They learn that others are affected by what they do and so they learn why it is important to be responsible. This is one of the reasons why we should not shield children from the consequences of their irresponsible actions. They need to recognize that when they do not carry out their end of a bargain, others could be inconvenienced or even hurt. Chores also help to teach children discipline.

Of course it is important that the tasks the children are given are appropriate for their age and levels of intelligence and maturity. Expecting a child to do something s/he is not able to manage, sets the scene for frustration and feelings of incompetence

and does not develop a sense of responsibility.

Remember that effort and competence – not just excellence – need to be recognized. Praising and encouraging a child are important in helping him/her to persevere in learning new tasks. It can also be helpful to reward children who take on additional responsibility voluntarily. The reward does not have to be money - a letter or certificate which notes the child's effort, extra play or TV time, a small gift are all ways of recognizing and applauding the extra effort put in. With older children many parents do opt to allow them to earn part of their pocket money as another way to help them learn the value of consistent work.

As with the first 'R', having parents who model responsibility will help children to develop this trait. However it is important to recognize that this is not automatic. Many parents today who were raised in modest circumstances have a highly developed sense of responsibility and a strong work ethic gained from the need to help their parents work. However as today's parents have become better off financially, they often do not set the same standards for their children with regard to chores and contribution to the family. This is because of the belief that their role is to make it easier for their children than it was for

themselves. While this is useful in some areas (you don't want your child to have just one school uniform because that is all you had), in other areas this can mean being so easy on the child that s/he is not expected to do chores (after all they have homework) or contribute to the family in other ways. When this child then grows up to be irresponsible the parent feels bewildered about what went wrong when they tried so hard.

Resilience. Being resilient means having the ability to recover from failure and go on to thrive. It is important that children realize they will not succeed at everything they do all the time. We must prepare them to deal with the inevitable failures that will occur. As Dr. Brazelton says "When a child is afraid to fail, she is also afraid to risk, and that greatly inhibits her ability to succeed". Our children need to be willing to try and we have to be there to pick them up, dust them off and help them to try again when failure occurs. We can help them by getting them to think about why they failed and seeing what lessons they can learn to help them next time. We must also be sure to encourage and praise them when they show a willingness to try again.

It helps too for children to know that as parents we have our failures also. You do not have to burden a child with the details,

but if they know that you tried to get a new job and did not get chosen, they can see close up how you deal with failure. Hopefully what they will learn as they watch you, is that though disappointments occur, life goes on and recovery and thriving are always possible.

References:

Brazelton, T. Berry. (August 8,1995) Early Years: The Other 3 R's – Respect, Responsibility and Resilience. *Family Circle* 108 (11)

Prepared by:
Sharon Williams-Brown for
The University Counselling Service (UCS),
Room 14, UWI Health Centre
11 Gibraltar Camp Way

Telephone: 970-1992/927-2520
Extns 2270/2370

Also available on the UCS website:
www.mona.uwi.edu/healthcentre/counsellingunit