The Power of Patience

Like a car running out of gas, when we run out of patience, we know we're stuck and in trouble. For parents, patience is more than a virtue; it's an absolute necessity. But not every parent has enough patience and almost every parent runs out of it at some point.

What is patience? The dictionary defines patience as "the capacity to bear pains or trials calmly or without complaint" and "remaining steadfast despite opposition, difficulty or adversity." Remaining calm and steadfast even in the face of opposition (a defiant child), difficulty (dinner is burned) or adversity (your mate is working late again), is not always an easy thing to do. But complaining, yelling or nagging increases your stress and makes the situation more difficult. In fact, chronic griping or screaming only leads to resentment and anger in you and other family members.

The power of patience helps effective parents deal calmly and rationally with day-to-day problems and annoyances. It lets them stay focused on the "bigger picture" and not get bogged down by daily hassles. Patience helps them maintain emotional stability even in times of crisis.

Is it possible to develop or increase patience? Yes. Patience is both attitude and ability, and parents can work to change both.

Your attitudes about yourself and your family have a tremendous effect on how you deal with everyday experiences. Your attitudes can become self-fulfilling prophecies. If you believe that you have no patience and are inadequate as a parent, you are more likely to continue patterns that increase your frustration and decrease your effectiveness. Your self-confidence will suffer, undermining your ability to find successful solutions to problems.

Your attitudes about your children also affect your parenting style. If you believe that your kids are spoiled, that they misbehave on purpose and that they are "out to get you," you will have little patience with them. On the other hand, if you believe they will make mistakes as they grow and learn, you will take more time to help them learn from these mistakes.

A critical attitude for the patient parent is taking the long-term view. Parents should understand that change and development are lifelong processes. Eventually, young children learn to use the toilet and teens become adults, even though you feel you may never survive toilet training or adolescence. Growing up is rarely neat, orderly, quiet, cooperative or painless. Your goal is not to reduce your own or your child's temporary discomfort, but to help him through the stages of his life.

Patient parents also consider "the big picture" rather than getting caught up in the minutia of everyday life. What's more important - that your teenage son doesn't wear an earring or that he doesn't drink or take drugs? A patient parent understands that how a teen cuts her hair or dresses will pass, but drinking alcohol can lead to trouble.

There are skills that can help you maintain your patience. Taking care of your own personal and emotional needs is important. Patient parents tend to enjoy themselves and their families more. They tend to be happier and more optimistic because they take care of themselves. Sufficient sleep and regular exercise are vital. Nothing makes you crankier than lack of sleep.

When faced with a problem, patient parents tend to take a neutral approach; they don't respond impulsively or instinctually. They allow themselves time to calm down when they feel angry or stressed. Counting to 10, deep breathing and other quieting or relaxation techniques are helpful parenting skills.

Patient parents use effective problem-solving methods. They try to understand all aspects of the problem and think of as many solutions as possible. Many of their alternatives will be more creative and successful than the old ways of doing things.

Patient parents know that parenting takes time, so they plan ahead and manage their time well. They allow enough time to get things done without feeling rushed or under pressure. They also allow time for unexpected difficulties like sick, cranky children. Although it seems easier and quicker to dress her son, a patient parent understands that 20 minutes invested now in letting him dress himself pays a big dividend in developing his competence and autonomy.

Parents who discover the power of patience can find peace of mind and serenity as a parent. They accept that struggle and difficulty are part of everyday life and that a patient, optimistic approach will help them move forward more quickly than complaining, angry words and

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