



Parenting ... On Purpose

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Have you ever found yourself wandering lost within your own life, within your own family? Have you ever listened to the words coming out of your mouth as you spoke to your children and wondered: who is this person? Have you ever caught yourself behaving, as a parent, in exactly the way you swore you never would? It is easy to find yourself carried by the tides. It is easy to find yourself scrambling from parenting crisis to parenting crisis. And it is also possible to find yourself again, to reconnect with the parent that you want

to be. It is possible to live on purpose and it is possible to parent on purpose. Pause. Take a breath. Ask yourself: what kind of parent do I want to be? Forget about your goals for now. Forget about the details and the plans. Just now, I'm not asking you to think about how you want to put your principles into practice. Instead, take time to connect with the principles themselves. Spend time getting to know the overarching values that underlie your goals and plans. Your values are the guiding principles of your life; they are the things that just plain

matter to you. When your child's eyes meet your own, what do you hope to see reflected there? If your child were to describe you in a single sentence, what do you long for them to say? Be honest with yourself. Name it even if it seems impossible. 'I want to be loving and affectionate.' 'I want to be there for my child.' 'I want to be kind.' Explore your values. Notice how your principles interconnect and feed each other; notice how they create the bedrock for your day to day actions. Are there particular values that stand out as

crucial? If your parenting could be about one thing, what would it be? For some it may be the principle of being there for your child. For others, it may be the idea of being a kind and compassionate parent. There is no right or wrong. Your values are your own and they are unique to you.

Listen to your heart. You can tell that you are truly touching on your values by the joy this creates. Following your own principles is deeply satisfying, even when it is also stressful and challenging. If you can find joy in responding to your baby, through the haze of exhaustion, then clearly being there for your child is tremendously important to you. If the kisses and cuddles feel so good, even when they interfere with your other plans, then being a loving, affectionate parent must be a core value. Look for that sense of satisfaction and joy within your own life and notice the values that it is pointing to. What is your heart trying to tell you?

Notice how flexible it all is. Open yourself up to the full array of possibilities. There isn't one way to be a loving, affectionate parent. There are many. There are ways that work right now and ways that used to work and ways that may work in the future. Values are not set and prescribed paths, they are wide open fields for us to run and play in. Your principles are smorgasbords for you to sample and take delight in. Even in unexpected circumstances, even when your treasured plans fall through, there are possibilities. Find them.

Remember your values. It is easy to get lost. So keep your map in your back pocket. Find ways to connect with your values daily. Write your values down and stick them on the fridge. Put reminders of your most cherished principles in your phone. Stick photos, pictures and

sayings that remind you of the parent you want to be on your bathroom mirror. Embodiment your values into your life. And every so often pause and ask: what kind of parent do I want to be? Am I moving closer to that or am I moving further away?

Rest your goals and plans firmly on the bedrock of your own principles. When making a parenting goal, consider, how does this relate to my most cherished values? Perhaps you need to find a way to manage temper tantrums that is also kind and compassionate. Or a style of night-time parenting that fits with being there for your child. You have every right to plan your parenting in accordance with your own values. By beginning with your values you are more likely to find the plans and goals that will work for you and for your child and parenting is more likely to be enjoyable and fulfilling for you.

What possibilities are open to you right now? How can you, today, take a step closer to being the parent that you want to be? Pause, and consider this. Now take your answer and put it aside because I guarantee you've chosen something that's too big. You've probably thought of a goal, an elaborate plan or a grand gesture. That's okay. You may well get it in time. But begin with something small, really small, so tiny it is easy. You could: ask your child about his or her day and listen to the reply, give your child hug, say 'I love you' or respond without hesitation to your child's next call for attention. Choose an action that is easy, small and arises from your values. As you take that action, notice your own joy. Don't underestimate the power of small acts chosen on purpose. Doing something small is not a mere practice run for the main event. The truth is that parenting is mostly formed of small acts,

tiny things, repeated many times over. In parenting, it is the pattern of tiny acts over time that makes the difference. If you manage to fit the occasional grand gesture in there too, that's great but, in all honesty it is unnecessary. Parenting is a million tiny things repeated.

Remember the smorgasbord. Life doesn't always turn out as we planned. And there are always possibilities. What is working for you right now in accordance with your principles? Are you moving closer to being the parent that you want to be or further away? If your current plan isn't working then return to your values and change it. Reconnect with the wide, open field that is offered by your principles and play. Try something new. Experiment. Find what works for you and for your child right now.

You'll slip. I guarantee it. Here's the open secret: we all do. Living and parenting on purpose is not about eradicating mistakes, it is about returning again and again to your values. Asking yourself, over and over: what kind of parent do I want to be? Am I moving closer to that or further away? And what can I do, right now, in a small way to live my values? It is easy to become lost. And it is possible to find yourself again. It is possible to parent deliberately, consciously, from your own heart. It is possible to parent on purpose.

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