

Falling In Love With Your Child: Part II Annoying Child Behaviors or Positive Personality Traits?

In part one of the “Falling in Love with Your Child” series, we focused on taking the time to enjoy your child in the current stage. Relishing each moment with your child helps you to bond closer and fall in love with that precious being. Another aspect of falling in love is being able to see positive traits in all behavior. When we are in love, we focus our attention on the positive spin of our partner’s behavior rather than seeing negative. I am not talking about being blind to harmful behavior, but simply looking for the positive spin. Once we get accustomed to each other, we begin to let some behavior annoy us. The things we thought were cute in the beginning become irritating. We do this with our children as well. The persistency of a child learning to climb the stairs is endearing the first few days. That cuteness turns to frustration when dealing with the same behavior day after day.

One of the biggest challenges of parenting is refocusing those negative thoughts into positive traits of our children. With the daily grind of raising children, tending house, and work outside the home, it’s no wonder we parents get exasperated at our children’s behavior. The challenge is not letting the frustration overwhelm us to the point that we focus the majority of our attention on negative behavior. When we focus on the negative, that is all we see. It becomes increasingly more difficult to find positive traits and easier to see negative traits especially when we are stressed, tired, or frustrated. We all love our children, but sometimes we have difficulty enjoying them especially during the trying developmental stages (i.e. the terrible two’s). When you are in the midst of a negative stage, imagine how this trait will manifest as a teenager or an adult. For example, a strong willed two-year-old may become the teenager who does not follow the crowd. The overactive child may find a job that requires high energy.

The old adage “looking through rose colored glasses” is true. We will view people or circumstances by the color of our lenses. If we focus on negative, we will likely find negative; and if we focus on positive, we will likely find positive. Research on the topic of expectations shows that a person’s expectations will account for approximately eighty percent of the outcome. That means that if you expect a movie to be bad, there is an eighty percent chance that you will not like it. That is pretty powerful. The flip side means that you can change your perception of the outcome by changing your expectations. Therefore, if you expect something to be positive, it probably will be.

We want our families to be our sanctuary, but home is also the place where we let our guards down and get comfortable with one another. This behavior can translate into stress and frustration especially with our children. The good news is that we can control how we view our children and their behaviors. We can determine our perceptions by reframing the situation, which alters the outcome. A simple technique to understand reframing is to look at a picture and see what colors predominate. Then, change the color of the mat or frame, and re-examine the colors. You will find that different colors

predominate depending on the color of the picture frame. As you read this article, I want you to think of the thing your child does that drives you crazy. Keep it in your mind and attempt to reframe (change your perception) the situation as you read.

Let's look at some examples of re-framing. Tammy reports that getting her child to sleep is stressful. Tammy wants her child to fall asleep on her own and to stay by herself through the night. Tammy values independence and autonomy. She needs time to herself and wants to teach her child to value and enjoy alone time. Suzzie, on the other hand, lies down with her son to get him to sleep, and he sleeps with his parents through the night. Suzzie values cuddle time with her son and wants to feel connected when sleeping. Neither approach is right or wrong. Each sees the behavior of sleeping through the lens of her own values. When an event becomes stressful, it can be helpful to reframe the situation in order to reduce the stress. If Tammy reported that getting her child to sleep was too stressful, she could reframe sleeping and change her perception. She may not have to adopt Suzzie's view; she might make a more minor change by transitioning from one sleeping arrangement to another. Her new thought might be that her daughter will function better with transitions rather than abrupt changes. Allowing yourself to accept alternative possibilities and view a situation differently reduces stress.

Julia describes her two-year-old son as strong willed and demanding. She struggles over the battle of wills daily. As her son acts to prove his independence, Julia is exasperated by the constant tantrums and pushiness. Julia views this behavior as negative. She has to deal with it. If she were able to view her son's behavior as expected and positive because he is showing normal developmental milestones, she would feel differently about the behavior. It is the job of a two-year-old to test boundaries and attempt independence. He is simply doing what a two-year-old should do. He is not pushing her buttons or disobeying on purpose. If I believe that a child is actively disobeying, I feel angry or disappointed. However, if I believe that a child is acting out to test limits, I feel understanding and compassionate. I may still want to correct the behavior, but I do not feel negatively towards the child. It is my approach or my thought that determines how I feel.

Monique's four-year-old daughter is constantly making a mess. She pulls everything out of cabinets, builds forts out of anything she can find, and has even painted the living room walls. Monique likes a clean house and constantly corrects her daughter for making a mess. If Monique could view her daughter's behavior as a positive personality trait rather than bad behavior, she could adjust to the situation. Monique's daughter sounds like a highly creative child. She creates and builds with any object, and her imagination runs wild. When viewed as imaginative, Monique can praise her daughter's accomplishments (we may want to also teach her how to clean up afterwards) and value that trait in her child. Most behaviors can be translated into a personality trait.

Each of us is born with certain traits that determine in some degree our personality. Those traits will find a way to manifest. If a child is strong-willed, he will seek out situations in which he can make decisions for himself. If a child is creative, she will find a medium in which to create. Our job as parents is to discover our child's

unique personality traits and encourage them to develop in healthy ways. It is often difficult to see some behavior as personality traits that need to be developed. However, if you are helping your child to develop these traits through chosen activities, your child will not have to find activities that drive you crazy. Begin to be pro-active and help your child meet those needs before they get into trouble.

For a child who is strong-willed, structure his day so that he can make some decisions that you approve of throughout the day. He will feel powerful and autonomous, and you will have fewer battles on your hands. For a creative child, fill the day with opportunities to create using different materials. Foster that child's need to be creative. The more you are recognizing and meeting the needs of your child, the less your child will seek methods to meet these needs independently. To do this successfully, you must positively value those traits. Seek to discover the traits your child is learning to develop. As you do, you will appreciate your child's behavior in a new light.

Falling in love with your child means discovering each aspect of the child's personality and finding value in each trait. Learning to love even the most difficult behaviors can sometimes be challenging. The key is learning to reframe each behavior into positive personality traits. When you change the way to perceive a situation, you change how you feel about it. The result is a child whose needs are fulfilled and parent who is less stressed.

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