



# Alexian Brothers Behavioral Health Hospital

## **PARENTING WITH PURPOSE:** *Preparing for Another School Year*

*By Jackie Rhew, MA, CADC, LPC, and Robin Choquette, LCPC*

### **WHY SHOULD I SET PARENTING GOALS?**

I often ask parents when I meet with them, to identify goals that they would like to achieve as a result of their parenting. I believe it is important to teach parents to parent out of purpose vs. parent out of emotion. This will allow for a closer and healthier relationship between the parent and the child, by creating structure and consistency in the home, healthier boundaries, and improved communication amongst family members.

### **HOW CAN I BECOME MORE SELF AWARE AS A PARENT?**

Self-awareness is a key ingredient in productive and purposeful parenting. It is beneficial for each parent to understand how his/her parenting style has been developed. Parental skills begin to be established early in our own development, by observing our own parents style of parenting and personal childhood experiences. Parents' reactions to pivotal and/or traumatic events that have occurred during childhood play an especially important role in what we come to accept as a way to respond to a child. Furthermore, it is critical to develop an understanding of one's own current emotional functioning, such as ability to form relationships and boundaries, communicate effectively with others, manage emotions, and tolerate distress.

This self-awareness will be useful when trying to understand how parenting tactics and reactions are influenced by emotional factors vs. goal directed parenting.

### **QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER TO INCREASE SELF AWARENESS**

- Describe some of my earliest memories of parenting tactics that my parents used.
- Describe earlier childhood memories that may impact how I parent today.
- How would I describe my emotional function?
- How well do I form and maintain relationships with others?
- Describe my relationship with my child/children.
- How do I tolerate and manage my emotions, particularly distress?
- How well do I communicate with others?
- How well do I communicate to my child?



## **NOW THAT I'M SELF AWARE HOW DO I SET GOALS?**

Parents are not given an instruction manual when a child is born, however it is important to create and implement an action plan when gearing up for the undertaking of parenthood. Much like in a job, goals allow for performance reviews, goal updates and modifications when necessary. Similarly, it is vital to set goals for parenting and identify values that are important to the family when designing the action plan, so that parents may monitor their objectives.

## **QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER WHEN DESIGNING GOALS**

- What am I hoping my child will learn as a result of my parenting?
- What values would I like to instill in my child as a result of my parenting?
- What types of personality traits would I like my child to develop?
- What kind of relationship would I like to have with my child?

Answering these questions may assist a parent in developing strategies that support the goals. In doing so, the parent may be more motivated to implement these strategies, as well as feel more confident in parenting. It is important to review the goals often with the child, so that the child begins to learn the values being withheld in the family. Common traits that are mentioned include independence, responsibility, self-confidence, compassion, kindness, trustworthiness, and respect.

## **EMOTIONALLY REACTIVE**

Parenting can trigger many emotions, in turn, causing parents to use language that reflects those emotions, such as frustration, anger, sadness, guilt, etc. As one begins to become more self-aware, he/she can more easily identify intense emotions, thus shifting from an emotionally reactive state to a more purposeful state. An anxious parent repeatedly questioning his/her child regarding a difficult situation that the child is facing may convey anxiety and self-doubt through the use of language. While the questioning may stem from the parent's own anxiety regarding the situation and/or concern over the child's ability to manage the situation, the child may be receiving a message of uncertainty and self-doubt. Simply teaching the child how to handle the situation and then providing cues to remind the child that the parent is there for support may convey confidence and a belief in the child's abilities. Often, a silent response can be as powerful as many words put together.

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