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Q&A Forum - Review

Why Children Seek Parental Approval? 2009-03

Fellow Q&Aers,

Greetings! Thank you for being on our Q&A list. Keep the questions coming. I had a really good time working on my answer to the question this time.

I would like to thank Terrie, Joanne and "Joke of the Day" (<http://www.ajokeaday.com/>) for the bonuses in this Q&A.

Look for the next issue of our newsletter, "Touchpoints," next month in your inbox. We will be accepting material for the issue until April 4th. Please send anything for consideration to me.

If I don't see you before, have a Blessed Easter!

Peace, John

Q: Why do children (no matter how young or old you are) always constantly seek parents' approval? Does this "quest for approval" ever end?

A: First, let me say that not all children seek parental approval. Some grow up being oppositional, i.e. rejecting their parents' and other authority figures' attempts to control them.

You are right, however, that many children seek parental approval. At an early, pre-verbal age, children learn that if mom and dad are happy, then they are more apt to smile and engage in other positive and affirming behaviors. The child feels good. This is a variation on the "if momma's happy, everybody's happy" theme. This sets up a pattern of reinforcement that allows the parents' values and expectations to be transferred to the developing little personality. However, as early as 2 years old, children frequently find themselves in a natural and dynamic process called separation, thus the "terrible twos" and the preponderance of the word "no." This process usually ebbs and flows throughout the child's development, culminating in late adolescence or early adulthood with a phase known as "individuation." In this phase the teen or young adult separates from the parents and finally becomes his/her own person, kind of like the butterfly finally leaving the cocoon. While the butterfly never returns to the cocoon, humans are different. Emotional bonding with a parent usually changes over time and, as the parent ages, can end up in a role reversal with the adult child caring for the ailing or infirmed parent.

Most parents learn to accept their child's efforts at separation, not take them personally and allow the child to grow separate from them. The process of separation and individuation can be bittersweet for both the child and the parent.

If a child is not allowed to separate or individuate (usually caused by emotionally needy parents or children with special physical or emotional needs), then s/he can continue to be dependent into adulthood. This may result in feeling held hostage by their parents' approval. Such feelings usually include anger, which is often repressed (i.e. not allowed), and that frequently evolves into depression and/or anxiety.

Sometimes children, and adult children, as well as parents, need the assistance of a professional in sorting through all the history and feelings that these issues engender. The issues and struggles are often closely linked to what happened (or didn't happen) in their family of origin as well as to the grief and loss process. The process of separation and individuation, if done responsibly by all parties, is one of naturalness, growth and maturation.

Thank you for sharing. I hope these thoughts shed some light on your question. Peace,
John

Quote:

R20: We could learn a lot from crayons: some are sharp, some are pretty, some are dull, some have weird names, and all are different colors ...but they all have to learn to live in the same box."

Bonus 1

What's the Weather?

It was already late fall and the Indians on a remote reservation in South Dakota asked their new chief if the coming winter was going to be cold or mild.

Since he was a chief in a modern society he had never been taught the old secrets. When he looked at the sky he couldn't tell what the winter was going to be like.

Nevertheless, to be on the safe side, he told his tribe that the winter was indeed going to be cold and that members of the village should collect firewood to be prepared.

But being a practical leader, after several days he got an idea. He went to the phone booth, called the National Weather Service and asked, "Is the coming winter going to be cold?"

"It looks like this winter is going to be quite cold," the meteorologist at the Weather Service responded.

So the chief went back to his people and told them to collect even more firewood in order to be prepared.

A week later he called the National Weather Service again. "Does it still look like it is going to be a very cold winter?"

"Yes," the man at National Weather Service again replied, "it's going to be a very cold winter."

The chief again went back to his people and ordered them to collect every scrap of firewood they could find.

Two weeks later the chief called the National Weather Service again. "Are you absolutely sure that the winter is going to be very cold?"

"Absolutely," the man replied. "It's looking more and more like it is going to be one of the coldest winters we've ever seen."

"How can you be so sure?" the chief asked.

The weatherman replied, "Because the Indians are collecting firewood like crazy."

Bonus 2 **WHO AM I?**

What makes me weak? My fears.

What makes me whole? My God.

What keeps me standing? My faith.

What makes me compassionate? My selflessness.

What makes me honest? My integrity.

What sustains my mind? My quest for knowledge.

What teaches me all lessons? My mistakes.

What lift's my head high? My pride, not arrogance.

What if I can't go on? Not an option.

What makes me victorious? My courage to climb.

What makes me competent? My confidence.

What makes me sensual? My insatiable essence.

What makes me beautiful? My everything.

What makes me a woman? My heart.

Who says I need love? I do.

What empowers me? My God & Me.

Who am I? I AM A STRONG CHRISTIAN WOMAN!

Bonus 3

Good words to remember...

The only survivor of a shipwreck was washed up on a small, uninhabited island. He prayed feverishly for God to rescue him. Every day he scanned the horizon for help, but none seemed forthcoming. Exhausted, he eventually managed to build a little hut out of driftwood to protect him from the elements, and to store his few possessions.

One day, after scavenging for food, he arrived home to find his little hut in flames, with smoke rolling up to the sky. He felt the worst had happened, and everything was lost. He was stunned with disbelief, grief, and anger. He cried out, "God! How could you do this to me?"

Early the next day, he was awakened by the sound of a ship approaching the island! It had come to rescue him! "How did you know I was here?" asked the weary man of his rescuers. "We saw your smoke signal," they replied.

The Moral of This Story: It's easy to get discouraged when things are going badly, but we shouldn't lose heart, because God is at work in our lives, even in the midst of our pain and suffering. Remember that the next time your little hut seems to be burning to the ground. It just may be a smoke signal that summons the Grace of God.

EXTRA SPECIAL BONUS (this ties together the above bonus and part of my answer to the above question. I hope you enjoy and learn from it.)

BUTTERFLY

A man found a cocoon for a butterfly. One day a small opening appeared, he sat and watched the butterfly for several hours as it struggled to force its body through the little hole. Then it seemed to stop making any progress. It appeared as if it had gotten as far as it could and could go no farther. Then the man decided to help the butterfly.

He took a pair of scissors and snipped the remaining bit of the cocoon. The butterfly then emerged easily. Something was strange. The butterfly had a swollen body and shriveled wings. The man continued to watch the butterfly because he expected at any moment, the wings would enlarge and expand to be able to support the body, which would contract in time. Neither happened. In fact, the butterfly spent the rest of its life crawling around with a swollen body and deformed wings. It was never able to fly.

What the man in his kindness and haste did not understand, was that the restricting cocoon and the struggle required for the butterfly to get through the small opening of the cocoon are God's way of forcing fluid from the body of the butterfly into its wings so that it would be ready for flight once it achieved its freedom from the cocoon. Sometimes struggles are exactly what we need in our life.

END OF BONUSES

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www.personalgrowthconcepts.com

jpacheco@personalgrowthconcepts.com

Personal Growth Concepts, Inc.

1825 Barnum Ave., Suite 304 , Stratford, CT 06614-5333

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