

The Good Enough Child:
How to Have an Imperfect Family
and be Perfectly Satisfied

Presentation By:

Dr. Brad Sachs, Ph.D

Safe Community Coalition

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How To Have an Imperfect Family and Be Perfectly Satisfied....

- We're all flying by the seat of our pants-the only predictable and explicable aspects of raising children are how unpredictable and inexplicable they can be
- Your child is not *your* child
- What you see is what you are likely to get
- *All* parental emotions are normal and acceptable
- Children need us the most when they are the least pleasant to be with

(How to Have...)

- Childhood can be a nightmare, but almost everyone wakes up from it
- As long as you do a good deal more positive parenting than negative parenting, things are likely to turn out fine
- Nothing important comes easy—pain, discomfort, and disruption are necessary counterparts to growth and change
- Childhood should be a preparation for adulthood, not a performance for adults
- The person *of* the parent must come before the person *as* a parent

(How to Have...)

- The parent's *nurture* must conform to the child's *nature*
- We need to spend *less time* naming the problem, and *more time* looking at the climate that creates and maintains the problem
 - (*Oppression* vs. Depression)
- We must convey that it's not what you have and what you do, but who you are and how you love that matters

Every Child Experiences Three Births...



THE FANTASY CHILD

THE ACTUAL CHILD

THE GOOD ENOUGH CHILD



THE GOOD ENOUGH CHILD

How to Raise an Imperfect Child...

And Be Perfectly Satisfied

FIVE STEPS TOWARDS EMBRACING

THE GOOD ENOUGH CHILD

- UNCOVERING
- ACKNOWLEDGING
- UNDERSTANDING
- FORGIVING
- CHANGING

SOME OFT-IGNORED ASPECTS OF CHILD DEVELOPMENT

- Of all the influences on the child, the family has by far the most effect
- Children are always in orbit around a nucleus of two birth parents, *no matter how present/absent they are*, along with other significant caregiving adults (adoptive parent, foster parents, stepparents, grandparents, etc.)
- Children must paradoxically grow up and away while simultaneously strengthening the connections that keep them close-discovering an “I” while maintaining a “we”
- Children heat up what the family needs to be working on, making patterns and problems more visible and available for change

(Oft-ignored...)

- Children are always worried about and loyal to their families
- Children need to say “No” to significant adults in order to know more about who they are, and who they aren’t—they *defy* in order to *define*
- Children can be mercenary, devoting great energy to outmaneuvering adults and challenging and undermining authority
- Parent-Child battles are a necessary way to acknowledge their attachment to each other and come to understand each other—the *worst* fights are usually created by the family’s effort to *avoid* fights

(Oft-ignored...)

- Children tend not to see difficulties as their own making, and prefer to assign blame rather than assume accountability, not because of their *lack* of responsibility, but because of their unfamiliarity and discomfort with assuming it
- The more that children doubt themselves, the more insistent and persuasive they may become (“Often wrong, never uncertain”)
- Children elicit in and project onto adults all of the discomfiting emotions that *they* are feeling (*Psycho-Dialysis*), preferring to fight with *others* than with themselves

(Oft-ignored...)

- Children may refuse to ask for help, or may reject help that is offered, because help reminds them of their own remaining vulnerability and dependence
- Children are seduced by, and addicted to, power-once they get it, it's hard to pry it away
- All children must temporarily disinvest in familiar activities, priorities and values in order to determine who they are, rather than who we want to be
- The child's (and parents') ultimate goal should be healthy separation- "walking away from home" (rather than "running away from home" or "staying home") towards self-sufficiency, without anyone being alienated or devalued

Why Contemporary Parents Have a Difficult Time Seeing Children as Good Enough

- 1) Smaller families
- 2) Bearing children later in life
- 3) Effort involved in starting a family
- 4) Experience in the world of work outside the home
- 5) Economic gap between the “have’s” and the “have-nots”
- 6) A yearning for reward, a validation of our choices
- 7) An overall Mid-life assessment/report card
- 8) The parenting industry
- 9) The pharmaceutical industry
- 10) The child’s need to differentiate, spurn, and repudiate

STAGE ONE:
Expectations... Conscious and
Subconscious

Conscious

- They had better do what *we* wished we had done
- They had better do what our *parents* wished we had done
- They had better do what our parents made *us* do
- They had better *not* do what we did
- They had better not do what *we* didn't do

(STAGE ONE)

UNCONSCIOUS

- They must heal our relationship with our parents
- They must replace a lost or loved one
- They must erase our visible and invisible flaws and failures
- They must reflect well on us
- They must make good on our deferred dreams and broken promises
- They must heal our marriage
- They must make us immortal

STAGE TWO: ACKNOWLEDGING...

SOME SELF-DEFEATING REACTIONS TO A
DISAPPOINTING OR DISILLUSIONING CHILD:

- Hyper-parenting
- Hyper-criticalness
- Over-anxious
- Self-Blame
- Blaming Others
- Blaming the Child
- Angry Withdrawal

STAGE THREE: UNDERSTANDING

How Our Children's Problems Are Actually *Solutions* to
their Problems

Physiologically-based problems

Socially-based problems

Emotionally-based problems

Family-based problems

Identity-based problems

Power-based problems

Separation-based problems

Children sometimes solve *problems* in *problematic* ways, guided by philosophical platforms like...

It's important for me to be seen as helpless so not too much is expected of me

I can't stop acting angry or everybody will think I've forgotten all the terrible things that have happened to me

I cannot do exactly what is being asked of me because I won't feel like, or appear like, I'm my own person

I will no longer recognize myself if I'm robbed of or give up this aspect of myself, maladaptive or unpleasant as it may be to maintain

(Solving *Problems...*)



If I can't solve a problem on my own, it doesn't count

I want everyone to know how unhappy I am, and if I stop misbehaving, they won't understand...

I'll feel humiliated if I decide to change, and everybody thinks that I've finally come around and says, "I told you so."

Doing things differently means admitting that the adults were right and I was wrong

If I become too successful, my parents will think that they're not necessary

I'm still too angry at my parents to make them proud of me and give them a chance to brag

STAGE FOUR: FORGIVING

Forgiving your child is not the same as, nor should it lead to...

- Acquiescence-a failure to assert your authority
- Passivity, resignation and hopelessness
- Dread of being disliked or unpopular
- Allowing yourself to be manipulated or exploited


(STAGE FOUR)

Forgiving parents...

- Release their children from the expectation that they will make all parental dreams come true
- Free their children from emotional debt
- Liberate themselves from chronic feelings of guilt, resentment and disappointment

STAGE FIVE:

The Realities of Family Growth and Change



- True change only occurs in a loving relationship
- Children won't change unless families change first
- Sometimes, you have to change the reason for changing
- Change is difficult and always presents risk
- Things can always change from bad to worse
- Behaviors may change before attitudes do

(*STAGE FIVE*)



- Not every step is a step forward, but there is no way for change to take place without steps
- Change is not always visible
- Talking about change is not the same as changing
- Predicting change increases the chances of change
- You can promote change, but you can't choose the ramifications of change
- Expected change is easier to adjust to
- Overplaying the *necessity* of change actually undermines the possibility of change

GOOD ENOUGH PARENTS...

- Remember that their main job is to be left
- Act as Beacon and Mirror
- Know that it's usually not firm action, but the *lack* of it, that pushes children to extremes-their job is to *lead* not to be *liked*
- Embrace their own, and their children's, mixed emotions about family life
- Set limits and assign age-appropriate responsibilities (become consultant, not subcontractor)

(Good Enough Parents...)



- Allow children opportunities to succeed and fail without rescuing them (You can't plant without digging a hole)
- Work in partnership with their children, gradually sharing power and slowly revising the family hierarchy
- Have compassion for their passions
- Are honest about the difficulty and unfairness of change

(Good Enough Parents...)

- Understand that not every family problem has an ideal solution
- Become comfortable with disappointing their child (and being disappointed by them)
- Focus more on modeling than instruction, less on “kneading” than “rising”
- LISTEN!
- Emphasize leadership rather than being liked

Communicating To Promote Change

EMPATHY	ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF UNCERTAINTY	FEARLESSNESS
CANDOR	PARTNERSHIP	BREVITY
RECOGNITION OF TRANSITION	OPTIMISM	RECEPTIVITY

Parents Compromise Leadership When They...



- Establish unrealistic goals
- Come up with irrelevant, repetitive, or impractical consequences for misconduct
- Display lack of effort when it comes to follow-through
- Display lack of cohesion with other caregivers (parents, step-parents, teachers, etc.)
- Act Impulsively (too harsh, then feel guilty and revoke)
- Want to be liked more than they want to lead
- Rescue children from the natural consequences of their behaviors (at home, with friends, in school, in the community)

Parents Establish Leadership When They:

- Solicit input on important matters
- Are permeable to, but not overly influenced by, the child's influence
- Allow themselves to change their mind
- Respond at their own pace, not the child's
- Choose battles selectively
- Establish a partnership with the child when it comes to setting and reaching goals and aspirations
- Distinguish between what is and isn't under child's control

The Person As the Parent
VS.
The Person Of the Parent

Self and marital development and focus...

- Prevent us from falling prey to unrealistic expectations
- Provide important modeling for the child
- Keep us from inappropriately underwriting their liberties

(As the parent vs...)



- Help us see children's growing independence as a beginning rather than an end
- Focus less attention on the child, diminishing the self-absorption and power of the child (and his/her problem/symptom)
- Reassure children that they can eventually separate and leave home without feelings of guilt and betrayal

TREATMENT CONSIDERATIONS



- Family-system centered
- Preventive
- Solution-focused
- Therapist Obsolescence
- Acknowledgement of limitations
- Awareness of spontaneous remission
- Promoting natural groupings/normal interactions
- Medication issues:
 - Medical side-effects
 - Psychological side-effects

POWER-GRAM



What decisions does the child have complete power to make?

What decisions do the parents retain complete power to make?

What decision-making do the child and parents share in?

Currently

One year ago

One year from now

RESPONSIBILITY-GRAM

What is the child solely responsible for?

What are the parents solely responsible for?

What responsibilities are shared between child and parents?

Currently

One year ago

One year from now

RELATIONSHIP-GRAM

What is the child entitled to do
on his/her own?

What are the parents entitled to do
on their own?

What are the child are parents
expected to do together?

Currently

One year ago

One year from now