Aug 2009 | By Karen Jacobsen and Lauren Bondy

10 Gifts For Your Children That Money Can't Buy

We all want our children to have "the best," and sometimes that might seem like the best prom dress, the best graduation present, the best summer camp experience ... the list goes on. But in our relentless focus on the best things, we often lose sight of what's really important—the gifts that can't be bought.

Below is a list of intangible gifts we can give our children, which help nurture healthy children, so they can reach their full potential. These gifts will help children develop the best qualities: being respectful, responsible, resilient and compassionate.

1. Your time, presence and connection
You may spend a lot of time with your children and still not really be there for them. Children need your presence. This means "tuning in," listening, responding from your heart rather than your head and observing your children with no agenda. In other words, being present and experiencing their beauty and the joy they create in your life. When you are truly present, they will feel your love.

2. Feelings
Feelings are not right or wrong—this especially applies to uncomfortable feelings. Expressing feelings is healthy and allows a child to get support and to learn problem solving. When parents don't accept their children's feelings, there is a consequence: Children disconnect from themselves, and this creates unhappiness as well as misbehavior.

3. Unconditional love and acceptance
Make sure your child knows that if given a choice of all the children in the world, he or she is the one you would choose, quirks and all.

4. Empathy

Empathy is one of the most important parenting tools, and it's essential for healthy relationships. Parents need to communicate empathy at every age, especially in the difficult moments. Empathy means letting your child know that you understand how they feel (even when you don't "like" it).

5. Limits and boundaries

Despite their protests, children need and want limits. Clear, consistent limits and rules based on your values, provide safety and security. Setting limits teaches children the critical life skill of setting healthy boundaries for themselves.

6. Boredom

When children are given the gift of down time and even boredom, they have the opportunity to look inward, to discover themselves, their feelings and their needs. Down time creates an opportunity for them to "take action" in their lives rather than have "action" come to them. It is through down time that creativity emerges and children learn how to be alone without being lonely.

7. Struggle and disappointment

While it is natural for parents to want to protect their children, it is important for them to allow children the freedom to make their own decisions. They need to experiment, make mistakes and fail (yes, fail). If we jump in to solve their problems or rescue them, we deprive them of critical learning opportunities. Through struggle, confidence is built, self-discovery deepens, and perseverance and problem-solving skills develop.

8. Conflict

Conflict pushes many parents' buttons. Because limit-setting and discipline often cause anger and conflict, many parents find themselves avoiding it altogether. However, conflict is part of life and it is OK. In fact, it is through conflict that children learn to understand their emotions, control their impulses, take responsibility, express themselves authentically, move towards solutions and develop empathy.

9. Chores and responsibilities

Chores and responsibilities help children feel valuable to the family. They learn that they are accountable and that there are consequences when they don't keep their end of the bargain.

10. Mistakes and imperfection

Teach and model for children that everyone makes mistakes and that it's okay to be imperfect. Children learn more from what we do than from what we say. When we make mistakes, it is important to apologize, take responsibility for our actions and repair the mistake.