

**Values Strengthen Your Commitment
and Connection to Family:
A Values-Based Vision for Parenting**



**Core
Values**



From the HeartWise® Coaching Institute

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How Values Strengthen Your Commitment and Connection to Family

Living a values-based life is equivalent to living a heart-centered life. When we understand how our values inform our decisions and influence our choices, we can help our children to see the world in new ways. Understanding and discussing our values and respecting the values of others allows us to model a heart-centered approach to relationships and communication that will improve our family connections across time. Values provide a strong foundation for our children so they feel prepared and secure to make big decisions at life-changing moments.

Examples of values include honesty, security, abundance, gratitude, respect, communication, knowledge, love, happiness, harmony, trust, reliability, responsibility, spirituality, faith, loyalty or truthfulness (Read on for a longer list and a quick assessment tool for determining your family values).

We rarely give attention to values, aside from what we hear in the media as “family values,” which have political and religious connotations. Those types of values are not what we are talking about here.

We are talking about focusing on what is really important to our families and us.

Having children truly changes the way we look at the world. Suddenly we begin to notice stories in the news with new eyes. We pay more attention to stories about bullying, sex, drugs, relationships, fashion sense (or lack of it) and other topics that may have an emotional impact on our children when they are faced with difficult moments.

As parents we think, “Oh, my child won’t be a bully,” or “My daughter will never try drugs or have sex before marriage.” While we all want to raise happy, self-fulfilled and confident children, the reality is that they will be faced with many difficult choices. Most of us skated through our lives under the guiding moral principles we inherited from our parents, our religion or even our chosen career. Perhaps many of us experienced the consequences of making the wrong choices and having to begin again. Many parents see raising a child as a second chance, an opportunity to turn our own lives around and become a better role model.

When we think about it, most of us have a set of values that can be easily identified. Even though we might have made a few wrong decisions, when we examine those decisions, we might see one of two things: we were never taught a clear example of what is right or wrong by our own parents or caregivers or we knew what we were doing was wrong and felt guilty about it, like buying alcohol when we were in high school. When we realize the important roles that values play in raising confident, resilient children, it is easy to see why understanding our own values is an important first step towards building a strong family commitment to connection and open, honest communication.

How to Model a Values-Based Life for Your Children

The old adage that our children do what we do and not what we say is very appropriate here. If you treat other people with kindness and respect, your children will too. If you say please and thank you, your children will too. If you are honest and tell the truth, so will they. Your children watch your every move. One of my

favorite parenting quotes of all times is by author and expert, Joseph Chilton Pearce who said, “We must become the people we want our children to be.”

What are you modeling for your children on a regular basis? Do you talk to your children like you would take to your favorite girlfriend or even to your spouse? Sometimes I see parents speak to children so harshly that I wonder how the child holds up under the criticism. We all have moments when we are tired, overwhelmed or downright cranky. We are entitled to have bad days and difficult emotions. It is not all right to take that out on our children. When we make a mistake, yell or become frustrated, it is okay to apologize to your children, repair the emotional damage and start again. When we are adult enough to accept responsibility for our own actions, we teach our children to do the same. We show them the value of forgiveness and that we are all human.

My job as a publisher is very deadline driven and I can become very stressed out and grumpy when a deadline is close. I have certainly had days when I snapped at my children and had to apologize and make it up later. What I realized is that I needed to communicate clearly with my children what was happening. I now let them know in advance that deadline week is coming and that I will be working extra hours. I tell them when it will be over and what we are going to do to spend extra time together once I am free to do so. We all feel better knowing exactly what is happening and why. They know that my stress is not related to them and that they will have my time and attention back soon. Knowing what is happening is very important to children. Tell them when you are sad or upset or stressed about whatever. They can handle it! If you do not share the truth with them, they will often think it is their fault, they will feel unloved and insecure. This is not our intention but it happens. By treating our children and us with loving kindness and honesty, they will reflect that back to us and to others. They will feel free to share their sorrows and challenges. This is especially critical for those of us who are parenting teens and tweens.

Creating Your Family-Rules Based on Values

The first step is to come up with a list of the top ten values that are important to you and will help define your family, your actions and beliefs. If you have not done this before, you can work with the list of Values at the end of this document.

Children, as young as 3, can understand and be involved in simple rules of what defines right and wrong. Teaching them where to put their lunchbox, shoes and coat each day when they walk in the door is a simple place to begin. Or modeling cleaning up the playroom together at the end of each day is another example of instilling values and rules at an early age. If your children are still young, you will want to make sure that you participate in these activities with them.

Model taking off your shoes at the back door or hanging up your coat, rather than laying it on a chair. Do a “Power 15” to fun music to clean up all the toys. There are several reasons why doing these things together and talking about them as a family are important, even for young ones. First, it models planning, discussion and conversation skills and teaches your children the value of open communication. Second, it makes your children feel like important, valued members of the family. They will feel loved and respected by your allowing them to participate in these discussions. Finally, because they helped to create the rules and did not have them dictated to them, they will feel more invested in following the rules.

I was talking to a mom recently who has two boys, ages 6 and 8. The older son has taken on more responsibility around the house and feels very important and values. She realized the younger son was acting out and misbehaving because he did not share those feelings. He did not know what his “role” in the family was. She real-

ized that he needed a job to call his own so that he would feel valued and respected like his older brother. It may sound like she was treating them differently, but she wasn't loving one more than the other or giving one more privileges than the other. What she realized was that she had given the older son more responsibility because he was capable of doing more. She was treating her younger son like a baby but he needed to be treated like an equal. One simple shift to creating a simple weekly chore for her 6-year-old to call his own empowered him and made him feel important. It is very simple actions and conversations like this one that boosts self-worth and self-reliance in our children. If we want our children to be independent and resilient, we have to create opportunities at home for them to practice.

If you have older children like I do, your conversations may be very different and the rule setting has new, broader implications. With a 12-year-old, we are looking at establishing rules around "hanging out" with friends, curfews, responsibility, and ultimately dating, relationships and romance. Because he is used to having these types of discussions with us, we don't anticipate any dramatic challenges or pushing back. He knows that will help to establish guidelines that suit all of us. His sister is only 9 and one of our challenges is helping her to understand why her rules might be different than his, but we are confident that we can work this out to everyone's satisfaction, given the groundwork around communication and honesty that we have already established with our kids. We acknowledge that it is not fair that he gets to do some things she does not, like have a cell phone or ride his bike to a friend's house nearby.

Now let's talk about consequences and how these, too, are impacted by our values. Once again, it is critical to involve your children in determining ahead of time, rather than in the heat of the moment, what appropriate consequences are for infringement of the rules. Although instances will always come up in which we want to react and even overreact when catching our child breaking a rule. My children know that lying, cheating, and dishonesty are unacceptable.

When he was in 5th grade, my son forged my signature on a piece of homework that he had failed to get signed. He was afraid to get in trouble at school but was even more afraid of the consequences at home, knowing that he had broken one of our cardinal rules. He handed me the sheet of paper, trying to hide what he had done but knowing he couldn't. He burst into dramatic tears and shouts of "I'm so sorry." I wasn't sure whether to laugh or cry. It was not an important piece of paper and the signature seemed silly to me. His lying was not silly, it was very serious and his biggest fear was my disappointment in his actions. I took a deep breath and worked to calm him down first. Once he was breathing normally and realized I wasn't going to banish him to the underworld forever, we were able to talk about an appropriate consequence. He had to write a letter of confession and apology to his teacher, hand it to her personally and wait while she read it.

This was not an easy task for a 10-year-old boy to do, but he did with his normal honesty and loving kindness. He also learned that the right thing to do when you lie is to accept responsibility for your actions and apologize. Taking away toys or television privileges would not have had the same impact or taught him the right way to act. When you think about appropriate consequences for their actions, make sure they match and reflect your values. If your teen breaks his curfew, he is also breaking your trust. What is the appropriate consequence? How will he regain your trust? You and your child have to work this out together in ways that are meaningful to you both.

In regards to chores around the house, we have implemented specific rules and guidelines that we came up with together as a family. These chores are tied to the children's salary. (We do not call it an allowance. We recently read Dave Ramsey's book on Financial Peace and adopted his viewpoint that no one in life gives us an allowance, we have to work for what we earn. He calls it a commission; we chose to call it a salary.) If they do not keep up their end of the bargain, they don't get paid. If they have set a B.A.G. (big, audacious goal) and fail

to meet their weekly savings goals, they will feel the pain of that and accept responsibility. No yelling, no fussing, no crying. We are very matter-of-fact in our discussions. We have all agreed on the rules and the consequences. It has made our lives much more peaceful and our house is much cleaner. The kids are proud of the money they earn and that they can buy what they want with their salary. It has also changed how my husband and I act. We cannot expect our children to keep their bedrooms and desks clean, if we don't do the same! Working together with these guidelines has brought our family closer in unexpected and beautiful ways!

Values Assessment Tool

Below you will find a list of possible values. For a quick assessment of what your values are, follow the steps listed. You should do this on your own first and then with a friend or your spouse.

Instructions

1. Put a circle around all of the words that you feel are important, right, or necessary. Circle up to 40 words on the list that for some reason are meaningful to you. Don't think about it; just start circling! Give yourself about 3 to 4 minutes to do this.
2. Now go back and put a star or mark next to half of the words on the list. This is the list that is more meaningful to you, it doesn't feel like a "should" or what society recommends, these are the words that are at the core of your own sense of what is important and what defines right or wrong for you.
3. Finally, narrow down that list by putting a line, highlighting or otherwise marking ten of the words. These are the words that drive you, internally motivate your decision-making process, and define you as a person.
4. Take note of the original 40 words. How was it to cut the list down? Are there more than 10 words that need to go on your list? That is okay. The key here is to drill down to the critical core of who you are from a values-based perspective. Note that on your original lists from steps two and three, you may find words that were important to your family, your community or your church that feel like "shoulds." Your goal is to create a very clear mental image of what matters to you and what you hope to pass on to your children.

Write your top 10 values here:

- | | |
|----------|-----------|
| 1. _____ | 6. _____ |
| 2. _____ | 7. _____ |
| 3. _____ | 8. _____ |
| 4. _____ | 9. _____ |
| 5. _____ | 10. _____ |

Core Values List

Accomplishment	Diversity	Ingenuity	Rule of Law
Accountability	Ease of Use	Justice	Safety
Accuracy	Efficiency	Knowledge	Satisfying others
Acknowledgement	Equality	Leadership	Security
Adventure	Excellence	Love, Romance	Self-giving
All for one & one for all	Expertise	Loyalty	Self-reliance
Authenticity	Fairness	Mastery	Self-thinking
Beauty	Faith	Meaning	Service to others
Calm, quietude, peace	Faithfulness	Merit	Seeing clearly
Challenge	Family	Methodical	Simplicity
Change	Family feeling	Money	Skill
Cleanliness, orderliness	Flair	Openness	Solving Problems
Collaboration	Freedom	Order	Speed
Commitment	Friendship	Originality	Spirit in life (using)
Common Sense	Fun	Patriotism	Spirituality
Communication	Genius	Peace, Non-violence	Stability
Community	Global view	Perfection	Standardization
Competence	Good will	Personal Growth	Status
Competition	Goodness	Pleasure	Stimulation
Concern for others	Gratitude	Power	Strength
Connection	Hard work	Practicality	Succeed; a will to-
Content over form	Harmony	Preservation	Success
Continuous improvement	Health	Privacy	Systemization
Cooperation	Honesty	Progress	Teamwork
Coordination	Honor	Prosperity, Wealth	Timeliness
Courage	Improvement	Punctuality	Tolerance
Creativity	Independence	Quality of work	Tradition
Customer satisfaction	Individuality	Regularity	Tranquility
Decisiveness	Inner peace, calm, quietude	Reliability	Trust
Delight of being, joy	Innovation	Resourcefulness	Truth
Democracy	Integrity	Respect for others	Unity
Discipline	Intensity	Responsiveness	Variety
Discovery	Intimacy	Results-oriented	Wisdom