



## **Parents Lead The Way**

By Michael Cruz

During this COVID 19 pandemic, managing our children's fears start and end with the parent(s). In parenting, we are responsible for our children's well-being. It all starts with the parent(s) being able to acknowledge and regulate their own fears. In doing so, they are best able to approach the selfless act of parental love.

Parental love requires that children experience predictable physical and emotional safety in their attachments to their parent(s). Each child having the experience of knowing they are precious in the eyes of their parent(s). This is the cornerstone of human development toward a full and rich mature life.

Children not only thrive under these conditions but children are predisposed to eagerly trade being loved in exchange for meeting parental expectations and will actually self-discipline to be loved.

This is not a "quid pro quo" or a conditional love relationship.

Rather, this is a quality that can only emerge in the presence of unconditional love. In unconditional love there are no deal-breakers; love is never withheld or withdrawn, discipline is always focused on the behavior, and consequences are naturally occurring opportunities for instruction on how to be with others and ultimately how to be with oneself.

It is important to acknowledge that fear and aggression are inseparable in our response to any perceived threat. Given enough fear, we all too easily, collapse to the behavioral and psychological reactions of fight, flight and freeze. It is also important to acknowledge that for survival reasons, our threat detection is frequently inaccurate. Fear and aggression tend to spread like a contagion; fearful and aggressive parents tend to produce fearful and aggressive children. Love and care also tend to spread like a contagion and will produce loving and caring children. Trust in yourself that you will know what to do if or when an actual threat emerges.

When we are imagining future threats, we may descend further into the abyss of our fears; or we can resist our tendency to time travel in our minds and stay present for our children's experience. This is how parents lead the way through and for our children.

Some suggestions on how parents can lead the way:

- Acknowledge your own fears and seek the support of another trusted adult.

- Suspend self – it's about the needs and interest of the children - it's not about us.
- Model for your children how to manage fear by practicing the mindfulness of being in the here and now.
- Minimize your children's exposure to fear-biased news - choose a reputable fact and evidence- based source(s).
- Create time for positive activities and attention with your children.
- Give plenty of verbal praise and validation whenever it is warranted.
- Give plenty of physical affection and comfort when it is needed and wanted.
- Be engaged in your children's success with the challenges of remote learning.
- Support your children in sustaining positive friendships and peer-group relationships.
- Get your children outdoors for plenty of sunshine, fresh-air and physical activity.
- Practice humor and laughter - the ironical is everywhere.
- Preserve your children's in-born curiosity and playfulness.

Under the best of circumstances parenting is difficult. Each generation comes to the challenge of parenting having been mostly informed by their own experience of having been parented. Regardless of our personal history,

**PARENTS LEAD THE WAY!**