

What do we know about parents? Parents give guidance. Parents set the rules. Parents observe the child and notice their strengths and weaknesses. Parents build the environment that children live in. Parents are responsible for their children. Parents see that the homework needs completed, the child needs to be clean and they are safe or not. But when should the child be aware of this and how is it effectively communicated?

Are our obsessive thoughts and watchful eyes enough to keep our children alive and well or is there more? How do we help them to develop what they need to acquire these skills themselves?

My daughter has 2 when I began training as a modern psychoanalyst and her naturally verbal temperament has been a terrific match for modern psychoanalytic parenting. She's been cooperative with the method, if I want to know how to parent her, all I ever had to do is ask. If I say the wrong thing, she lets me know about it.

She and I spent the day together recently and she repeatedly delighted in the moments when I was wrong. She waited for these moments, always comparing if I really knew something or did she know what I didn't. How annoying this was to me! I spent the whole day's commitment away from the rest of the family to be with her and this was my reward. I wasn't getting it so she studied me even closer and increased her acknowledgements of my misconceptions. After some time, I decided that I should join her. So the next time it happened, I noticed how delightful it is to know anything that I was unaware of. I asked if it was possible for two people to know something and she hardily answered "no" Clearly not what she needed from me. So, we kept on this way, her gleeful noticing of when I thought differently than she and then delighting in her

enjoyment of our being together. “Mommy, you always know things and I like it when I know something sometimes” The best moments of the day for her!

I had to give up my idea that I knew best and become a failure to help her develop her own capacities that day. Certainly I didn’t know best about anything. It’s only through consulting the child that I find out when it is useful for the parent to “know” and comfort with constant failure. Consulting allows the child to be able to say what is needed. And my oldest, very verbal child now certainly tells me. She: “Stop agreeing with me (too much joining)” Me: Should we be disagreeing now? She: Yes! She: You don’t tell me what you are thinking! Just give me an answer about it. What should I do? Tell me! If I have trouble communicating, she helps me: Just tell me what it was like for you in fourth grade.

And so it goes. I used to think that I couldn’t be a mother. I would not be as knowledgeable or devoted as my own mother. I didn’t feel like I knew anything about how to go about parenting. What a relief it is to see that I don’t have to know so much.

This same resistance was at play in treating patients. Before I didn’t think that I could treat people because I didn’t know a way for myself. I couldn’t pretend to know the methods that I had been introduced to in a way that seemed helpful to others. I didn’t really know the definitive meaning of their drawings and talk. I wasn’t certain that I knew what thoughts they should have, what they should be doing in their lives or how many times a week they therapeutically might be involved in any one activity. So, instead of treating patients, I taught and supervised people to practice in their chosen model. It wasn’t until I adopted a modern psychoanalytic stance that I wanted to be with my own patients and help them become themselves.

I still grow tired sometimes of consulting and living in the perspective of others. I come to have enough of the work of mothering and treating. And underneath it all, when I am with just myself in my own narcissism, in the end I can know that I really know best.