
A P R A C T I C A L P A R E N T I N G G U I D E

Why My Adult Children Still Call Me First

*The Relationship Principles That Helped Me Raise
Three Children Who Still Trust, Confide In, and Turn
To Me As Adults*

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THE CONNECTION BEFORE CORRECTION FRAMEWORK



*“Parenting is not perfection.
Parenting is repair.”*

— a lesson learned the hard way, and repaired anyway

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INTRODUCTION

The Childhood I Refused to Repeat

People often ask me what I did differently with my children. They see that my children are now grown and living their own lives, and that despite the challenges every family faces, our relationship has remained strong. My sons still call me when something is bothering them. My daughter still tells me what is going on in her life. When they are happy, they share it with me. When they are struggling, they share that too.

One day, I began to ask myself a question: why? What made them trust me enough to keep coming back? The answer did not begin when I became a parent. It began many years before that, with the childhood I never wanted for myself.

When I was eight years old, my parents divorced. Like many children whose parents separate, I was confused and heartbroken. I missed my mother terribly. I missed my sisters. I was still trying to understand what had happened when my father took me to a boarding school and left me there.

At that age, I was not prepared for what was happening. I was grieving, lonely, and afraid. But in those days, people did not talk about mental health the way they do today. No one spoke about childhood trauma or depression, at least not where I grew up. People simply expected children to adjust. I didn't. I cried often. I was always sick. I struggled in school, and as I got older, things became worse. I lost confidence in myself, became anxious, and eventually had to repeat a class in secondary school.

Looking back now, I can see that I was carrying emotional wounds that nobody knew how to help me heal. But even in the middle of that pain, something happened that changed the direction of my life.

As a teenager, I loved reading. Like many girls my age, I started with romance novels. Then one day, I stumbled across a book called *Think and Grow Rich* by Napoleon Hill. That book opened a door for me. For the first time, I began to see that the way we think affects the way we live. I became fascinated with books about personal growth, success, relationships, and human behaviour. I could not afford to buy many books, so I worked out an arrangement with a local bookseller: I would pay a small amount, borrow a book, read it, return it, and borrow another. Over the years, I read hundreds of books. Those books became my mentors. They helped me understand myself and challenge beliefs that were holding me back.

Most importantly, they helped me make a decision. I decided that if I ever became a parent, I would do everything in my power not to repeat the painful parts of my childhood. I was not looking for perfection. I knew I would make mistakes and get things wrong sometimes. But I wanted my children to grow up knowing something I had desperately needed to know when I was young:

“You are loved. You matter. You can come to me with anything.”

Years later, when I became a mother, that decision guided almost everything I did — how I disciplined my children, how I listened to them, how I spoke to them, how I corrected them,

how I handled their failures, and how I responded when they made mistakes.

Did I get everything right? Absolutely not. In fact, one of the chapters in this book is about a mistake I made that affected my oldest son more than I realized at the time. Parenting is not about being perfect. Parenting is about learning, adjusting, repairing, and growing alongside your children.

Today, my children are adults. They have their own strengths, their own struggles, their own journeys. Like every human being, they are still learning and growing. But one thing fills my heart with gratitude: they still call me. Not because they have to, but because they want to. They call when they are excited. They call when they are confused. They call when life hurts. They call when they need someone to listen. And every time the phone rings, I am reminded that the greatest achievement of my parenting journey is not that I raised perfect children. It is that I built relationships strong enough to survive childhood, adolescence, and adulthood.

This book is not a collection of expert theories. It is a collection of lessons learned through mistakes, through experience, and through raising three children while trying to break unhealthy cycles from the past. My hope is that somewhere in these pages, you will find an idea, a perspective, or a lesson that helps you build a stronger relationship with the children you love. Because one day, they will grow up. And when that day comes, I hope they still call you too.

COMING NEXT

*Chapter 1: Be the Safe Place — why children tell the truth when they
know they will be heard.*

THE FAMILY



My children and me.



With my first son.



With my second son.



With my daughter.

CHAPTER ONE

Be the Safe Place

One of the greatest compliments I have ever received as a mother is not that my children are successful, or that they did well in school, or even that they are responsible adults. The greatest compliment is that when something goes wrong in their lives, they still call me. Not because they have to. Because they want to.

Over the years, I have come to realize that children do not automatically confide in their parents. Many parents assume they will. But children only share their struggles when they feel safe. If they think they will be judged, they hide. If they think they will be mocked, they hide. If they think they will be compared to others, they hide. If they think every mistake will become a lecture, they hide.

Children may obey parents they fear. But they confide in parents they trust. That trust does not happen overnight — it is built little by little over many years. Every conversation matters. Every reaction matters. Every time your child comes to you with a problem, they are silently asking, “Is it safe to tell you the truth?” How you respond determines whether they will come back the next time.

The Relationship Problem My Son Could Have Hidden

One day, one of my sons called me from abroad. At the time, he was a teenager studying overseas. Like many young people his age, he had started dating. I knew about the relationship from

the beginning — he was the one who told me. I remember he asked me not to tell his father, because he was worried about how his father would react.

Years later, the relationship began to fall apart. One day, I called him as I usually did. Something felt different. A mother often knows when something is wrong. I asked him if everything was okay. He said he was fine. But I could tell he wasn't. I didn't push. I simply continued talking. Before the call ended, he finally opened up. The relationship had ended. He was hurting, and he needed someone to talk to.

What struck me later was not the breakup itself — heartbreak is part of life. What struck me was that he chose to tell me. He could have hidden it. He could have kept it to himself. But he didn't, because he knew I would listen before judging. He knew I would not mock his feelings, or dismiss his pain simply because he was young.

Sometimes children don't need solutions immediately. Sometimes they simply need someone who is willing to sit with them in their pain. That day, I listened. I encouraged him. And little by little, he healed and moved on. Years later, he still talks to me about important things happening in his life — not because I have all the answers, but because he knows he will be heard.

The Day My Daughter Needed Me

My daughter taught me another lesson about being a safe place. When she was in Primary 5, she moved from a traditional Nigerian school to a British-run school. The cultures were very different. In her former school, children were expected to be

quiet when adults spoke; if a teacher corrected you, you listened, you did not explain yourself, and you certainly did not look an adult directly in the eye while being corrected — that could easily be interpreted as disrespect.

In her new school, things worked differently. One day, she began having problems with her French teacher. The teacher felt she was rude — when the teacher spoke to her, she looked down; when she was corrected, she remained silent. The teacher interpreted this as disrespect.

My daughter came home and told me everything. Not once. Not twice. Several times. The important thing is not that she had a problem. The important thing is that she felt comfortable telling me about it.

When Open Day came, I met the teacher. She explained all the concerns she had about my daughter. Then I explained something she had not considered: my daughter wasn't trying to be rude, she was simply carrying habits she had learned in a different school environment. The teacher immediately understood. She became more patient. My daughter adjusted. And the problem eventually disappeared.

That experience reminded me of something important: when children know they can talk to us, we are able to help them navigate situations before they become bigger problems.

Safe Does Not Mean Soft

Some parents worry that if they become a safe place for their children, they will lose authority. I disagree. Being a safe place does not mean allowing bad behaviour. It does not mean removing consequences. It does not mean agreeing with

everything your child says. It simply means creating an environment where the truth is welcome.

There were times my children faced consequences. There were times I disagreed with them. There were times I corrected them. But they knew something important: we could always talk about it. A consequence is easier to accept when a child knows they are still loved. Correction is easier to receive when a child knows they are still respected. Children do not need perfect parents. They need parents who are approachable, who listen, who try to understand before reacting.

What Being a Safe Place Looks Like

Being a safe place does not require special parenting skills. Often, it looks like simple things: listening without interrupting; staying calm when your child admits a mistake; asking questions before making conclusions; avoiding public embarrassment; letting your child explain their side; separating the mistake from the child.

A child who makes a mistake is not a bad child. A child who fails an exam is not a failure. A child who makes a poor decision is not a bad person. Children need to know that while their behaviour may need correction, their value remains unchanged.

A Lesson I Learned From My Own Childhood

Looking back, I think one reason I became intentional about this is because of my own childhood. As a child, I often felt alone with my struggles. There were many things I didn't know how to express, many emotions I didn't understand, many fears I carried by myself. I never wanted my children to feel that same loneliness. I wanted them to know there was always one person

they could come to — even if I couldn't solve the problem, even if I didn't have all the answers, even if I disagreed with them. I wanted them to know they were not alone.

And perhaps that is why, years later, my phone still rings. Not because I am a perfect mother. But because I tried to be a safe place.

REFLECT

- If my child made a serious mistake today, would I be the first person they called — or the last?
- What does my child experience in the first ten seconds after admitting a mistake to me?
- Is there a topic my child currently avoids bringing to me?

Your answer may reveal more about your relationship than any report card ever could.

TRY THIS THIS WEEK

1. Notice Your First Reaction

The next time your child tells you something difficult, pay attention to your very first response — before you say anything. Is it curiosity, or is it judgment? Awareness of that first instinct is the first step to changing it.

2. Say It Out Loud

Tell your child directly, in your own words: “You can always tell me the truth, even when it’s hard. I would rather know than be kept in the dark.” Children rarely assume this. They need to hear it stated plainly.

PARENT REMINDER

“Children may forget your rules, but they will remember whether you were safe to talk to.”

COMING NEXT

Chapter 2: Connection Before Correction — why children listen better when they feel understood first.

CHAPTER TWO

Connection Before Correction

One of the biggest lessons I learned as a parent is this: children listen better when they feel understood. Many parents focus on correction first — I understand why. When a child talks back, lies, breaks a rule, or makes a bad decision, our natural reaction is to fix the behaviour immediately. We want to correct the mistake, teach the lesson, prevent it from happening again.

But over the years, I discovered that correction works best when connection comes first. A child who feels understood is far more likely to listen. A child who feels attacked is far more likely to defend themselves. That simple truth changed many of my interactions with my children.

Every Child Wants To Be Heard

One thing I noticed when my children were growing up was that they often wanted the same thing adults want: someone to listen, not interrupt, not assume, not jump to conclusions. Just listen. Many times, when my children came to me with a problem, they did not need me to immediately solve it. They needed me to understand it.

As adults, we often appreciate people who listen to us before offering advice. Children are no different. The difference is that many children are rarely given that opportunity. Too often, they are told what to think before they have been allowed to explain what they are thinking.

Why Children Stop Talking

Parents often wonder why children become secretive, why they stop sharing, why they hide things. In my experience, children rarely stop talking suddenly. It usually happens little by little. A child comes with a problem. The parent overreacts. The child feels judged. The next time, the child shares less. Then less. Then eventually, nothing at all. The child learns: it is safer to keep this to myself.

That is a dangerous lesson, because children do not stop having problems. They simply stop bringing them to you. I wanted the opposite for my children. I wanted them to know that no matter what happened, they could talk to me first — not because I would always agree, not because there would never be consequences, but because I would listen.

Listening Does Not Mean Agreeing

This is important. Many parents think listening means giving up authority. It doesn't. I listened to my children, but there were many times I disagreed with them, said no, and enforced consequences. Listening simply meant I wanted to understand before making a decision.

One of my sons once said something to me that stayed with me:

“Even when you don't agree with me, you will listen to me and we explain things to each other.”

— My second son

That statement meant a lot to me, because it told me he felt respected. Not controlled. Not dismissed. Respected. Children who feel respected are usually more willing to respect others.

The Goal Is Understanding

When a child makes a mistake, many parents ask, “Who is to blame?” I often found it more useful to ask, “What happened?” The first question looks for a culprit. The second looks for understanding. Understanding does not remove responsibility, but it often reveals information that helps us respond wisely. Sometimes the issue is immaturity. Sometimes it is fear. Sometimes it is misunderstanding. Sometimes it is poor judgment. The more information we have, the better we can guide our children.

What Connection Looked Like In My Home

Connection was not something complicated. It happened in ordinary moments — during school runs, while helping with homework, while washing dishes together, during games, songs, and family conversations, when I gave each child individual time, when I listened more than I spoke.

Many parents think connection is built during big events. I have found that connection is usually built during small moments repeated consistently over time. A conversation today. A listening ear tomorrow. A shared laugh next week. Year after year, those moments become trust. And trust becomes influence.

Children Accept Correction Better From Someone They Feel Connected To

Think about your own life. Who are you more likely to listen to — someone who criticizes you constantly, or someone who clearly cares about you? The answer is obvious. Children are no

different. When children feel loved, heard, and respected, correction feels different. They may not enjoy it, they may not agree with it immediately, but they are more likely to receive it. Connection does not eliminate discipline. It strengthens it.

A Lesson I Wish More Parents Knew

Many parents spend years trying to get their children to listen. But listening starts long before the correction. It starts with the relationship. Children who feel connected to their parents are more likely to share their struggles, ask for advice, accept guidance, tell the truth, and come back when life gets difficult. That is why connection matters — not because it makes parenting easier, but because it makes influence possible. And influence will always take you further than control.

REFLECT

- When your child comes to you with a problem, what do they experience first — a lecture, a judgment, or a listening ear?

Sometimes the quickest way to change a child's behaviour is not to speak more. It is to listen better.

TRY THIS THIS WEEK

1. Practice the “Tell Me More” Rule

The next time your child tells you about a problem, resist the urge to immediately correct, advise, or lecture. Instead say: “Tell me more about what happened.” Then listen. You may be surprised by what you learn.

2. Give Your Child Ten Minutes of Undivided Attention

This week, spend ten minutes with your child without your phone, television, or distractions. Let them choose the topic. Ask questions. Listen more than you talk. Connection is often built in small moments, not big speeches.

PARENT REMINDER

“Children who feel heard today are more likely to talk to you tomorrow.”

COMING NEXT

Chapter 3: Discipline for Character, Not Control — why I believed discipline should prepare children for adulthood, and how simple responsibilities at home helped teach lessons that lasted long after childhood.

Discipline for Character, Not Control

When people hear the word discipline, many immediately think of punishment. I used to think differently. For me, discipline was never about controlling my children. It was about preparing them for adulthood. I wasn't raising children. I was raising future adults. One day they would leave my house, have jobs, have relationships, and make decisions without me standing beside them. My job was to prepare them for that day.

That meant teaching responsibility. It meant teaching self-control. It meant teaching them to do what was right even when nobody was watching. The goal was never, "How do I make my child obey me today?" The goal was, "How do I help this child become a responsible adult tomorrow?" That small shift changed how I approached discipline.

The Chore Chart Was Never About Chores

One thing I strongly believed in was shared housework. From a young age, my children had responsibilities around the house — age-appropriate, of course. I wasn't trying to turn children into servants. I was trying to teach life skills. As they grew older, they learned to tidy up after themselves, helped with simple household tasks, and learned that a home works best when everyone contributes.

I remember hearing some parents say, "Leave them alone, they are just children." I understood the sentiment. But I also knew

something important: one day, those children would become adults, living on their own, with nobody there to pick up after them. I wanted my children to learn early that responsibility is part of life. The chores were never really about chores. They were about discipline, consistency, responsibility, and contribution — and those lessons stayed with them long after childhood.

The Day My Son Questioned Our Family Rules

When my oldest son was about thirteen years old, he came home from school one day and asked me a question. It wasn't an angry question — it was the kind of question many children ask when they begin noticing how other families do things. He said, “Mummy, why do you make us do house chores? We are the only ones among my friends who do house chores.” I smiled and asked him, “So who does the chores in your friends' homes?” He replied, “Either their mothers or the house help.” I remember saying to him, “You know I've always told you that every family has its own values. In this family, one of our values is that everybody contributes. Not just the mother.” The conversation ended there. At least for a while.

A few years later, when he was around fifteen or sixteen, the real rebellion began. One of the rules in our home was that whenever the children were home during school holidays, they spent time in the kitchen with me while I cooked. The goal was never to make them my assistants. I was trying to teach them two things. First, empathy — I wanted them to understand that when someone is working, especially for the benefit of the family, it is good to help where you can. I did not want to raise children who sat comfortably while someone else struggled. Second, I wanted

them to learn practical life skills. Cooking is not a female skill. It is a life skill. Every adult should know how to feed themselves.

But by this time, my son had become a teenager, and like many teenagers, he had his own opinions. I suspect he felt that because he was now older — and because he was a boy — perhaps kitchen duties should no longer apply to him. Whenever I called him into the kitchen, he would come reluctantly. Sometimes he refused to help altogether. Sometimes he stood there without touching anything.

But I didn't fight him. I didn't argue. I didn't turn it into a daily battle. I simply insisted that he stay. If he wasn't going to help, he was at least going to watch. He would see what I was cooking, how I prepared it, hear the conversations, absorb the process.

At the time, I don't think he appreciated what I was doing. In fact, I am quite sure he thought I was being unreasonable. But years later, I saw the results. When my children went abroad for their studies, they already knew how to cook — not just basic meals, but many of the foods they grew up eating. They knew how to clean. They knew how to live with other people. They knew how to contribute to a household. Most importantly, they did not expect someone else to take care of them.

Looking back now, I realize those kitchen lessons taught much more than cooking. They taught responsibility, self-sufficiency, humility, and consideration for others. And those values carried over into other areas of life. That is the thing about discipline: sometimes children only see the inconvenience. Parents see the preparation.

Rules Need Reasons

Another thing I learned was that children respond better when they understand the purpose behind a rule. In my home, I tried not to create too many rules — I wanted my children to know what truly mattered. Every rule had a reason. Every consequence had a purpose. Whenever possible, I explained why a rule existed. Not because I needed their permission, but because I wanted them to understand the value behind it.

Children are more likely to respect a rule when they understand its purpose. Many parents say, “Because I said so.” Sometimes that may be necessary. But I found that explanation often creates understanding, and understanding creates cooperation.

Consequences Matter

Of course, explanation alone is not enough. Children also need consistency. One of the quickest ways to confuse children is to create consequences that are never enforced. If I told my children there would be a consequence for a particular behaviour, I followed through — not because I was angry, not because I wanted revenge, but because consistency builds trust.

If rules change depending on a parent's mood, children never know what to expect. But when consequences are predictable, children learn that their choices matter. Over time, they begin making better choices for themselves — not because someone is watching, but because they understand cause and effect.

Discipline Is Easier When Relationship Comes First

One advantage I had was that discipline was built on a relationship. My children knew I loved them. They knew I was available. They knew I listened. They knew I respected them.

Because of that foundation, discipline did not feel like rejection. It felt like guidance. This is one reason I believe connection and discipline should never be separated — children accept correction more easily when they know it comes from someone who genuinely cares about them.

What I Learned

Looking back, I realize that some of the most important lessons my children learned were not taught through lectures. They were taught through everyday life — through responsibilities, consequences, consistency, and being expected to contribute. Discipline is not about raising obedient children. Discipline is about raising capable adults — adults who can manage themselves, face challenges, understand responsibility, and do the right thing even when nobody is watching. That was always my goal.

REFLECT

- Are your rules helping your child become a responsible adult, or simply making life easier in the moment?
- Do your children understand the purpose behind your rules?
- Are you consistent with consequences?
- What values are you trying to build through discipline?

Remember, the goal is not perfect behaviour today. The goal is strong character tomorrow.

TRY THIS THIS WEEK

1. Review One Family Rule

Choose one rule in your home. Ask yourself: “What value is this rule teaching?” If you cannot identify the value, it may be worth reconsidering the rule. Then explain the purpose of the rule to your child — you may be surprised by how differently they respond.

2. Give a Responsibility, Not Just a Task

Assign your child one responsibility this week that contributes to the family, then explain why it matters. For example: “We all live in this home, so we all help take care of it.” Focus on the lesson behind the task, not just the completion of the task.

PARENT REMINDER

“Discipline is not about controlling your child. It is about teaching your child how to control themselves.”

COMING NEXT

Chapter 4: Teaching Children to Face Difficult Things — why protecting children from every struggle can sometimes weaken them, and how one painful school failure taught my son a lesson that stayed with him for life.

CHAPTER FOUR

Teaching Children to Face Difficult Things

If there is one lesson life has taught me, it is this: you cannot protect your children from every disappointment. No matter how much you love them, no matter how hard you try, no matter how carefully you raise them, life will eventually bring challenges their way. They will fail sometimes. They will be rejected sometimes. They will lose friendships. They will make mistakes. They will experience heartbreak. They will face situations that feel unfair.

As parents, our instinct is often to remove the pain. We want to fix it, rescue them, make the problem disappear. I understand that feeling because I have felt it many times myself. But over the years, I learned something important: sometimes the greatest gift we can give our children is not rescue. It is resilience. Because if we solve every problem for them, they never learn that they can survive difficult things. And one day, when life hits them and we are not there, they will need that strength.

The Day My Son Wanted to Leave

One of the hardest parenting decisions I ever made involved one of my sons. He had failed his promotional exams in secondary school and was required to repeat the class. He was devastated — embarrassed, ashamed, disappointed — and he desperately wanted a fresh start. So he came to me with a request: he wanted me to transfer him to another school. From his

perspective, it made perfect sense. A new school meant nobody would know he had repeated, nobody would ask questions, nobody would remind him of what had happened. He would be able to leave the embarrassment behind.

As a mother, part of me wanted to say yes. I could see how hurt he was. I could see how badly he wanted an escape. But deep down, I felt that saying yes would teach the wrong lesson. So I said no — not because I lacked compassion, not because I wanted to punish him, but because I believed he needed to learn something bigger than academics. He needed to learn that difficult situations can be faced.

I explained my reasoning to him. I told him that running away might feel easier now, but it would not help him develop the confidence that comes from overcoming a challenge. I remember telling him, “You may not like me for this today, but one day you will understand.” And for a while, I am sure he didn’t understand. But he stayed. He worked harder. He learned from his mistakes. And eventually he excelled.

Looking back now, I am convinced that repeating that class was not the worst thing that happened to him. Running away from it would have been worse. Because sometimes the challenge itself is the lesson.

Failure Is Not The Enemy

Many parents are terrified when their children fail. I understand why — we want our children to succeed, to do well, to be happy. But failure itself is not the enemy. Giving up is. Refusing to learn is. Believing that one mistake defines you is.

Some of the strongest people I know have failed at something. The difference is that they got back up. One thing I tried to teach my children was that failure is information. Failure tells us that something needs to change — maybe a different strategy, more effort, more patience. But failure does not mean we are worthless, and it certainly does not mean the story is over.

When Life Breaks Their Hearts

As my children grew older, the challenges changed. The scraped knees and playground problems gave way to bigger issues — relationships, friendships, disappointments, heartbreak. I remember when one of my sons went through a painful breakup while studying abroad. Like many young people in love, he had invested his heart into the relationship. When it ended, he was deeply hurt.

As a mother, I wished I could remove the pain. But I couldn't. No parent can. What I could do was listen, encourage, and remind him that heartbreak is painful but survivable, and that one difficult season does not determine the rest of his life. And eventually, as happens with most wounds, time helped him heal. That experience reminded me that resilience is not only built through academic challenges. It is built through emotional challenges too. Each time our children survive something difficult, they gain evidence that they are stronger than they thought.

Why I Praise Effort More Than Results

One practice that helped me was praising effort more than outcomes. Of course I celebrated success, but I paid close attention to effort, because effort is something children can

control. Results are not always fully within their control. A child can study hard and still struggle. A child can do their best and still lose. A child can make all the right choices and still experience disappointment.

If we only praise outcomes, children begin to fear failure. But when we praise effort, perseverance, and growth, children learn that their value is not tied to winning. They learn that trying matters, that growth matters, that setbacks are part of learning.

What I Learned

Looking back, I realize that many of the most important lessons my children learned came through difficult experiences — not because I wanted them to suffer, but because life itself is a teacher. Our role as parents is not to remove every obstacle. Our role is to help our children develop the confidence to face obstacles — to remind them that failure is not final, that mistakes can be corrected, that setbacks can become stepping stones, and that difficult seasons do not last forever.

REFLECT

- Do you tend to rescue your child too quickly?
- Are there challenges your child may need to work through rather than avoid?
- How do you respond when your child fails?
- Do your words make failure feel permanent or temporary?

Sometimes what a child needs most is not an easier path. Sometimes they need the confidence to walk the difficult path.

TRY THIS THIS WEEK

1. Share One Failure Story

Tell your child about a time you failed at something — school, work, business, friendship, anything — then tell them what you learned from the experience. This helps children understand that failure is part of life, not the end of life.

2. Praise Effort This Week

Instead of focusing on results, look for effort. Say things like: “I noticed how hard you worked on that,” or “I am proud that you didn't give up,” or “I like the way you kept trying.” These kinds of comments build resilience more than constant praise for success.

PARENT REMINDER

“Your job is not to make life easy for your child. Your job is to help your child become strong enough to face life.”

COMING NEXT

Chapter 5: Respect Goes Both Ways — why I never believed children should earn respect before receiving it, and how treating my children with dignity helped strengthen our relationship for life.

CHAPTER FIVE

Respect Goes Both Ways

Growing up, many of us were taught that respect only flows in one direction. Adults give instructions, children obey. Adults speak, children listen. Adults are respected; children earn respect. That was the common thinking. But as I became a parent, I began to question some of the things I had been taught. One question kept coming back to me: how can I expect my children to learn respect if they are never shown respect themselves?

Please don't misunderstand me — I am not saying children and adults have the same responsibilities. They don't. Parents still lead, still make decisions, still provide guidance and discipline. But I came to believe that children are human beings deserving of dignity simply because they are human beings. Not because they have earned it. Not because they are perfect. Not because they always obey. But because they matter. That belief shaped the way I spoke to my children, corrected them, and related with them throughout their childhood.

Respect Starts With How We Speak

One thing I tried very hard to do was speak respectfully to my children. Of course, there were days when I was tired, frustrated, and didn't get it perfectly right. But as a general rule, I tried to speak to them the way I would want someone to speak to me. I never believed that shouting automatically made a message stronger. In fact, I often found the opposite — the louder the parent becomes, the less the child hears. Children

may hear the volume, but they miss the lesson. I wanted my children to focus on the message, not the emotion. So whenever possible, I corrected calmly, firmly when necessary, but respectfully.

Every Story Has Two Sides

Another way I tried to show respect was by listening to my children's side of the story. Notice I didn't say I always agreed with them — many times, I didn't. But I wanted them to know that their voice mattered. If there was a disagreement, a complaint, a misunderstanding, I listened. Not because they were always right, but because they deserved to be heard. I wanted my children to learn that respectful people listen before making conclusions. And children learn that lesson best when they experience it.

The Power Of A Parent's Apology

One thing that surprises people when I tell them is that I apologised to my children when I was wrong. Some people believe apologising weakens authority. I found that it strengthened trust. Children know when we make mistakes — they may not always say it, but they know. When parents refuse to admit mistakes, children learn that power matters more than truth. But when parents apologise, children learn something powerful: being wrong is not shameful. Refusing to admit it is.

There were times when I misunderstood a situation, reacted too quickly, or hurt a child's feelings without intending to. When that happened, I apologised — not because I stopped being the parent, but because I was modelling the same accountability I expected from them.

Never Correct A Child For An Audience

One parenting rule I felt strongly about was this: never embarrass your child in front of other people if it can be avoided. I saw this happen often — a child makes a mistake, and the correction becomes a public performance. Everyone hears, everyone watches, everyone knows. The child may obey in that moment, but inside, something else is happening: shame is growing, resentment is growing, embarrassment is growing.

I chose a different approach. If one of my children needed serious correction, I would often call them aside, into another room, away from the audience. Then we would talk. The correction still happened. The consequence still happened. But their dignity remained intact. I wanted my children to know that my goal was to correct them, not humiliate them. There is a difference.

Respect Creates Trust

Looking back now, I believe many of the conversations I have with my adult children today were built during those younger years. Trust is built in small moments. A child notices when you listen. A child notices when you apologise. A child notices when you protect their dignity. A child notices when you speak respectfully even while correcting them. These moments may seem small at the time, but they accumulate, year after year, until one day that child becomes an adult who still feels safe talking to you.

Respect Does Not Mean Lack Of Discipline

I think this is where some parents get confused. They hear words like respect, listening, and understanding, and assume

discipline disappears. Not at all. My children still had rules. They still had consequences. They still had boundaries. Respect did not replace discipline. It strengthened it, because discipline works best when it exists inside a healthy relationship. Children are far more willing to accept correction from someone who consistently treats them with dignity.

What I Learned

One of the greatest parenting lessons I learned is that respect is not something we demand. It is something we model. If we want respectful children, we must show them what respect looks like — not only when they are behaving well, but especially when they are not. Children are always watching. They learn far more from what we do than from what we say. And perhaps one reason my children still come to me today is because they always knew one thing: even when I disagreed with them, even when I corrected them, even when there were consequences, they would still be treated with respect.

REFLECT

- Do your children feel safe expressing a different opinion from yours?
- When your child makes a mistake, do you correct or humiliate?
- How often do you listen before responding?
- Have you ever apologised to your child?

Sometimes the strongest authority comes from humility.

TRY THIS THIS WEEK

1. Listen Without Interrupting

The next time your child is telling you about a problem or disagreement, allow them to finish completely before responding. Do not interrupt. Do not correct. Just listen. You may learn something you would have otherwise missed.

2. Admit One Mistake

If there is something you handled poorly recently, consider apologising. Keep it simple: “I was too harsh yesterday. I’m sorry.” You are not losing authority. You are teaching accountability.

PARENT REMINDER

“Children learn respect best from parents who practice it.”

COMING NEXT

Chapter 6: The Parenting Beliefs I Refused to Pass On — the traditional parenting ideas I chose to challenge, and why breaking some family patterns may be one of the greatest gifts we can give our children.

CHAPTER SIX

The Parenting Beliefs I Refused To Pass On

One of the most important decisions I made as a parent had nothing to do with school, discipline, or house chores. It had everything to do with a simple question I began asking myself: “Just because something was done to me, does that mean I should do it to my children?”

For many years, I carried pain from my childhood. Not because my parents were evil people — they were simply people doing the best they knew how to do. Like many parents, they were raising children based on what had been passed down to them. The problem is that not everything passed down should be preserved. Some things should stop with us. Some things should be questioned. Some things should be replaced with something better.

As I raised my own children, I found myself rejecting certain parenting beliefs that were common around me. Not because I wanted to be different. Because I wanted to be intentional.

“Children Should Be Seen And Not Heard”

This is probably one of the most common parenting beliefs I grew up hearing. The idea was simple: children should stay quiet, adults should do the talking, children should obey, adults should decide. Questions were often interpreted as disrespect. Opinions were often interpreted as defiance.

But I noticed something: children who are never allowed to express themselves often become adults who struggle to express themselves. I wanted something different for my children. I wanted them to learn how to think, how to communicate, how to ask questions respectfully, how to express disagreement respectfully. That meant giving them a voice — not equal authority, a voice. There is a difference. Children do not need to make every family decision. But they should feel that their thoughts matter, because one day they will become adults who must make decisions for themselves.

The Family Prayer Meetings

I remember a period when my husband and I were struggling financially. It was a difficult season — school fees were a challenge, money was tight. Many parents would have hidden everything from the children. I chose a different approach. Age-appropriate, of course. I explained what was happening, and then I invited them to join us in praying.

Something beautiful happened. Instead of feeling shut out, they felt included. Instead of feeling confused, they understood. Instead of feeling powerless, they felt part of the family. Even today, my children still ask about family matters, even though they are adults and live far away. I believe that started because they always felt included. Not burdened. Included.

Public Humiliation Is Not Discipline

Another belief I rejected was public humiliation. I never saw the value in embarrassing a child. Correction, yes. Consequences, absolutely. Humiliation, no. I have watched parents insult children in front of relatives, compare them publicly, mock them

publicly, shout at them publicly — and then wonder why the relationship becomes distant later.

A child may forget the mistake. But they rarely forget the shame. I wanted my children to know that even when they were wrong, their dignity mattered. That is why I usually corrected them privately whenever possible. The lesson could still be taught, without damaging the relationship.

Comparison Is A Dangerous Teacher

One thing I never wanted to do was compare my children to each other, or to other children. Comparison may motivate some children temporarily, but it often creates resentment, jealousy, insecurity, competition. Every child is different — different strengths, different personalities, different struggles, different timing. The goal is not to turn one child into another child. The goal is to help each child become the best version of themselves. I wanted my children competing with their own potential, not with each other.

Fear Is Not Respect

Many parents were raised to believe that a child should fear adults. I was not interested in that. I wanted my children to respect adults. But respect and fear are not the same thing. Fear says, “Don't get caught.” Respect says, “Do the right thing.” Fear creates distance. Respect creates trust. Fear may produce obedience in the short term. Respect produces influence in the long term. I did not want my children to fear me. I wanted them to trust me. And trust has lasted much longer than fear ever could.

You Can Be A Parent And A Friend

This is another belief I hear often — people say, “Don’t be your child’s friend.” I understand what they mean: parents should not abandon their responsibility to lead. I agree with that. But I disagree with the idea that friendship and parenting cannot exist together. My children know I am their mother. That has never changed. There were rules, consequences, boundaries. But there was also friendship, laughter, conversations, trust, connection. In fact, I believe much of our friendship today exists because I was their parent first. The boundaries created safety. The relationship created closeness. The two can coexist beautifully.

What I Learned

As parents, we often inherit beliefs without questioning them. We repeat phrases because they were repeated to us. We continue practices because they are familiar. But good parenting requires reflection. It requires courage. It requires asking, “Is this helping my child become the kind of adult I hope they will become?” Sometimes the answer is yes. Sometimes the answer is no. And when the answer is no, we have permission to choose a different path. That is what I tried to do. Not perfectly. But intentionally. And I believe my children are better for it.

REFLECT

- What parenting beliefs did you inherit from your parents?
- Which ones have helped you?
- Which ones may be hurting your relationship with your children?
- Are there any patterns you want to stop passing on?

Sometimes healing our parenting starts with examining what we inherited.

TRY THIS THIS WEEK

1. Identify One Parenting Belief

Write down one parenting belief you grew up with — for example, “Children should be seen and not heard,” or “A child must fear adults.” Then ask yourself: “Do I still believe this? Why or why not?”

2. Invite Your Child's Opinion

This week, ask your child for their opinion about a family matter that affects them — a family outing, a weekend plan, a household rule. You do not have to do what they suggest. The goal is simply to show them that their voice matters.

PARENT REMINDER

“Not every family pattern deserves to become a family tradition.”

COMING NEXT

Chapter 7: When I Got It Wrong — the painful mistake I made with my oldest son after the birth of my premature baby, and what it taught me about repairing relationships when we fail as parents.

CHAPTER SEVEN

When I Got It Wrong

If you have read this far, you may be thinking: this sounds wonderful, but surely you didn't get everything right. You would be absolutely correct. I didn't. No parent does. In fact, one of the most important lessons I learned about parenting came from a mistake I made — a painful mistake, one that affected my oldest son, and for a long time, I didn't even realize what was happening.

Looking back now, I share this story because I want parents to understand something important: good parents make mistakes too. The goal is not perfection. The goal is awareness, humility, and repair.

The Baby We Almost Lost

When my second son was born, he arrived prematurely. It was a frightening experience. At the time, we didn't know if he would survive. He was tiny, fragile, and needed far more attention than most newborns. As a mother, I went into survival mode. My days became consumed with feeding him, monitoring him, worrying about him, and caring for him. I was exhausted — physically, emotionally, mentally. Everything revolved around keeping this little baby alive and healthy.

What I didn't fully realize at the time was that while I was focusing all my attention on one child, another child was quietly hurting.

The Child I Didn't Notice

My first son was still very young. He had been used to having me to himself. Suddenly, everything changed. The baby needed me. The baby got the attention. The baby got the time. The baby got the energy I had left. I wasn't trying to neglect my first son — in my mind, I was simply dealing with a crisis. But children do not experience our intentions. They experience our actions. And from his perspective, something very important had changed: Mummy was no longer available the way she used to be. Mummy was always busy. Mummy was always tired. Mummy always seemed to be with the baby.

At the time, I didn't fully understand what he was feeling. I was too overwhelmed, too focused on the emergency in front of me.

The Unexpected Result

Eventually, I began noticing something. My oldest son seemed to dislike his younger brother. There was tension, resentment, a distance I couldn't quite understand. At first, I assumed it was normal sibling rivalry — many families experience that. But over time, I began to realize there was something deeper underneath it. This wasn't really about the baby. It was about loss. My son had lost something important — not intentionally, not maliciously, but he had lost access to the mother he was used to having. And because he was a child, he didn't have the words to explain what he was feeling. He simply expressed it through his behaviour.

What I Wish I Had Known

If I could go back in time, there are things I would do differently. I would be more intentional about creating special moments with my first son. I would reassure him more often. I would

explain more. I would make sure he knew that although the baby needed extra attention, he had not been replaced.

The truth is that when we are under pressure, it is easy to become so focused on one problem that we miss another. Parenting often requires us to divide our attention, and sometimes we do not get that balance right. I certainly didn't.

The Good News About Mistakes

For a long time, I felt guilty about this. Many parents carry guilt — we think about what we should have done, what we could have done, what we wish we had done. But guilt only helps if it leads to growth. One of the beautiful things about relationships is that they can heal. Children are remarkably resilient when they experience love consistently over time.

As my children grew older, I became more aware, more intentional, more available. The relationship strengthened. The resentment slowly faded. Today, my sons have a relationship with each other — not a perfect one, no sibling relationship is perfect, but a relationship nonetheless. And I am grateful for that.

Why Parents Need Humility

One thing I have learned is that parents who cannot admit mistakes often struggle to repair relationships. Children do not need perfect parents. They need honest parents — parents who can say, “I got that wrong.” Parents who can say, “I’m sorry.” Parents who can say, “I didn’t know then what I know now.” Humility creates room for healing. Defensiveness creates distance. When we admit mistakes, we teach our children something powerful: that mistakes are part of being human, and

that relationships can survive them.

What I Learned

If I could summarize this lesson in one sentence, it would be this:

Parenting is not perfection. Parenting is repair.

You will make mistakes. You will miss things. You will have regrets. Every parent does. The question is not whether you will make mistakes. The question is: what will you do when you realize you've made one? Will you deny it? Will you defend it? Or will you learn from it? The strongest families are not the ones without mistakes. They are the ones where mistakes can be acknowledged, discussed, and repaired. That is what I wish I had known earlier, and that is what I hope you remember when you inevitably have your own parenting regrets. Because you will. And when that day comes, remember: you do not need to be perfect to be a good parent.

REFLECT

- Is there a parenting mistake you still feel guilty about?
- Have you ever apologized to your child for something important?
- Is there a relationship with one of your children that needs repair?
- What would happen if you started that conversation today?

Remember, healing often begins with honesty.

TRY THIS THIS WEEK

1. Have a Repair Conversation

If there is an unresolved issue between you and your child, consider opening the conversation. You might say: “I’ve been thinking about something, and I realize I may not have handled it well.” You don’t need a perfect speech. You just need a genuine one.

2. Spend Individual Time With Each Child

If you have multiple children, spend some one-on-one time with each child this week. Even fifteen minutes can make a difference. Children often feel most seen when they don’t have to compete for your attention.

PARENT REMINDER

“Your children do not need a perfect parent. They need a parent who is willing to keep showing up, learning, and growing.”

COMING NEXT

Chapter 8: From Parent to Mentor – how my role changed as my children became teenagers and adults, and why letting go of control helped us stay close.

From Parent to Mentor

One of the hardest transitions in parenting is learning when to step back. When our children are young, they need a lot of direction. We teach, correct, supervise, remind. We guide almost every part of their lives. But as children grow, something changes. Or at least it should. The goal of parenting is not to raise children who depend on us forever. The goal is to raise adults who can think for themselves, make decisions, solve problems, and stand on their own feet. That means that at some point, our role has to begin changing too. We move from being mainly teachers to becoming mentors.

I did not understand this fully when my children were young. But over time, I learned that holding on too tightly can damage the very relationship you worked so hard to build.

When Control Stops Working

Something interesting happens when children become teenagers. The methods that worked when they were eight years old suddenly stop working. You cannot lecture a sixteen-year-old the same way you lecture an eight-year-old. Well, you can. But it usually doesn't end well. Teenagers are trying to figure out who they are — developing their own opinions, their own personalities, their own identities. This is normal. In fact, it is healthy.

The problem comes when parents mistake independence for rebellion. Not every disagreement is disrespect. Not every different opinion is rebellion. Sometimes your child is simply

growing up. I learned that if I wanted to keep influencing my children, I had to create more room for conversation. Less commanding. More mentoring.

The Foundation Was Already Built

One thing that helped me during the teenage years was something I did not fully appreciate at the time: the relationship had already been built. The trust had already been built. The communication had already been built. The connection had already been built. That foundation made it easier to loosen my grip, because I wasn't starting from scratch. My children already knew my values. They already knew my expectations. They already knew where I stood on important issues. So I did not feel the need to control every decision. Instead, I focused on helping them learn how to make good decisions for themselves.

Giving More Freedom Without Losing Boundaries

As my children got older, I deliberately began giving them more room. Not because I stopped caring, but because growth requires practice. A child cannot learn responsibility if they never have responsibility. A child cannot learn decision-making if someone always decides for them. A child cannot learn consequences if they never experience any.

Of course, boundaries still existed. Certain values remained non-negotiable — respect, honesty, responsibility, kindness. Those things did not change. But outside of those core values, I tried to allow more freedom, more ownership, more independence. And surprisingly, that often reduced conflict rather than increasing it.

Mother-Son Time

One thing I became intentional about during the teenage years was creating one-on-one time with each child. Life gets busy. Families get busy. But individual relationships matter. Sometimes I would spend time with one of my sons, sometimes with my daughter. These moments were not lectures. They were opportunities to connect, to talk, to listen, to laugh, to understand what was happening in their lives. Children often reveal important things during relaxed moments, not during interrogations, not during lectures, but during ordinary conversations. Those moments helped keep our relationship strong even as they became more independent.

When My Son Needed Someone To Listen

One of the clearest examples of this happened when one of my sons was studying abroad. He had started dating a young woman, and like many young people experiencing their first serious relationship, he was deeply invested. Over time, the relationship became an important part of his life. Then one day, it ended.

The breakup hit him hard. I remember calling him as I normally did. Something felt different — his voice sounded different, his energy felt different. I asked if everything was okay. At first, he said yes. But as our conversation continued, he finally opened up. He told me about the breakup, what had happened, how hurt he was.

As a mother, I wanted to fix it. But there was nothing to fix. Heartbreak is one of those things people must walk through. What he needed was not a solution. He needed someone safe — someone who would listen, who would not dismiss his feelings, who would not tell him to “just get over it.” So I listened. I

encouraged him. I reminded him that painful seasons do not last forever, and that one day he would meet the right person. Most importantly, I reminded him that he was not alone.

Looking back, I do not think he called because I had all the answers. I think he called because he knew I would listen. And that is often what mentoring looks like.

The Difference Between Parenting And Mentoring

When children are young, parents often provide answers. When children are older, mentors help them find answers. That is a very different role. Mentoring requires patience, listening, and resisting the urge to immediately solve every problem.

Sometimes when my children came to me with challenges, I would ask questions — questions that helped them think, explore options, discover their own solutions. I still gave advice when needed, but I tried not to make every decision for them. Because one day, I would not be there, and they needed confidence in their own judgment.

Why My Adult Children Still Call Me

People sometimes ask me why my adult children still call me regularly. The truth is, I do not think there is one secret. I think it is the result of many small things done consistently over many years: trust, respect, availability, listening, encouragement, love. By the time my children became adults, they did not see me as someone waiting to judge them. They saw me as someone safe — someone who would listen, who would help them think through life, who would love them whether things were going well or badly. That is what I hope every parent experiences one

day. Not adult children who call because they have to. But adult children who call because they want to.

What I Learned

As children grow, our influence comes less from authority and more from relationship. You cannot force an adult child to trust you. You cannot demand closeness. You cannot command connection. Those things are built over time — one conversation at a time, one listening moment at a time, one relationship-building moment at a time. The beautiful thing is that when those deposits are made consistently over the years, the relationship often becomes one of the greatest rewards of parenting.

REFLECT

- Do you spend more time talking or listening?
- Does your child feel safe bringing problems to you?
- Are you trying to control everything, or are you helping your child learn to think for themselves?
- What kind of relationship do you hope to have with your child when they are 25 years old?

Sometimes the best parenting decisions are made by looking far into the future.

TRY THIS THIS WEEK

1. Ask More Questions

The next time your child comes to you with a problem, resist the urge to immediately provide the answer. Instead ask: “What do you think your options are?” “What do you think would happen if you chose that?” “What feels right to you?” Help them think instead of thinking for them.

2. Create One-On-One Time

Spend at least thirty minutes alone with one child this week. No lectures. No corrections. No agenda. Just connection. You may be surprised by what they choose to share.

PARENT REMINDER

“The goal is not to raise children who need you forever. The goal is to raise adults who know they can always come back to you.”

COMING NEXT

Chapter 9: The Reason My Adult Children Still Call Me First – the simple habits that kept our relationship strong through childhood, adolescence, and adulthood, and why emotional safety may be the greatest gift you can give your child.

CHAPTER NINE

The Reason My Adult Children Still Call Me First

People often ask me: “What did you do differently?” Or they say, “Your children tell you everything.” The truth is, they don't tell me everything. No parent knows absolutely everything about their adult children. And that's okay. But they do tell me a lot. They call me when they are happy. They call me when they are confused. They call me when they have made mistakes. They call me when life hurts. They call me when they need advice. Sometimes they call simply because they want to talk.

I don't say this to boast. I say it because many parents secretly want this kind of relationship with their children — not just while they are young, but when they are grown. The question is: why do some children continue coming back while others slowly pull away? After thinking about it for many years, I believe the answer comes down to one word: safety.

Children Go Where They Feel Safe

Every human being wants a safe place — a place where they can be honest, a place where they can be imperfect, a place where they can make mistakes and still be loved. Children are no different. The reason many children stop talking is not because they suddenly become secretive. Often, they stop talking because they don't feel safe talking. Maybe they fear criticism. Maybe they fear being judged. Maybe they fear disappointment. Maybe every conversation turns into a lecture. Maybe every mistake is used against them later. So they learn something:

keep quiet, hide it, handle it alone.

I never wanted that. I wanted my children to know there was always one place where they could come exactly as they were. Not perfect. Just honest.

When My Children Made Mistakes

One thing I noticed over the years was that my children usually told me when they got into trouble. Not always immediately. But eventually. Why? Because they knew I wasn't interested in humiliating them. They knew I was interested in helping them. That doesn't mean there were no consequences. There were. But consequences and condemnation are not the same thing. Many parents confuse the two. A consequence says, "This action has a result." Condemnation says, "You are a bad person."

I worked very hard to separate behaviour from identity. A child can make a poor decision without being a poor person. And when children know this, they are much more likely to come to you when they need help.

The Time My Son Was Struggling

There was a period when one of my sons went through depression. He withdrew from people, stopped communicating much, cut himself off from others. Many parents would have taken it personally. Many would have become angry. Many would have said, "If he doesn't want to talk, leave him." I couldn't do that. Something inside me knew he needed support. So I kept calling — not to pressure him, not to lecture him, just to remind him that he wasn't alone. Some conversations were short. Some days he didn't say much. But I stayed consistent.

Years later, he told me something I will never forget:

“When I was going through a period of depression and cut everyone off, you refused to leave me alone. You kept calling me and checking on me.”

— My oldest son

When he said that, I realized something. Sometimes love looks like persistence. Sometimes the most important thing you can say is, “I’m still here.”

You Don't Have To Agree To Listen

One thing my second son once told me was:

“We can always talk things over. Even when you don't agree with me, you will listen to me and we explain things to each other.”

— My second son

I think that sentence captures something many parents miss. Listening does not mean agreeing. Listening means understanding. There were many times I disagreed with my children — many times. But disagreement never stopped the conversation. I wanted them to know they could bring me their thoughts without fear, even when I saw things differently. Because if children cannot talk to us when opinions differ, they eventually stop talking altogether.

Sometimes They Need Advice. Sometimes They Just Need You.

As parents, we often rush into solution mode. We hear a problem, and we immediately start fixing. But I learned something from my children. Sometimes they don't need advice. Sometimes they need understanding. My second son once told me:

"That's why I like talking to you. I always feel better after talking to you."

— My second son

Notice what he didn't say. He didn't say, "You always solve my problems." He said he felt better. That is emotional safety. Sometimes people don't need solutions first. They need connection first.

Why I Constantly Tell My Children I Love Them

Even now, when I speak to my children, I tell them I love them. Every single time. Some people may think that is excessive. I don't. Life is uncertain. Tomorrow is not guaranteed. I never want my children wondering whether they were loved. I want them to hear it — often, clearly, without conditions. Not because they achieved something. Not because they behaved perfectly. Not because they made me proud. Simply because they are my children. Love should not feel like a reward children earn. It should feel like a foundation they stand on.

The Greatest Gift I Gave My Children

When people ask me what the greatest thing I gave my children was, they often expect a complicated answer. It isn't. The greatest gift I gave them was my presence. I was available. I listened. I paid attention. I cared. Not perfectly. But consistently.

Looking back, I do not think my children remember every meal I cooked, every school run, every homework session, every conversation. But I believe they remember how those things made them feel. They felt loved. They felt important. They felt safe. And children never forget that.

What I Learned

The reason my adult children still call me first is not because I was a perfect mother. It is because I spent years creating a relationship where they felt safe — safe to fail, safe to disagree, safe to cry, safe to ask for help, safe to be themselves. And when children have that kind of safety at home, they usually keep coming back. Not because they have to. But because they want to.

REFLECT

- Does your child feel safe telling you bad news?
- What happens when your child makes a mistake?
- Do your children come to you because they want to, or only because they need something?
- What can you do today to make your home emotionally safer?

Remember, connection is built long before it is tested.

TRY THIS THIS WEEK

1. Respond Differently To A Mistake

The next time your child admits a mistake, pause before reacting. Instead of immediately correcting, ask: “Tell me what happened.” Listen fully before responding. You may find that understanding opens doors that anger never could.

2. Say The Words

This week, tell your child: “I love you.” Not because they achieved something. Not because they earned it. Just because it is true. Never assume they already know. Children need to hear it.

PARENT REMINDER

*“Children do not stay close because parents are perfect.
They stay close because they feel safe.”*

COMING NEXT

Chapter 10: What I Hope My Children Carry Into The World – the values I worked hardest to pass on, and the legacy I hope will remain long after the parenting years are over.

CHAPTER TEN

What I Hope My Children Carry Into The World

As parents, it is easy to become focused on the day-to-day tasks of raising children — getting them ready for school, helping with homework, correcting behaviour, managing schedules, cooking meals, paying bills, driving them around, worrying about them. Most days, parenting feels like a long list of things that need to get done. But every now and then, I would stop and ask myself a bigger question: when my children become adults, what kind of people do I want them to be? Not what career I wanted them to have. Not how much money I wanted them to make. Not what titles I wanted them to earn. But what kind of human beings I hoped they would become. Because long after school grades are forgotten and careers change, character remains. And character was always my real goal.

I Wanted Them To Know They Were Loved

If I could choose only one thing for my children, it would be this: I wanted them to know they were loved. Not loved because they performed well. Not loved because they obeyed perfectly. Not loved because they made me proud. Simply loved because they were mine.

I grew up understanding what it feels like to carry emotional wounds. I knew what it felt like to question your worth, to wonder if you mattered. I never wanted my children carrying those same questions. That is why I told them often, “I love you.” Even now, I still do. Love was never something I wanted them to

assume. I wanted them to hear it. Again and again.

I Wanted Them To Be Confident

Not arrogant. Not entitled. Confident. There is a difference. I wanted my children to believe that their voice mattered, that their opinions mattered, that they could enter a room without feeling smaller than everyone else. That they could try difficult things, recover from mistakes, stand on their own feet.

Confidence is not believing you are better than others.

Confidence is believing you are valuable too. For someone who spent years battling low self-esteem, this was especially important to me. I wanted my children to start life with something I had to spend years learning.

I Wanted Them To Be Kind

The world already has enough clever people, enough talented people, enough successful people. What it desperately needs are kind people — people who care about others, who notice when someone is struggling, who help when they can, who treat others with dignity. That is one reason I insisted on house chores. Not because I needed servants. Because I wanted my children to understand that everyone contributes. Everyone helps. Everyone matters. Kindness is not just what we say. It is what we do.

I Wanted Them To Be Honest

Honesty was one of the values I held onto tightly. Not because honesty always makes life easier — sometimes it doesn't. But honesty builds trust, and trust opens doors. I wanted my children to understand that integrity matters even when nobody is watching, that doing the right thing matters, that character

matters. The older I get, the more convinced I am that honesty is one of the greatest gifts a person can possess.

I Wanted Them To Never Give Up

If there is one lesson life has taught me, it is that difficult seasons come to everyone. Nobody escapes them. Not my children. Not yours. Not anyone. The question is not whether challenges will come. The question is what we do when they arrive. I wanted my children to learn persistence — to keep going when things became difficult, to learn from failure rather than be defeated by it, to understand that one bad chapter does not mean the story is over. This was one of the lessons I tried hardest to teach, because life rewards people who keep getting back up.

I Wanted Them To Think For Themselves

One thing I worried about was outside influence. Not because influence is always bad, but because I wanted my children to know how to think independently. As my sons later told me, there were situations abroad where they could easily have been influenced by the wrong crowd. The reason they weren't was not because I controlled them from thousands of miles away. It was because they had developed their own values. They knew who they were. They knew what they stood for. And they knew how to make decisions for themselves. That was always the goal. Not dependence. Wisdom.

The Legacy I Hope Remains

When I am gone one day, I do not expect my children to remember every rule, every conversation, every correction, every meal, every sacrifice. Parents often worry that children

forget. But I have learned that children remember what mattered most. They remember how we made them feel. They remember whether they felt loved, safe, seen, valued.

If my children carry anything from me into the future, I hope it is this: that they are loved, that they are capable, that they are worthy, that they can overcome difficult things, and that they can pass those same gifts on to the next generation. Because that is how family legacies are built. Not through money. Not through possessions. But through values.

Looking Back

Now that my children are adults, people sometimes assume I must feel finished — that parenting is over. I don't. The role has changed, but the relationship continues. Today I am less of a teacher, less of a manager, less of a disciplinarian, and much more of a mentor, a guide, a supporter, a friend. And honestly, it is one of the most rewarding seasons of motherhood. Not because everything is perfect. But because after all these years, we still have each other.

And if there is one thing I hope this book has shown, it is this: the goal of parenting is not to raise perfect children. The goal is to build a relationship strong enough to survive real life. That relationship is why my adult children still call me first. And if it can happen for me, it can happen for you too.

REFLECT

- What kind of relationship do I want with my child 20 years from now?
- What values matter most to me?
- What family patterns do I want to continue?
- What family patterns do I want to stop?
- What small step can I take today to strengthen my relationship with my child?

The relationship you hope to have with your adult child tomorrow is being built by the choices you make today.

TRY THIS THIS WEEK

1. One Final Challenge

Tonight, before your child goes to bed, look them in the eyes and say, “I love you.” Then ask, “How are you really doing?” And listen. You may be surprised by what happens next.

A Final Word From Me

I'm a certified child and adolescent counsellor — but that came two years ago, long after I had already raised three children mostly by instinct, trial, and error. This book isn't counselling theory. It's what I lived through first, and only later understood professionally. I made mistakes. I learned lessons. I adjusted along the way. And by God's grace, I raised three children who still call me, still trust me, and still allow me into their lives. If this book helps even one parent build that kind of relationship

with their child, then sharing these stories will have been worth it.

A companion bonus chapter — 10 Things My Adult Children Still Say To Me Today — is included separately with this book.

With love,

Demi F. O.

Mother of three. Certified Child & Adolescent Counsellor.

