

“Earth to Mom”...“Earth to Dad”

Two Secrets to Get Your Kids to Tell You More



If men are from Mars and women are from Venus, then where are kids from? Kids also have their own perspective and they also speak a language of their own. This language is somewhat unique from Mars and Venus (until kids become like the men and women they unwittingly learn from); this language is simply "Down To Earth"; and it's a language which demands an embodied understanding of "Being Here Now". This language is simply more "Down To Earth," and it's a language that demands us to "Be Here Now".

“Get Down to Earth”

When John Gray wrote his tremendously successful book, *Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus*, he was attempting to get adults to stop, step outside of their inherited and learned ways of communicating so that they could improve their relationships with the opposite sex. If you want something from your partner in a relationship, first you've got to understand your differences, learn how to approach them (give), and then practice that understanding and action on a regular basis. Gray wanted men and women to look, hear and feel from a simple yet alternative perspective (the language of the other sex expressed through words, tones, body and emotions), and then communicate with a new understanding back to that perspective.

Adults often underestimate the effects that their body size and position has on their ability to hear a kid and get a kid to hear them effectively, in a way that produces understanding, action and results. Stop right now and think about your relative body size compared to a small child. Now think what it would be like for you to communicate with some “thing” that is that much bigger than you. If you'll try it you may find it to be uncomfortable at best... very scary at worst... or at least ridiculous enough to make a point.

In my work with parents and teachers I often reread books, especially

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the ones that have been sitting on the shelf for a few years - you know ... the out of date ones. Not long ago I picked up a few and was struck by the fact that they all commu-

nicated to me the point I have covered above. I found the point in *The Road Less Traveled*, by M. Scott Peck. And, in picking up Bodenhamer's *Back In Control*, there it was again. And in *The One Minute Father* and *The One Minute Mother* Spencer Johnson, M.D., eludes to the same fundamental point. And again in Faber's and Mazlish's, *How to Talk So Kids Will Listen & Listen So Kids Will Talk*,

there it was again. Even hidden between the lines of Bill Cosby's Fatherhood.

Physically "Getting Down With" a kid makes all the difference in their world, now. It means stopping — putting down the dish towel, setting aside the wrench and putting the book away for the moment. Unfortunately we sometimes replace "Getting Down" with talking down at kids, or talking beneath kids (using baby talk) or attempting to get kids to reason with us (grow up before their time).

"Getting Down There" means to get down there physically (kneel, sit, scrunch) to a level that's no higher than the kid, and if possible, a shade lower than their eye level. Optimally you would have to look slightly up into their eyes.

Open your body and move it to a position that's just below that of the child. Look into the child's eyes. In some way make non-threatening physical contact, if only for an instant. A slight brush or touch on the hand or arm with your finger may be all that's needed. (You can do it with teenagers, too, just get creative.) Now You're Getting Down There. Back Earth from Mars and Venus.

"Be Here Now"

I notice that moms, dads and teachers live most of their waking hours in the mental worlds of "yesterday" and "tomorrow". We're thinking about what didn't get done last week, last year, or early this morning. And when we're not thinking about that, we're often thinking about what we need to do later today, where we need to go tonight, what we need to spend money on next month, and how we need to be when we get "there"— where ever "there" is. As adults we literally exist in the mental chatter of the past and the future. And we try to do a balancing act with it everyday. But kids don't!

When your child was an infant, how much attention did you give them? Usually the answer sounds something like, "Constantly!" If it was truly constant attention, it would mean that you didn't do much of anything else... you didn't eat, you didn't go to the bathroom, you read nothing... you were literally glued to your child. Now you may have felt glued to them, but you weren't. Perhaps you mean that you paid A LOT MORE attention to them than you were used to paying to almost anything else prior to their birth. This is the time when you were probably the most present with your kids on a regular basis.

Have you ever noticed how quickly a kid can move from one state of mind to another? They are laughing with each other, then hitting each other, then one gets scraped by something sharp, then "I want ice cream", then there's a giggle, then a sour face, then they're coloring together... And this is all within the space of just a few minutes. It drives us crazy, especially if we are the kind of parent or teacher that always has to be in control. But to kids it's normal. Why is that?

Maybe because they live (and communicate) moment -to moment -to moment. And in order to communicate to them, or with them, to understand them, to request of them, to get their attention, or to get things done, then we've got to learn how to get very present to them very fast... and then... actually put that how-to into action, that means doing it!. And then do it again. And again, and again. Consistently.

There is immense value that can be obtained by simply "Being Here Now" with your family. But what I've learned from my four kids is that

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Lance Giroux and 13 year old son Alex

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"Being Here Now" is possibly the most powerful and most difficult thing a parent can do with kids - and in any life situation.

Now think about it from an infant's perspective and how much attention he or she gave to you. Aside from their nursing, crying, sleeping and pooping, maybe it was they who gave you all of their attention.

"Being Here Now" is possibly the most powerful and most difficult thing a parent can do

In other words, you (moms and dads)

were the constant focus of their attention. They suddenly looked out into their blurry world and began to focus it and experience it. They began to study you, all your mannerisms; what made your mouth move up ('Ahh, that means I can generate a happy response from the giant'); what made your mouth move down in a frown ('Oh, giant doesn't like that'); what made you yell ('Oh, giant really doesn't like that!'). And, why? Because they had to survive.

You also became the unwitting teacher in their ability to push your buttons. What they saw you do was important to their system of learning the basics of survival in life.

To use modern terms they were like a relatively un-programmed computer with an unlimited byte capacity and a wide open super fast modem connected to the "parent wide web". Suddenly the switch flipped on and information began racing in at an enormous rate — through sight, sound, feelings and touch.

And in the process they began to learn that certain things done a certain way could elicit two completely opposite and opposing responses from the two main data sources — the big giant main frames called mom and dad. They learned (subjectively and unconsciously) that some things could be done (burps and belches and glitches) that could usually drive wedges between the two giant main frames. They learned how a kid can get his or her own way especially if kid can get mom and dad or the teachers off track and into a world that's somewhere other than Here and Now.

They also learned that mom and dad and the teachers often don't see it coming, don't realize they've been had, and slip off into their normal worlds of yesterday ("He said," "She said," "You always do that," "You never listen to me") or tomorrow ("You're always going to be like this," "I can't live this way for much longer," "What's going to happen when...").

A number of years at my two younger boys' elementary school I had the wonderful opportunity to be a volunteer. On occasion I got "yard duty". One day a little girl walked across the yard in front of me, obviously distraught, while I was trying to figure how much time we had left for recess. I leaned over, keeping one eye on the school yard and another on her, and asked what was wrong.

She stopped walking but wouldn't talk, She just looked down and refused to speak. Then I sat down on the ground, reached out with one finger, and asked her to grab hold. As I looked up at her, as she was now much taller than me. And only then did she begin to talk.

Make an honest attempt this month to make it a practice of yours to increase your activity in "Getting Down to Earths" and "Be Here Now" with your kids and teens. I think you will surprise yourself with the results. And you'll probably like most of the surprises. ☺