

Children Are Our Future

"I'll go real fast and I hope I don't come in last,
I'll do my laps and I hope I don't fall into any traps".

These lines were found written on a piece of paper on Sophie Moggridge's desk, a couple of days before the Santa's Shuffle. Sophie is 7 year's old.

As a Gestalt therapist, I am often asked what the term 'Gestalt' refers to. Gestalt is a German word for complete 'form' or 'figure'. Whenever a child or an adult is about to start an athletic event, he or she is about to participate in a Gestalt cycle of formation and destruction. In layman term, this means that during the cycle of starting and finishing an athletic event, the person will experience an array of sensations that will trans-FORM his self-awareness. This renewed 'self-awareness' takes place no matter what age the participant is. That is the magic of citizen racing.

I am always amazed at the shapeshifting that occurs at the mental, spiritual, emotional and physical level in the kids and teenagers that participate in my mountain bike camp. It is that trans-FIGURE-ation that fuels me to keep running the camp. Movement, nature and loving coaches are a potent prescription for the development of our children's self esteem and independence.

Kahlil Gibran expressed it well when he wrote "Of Children" in the Prophet: "*Your children are not your children. They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself. They come through you but not from you...*" Children come to this world with a mind and spirit of their own. I see them as beautiful angels with white wings. The role of the parent, the teacher, the coach, the mentor... is to make sure that our children's wings don't get clipped through hardships but stay full and fluffy so that they can give flight to their dreams. What follows are my observations as a coach and camp director. They are simple reminders to refine the quality of our parent-children-teenager interactions.

- The sport environment is a wonderful arena to teach children the difference between 'wants and needs'. Does a twelve-year-old need a \$2,000 bike? Examine your personal motivations before buying expensive sport equipment. Having them open their own bank account and rewarding them for good behaviour is a lifestyle skill you can start teaching at a young age.
- Kids know when grown ups are superficial. Our eyes mirror our soul. Work at developing good eye and body contact. For example, when expressing your feelings, take both hands of your child and look deep into their eyes.

- Don't impose your competitive drive on your children. Let them decide for themselves if racing is what they want to experience. I have yet to meet a child that does not have a desire to 'participate'. Kids love to be involved in-group activities for the different contacts and models they get exposed to.
- Lack of time is a poor excuse to not watch your child ride down a rockface or show you what they have learned ... The 'small stuff' can always wait. How many disappointed kids do I see at camp from the lack of parental involvement. Walk your Talk!
- Try not to express how much work kids/teenagers are in front of your children. How does that make a child feel? It is always worthwhile to take some time to reflect and remember why you had your children in the first place.
- Don't assume you are here to teach your children all the time. Children have valuable teachings of their own. Just because they are young, doesn't mean they don't know! Take time to listen to their philosophy of life.
- Try not projecting your fear of risk taking and personal body insecurities on your children. Positive outcomes from calculated risk taking is what builds confidence in children. Children take note of what adults say and may grow up thinking that fear of risk taking and hating your body is 'normal' behaviour.
- Winning is not everything. Obsessive compulsive behaviours are widespread in athletics. I always believed that if my goal in life was to work at becoming a balanced and centred human being, then the 'athlete' in me was surely to manifest.

We must take the time to teach our children what is healthy and what is not. Listening to our children's feelings and talking them out takes time and energy but once again, the dividends down the road will be extraordinary. I believe we all have our 6th sense to guide us in those teachings. Listen to your own personal wisdom and intuition and share that with your children. There is always more room for love, compassion and sincerity in this world.

Dominique Larocque is a retired national team athlete who runs a private counselling/coaching business in Ottawa called Creative Wheel. Visit her website at www.creative-wheel.com Tel: 860-0887 / email creativewheel@igs.net

Children

From the Prophet by Kahlil Gibran

And a woman who held a babe against her bosom said,
"Speak to us of Children."

And he said:

Your children are not your children.

They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself.

They come through you but not from you,

And though they are with you, yet they belong not to you.

You may give them your love but not your thoughts.

For they have their own thoughts.

You may house their bodies but not their souls,

For their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow, which you cannot visit, not even
in your dreams.

You may strive to be like them, but seek not to make them like you.

For life goes not backward nor tarries with yesterday.

You are the bows from which your children as living arrows are sent forth.

The archer sees the mark upon the path of the infinite, and He bends you with
His might that His arrows may go swift and far.

Let your bending in the archer's hand be for gladness;

For even as he loves the arrow that flies, so He loves also the bow that is stable.