

Grace and Acceptance Versus Guilt and Shame

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Have you noticed yet that each point interweaves and builds on the others? If you are gracious and accepting of your child, you will probably use positive reinforcement to teach them, be more transparent, forgiving, patient and validating. You would prefer open and honest communication so that your child can see your heart and follow your example.

Grace may be simply defined as “*unmerited favor*”, meaning, you give your child the benefit of the doubt and choose to think the best of him. This does not mean that you are ignorant or naïve, but you allow your child some wiggle room to learn and experience life. He has a framework to function within, but the boundaries are flexible and adaptable depending on his personality and character. Your child knows that you love him for exactly who he is. You help him to see his strengths and deficits, and encourage him to realize he is a work in progress like the rest of us. Giving your child the gift of grace and acceptance teaches him the very heart of God, because that is how God initiates to all of us too.

Also, when you accept your child for who he is, he will accept himself too. Your child looks to your eyes to define who he is. If a parent’s eyes reflect joy, love, pride and acceptance towards his or her child, he will be self-confident and have a healthy love and respect for himself. He will also be mindful of his choices because disappointing you is often punishment enough.

When a parent uses guilt tactics to control his or her child, he will be insecure and question himself. Guilt is a power play for control that will have a negative response where the child will exert control in a different, often passive, way. Often coupled with guilt tactics is shame. Shame is an attack against the *personhood* of someone. Instead of imparting correction for undesirable *behavior*, the child is infused with the faulty belief that he is undesirable. Thus, instead of, “*what you did was bad*”, the child hears, “*you are bad*”—he personifies the problem!

Again, after many years in clinical practice, this theme has consistently shown itself, along with the negative repercussions from living in guilt and shame throughout the years of maturation into adulthood. If we as parents take the time to think and respond with love rather than reacting from emotion, many issues will be avoided.