



You Have the Most Influence

As parents, we intuitively know that we play a critical role in our children's lives. Is this true? Or do friends, peers, teachers, and the media play a greater role? For the most part, research supports what we as parents already know: we have the largest influence on how children think, feel and act. We have tremendous impact in helping children and adolescents grow up healthy. We nurture who they are and what they will become as adults by being good role models. We teach them the positive values we hold dear and the necessary skills for success.

Children copy our behavior and do as we do. This is the way children learn about themselves and the world. Scientists have discovered “mirror neurons” in our brains that respond identically whether you perform an action or witness someone else perform the same action. There is a real scientific basis for “monkey see, monkey do”! And children are very impressionable. Parents are powerful models for children! So we have to model the specific actions we want our children to imitate.

The ways parents influence the development of children and adolescents are many. We “wire” their brains by how we interact with them and by the experiences we provide them. When we are bonded to them and monitor what they do, we show support and security. When we are “attuned” and “warm” in our response to them, it helps them develop socially. We need to ask ourselves frequently: “At this moment, what is my action teaching my child? What kind of actions can I do to promote positive behaviors”?

Your ability to influence your child by your example will never be greater than it is right now and will ultimately impact their success in school and in life. While it is also true that peers, friends, teachers, other adults, and the media play important roles, we are the most powerful influence in our child’s healthy development!