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What’s It Mean?

You’re on edge, agitated easily, and you worry all the time. It seems like everyone is against you and you feel squeezed from all sides. You’re more tired than energized, every day. You’re finding yourself calling in sick more often. You get easily frustrated in your relationships, snapping at family and friends for no reason. You seek external stimuli (coffee, food, drugs, alcohol) just to make it through the day....

A survey says approximately 15% (that’s roughly 19 million people!) show up to work either drunk, buzzed, or with a hangover.¹ And about 10% show up to work high on drugs, about 5% of it is marijuana, the rest other controlled and uncontrolled substances.² Don’t think drugs and alcohol are the only culprits, though.

Sleep deprivation is linked to over 100,000 deaths on the road each year. Lacking just one night of sleep is like showing up to work with a blood alcohol level of 0.05, just below the legal limit in many states (most states consider someone with a BAC (Blood Alcohol Content) of 0.08 to be legally drunk).³ If you miss two or more nights of sleep, you might as well have drunk that fifth of Scotch. As far as impairment goes, you’d be considered completely incapable of driving.⁴

In the U.S., roughly 52 % of people surveyed responded that that they’d called in sick even though they were not sick.⁵ This relates to about \$576 billion dollars lost for the U.S. economy. Of that amount, 39 percent, or \$227 billion is from “lost productivity” from employee absenteeism due to illness or what researchers called “presenteeism,” when employees report to work but illness keeps them from performing at their best.⁶

If you aren’t performing at your best, and taking care of yourself, how will that affect your daily life with your child? How do think you’ll ever be able to be a role model for your child, or anyone for that matter?

Someone to look up to

While nobody expects you to be a “perfect” parent, it really isn’t that complicated to raise happy, healthy, well-adjusted kids. Yet, easier said than done, as anything in life that is worthwhile.

Children need someone to look up to and learn from. And you want that someone to be you, not a celebrity, whose actions you cannot control. As a parent you must model the type of behavior you want your child to emulate. Actions speak louder than words and so, you must lead by example. In other words, walk the walk and talk the talk.

First, you do have to take a look at yourself at how you are living your own life. This can be hard, even uncomfortable, and sometimes life-changing. If you are not leading the life you'd want your children to live, then why would you want your child to imitate that. That's not to say that because you might be living in less desirable circumstances you can't be a good role model. Striving for a better life and showing your child that the dream is alive *is* being a good role model.

Children are the best copycats in the world

Children are remarkably perceptive. Their eyes ever observe, their ears ever listen, and their minds ever process the messages they absorb. If they see us patiently provide a happy home atmosphere for family members, they will imitate that attitude for the rest of their lives. The wise parent realizes that every day that building blocks are being laid for the child's future. Let us all be wise builders and role models. Take care of yourself, ... and those you love, ... today, and every day!⁷

I'm sure you've seen the photos of cute little toddlers with a myriad of make-up on their faces, not all in the correct places, though... When a mom puts on her lipstick, the child immediately wants to do the same. The dad is shaving and the young boy starts to whittle away at his own “moustache” or “beard,” even though it'll be years until he has any extra hair on his body. Children imitate us every day, in every way.

“What is the most important influence on child development,” asked Tom Weisner in his TED talk. He implores us to think about where in the world is that child growing up, the context where the child is living: community, nation, household, religious pathway, cultural differences, etc. Only then can you begin to understand how influential just one person can be.⁸

The context that matters the most, no matter where the child grows up, is having a positive role model. Keeping the context in mind is the way to improve the life of any child. Think back to your apprenticeship, your first job even, and now think: how did you learn? Did you just sit at the desk and immediately know what to do? Stand behind the cash register and instinctively know which key to push to make the sale? Probably not.

The same goes for your child. It seems like some parents assume that their child knows how to do certain things, just because they have now learned how to walk, feed themselves, and ask for other things they need and want. The human brain is not fully

developed until about 25 years of age.⁹ Until then, all we see and hear, touch and taste can be new to us. That’s not to say you can’t learn new things later in life, but then you are just adding to the files, all things you need to learn for survival, you’ve learned by age 25.

Being your child’s champion

“Nice, healthy, safe, super “at the top”, like outstanding behavior,” describes a great role model according to Ricardo and Ethan, pre-teens in a YouTube video called Trios Health—According to the four kids (Ricardo, Ethan, Ryleigh and Sophia) a role model does not need to be rich, the most beautiful, the expert, nor do they need to know everything. They also say that a role model is one that does the most work, works the hardest so that everyone can have a good time.¹⁰ We could add to this list with being genuine, confident, humble, generous...

If you’re ready for your child to describe you as his or her role model, someone with outstanding behavior and hardest working person they know, strap yourself in the driver’s seat to lead by example in helping your kids to build character and self-respect.

1. Be your best. When it comes to your kids, role-modeling is everything. Your children pay attention to everything you say and do, and they imitate your words and actions. Keep in mind how easily they are influenced. Be your best.

Influence and trust play an integral role in how your child will develop physically and emotionally. When a child grows up in a supportive environment, they learn to trust. It starts with infants and meeting their needs. In toddler years, the influences and people your child looks up to are still mostly coming from you and immediate family members. Elementary school years add peers and teachers into the circle and later on, the surrounding community, after school activities, and perhaps work join in. But through all these additions, if the trust is strong on your part, the child will always guide himself back to the parent, although “positive interactions between community and family give a sense of security and well-being to all.”¹¹

2. Take care of yourself. Being your best starts with taking good care of yourself — getting enough sleep, making time to exercise, eating good food and finding healthy ways to manage negative emotions without lashing out.

Getting enough sleep, exercising and eating healthy can be somewhat self-explanatory when discussing self-care. But an important aspect is learning how to regulate your emotions so that your child will be able to regulate theirs. Children see how their parents display emotions and interact with other people, and they imitate what they see their parents do to regulate emotions.¹² If you lash out, your toddler might do the same. How

you then address the emotions of your child and respond to them affects how expressive the child feels they can be.

“If you react with criticism or dismiss the sadness or anger of a child, you are communicating that their emotions are not valid or appropriate. This can cause children to be even more prone to those negative emotions and less able to cope with stress.”¹³ Instead, guiding children’s emotions and helping them find ways to express themselves in a healthy manner Regulates their responses to future events and may even aid in their academic and social skills.¹⁴

3. Be dependable. You don’t want to raise a flaky kid who lets people down — so make sure to model dependability. This includes keeping promises, being a self-starter, and being resourceful.

Dependability includes living up to your promises. That means that not only coming through for your child (keeping the promise to take them out to the park after they finish a chore) but also other obligations your might have to other people. Keeping your promises to friends, family, and colleagues also matter. Understandably, life happens. And you must remember that a child can forgive more easily and yet, you should not use this as a crutch. Soon enough, they’ll get the gist: either you keep your promises or you don’t.

Being a self-starter means not waiting for someone to approach you and hand you tasks. Take the initiative to learn what you can do to help and volunteer to do it. It’s necessary that you know your strengths, so you’ll have a clear idea what you can contribute to the group.

A resourceful person will squeeze out all the creative juice they can manage and be the hero in sticky situations. Resourcefulness is a quality anyone can appreciate. Be innovative, be ingenuous. Knowing how to think out of the box can help in the process.¹⁵

4. Check in with yourself. “Checking in” to evaluate your own behavior is an integral part of being a good role model —it’s healthy for your child to see and hear you doing it. By saying things like: *Lately, I’ve been thinking: I might be watching too much TV or not getting enough sleep.* Ask your child if there are things they’d like to explore or improve. By doing this, you’re reinforcing the idea that being an awesome person is an ongoing process.

Evaluating yourself begins with knowing your personality, values, habits, needs and emotions. All of this includes your strengths and weaknesses as a parent. When you know yourself, you can check in with yourself.

Do you know, for example, how much sleep you really need? Only 1-3% of the population can sleep five or six hours a night without suffering some performance drop-off. Moreover, for every 100 people who think they’re a member of this sleepless elite, only five actually are.¹⁶

5. Be loyal. A truly loyal person will be loyal because they want to. Showing up to help a friend in a time of need, or sticking with a local business owner who has served your family for years, instead of hopping over to the newest cheap-o mega-store can show your child what a loyal person acts like.

Loyal friends do not do 'conditional' friendships, it's not a tit for tat scenario. In loyal relationships, there are no expectations of payback.

Loyal friends are impartial. Being impartial means you are accepting, non-discriminatory, and view others' lives objectively based on *their* life experiences. Understanding differences—and accepting them—is key for offering support and learning more about the people around you. It will help strengthen other friendships, too.

A loyal relationship is respectful. When you take part in gossip, you are disloyal. Respecting someone goes beyond them being in the room. When you are loyal, you will decline the opportunity to spread gossip and may even remind the other person about what loyalty entails.

A loyal relationship is trustworthy and honest. Even if it's not what you want to hear or say, a loyal friend will tell you their honest opinion. Sometimes, they want to share their experience with you, hoping that it will give you insight into the situation.¹⁷

6. Be attentive. As children get older, they push for more independence (“Mom, please don’t come in my room!”) and that’s to be expected. But as a parent, your job isn’t to be a “cool friend.” Your job is to be a *parent*. Which means being attentive and making sure that your child isn’t in harm’s way — even if your child thinks you’re “annoying.”

You can be attentive by:

- getting off your phone! Make a conscious effort to put your phone away whenever your child is conversing with you. Active listening is the most respectful thing you can do.
- if your child is old enough to be on social media, like their tweets, posts, and selfies. This shows you care about what your child does on these sites. It’s not stalking nor do you have to retweet or “like” everything they post.

- Learn how to listen attentively. Listening to your child can be exhausting, but by being a good listener, you can turn an average relationship into a spectacular one.
- Ask question. Ask them often and then ask them again. Questioning (not interrogating) shows that you are paying attention and that you’re interested in their lives.
- Know your child’s friends. And the friend’s friends. And everyone’s parents. When you have a good know-how of your child’s inner circle, you’ll sleep better.
- Spend quality time together. The more time you spend together, the more chances you have to be attentive, to show interest, to be affectionate, and to get to know your partner even better.
- Create routines that connect you and your child. Talk about the day during dinner. Tuck them into bed, read a story together, watch movies, play games on Friday nights. These may seem simple, but they create meaningful memories for both of you.¹⁸

7. Give positive attention. Positive attention is the way you show delight in your child and warmth in your relationship by:

- smiling at your child
- making eye contact and using caring facial expressions
- being physically gentle and caring with your child
- using words to celebrate and encourage your child
- showing interest in your child’s interests, activities and achievements.¹⁹

8. Teach (healthy) skepticism. Children are naturally trusting and they look eagerly to their surroundings for role models. Teach them that not all “role models” are reliable. Show them what it looks like to have a healthy skepticism and to “follow your instincts.”

Skepticism means “to inquire” or “look around.” Everyone should have a dose of skepticism, which requires additional evidence before accepting someone’s claims as true. Willing to challenge the status quo with *open-minded, deep questioning* of authority is part of acquiring critical thinking skills.²⁰

8. Own up to your mistakes. Everyone makes mistakes. Don’t beat yourself up about it, instead fess up. For example, if your child heard you barking angrily at your partner because you’re grumpy and hungry — don’t make excuses. Take responsibility and

admit that you did something unacceptable. This shows your child that you’re taking responsibility for your actions. — and enforcing “consequences” to correct inappropriate behavior.

9. Enforce consequences when your kid does something wrong. When your child does something unacceptable, *you must implement an appropriate consequence*. This is connected to lesson #3: Being dependable. Kids thrive on consistency and reliability. Without it, they invariably feel aimless and unsupported... Natural, logical, and imposed consequences all share one thing in common: your child will learn that each action has a consequence, — good or bad, something will happen.

10. Start now. The sooner, the better. The more consistent, the better. And please realize, it’s never too late. Raising splendid kids with character and values, who grow up to become awesome adults starts with you.²¹

Action Steps...

- ✓ Volunteer with your child. Find a place where both of you will get the needed benefit of giving to others. It can be as simple as helping a neighbor with carrying in her groceries every week. Or giving up a couple of hours on Sunday at your church. There are hundreds of organizations who would welcome your time. (FYI- research has shown that two hours per week is an optimal time limit. Otherwise you chance becoming overwhelmed with your own commitments.²²)
- ✓ Find a parent support group in your community or online. Discuss how other parents are doing and what type of role models they allow their children to follow.
- ✓ Find a discipline area that suits your personality, so that what and how you dole out consequences to your child is natural. A great one is [Love and Logic](#), which relies on responsibility and kids learning from their mistakes in a safe way.
- ✓ Role play to get your child comfortable with different scenarios, like how to be a healthy skeptic: For example, at a car dealership, you could privately turn to your child say:
- ✓ *“This man says that this is the best deal in town, but I have a hunch he might not be correct. Let’s check out some other dealerships. It’s important to trust your gut.”*

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