

Raising Successful Children... To a child, it's no joke

By Susan Collins

He still remembers the day he was kidding around. "I'm not your Dad. No really, I'm not." And despite his son's repeated questions, he stuck to his story. Then nothing more was said until several weeks later, he overheard his son ask his mom, "Can I go to the park with my sister's Dad?"

Pain convulsed his heart. And huge tears burst from this young Dad's eyes. His son had taken him literally, believing this man—who loved him so dearly, who was working so hard to support him and raise him—wasn't his father.

He went to his child and told him he was kidding. "I didn't really mean it. That wasn't the truth. You really are my son. And, I really do love you." But for years after that, whenever he answered important questions for his son, his child asked him if he was telling the truth, reopening that old wound and filling his eyes with tears.

What you say to your children is no joke. You are their truth. They will even fight for your truth at school, with teachers and peers. "I know it's the truth because my Dad told me so." Or, "My Mother crossed her heart."

Children need you to be their certainty as they sort out the rights and wrongs, goods and bads, truths and lies of their lives. That is the phase of "growing up" they are in. They really don't know. And can't decide for them-

selves. So whenever they ask, they really need an answer—the answer you want them to record and make decisions with.

The way they organize their inner world depends on you. The way they make sense of things depends on you. They are building their data base, writing the programs they will use to compute their whole lives. "Whenever this, then... Parents always... Children never... Dogs have four legs and a tail. Dogs and cats are different because..."

"Does this person I need and love so much belong to me? Or does he belong to my sister? If he's not mine, then I don't belong. Maybe I'm adopted..."

The silent loss in the night is devastating as that child constructs a whole new internal reality. A reality that puts in doubt everything they've ever believed and trusted, opening a million questions. A million uncertainties and insecurities. "Who is my real Dad? Where is my family? Where do I belong?"

That child's behavior suddenly changes. Sullen. Withdrawn. Insecure. But never a word is spoken. No further questions are asked, he or she simply uses "your truth" as "his own"...until that false assumption is updated later on.

But these truths may last for years. Shortly after I married, I took my new husband to the park I played in as a child. And, as I had always done, I brought along bread to feed the squirrels.

"Bunny, bunny, bunny," I called. And I heard my husband laughing. "Susan, do you hear what you're saying? Do you always call a squirrel a bunny?" I hadn't

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even heard myself. But when I repeated it again, I could hear my mother's voice in my head. "Bunny, bunny, bunny," that's what she always said.

In the name of love, tell your child the truth. Their reality depends on it... and you.

Susan Collins, author of Our Children Are Watching: 10 Skills For Leading the Next Generation to Success, spent fifteen years "shadowing" successful people, literally following around corporate heads, outstanding educators and coaches, inventors, entertainers and artists. She discovered they were all using the same ten skills. After fifteen more years of teaching The Technology of Success at American Express, IBM, and Florida Power & Light, now Susan is teaching these success skills to parents and teachers as well. For information on her books, tapes and seminars, call Our Children Are Watching 305-892-2702.