

### **Insightful Parenting and the Itasca State Park Fire Tower**

Perhaps you have been to Itasca State Park, source of the Mississippi River, or climbed a fire tower closer to where you live. I was there most recently last summer and climbed the tower with three other adults (no children). One had a GPS function in his phone and kept informing us of our elevation. Another kept looking up, with great apprehension about the seemingly endless steps ahead, and the third would get nervous whenever she looked down and she kept looking down. Let me tell you what I think this has to do with parenting insightfully.

First of all, there is nothing easy about parenting. And the insightful parenting approach is particularly challenging because it asks you to let go of a few very widespread parenting strategies (do everything for them, sermonize relentlessly, bark back when they speak disrespectfully to you). Instead, we are asked to stay connected with our children at all times, discipline with reassurance when necessary, and teach our children what they need to learn by using the moments provided by everyday life. Share their journey, be on the road they are on, start where they are at, help them change as fast as they can change and be comfortable with their pace of change.

It is a long way from the bottom of the fire tower to the top, and it is a long way from diapers to college. The best way to ward off the anxious feelings is by looking straight ahead and focusing your energies on the step you are on. Looking down at the ground can make you dizzy. Looking back in time can make you impatient, angry about how long it takes for children to change, or even fill you with feelings of regret. Looking up at all the steps yet to be climbed before you get to the top of the tower can be daunting. Looking ahead to the months and years to come can add to your worries about how your children may turn out. And it is at the times when we are looking back in time or ahead to the future that we are at greatest risk to parent poorly.

I believe that this is because we are less likely to see what is right in front of us if we are looking back or forward. If your 10-year old son is lying to you, even if this is not the first time he has lied to you, you want to be able to see this for what it is: a mistake he is making that requires a consequence and a pep talk. "In our family we tell the truth and when you don't, you will miss your friends." The tone is reassuring rather than angry. Same with sibling rivalry and getting out of the house in the morning. Same with poor effort in school and friendship problems. Same with texting while they do their homework and talking about other children behind their backs. None of it indicates that the end of the world is near or that your child is heading for the abyss. In fact, it is all a normal part of childhood development and a normal part of family life.

The next time you feel like you are almost at your wit's end and do not know how you are going to stand another moment, *try to forget about all the moments that aren't currently happening*. Pay attention only to the moment in front of you. You have a 10-year old who is lying. Ask yourself: "How may I use this? What can I teach?" Convince yourself that how you respond is the predictor of how things will turn out. Breathe in and out. Give the consequence. Be the reservoir of confidence: "We'll get through this together." Make dinner.

Getting to calm is greatly helped by staying in the moment with your child and not getting sidetracked by how long this has been going on or what happens if this problem continues for years and years. Like climbing the fire tower, just be on the step you are on. Try not to look down or up. In time, children follow their parents into the future.

Dr. Steve Kahn is a psychologist in St. Paul, Minnesota and the author of *[Insightful Parenting: Making Moments Count](#)*. Please check [www.phoenixschoolcounseling.com](http://www.phoenixschoolcounseling.com) for more free parenting resources or to learn more about the book, available both in paperback and on e-readers. Please feel free to share this article with others.