



Relationships with Parents

Thoughts for Leaders

One day I will turn this into an article. In the meantime, here is a collection of hopefully helpful thoughts and comments from various sources. BL

"When I was a boy of fourteen, my father was so ignorant I could hardly stand to have the old man around. But when I got to be twenty-one, I was astonished at how much the old man had learned in seven years." A quote often attributed to Mark Twain but this is in some doubt.

What does it mean to honour parents? Honour = great respect.

What it means to honour parents changes with each stage of life.

"Honouring isn't necessarily obeying but we should obey our parents as much as we can because they are trying to protect us. Putting ourselves in their shoes helps. They might not be perfect but they are doing their best to keep a happy family." An older teenager

What is Obedience? Could it be defined as 'doing the right thing in the right place at the right time'. There are a lot of parents who would be happy with that. It is not about authoritarianism.

Children

We no longer teach children to obey adults unconditionally. We tell them that if an adult tells them to do something they feel is wrong or uncomfortable about, then they should speak to an adult they trust.

When we were very young we may have put our parents and parent-figures on a pedestal – thought they were the greatest, that they knew everything and could do anything. My 3 year old cousin thought that my Dad could mend her burst balloon!

Teenagers and Young adults

When we become teenagers we develop the ability to think more widely about things. We become more critical of ourselves, others and especially parents. We start to see their faults and this can be difficult for us to come to terms with. It can be easier to accept faults in ourselves and our friends than in our parents. We sub-consciously want them to be superhuman, but they're not. We also do not see/understand many of the problems they have to cope with and that life is harder for them than we realize. We can become too critical and even judgmental because we don't fully understand and we are going through a stage of being idealistic about life. It is sometimes said "Don't judge anyone until you have walked a mile in their shoes." We really cannot tell what we would do if we were in the same situation.

"When my Dad was in his 50's he had to take many pills for heart disease and other health problems. Some days these would make him a little slow of thought. We were having a family meal one day and he was saying something that did not seem to make much sense. We were a family that liked to joke & tease



a lot. I was a teenager and I light-heartedly turned to my Mum and asked “Do all men get like this when they get to his age?” My Mum replied, “I don’t know. I’ve never been married to one his age before.”

We have a tendency to think that our parents have always been here and do not appreciate that they are facing situations that are new to them in the same way as us. For parents, it’s a bit like trying to tackle level 8 in a computer game at the same time as helping someone else handle level 2 of that game. It’s also not always easy to see when a young person have completed a level and has moved onto the next level. Dads often find it harder to keep up with this than Mums do.

Although our parents have not always been here we can also overlook the fact that they did have a life before we arrived in the world. They also have different sides to their character that we may not yet have seen. In the film ‘Back to the Future’ Marti has a shock at some of the things his mum did as a teenager.

Young adults

Recognizing and accepting our parents’ faults is an important part of growing into adulthood. It is difficult to avoid being judgmental. It can be many years before we start to appreciate what our parents or grandparents had to cope with. Even if we know some of the facts, we don’t always appreciate how hard they may have struggled until we are a great deal older.

“With age you appreciate parenting more, of course you do. I am increasingly pleased with my parents as I meet more and more people. But you also see their shortcomings.”

Stewart Henderson has written a poem about his grandmother called ‘In the Parlour’. The first part really makes me laugh as he describes this strong-willed, hard, bigoted women but the second part had me wiping away a tear as he uncovers some of the life experiences that caused her to become the way that she was by the time she died. I don’t usually like poetry but it was the most gripping poem I have ever heard.

“Sometimes your parents don’t tell you things because they are protecting you or because it’s personal. When I was a teenager both my parents were difficult to live with. Sunday afternoons were the worst. They were usually both in a bad mood. At the time I thought that my Mum was having a difficult time with her age and was working too hard. Looking back now I suspect that actually a lot of it was because their marriage was going through a tough patch, but she would never have told us that. My Dad was great but he wasn’t the easiest person to live with.”

“There comes a time when you need help or advice from a parent. Upsettingly, this will happen, no matter how independent you are. And they can help a lot more if you have given them the full picture not just the bare minimum.”

Leaving home

Many people develop a better relationship with their parents once they have left home. We no longer have to obey them but we can still choose to take advice from them. When we leave home our lives can be busy and exciting and it can be easy to forget to contact them. If we were struggling to get on well with them, we may not particularly want to contact them.

Having a 'child' leave home is a very ambivalent situation for a parent. They want you to move on – of course they do because otherwise you cannot continue to grow as a person and they very much want that to happen. It also indicates that they must have got something right along the way! On the other hand it is always difficult when someone special moves on. One mother I know says that when her daughter left home it was almost like a bereavement.

I think that Dads suffer 'empty nest syndrome' as much as Mums do sometimes. Most of them wouldn't admit that though. After I left home my Mum told me that my Dad would sometimes wander into my room, look around and wander out again. Whenever I phoned home (and I used to get into trouble for not phoning enough) he would always pass the phone straight across to Mum. I know a father of five who simply says "Well at least we no longer have to fight for the bathroom" but when they come home he inadvertently winds them up by fussing over them.

Older adults

As our parents get older, the roles start to reverse with us beginning to take care and responsibility for them. Think about your grandparents if you have any. How do your parents 'honour' their own parents?

Comments about parents from young people aged 18-21

"I like to think that I don't take any notice of my parents but in reality I do tend to do what they do."

"Let them have their stupid ways, respond to anger with polite short responses in a nice light tone. This winds them up further but leaves them in a state where they have no justification for being angry with you, so they can't show it. Then you escape! Try to accept they are annoying and very unlikely to change, and just try to give up on that. Patience is a gift of the spirit and is vital. God can help us with that!"

"My gran had a bad head for heights and so was forever telling mum not to go near the edge. She got wound up by this and in response she would let us go as near to the edge. Now we know no fear and climb cliffs all the time. But she thinks she made a bit of a mistake there in not teaching us enough fear!"

"My dad infuriates me at breakfast simply because he is too helpful! All I want to do is sit in silence and munch my Weetabix but he wants me to talk and then to bring me coffee and juice and toast and eggs and just about everything. I want to get my own juice if and when I want it. Its stupid but as much as possible I will avoid breakfasting together just because I know that will wind me up and then we will kick off about something stupid as a result."

"Communication with parents helps a lot. Parents want you to communicate and so instinctively you don't want to. I am still slightly of this ethos, the less they know the less of a hold they have on me, the less they can offer me patronizing advice, the less they will talk to me about something they clearly know nothing about, the less they will discipline me, and hence the more mature I am!"

"Now it's kind of infuriating being home sometimes and my parents drive me up the wall sometimes. Although I live here I completely run my own life, avoid them as much as possible and get on with it. Then ask for their help every now and again!"



Comments from older people

“It wasn’t until several years after my father-in-law died that we discovered that he had been illegitimate. His father never wanted him and made no contribution to his life whatsoever. There were no paternity laws in 1921. We know very little except that his mother worked all her life and paid a family to foster him. He only met his father once. We don’t know what happened to either of his parents. It must have been difficult for him but he was of a generation that did not speak about such things. They just got on with life. I always found him somewhat reclusive – perhaps that would help to explain why.”

Communicating love

Different families and individuals have different ways of communicating love. Sometimes one person can be using one type of ‘language’ but the recipient doesn’t hear it because they are not so well tuned into that particular language.

The Five Love Languages – Gary Chapman book

- words of praise, encouragement, reassurance and love
- quality time i.e. undivided attention
- gifts
- acts of kindness/service
- appropriate physical touch

In the film ‘Iron Man 2’, the main character comments that his father, who was an inventor, never told him that he loved him, or even that he liked him. However in a film clip that he had left for his son to watch as an adult he says “Tony – my greatest creation was you.” Some men in certain cultures struggle to express love to their families. Some women do too.

“My real Dad was a good dad as far as I remember but he died of cancer when I was 8. It was only when he knew he was going to die that he expressed his love most clearly. Indeed I remember standing by the bed while he held my arm and told me how much.” SR

My Dad used to tease us a lot. Mostly we knew that it was because he loved us so we enjoyed it. He did also tell us that he loved us. We live in a culture where we do tend to tease those we love. However he sometimes didn’t know when to stop. We would start to feel that we were being ridiculed and get upset. What is the difference between teasing and ridicule? I suppose it’s the motivation behind the speaker. However if the hearer feels insecure about what is being said, or if the speaker is being self-indulgent then it is wrong.

I think that some people are too narrow in the way that they express love. There are some who will rush around **doing** things for other people but just will not affirm their nearest and dearest or talk about anything other than superficial stuff. It’s very sad. And then I think that that’s how so many Christian treat God. They rush around ‘serving’ him but don’t spend quality time with him.

Discussion topic for older groups

“The family forms a focus of mutual affections, understanding, loyalty, care and nurture which is impossible to replicate in any other social structure known to us.” Raymond Johnston – founder of CARE.

Discuss: Do you agree?

Father son thing

It isn't always what they do or don't do that is the thing. It's what we believe about why they are doing it. Supposing you were staying in someone else's house and they were to treat you the same way at breakfast. Would you feel the same way about it as when your Dad does it? If you are simply not a 'mornings' person then maybe you would, especially after a late night. However if you felt that you were being treated like an honoured guest then maybe you would feel differently. When you were little, your Dad fussed over you because you needed the help as well as because he loved you. Now that you are older – and he is very aware that you are more than capable of looking after yourself and is proud of the fact that you are – then waiting on you at breakfast is perhaps his way of expressing his love for you and his excitement at being able to spend some time with you. I doubt that it's because he is seeing you as a kid. If thinking that way about it doesn't help, then carry on avoiding him at breakfast!

The last time I had a Dad fussing over me was when I went to Slovakia when I was 38. I had to change buses in Bratislava. Dana's Dad met me at the bus station to help me with the language barrier. He **insisted** that I went to the ladies before getting on the bus and gave me the right coins! Had that been my Dad fussing over me when I was younger it would have bugged me but I hadn't had a Dad around to fuss over me since I was 25 so I kind of appreciated it even though it wasn't necessary.

Of course there are instances where it is easier to be more tolerant of the opposite sex than our own. I always struggled with my mother-in-laws attempts at being 'helpful' in the kitchen because it came across as interference, even though probably it wasn't.

There's a school of thought that we switch between different hats or roles, playing either the parent, the child or the adult at any given point. Some adults play the parent most of the time and try to parent other adults. This can be very annoying.

On the father son thing, somewhere there is a film clip which talks about this perfectly, how hard it is for a father to acceptably show he loves his son, it's very good but can't remember it for the life of me.

It reminds me of when I used to get home after a holiday or a long drive & was really tired and my Dad would help me with my luggage but he would want to talk lots but I was too tired so I would disappear into the bathroom. On the other hand, how does an older man show his grown up son/daughter how much they love them & how excited they are that they are home for a bit? Sometimes the way we interpret something makes a difference to how we react to it.

Charles Francis Adams, the 19th century political figure and diplomat, kept a diary. One day he entered: "Went fishing with my son today - a day wasted." His son, Brook Adams, also kept a diary, which is still in



existence. On that same day, Brook Adams made this entry: "Went fishing with my father - the most wonderful day of my life!" Earthly fathers, even the best of them, are fallible human beings.