

Helping You Navigate Your Journey Through Parenting

The Power of Understanding:

See the World Through Your Child's Eyes

BY KIM DeMARCHI



Perception is highly personal, made from our life experiences and our temperaments. It's almost as if each of us goes through life wearing a pair of glasses that alters the

world so that we see it the way we need, want, or expect it to be. In other words, most of us don't experience situations as they really are, but as we are. Two people could be in the exact same situation together and see things completely differently. And of course, this perception extends to our children as well. Sometimes the lenses we wear can block true understanding of our children, but understanding is critical to connection. That's why, as parents, we need to make an effort to remove our glasses and see the world through our children's eyes.

Stephen Covey talks about understanding in his book, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Families*. Habit #5 is one of my favorites: *Seek first to understand... then to be*

understood. We all have a strong basic need to be heard and understood, and sometimes, children misbehave because they are not getting those emotional needs met. Instead of being concerned only with a child's misbehavior and the consequence to give, we need to take our glasses off and look very carefully. We need to figure out why our children are misbehaving. That can be especially challenging, because it really requires us to acquire a non-adult point of view.

Imagine this: You walk into your child's room and see that she's pulled all her books off her shelves; they are now in a pile on the floor. Rather than jumping to conclusions that she did it to make you mad or because she doesn't respect your rules or is trying to get your attention, take a moment to pause before you respond. Try to get into your

daughter's world. Assume positive intent: Why would a perfectly reasonable child pull all her books off the shelves? As you're trying to see the world from her point of view, many more explanations become possible: She likes the sound of books hitting the floor. She wanted to build something and is using them as blocks. She is angry and doesn't have words for her big emotions. She wants to spend time with you and knows you will sit with her while she puts them away. She's bored of sitting in her room and is coming up with something new to do. You can see that shifting from your perspective to your daughter's allows for empathy and creative solutions that may fit the true intention of what she did.

Understanding usually begins with genuine curiosity. When children

misbehave our first response should not be an accusation, but a calm question about what the child was thinking in that moment. This kind of understanding is empathic understanding. It's the kind of listening we do when we're really "all in" and seeing the world through someone else's eyes and through their set of lenses. It's not something you can do in a hurry or with an agenda.

Influential people tend to be great listeners, and as parents most of us do want to influence our children. We want them to value what we value. But for children to be open and receptive to our values and our perspective, they first need to feel heard and understood. It's the foundation of lifelong trust and lifelong relationship between parent and child, no matter how old we may be.

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