



Find the Key



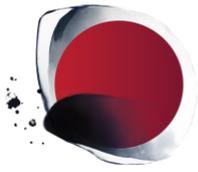
Learning When to Connect and When to Let Go.

So many naturally occurring challenges in our children's lives will tend to pull him or her away from us. This can occur almost daily during certain levels of development. To have the experience, he needs to disconnect from his parents. To make sense of the experience, he needs to re-connect. This separation and connection, the breath of parental relationship, is inevitable.

When to connect and when to let go requires a crystal ball.

If you happen to have one,

by all means use it.



For the rest of us, we must stumble along and test out options. When she is distant, trace back into the day or even several days and see if something occurred that could be the cause. Notice what is happening in his life; is there a sporting event on the horizon, is he up to speed with his homework, is there a test approaching? Did she leave something undone and is hiding it: a test score, a concern about a friend, or a problem with one of her parents? And, as they develop, we must be aware of substance, drugs, and alcohol, and ask ourselves does she have access, is she feeling pressured, did something happen that she feels bad about?

We must ask the difficult questions first to ourselves and sparingly with our children. They will talk to us, but we must **find the key to unlock the process**. As frustrating as this can be, our children need to be far away from us to learn many things in life. However, they also need to come home, tuck under our wing, and rest as they make room inside for the complexity of being human.

This takes back to an entry in my fathering journal written when my son was very young:

“Being present for your child and the relational life that is developing between the two of you, requires that you are able and willing to remain separate. Your relationship with your child carries within it the capacity to develop. It is a living, breathing organism that you manage with your presence, caring for it so that it evolves as a healthy and functional separate entity. This relational life exists because of your presence as well as in your absence. Like the breath of a living thing, you are present when you are inhaled into participation with your child and your presence remains when you are exhaled.”

“This morning when my boy woke up, he called for his mother; a few minutes later, while she was preparing a bottle, I walked quietly into the room. He waved to me, as I lay across the end of his bed. He muttered “good morning” in his sleepy voice. His hand was extended to me and I held it for a while, massaging the fingers gently. No



words were spoken. The action seemed to be pulling him from his not-yet-awake consciousness, into the world. He withdrew his hand and said "Go." That was all he said, "Go!" I smiled and said "ok." As I left the room, I added that I would see him in a while. He smiled and nuzzled deep into the bedding."

This moment, captured in my fathering journal, occurred when my son was very young. I remember feeling conflicted. What I really wanted to do was to be with him on that sunny Saturday morning and play "Spaceship." This was our traditional "under-the-covers" game in which we turned his bed into an intergalactic warship, struggling for survival against hideous celestial creatures. I felt rejected and would miss this moment of actively creating our relationship through this magical play. However, the life of our relationship would go on in my absence. Some things grow more fully in the dark than they do in the light.

My boy can afford to "toss his father away" in one moment because he is safe enough to expect that I will be there later, when he chooses to be with me. The presence of my absence, in this case, was positive. My child determined our proximity to one another, and the relationship continues in the soft embrace of a world that is whole and together.

"Psychologically, the result of separation by division into two is awareness of the opposites. This is a crucial feature in emerging consciousness." (Edinger, 1985, p. 187)

*Against a backdrop of presence, if we cannot tolerate what it feels like for us to separate from our children we inhibit the natural development of relational life. And we may find ourselves doing this **simply because we don't like how it feels!** Presence requires that we can tolerate the conflicting feelings within us without having to project them into our relationship with our child.*

"One becomes conscious as one is able to contain and endure the opposites within." (Edinger, 1985, p. 187)



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Reference

Edinger, Edward F. (1985). *Anatomy of the psyche: Alchemical symbolism in psychotherapy*. La Salle, IL: Open Court.

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