Unconditional Teaching (#)
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Unconditional teaching is not about giving students a blank check to do whatever they want. It is about creating a learning environment where students feel safe and valued, regardless of their behavior. This approach recognizes that students come to school with a variety of needs and challenges, and teachers play a crucial role in supporting their growth and development. 

For a child, however, it is even worse, since she may come to believe "that there is something so wrong with her that she isn't worth being loved," concludes Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish (1995) in Unconditional Parenting. "That's what's so terrible about being punished. It's not that they do bad things; it's that, as a result, they regard themselves as worthy only when they act in a certain way. In specific ways.

In the course of researching a book on these issues, I discovered the remarkable therapeutic success of a method known as "the unconditional approach." This posture allows "their best motives to surface," thus creating "the circumstances in which growth and change are more likely to occur." This is the long, hard way to go, but it turns out to be the only way to help children learn on their own. The moral here is that unconditional acceptance is not only something all children deserve; it's also a powerfully effective way to help them become the kind of people we want them to be.

Providing Unconditional Acceptance

Teaching in this way is not just a matter of how we respond to children after they do something wrong. It is a matter of shaping the countless gestures that let them know we're glad to see them, that we trust and respect them, that we care what happens to them. It's about the real (and unconditional) respect we show by asking all students what they think, even when we don't want to hear it. It's about providing Unconditional Acceptance.

Unconditional teachers are not afraid to be themselves: to act in real human beings rather than to play virtuously controlled characters. Their classrooms have an appealing informality about them. They bring so much of their own stories - their own challenges, their own children, their own lives - into the heart of their own students. The result is that these teachers have a special way of using their own vulnerabilities to build trust that we care for them. They conclude, "Then we need to display our affection without demanding that they behave or perform in certain ways in return. It's not that we don't want and expect certain behaviors; it's that we care about them and want what is best for them.

This is the heart of unconditional teaching, and Watson points out that it's easier to maintain this stance, even with kids who are frequently insolent or aggressive, if we keep in mind why they're acting that way. There's a new urgency in the classroom when we behave like our kids do. When we are there to help - to guide, to inform, to protect - to let their behaviors happen and be their own. The popular view is that children who are submissive are just "less testing" - a phrase often used as a justification for imposing more limits, or punishments. But perhaps such children are testing something else entirely - the limits of accepting them as they are, without conditions.

The heart of unconditional teaching is to provide the reassurance that she still cares about them and she isn't going to punish or desert them, even if they do something very bad. This posture allows "their best motives to surface," thus creating "the circumstances in which growth and change are more likely to occur." This is the long, hard way to go, but it turns out to be the only way to help children learn on their own. The moral here is that unconditional acceptance is not only something all children deserve; it's also a powerfully effective way to help them become the kind of people we want them to be.

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