

Beyond Acceptance – Embracing What Is

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North Florida School Days – November 2014

Many parents conceive images of their children way before they physically conceive. Preferences go beyond boy or girl. Parents expect a healthy child who will be smart, artistic, athletic, kind, strong, well-behaved, and popular.

What happens when these expectations aren't met? That is truly the biggest challenge we, as parents, face. Can we accept our children with all their positive AND negative qualities? Can we go beyond acceptance and embrace what is?

My two children have many positive qualities but also struggle with serious physical and mental health challenges. Neither is on-track for achieving the fantasies I had for them 16 & 24 years ago when they were babies and that is OK. I've embraced the mission of helping them make lemonade out of life's lemons. Although some would say their bodies are "flawed," their hearts are full of compassion for others because they understand suffering. They are making their way through the "School of Hard Knocks" and I am confident they will eventually graduate with honors. Each of those "Knocks" has helped them learn a lesson and become better human beings.

When parents don't accept and embrace their children for the individuality they express, the results can be catastrophic. Gender, gender identification, and sexual orientation can be a major source of conflict. What about a boy who shuns football or a girl who isn't pretty? What about children who aren't particularly intelligent or are physically disabled? Parents need to reconcile their disappointment through introspection, reading, support groups, or counseling* so they can truly give their children the love and support they need and deserve. If parents don't, family conflict escalates. Family conflict is the #1 reason kids run away, leaving themselves vulnerable to sexual predators searching for runaway kids on the street to exploit.

If you are experiencing family conflict in your home for any reason, please call CDS. Family Action counselors can work with your 6-17 year old and help parents as well if needed. CDS also offers the Interface Youth Shelter, a residential program for 10-17 year olds. There is no charge to families for these services! CDS Family & Behavioral Health Services: (352) 244-0628 (counseling) and (352) 244-0618 (24/7 shelter) www.cdsfl.org

*Support Groups & Counseling: **PFLAG** (Parents, Friends of Lesbians & Gays) – pflaggainesville.org; **NAMI** (National Alliance on Mental Illness) - www.namigainesville.org; Call **United Way 2-1-1** to find other types of support groups; **Alachua County Crisis Center** offers free counseling – useful for parents who need help “embracing what is.”







“One of the greatest sources of unhappiness, in my experience, is the difficulty we have in accepting things as they are.” Leo Babauta