

## **Are you a Brick Wall, Jellyfish or Backbone Parent?**

Anyone who is one will say that the hardest and most rewarding job in the world is being a parent. When my children look up at me and smile, not much else in the world really matters and in that moment in time I know my true purpose in life. A purpose to provide my son and daughter the basic necessities of life and that is the easy part. I also want to give them self esteem, self confidence the gift of self respect, inner strength and a strong moral compass that will guide them through life's holes and hazards that we call adolescence. Don't get me wrong, I know my children won't get through childhood without making mistakes. We are all human and without mistakes there are no lessons in life from which the richest education comes. These aren't qualities my husband and I can go and purchase- these are gifts that my husband and I have to live and model. Sound easy.....it's not.

How do we become the parents we are? If we are all motivated to see our children grow to be healthy and happy why aren't all children getting to that universal goal? The most important question that all parents should ask is how does the way that I was parented affect how I parent today? All parents fall into one of three types of parenting styles that parenting expert and author Barbara Coloroso calls brick wall, jellyfish and backbone.

Where do you fit most of the time? Brick wall parenting comes from a place of wanting power and control over children. Brick wall parents expect obedience and rigid adherence to rules. Growing up in a brick wall family these characteristics ring loud and true in my ears, I flash back to a time where I was so fearful of my dad coming home because I knew I would be in trouble, that the fear was much more terrifying than the punishment. I wasn't taught how to think for myself but told what to think. I didn't feel heard, valued, or respected, leading to a low self esteem and ultimately me looking for love in all the wrong places.

When it comes to jellyfish parenting there are two types. Jellyfish A parents are neglectful of their children on all levels. This could be due to the parents being wrapped up in their own issues of addictions, mental health issues; unresolved grief, past trauma or domestic violence. Jellyfish B parents are completely lacking in any type of rules, limits, consistency, routines or consequences. Often jellyfish B parents believe that children shouldn't have rules or limits and just have free rein to be "kids". Sometimes these are parents that grew up in brick wall families and want their children to grow up with the things they were denied. Parents may also be unaware of the importance of setting limits, having rules, routines and consistency and don't have the tools to put these things in place.

Although brick wall and jellyfish styles are at opposite ends of the spectrum, they tend to create children that feel unheard, disrespected, lonely and don't believe in themselves which can be a recipe for going down the wrong path in adolescence.

Backbone parents fall in the middle of brick wall and jellyfish parenting. Backbone families live by six critical life messages; I believe in you, I trust you, I know you can handle life situations, you are listened to, you are cared for and you are very important to me. In these families the parents set the example for respect, caring, unconditional love and acceptance, fostering their children's inner spirit and helping their children reach their fullest potential.

It is pretty clear where all parents would like to be. No one can be a backbone parent 100% of the time but what matters is that you parent that way most of the time. If you need some support to become more of a backbone parent there are several options. Pick up Barbara Coloroso's book "Kids are Worth It." In her book she talks about how to be the best backbone parent you can be. Barbara will be visiting Central Alberta in September presenting a two day workshop for professionals and a parent night where she will be speaking to her book "Kids are Worth It". For more details about Barbara Coloroso's presentations as well as other parenting support programs please go to Family Services of Central Alberta's website [www.fsca.ca](http://www.fsca.ca) - After all your kids are worth it, but so are you!

Trina Kennedy RSW  
Growing Together Group Coordinator  
Family Services of Central Alberta  
403.343-6400