

Chapter 4

**Offering Presence
Rather Than Presents**

T

*We are always too busy for our children;
we never give them the time or interest they deserve.*

*We lavish gifts upon them; but the most precious
gift—our personal association, which means so much
to them, we give grudgingly.*

-Mark Twain

Bridge Builder's Tip

You enter the world of your child by your offering spirit connecting to your child's seeking spirit.

Daisy could hear his footsteps. She felt a tingle rush through her body. This was the best part of being sick. Sure, it was great missing a day of school. And M.J., she would make Daisy her special homemade soup. But nothing made Daisy feel as special as the times Dad offered his special brand of care after coming home from work.

He would stop off at *United Dairy Farmers* to get Daisy her favorite flavor—mint chocolate chip ice cream. Two scoops of that was more medicinal than any aspirin or cold remedy.

But that was just the beginning. Dad would stay with her the rest of the day. Just her and Dad—it made her feel special. Dad had a way of talking with her that made all her problems melt away. When Dad would say, “Let’s talk, Daise,” that meant it was time for Daisy to talk and Dad to listen. It was moments like these that had given birth to the special connection she felt with her father.

That’s what made her sick days so special. Daisy had Dad’s complete undivided attention. No television, no phone calls coming between them. Just Dad and Daisy.

The time they spent together cemented the special bond these two shared. This man had a way of making her feel significant—a part of a bigger whole. At times like these, she ceased to be plain ole’ Daisy. These shared moments enabled her to expand, to become something more than just herself. This process of connecting grounded her with her father. Daisy felt a sense of belonging. No longer was she just Daisy, she was Fred’s daugh-

ter. She felt safe in knowing that no matter what she did or said, nothing could undo her place in his world.

It didn’t matter to Daisy what they talked about. *How* they talked about the things in her life was what made an impact. That’s what was so special about Dad. He let Daisy explore her world rather than force Daisy to swallow his world of thoughts and feelings.

When they had these talks, the only thing that mattered was what Daisy thought and felt. As Daisy groped to make sense out of her life experiences, Dad guided her, even prodded her, but never once did he judge her; he only *encouraged* Daisy.

Sure it was tempting. When Daisy hurt, Dad hurt. He wanted to fix whatever Daisy struggled with. But he backed off. He left out his opinions. You see, he *trusted* Daisy; more importantly, he *understood* that the best way to help her grow was to *nurture* and *support* rather than belittle and lecture.

The impact of Daisy leading and Dad following? Daisy felt *safe* with Dad. She never felt guarded, like she had to hold anything back. There was only one point to this exercise—being and becoming more of herself. The foundation of their bond was one thing and one thing only—Daisy’s emotional needs.

Daisy could be messy because life was messy. *Acceptance* was not just giving lip service in their relationship. It was woven into the very fiber of the relationship. Acceptance was the lubricant that liberated all the hard pieces Daisy had to let out and examine in order to grow.

Daisy was grateful for what she had with her father. In fact, recently she had discussed this very subject with her best friend, Paula.

“It’s this thing about him listening. Dad sometimes doesn’t get a lot of what I tell him. Hell, I don’t know what I’m saying most times. That’s not the point,” Daisy said, chuckling at the irony of what she just realized.

“Then what is the point?” Paula asked. “He doesn’t get most of what you say. You, yourself, don’t understand a lot of what the two of you talk about. But somehow, somehow, you feel like he understands you?”

“I know Dad understands me because he’s there for me. He knows I need him to be there. That’s what feels good. Even if he doesn’t get it, he gets me. Forget what we talk about. Just him being there and making an effort leaves me feeling cared about, like I’m worth the time.

“I don’t feel argued with. He doesn’t make me feel silly. I would never admit this to him, but a lot of what I say and do is off the wall. But it never phases him.”

“Well, I don’t get the big deal,” Paula said. “My parents talk to me all the time. There isn’t a day that passes that they don’t want to talk with me about something. Do this. Do that. Why did I say this? Why did I do something this way or that? They’re just as involved as your Dad; but I don’t feel any closer to them!”

“That sucks! I would resent the hell out of my Dad if he treated me that way,” Daisy observed.

“Whatever. I stopped listening a long time ago, so it doesn’t matter. Now, I just nod my head until I see their lips stop moving, then I walk out of the room.”

The more Paula talked the more her bravado dwindled. Her voice started to crack. “But you know what really hurts, Daise? I feel like I’m invisible to them. They never see me. All they see is themselves,” Paula was visibly shaken by this admission.

“What do you mean?” Daisy asked, stroking her hair.

Tears fell from Paula’s eyes as she said, “I don’t know. I have to be really careful about what I say around them. The few times I dare reach out, things seem to get turned around on me. It’s as if I have to take care of them.

“Daise’, I feel like they never hear me. It’s like my every word wounds them. That’s what I mean. They never step out of their selfish, self-centered lives long enough, to see me, hear me, find me.

“It never fails, I always come second because they’re so G.D. frail. All I ever get from them is, ‘Don’t upset your mother with that now.’ ‘Your father had a hard day, can’t it wait until tomorrow?’ ‘You always do this just to stab me in the back.’ ‘You know how that upsets me when you talk that way,’” Paula said mockingly.

“I just want to shout at the top of my lungs, ‘Can you forget about yourselves long enough to see me, to listen to me, to freakin’ be there for me!’”

Quite a contrast in parenting styles. More importantly, quite a contrast in the impact these styles have on Daisy and Paula. The difference? Daisy’s emotional needs are the entrée to her world—the link between Daisy and her dad. The priorities are very clear. Dad is there to meet Daisy’s emotional needs—not the other way around.

Paula, on the other hand, is left out in the cold. Indifference masks her pain. Her unexpressed hurt leaks out as anger, even disdain for her parents.

Because Paula’s emotional needs go unfulfilled, she’s begun to feel unimportant, as if she doesn’t matter. There’s so much for her to get beyond in order for her parents to ever take notice of her. The message from her parents is subtle but powerful: “our comfort comes before your

needs.” The implication is, “you’re not worth our time and effort.” Knowing this, Paula has begun to retreat within herself—inevitably she’ll seek comfort elsewhere.

These contrasting parenting styles highlight two important dimensions of the emotional connection between you and your child—your child’s seeking spirit and your offering spirit. These two dimensions are the means by which you plug into the world of your child.

Your child’s seeking spirit is the very human desire to have his emotional needs fulfilled. These emotional needs are the goodies he receives through the manifestation of your offering spirit. Think of these goodies as nutrients—they’re what enable him to feel acknowledged, validated, affirmed, and loved. These goodies come in all shapes and sizes. Appreciation, attention, belonging, love, nurturance, trust, and understanding are but a few of the needs your child is seeking to have fulfilled by you.

Your offering spirit is the energy from within that you extend towards your child to fulfill her emotional needs. You experience the essence of this energy as feelings of love and responsibility for his well-being. This energy appears in all the ways you express your love and sense of responsibility for his emotional, physical, and spiritual well-being. It’s similar to the telephone commercial, your offering spirit is the energy you tap into when you reach out and touch somebody.

How do you reach out and touch him with your offering spirit? Validate his feelings. Fulfill his emotional needs. Honor who he is. Support his efforts to grow and mature. Be a safe person for him to turn to. These simple acts of love are what create and nurture the link between you and your child.

How does your offering spirit link up with your child’s seeking spirit? Think of the emotional connection as a conduit that runs from the core of your offering spirit to the core of his seeking spirit. Simply put, your offering spirit infuses the emotional connection to your child with the energy necessary to fulfill those emotional needs he seeks for you to fulfill.

Can you see from the story above how Daisy’s father connected with her by offering up the goodies Daisy was seeking? Why not take a moment and think about the relationship Daisy has with her father. Review the story. Take notice of the emotional needs Daisy is seeking from her dad. List what those needs are.

As you become more sensitized to your child’s emotional needs, you may wonder, how can you insure that your offering spirit manifests itself in your relationship with your child? Consistently applying the skills I discuss with you in each chapter of this book will build a bridge between your offering spirit and your child’s seeking spirit. By applying these skills, you’ll tap into the energy of your offering spirit and connect it with your child’s seeking spirit.

By using the energy of your offering spirit, you’ll create a special emotional climate for you and your child. This climate will leave him feeling safe and loved. Think about how your child’s emotional well-being would be impacted by you activating the energy of your offering

spirit. Can you imagine what impact such an emotional climate will have on his growth and development?

As your eyes open to the power of your offering spirit, you'll discover the most fundamental truism of creating a long-lasting emotional connection with your child. *At the heart and soul of the connection you create with your child is the fulfillment of their emotional needs.* When you feel lost, at your wits end, like you have nowhere else to go with your child, return to this page, this paragraph, this premise. Your child desperately needs you.

There's so much that he needs from you. *Involvement*—extending your offering spirit to him is an active process that never takes a day off. *Acceptance*—he needs to feel the warmth of your forgiveness as he experiments with learning who he is. *Openness*—he needs a shoulder to lean on when life becomes overwhelming. *Accountability*—he needs to discover The Law of Congruence, namely, that his words and actions must match. *Discipline*—he needs you to tell him how far is too far. *Commitment*—he needs to trust that you'll be there for him no matter what. *Love*—it's his drug of choice.

Now it's a fair question to ask whether he's aware all of the time how much he needs you. Absolutely not! Is he able to admit to himself—let alone you—how much he needs you? More times than not, no. Is he comfortable displaying his emotional neediness? No more so than you're comfortable displaying yours.

However, that's what's at the core of the dance the two of you do. Him needing you. Him wanting you to be there—seeking, desperately wanting your attention, your approval, your affections.

I can imagine the look of disbelief in your eyes. These

objections are thrown my way all the time. "If you knew my Johnny, you wouldn't say that." "If you saw how my Judy tolerates what she calls my 'interference' you'd rethink this whole idea of kids needing their parents." "If you heard how my Bobby talked to me, you'd junk this idea of seeking and offering spirit."

For those of you who genuinely believe your kids don't need you, it's time to step out of the bunker and take control of your relationship with them.

For those of you who have bought into the indifference your child projects, it's time to peak behind the mask.

For those of you who have come to believe that your child's belligerence is nothing more than the actions of an overindulged brat, it's time to take your blinders off and discover what is churning inside your child.

For those of you who are overwhelmed with being made to feel you're a bad person, it's time to take a deep breath!

You can transform your child's indifference into genuine caring. You can discover that the underbelly of his belligerence is respect and honor. Armed with the potency of your offering spirit, you can change your feelings of powerlessness into empowerment.

The path is simpler than you believe. Sure, the enormity of the responsibility you are faced with everyday can be overwhelming. But don't let your discouragement blind you to how powerful your offering spirit is.

Here's an old rabbinic tale I tell at my workshops. It demonstrates just how potent your offering spirit is.

The Lord said to the Rabbi, "Come, I will show you Hell."

They entered a room where a group of people sat around

a huge kettle of stew, desperation etched in their faces. They were all famished. Each person held a spoon that reached the kettle but had a handle so long the spoon could not be used to reach their mouths. The suffering these people endured was unbearable.

“Come, now I will show you Heaven,” the Lord said.

They entered a second room, identical to the first in every detail. This room had the same kettle of stew, another group of people, the same long spoons. But, there, everyone was happy and nourished.

“I don’t understand,” said the Rabbi. “Why are they happy when they were miserable in the other room, yet everything is the same?”

The Lord smiled. “Ah, don’t you see the difference?” he asked. Here they have learned to feed each other.”

Your offering spirit is the long spoon by which you can feed your child’s emotional needs. The more you use your offering spirit, the more powerful it will become. The skills I talk about throughout this book have only two aims in mind—empowering you to tap into your underutilized offering spirit so that you can safely fulfill the emotional needs of your child. Once your child feels fed and nourished, they’ll feed you right back.

Along with creating a link between your offering spirit and your child’s seeking spirit, you can create a connection with your child by building a bridge of understanding between the two of you. You can accomplish this by effectively communicating to your child how well you understand what it is your child is experiencing in their world. In the next two chapters, we’ll focus on two skills that will forever cement the bond between you and your child as you use these skills in a consistent fashion.

Bridge Builder’s Checklist



Emotional needs of your children that your offering spirit can fulfill.

- | | |
|---------------------|-------------------|
| 1. Acceptance | 7. Love |
| 2. Accountability | 8. Support |
| 3. Affirmation | 9. Trust |
| 4. Appreciation | 10. Understanding |
| 5. Emotional Safety | 11. Validation |
| 6. Involvement | |

Write down in the space below the emotional needs your offering spirit can fulfill for your child. As you list the emotional needs of your children, write down some specific ways your offering spirit can begin connecting with your child’s seeking spirit.
