



## **THE DISTELFINK – Children Are Watching**

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It's amazing what you can learn from a hungry teenager after you've served up a lot of tasty food. I tried this technique over the summer with a bunch of my children and their friends in order to do some hands on research to test the theory "Our Children Are Always Watching Us". "So what do you see?" I asked, having sated the kids with a pot now not-so-full of pasta, loaves of garlic bread and a big green salad. The scent of warm brownies in the oven beckoned, if they gave me some answers to work with. Wishing I had a glass of wine close-by to bolster my courage, I braced myself for the responses to come.

What I learned can loosely be divided into three categories:

- Our children pay attention to how we interact with people;
- They watch how and when we work;
- They take note of what we buy – both for ourselves and for them.

I felt like I had opened Pandora's Box and I wanted to stuff the furies back in, but I couldn't. So here's the detail to support the observations they shared with me.

Regarding people interaction, our children notice everything! They observe how their parents talk to each other, the tones used and what they may discuss. They look at our friendships and how often we meet, what we talk about and how everyone gets along. They focus on how we treat their friends and their friends' parents. They don't miss a beat. And once they've taken all this in, they process it, and often it comes back out in their behaviors and actions.

If as spouses we treat each other with love and respect, and we support each other consistently in the raising of children, it gets acknowledged and there are positive ripple effects. If on the other hand, we are frequently angry with our spouse, we fight and we undermine each other regarding the kids, no "aha moments" here, the kids pick up on that too, and the negative currents carry over.

They look to us for how to be a good friend. How do we treat our friends? How often do we talk and get together? Do we laugh, cry, hug and rant about things? Is there an ease in how we just hang out? Or do we take advantage of our friends, try to manipulate and connive to our benefit? Do we back out of arrangements at the last minute or forget to return phone calls? Do we make excuses? I promise you, our children pick up on all this, and more, and they take stock of it. It is from these behaviors that they decide how involved they want us to be with their friends. Can we be trusted to be cool and okay? Or will we embarrass them? Probably we will, but will it be because we're just who we are, or will we deliberately try to poke fun at them? Too much provocation, and we won't be seeing their friends around much longer.

And finally, do we take time to get to know the parents of their friends? The more intertwined as adults we are in a positive and constructive way, the less opportunity our children see to get something over on us. If as parents we share some values, and have mutual interest in each other's kids, our children are far more likely to make good choices when they are in these spheres of influence.

So, do our children forgive us our bad days and less than stellar moments? Not really. We are their role models. We are their heroes. And while they definitely love us, they want us to be there for them. Therefore they may not always be as forgiving of us as we would hope them to be as they get older. Our little ones will love us blindly and unconditionally. However, our tweens and teens are tougher. It's the "all about me" years. And so, we must be as strong and positive and confident as we can muster ourselves to be, and trust that it is being noticed, because it will be.

To be continued...

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