

WORRY ≠ LOVE

“We worry because we love you.” Have you ever said this? Have you ever had this said to you? It seems so natural, doesn't it?

But is it really? And is this the message our kids receive from our worry? That we love them? It turns out, at least in my case, that I was relaying a message far different from the one I wanted to convey. And now I've learned that parents have not always worried so much about their children.

Currently, the ethos prevalent in the North American middle-class, is that parents are responsible for much of their children's character, success, failure and suffering. This has not always been the case. A historical perspective shows that children were not viewed as very special or different from adults until fairly recently in Western history. In addition, seeing children as fragile and precious is a view that, along with parents' worry and anxiety about their children, has increased dramatically since the early 20th century.

As middle-class children were deemed both to be fragile and to live in a world where they must succeed, be the best in their class, go to a

good university, enact the American dream, parental worry and anxiety was one result from such beliefs.

Add to this the influence of mass media that spreads terror in the hearts of parents while misinforming them about the preponderance of kidnappers, sexual predators and poisoners of Halloween candy.

While concerns for children living in a seemingly dangerous world make sense, parents often continue to worry when those children are grown.

I did the research on this topic while I was at a lake where I sat on my beach chair, close to the shore. A mother duck bobbed by with her ducklings behind her. Occasionally, one of them strayed to explore a piece of driftwood and once, even a piece of red plastic which it swallowed after much effort. Mother duck didn't appear upset. She simply swam along the shore and farther into the center of the lake when a dog or person neared. It reminded me of Wendell Berry's

poem "*The Peace of Wild Things*" in which he says

*I come into the peace of wild things
who do not tax their lives with forethought
of grief.*

While my sons were growing up, I worried all the time.

I cringe when I think of the tension my worrying created. I feel sad that I put myself through so much unnecessary suffering.

Once he was grown, my son, informed me that my worrying conveyed the message that I didn't trust him or his brother to be able to handle the challenges life brought them. Wow. I had no idea! Now, when worry comes, I do what I can to make an informed assessment of the level of danger that exists and then practice antidotes to worry as I take appropriate action.

I remind myself I don't know more than universal wisdom. I don't know the future. I don't know what's best for another person. I go for a walk and practice trust that those I love, including myself, will handle whatever comes and are capable of reaching out for help. This trust is a bow, a show of respect.

I don't want to minimize situations when a son or daughter lives in violent circumstances, like war for example, or domestic violence, or when they seem to be in a high-risk situation because of a health issue or risky behaviors or a dangerous environment. Our caring as parents is going to keep us hyper-alert. And yet, expressing our love

with a message of trust and confidence will be more helpful than our worry, anxiety or suffering.

Selene Aitken
www.TheDanceofCommunication.com