

Raising Children in the 'Post Truth' World

We know we're living in extraordinary times when the new catchphrase to describe the age is, the 'post truth' world. So, suddenly, the truth has become insignificant, trust doesn't matter any more, honesty and integrity are terribly 'yesterday', old fashioned concepts we no longer need in the world!

Faced with such messages, as parents or educators – those who care about children and care about the future of the world, we can be forgiven if we stop, pause and wonder whether we need to change the messages we teach to our children. How are we to prepare them effectively for a world in which the truth has become an ambiguous luxury, or a world where honesty and integrity are portrayed as somehow naïve and vulnerable?

Is it time to sit our children down and tell them, "It's a dog eat dog world out there, and you need to forget fancy ideas of morality and fight to get whatever you can for yourself"? Or "There's a limited amount of anything and you have to do what it takes to get as much of it as possible for yourself. If people get in your way, you must do whatever you have to for victory".

The news is full of politicians saying things that aren't true, sporting heroes tumbling from their pedestals as they are revealed to be cheats who used artificial means to win at all cost. We see evidence from the worlds of finance, business and commerce where people are exploited, cheated and tricked for financial gain. Pharmaceutical companies are under suspicion for peddling worthless or even potentially harmful medicines to make extra profits after manipulating tests and approval processes. Resource companies pay scientists to make claims against the overwhelming evidence of global warming and potentially devastating climate change.

So, are we in a 'post truth' world?

I believe not. Rather, I believe that this is a time to double down with our children on the values of integrity, empathy, caring and compassion for others. It becomes even more important that we talk with our children, discuss the challenging issues in society and help them to make sense of the world around them.

The values I have listed above all form part of the broader term, 'character' – and that hasn't and never will go out of fashion. The person of character will, if anything, stand out more as an exception in a world where it seems that dishonesty and lack of true character are accepted as the new normal.

My son and I have a favourite saying, "It's on the internet – it must be true!" This is, of course a joke I adopted as he was growing up and now we both use it to remind ourselves that we need to be discerning and ready to be critical of all information and 'facts' that come to us. This doesn't just apply when using the internet, but when receiving information from anywhere, or anyone.

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