

Parenting Tools:

Season of Service



HOME
22:6

Parenting Tools: *Season of Service*

From “Parenting by the Book” by John Rosemond

There are seasons in parenting; in Home 22:6 we call these seasons the root years, the trunk years, and the branch years. The root years could be called “The Season of Service,” it begins at birth and lasts approximately two to three years. That is when parents should begin to gradually shift to the next season of trunk years. During this initial season, parents function as servants to a child who cannot serve himself and cannot anticipate the consequences of his actions. His dependency and ignorance (not to be confused with lack of intelligence!) require that his parents place him at the center of their attention and orbit around him in a near-constant ministry of surveillance and “doing” – checking, feeding, carrying, changing, comforting, fixing, fetching, and so on.

The purposes of season one are threefold:

- To “root” the child securely in the world – to assure him that he is where he belongs, with people who love him and who will take good and proper care of him under any and all circumstances.
- To provide for the child’s fundamental biological needs – put bluntly, to keep him alive and thriving.
- To prevent, as much as possible, the child from hurting himself. In all cultures and in all times, the mother has been and is the primary servant during season one. (There have been and are exceptions, but they are individual exceptions that have not significantly tilted the historical norm.) The father, even one who wants to be highly involved, stands slightly outside the periphery of his wife’s busy orbiting. He is her “parenting aide.” Like a teacher’s

aide's, the husband's job is to assist his wife and fill in for her when she needs a break. Consequent to this child centeredness, the marriage is "catch-as-catch-can" during season one. (To those of you who have noticed what may appear to be an inconsistency between what I say here and what I have earlier said about mothers orbiting around their children and fathers playing the role of "parenting aide," I will simply say [paraphrasing Ecclesiastes 3:1], "There is a time for everything...but it is not the entire time.") Now, an infant or young toddler may not yet have well-developed language skills, but he is highly intelligent nonetheless. He is drawing inarticulate conclusions concerning the workings of things in his microcosm (which is the one-and-only world as far as he is concerned), one of which is that his mother is there to do his bidding and that he has power and authority over her. He verifies this by crying, at which his mother appears and does everything in her power to fix whatever it is that is causing his distress. Grandma (parents of previous generations) understood that whereas her ministry was a necessary one, she was slowly creating a monster. If she did not bring this first season to a close, she was in danger of raising a spoiled brat – a child who would believe that as his mother was continuing to do, so the world revolved around him. She realized that out of absolute necessity she had caused her child to believe that he had power over her, that she was his gofer; therefore, she had to step up to the plate and correct that impression. And so, around her child's second birthday, as he became more capable of doing basic things for himself, Grandma began to make the critical transition from the first of parenting's seasons to its second. Under normal circumstances, this transition takes about a year. It is, without question, the most significant and precedent setting of all times in the parent-child relationship, the future of which hangs in the balance.

To bring about this transformation, a mother must begin:

- Teaching and expecting her child to do for himself what she has previously done for him – use the toilet instead of diapers, get his own cup of water or basic snacks, dress himself, pick up his toys, and so on.
 - Building a boundary between herself and her child, thus limiting his access to her – making him wait before she does something for him, refusing to pick him up (pointing out that she is involved with something else), instructing him to go elsewhere while she finishes a task.
 - Backing slowly out of a state of high involvement with her child and re-establishing a state of high involvement with her husband, thus bringing his tenure as parenting aide to a close.
- The above material is Copyright 2014 John K. Rosemond and is used by permission from the author. It may not be further used, reprinted, or distributed in any form without the express permission of John K. Rosemond (johnrosemond.com, parentguru.com).