

## Four Things That Matter Most in Parenting

by Kathy Slattengren

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What four things matter the most in parenting? Could they be the same as the four things that matter most in life? It is likely they could be the same since our relationships with our children are some of the most significant ones we have in our lives.

### The Four Things That Matter Most

In his book, [The Four Things That Matter Most: A Book About Living](#), Ira Byock proclaims these are the four most important things to say to those you love:

- Please forgive me.
- I forgive you.
- Thank you.
- I love you.

Byock explains "Comprising just eleven words, these four short sentences carry the core wisdom of what people who are dying have taught me about what matters most in life." The book contains many moving stories of people who have healed relationships when they've been able to say these things to each other.



### Forgiveness - The Hardest Thing To Do

One story in the book is about Avi who had been rejected by his father when he was a boy. He harbored a deep resentment against his father for his cruel behavior. When he found out his father was dying, he realized how much his hatred of his father was still controlling his own life. It was even interfering with the relationships he had with his own young sons.

Avi did not feel his father deserved forgiveness. Byock explains "It is wrong to think that people need to *feel* forgiveness in order to *give* forgiveness. Forgiveness is actually about emotional economics. It's about a one-time cost that you pay to clear up years of compounded emotional pain. ... Even if his father didn't deserve forgiveness, Avi *did*. His father was going to die. Avi was the one who would carry the animosity and resentment in the years to come. He had carried them long enough."

After Avi forgave his father, he also found that he was more forgiving towards his wife and children. "Without knowing it, Avi had been perpetuating many of the traits - such as being quick to judge, overly critical and rigid in his ways - that he despised in Simon." It's so easy to repeat our parents' behavior with our own children, even when we've sworn we'd never treat our children that way.

Byock points out "Righteous indignation can be seductive, and even addictive, but unresolved anger is toxic to your happiness and your relationships." Anything toxic to both our happiness and our relationships is worth the effort to remove!

## Your Relationship with Your Parents and Your Children

The relationship we have with our parents influences the relationship we have with our children. Even if our parents have died, they continue to strongly influence our lives.

Mike & The Mechanics' song "In the Living Years" captures it well:

*"I know that I'm a prisoner to all my father held so dear  
I know that I'm a hostage to all his hopes and fears  
I just wish I could have told him in the living years"*

You do not have to wait until someone is dying to say the four things. Expressing love, gratitude and forgiveness can be woven into your daily life.

Saying these four things to those who are most precious to you will strengthen your relationships with them. Try doing it today!

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