

# Howard Glasser's Key to a Child's Self-Esteem

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Parenting



Photo by  
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Howard Glasser believes a parenting philosophy can be found in techniques used to train **Shamu** the killer whale. In his parenting book **Transforming the Difficult Child – The Nurtured Heart Approach**, Glasser describes the method used by trainers to teach Shamu to jump over a rope suspended over his tank. How they started surprised me. How that philosophy informs parenting is **profound**.

## Make Success Easy

As described by parenting expert Howard Glasser, training Shamu to jump over a rope suspended above the water was relatively easy -- once they found the right approach:

1. Make it easy for the Shamu to succeed
2. In the beginning, reward success, no matter how small

To make it easy for Shamu to succeed, instead of putting the rope above the water and trying to persuade the Shamu whale to jump over it, the trainers started by laying the rope **on the bottom** of the tank. Then they watched Shamu very carefully. When they saw Shamu cross over the line (or even get near it in the beginning), they gave him a reward. Rather quickly, Shamu learned that if he swam over the rope, he would often receive a reward. Then they raised the rope off the bottom of the tank, rewarding Shamu only when he swam over it. Eventually, they raised the rope **above of the water**. By that point, Shamu "knew" he would often receive a reward when he had to cross over the line, so quite naturally he began jumping over the rope. Simple, right? What does that have to do with parenting?

## Howard Glasser's Insight on Parenting

As with training a killer whale, parents need to **make it easy for their kids to succeed** AND reward those small successes, at least in the beginning. As I describe in my previous post [Beyond Positive Discipline](#) the reward is often just the parent's attention, but the goal is vital:

To get a child **focusing on his or her success**.

According to Glasser's approach, parents do that by giving their attention to a child (the reward) when the child is succeeding, if only a little. However, most parents (myself included) give the most attention to a child when

he/she is doing something wrong. Howard Glasser believes this can have a profound impact on a child. He puts it this way:

*"A child's feeling of **self-esteem** is centered on the experience for which he/she is **noticed most intently.**"*

## **Accentuate the Positive**

Howard Glasser asserts that by giving kids the most attention (reward) when they are failing, kids develop a mindset of focusing on their own failures. That focus can become a big part of their mindset for life. Put another way, parents are trying to teach the values they want in their children EXACTLY when the opposite is happening. Does that make sense?

But imagine if parents focused primarily on their children's successes.

How would that change what they notice and focus on in themselves? Wouldn't they focus on their successes as well?

What impact would such a mindset have on a person's life?

Isn't that profound?

## **Howard Glasser Nurtured Heart Approach**

This one insight is a large part of why I like Howard Glasser's work on parenting. Because, if taken to heart, this one insight is enough to transform a parent's attitude about their children...and themselves. Do take a look at Howard Glasser's book **Transforming the Difficult Child – The Nurtured Heart Approach** apply

## **Is Glasser's Book Only for Parenting the "Difficult" Child?**

**No!** Perhaps it's an unfortunate title...but then again, it's easy to refer to your own child as "difficult" when he or she won't listen to a word you say. In any case, the parenting principles and techniques described in **Transforming the Difficult Child – The Nurtured Heart Approach** apply to ALL children. Perhaps they just apply *even more* for parenting the "difficult" child -- whatever that means.

Resources by Howard Glasser:

[Transforming the Difficult Child](#)

[101 Reasons to Avoid Ritalin Like the Plague](#)

[Transforming the Difficult Child 6 disc DVD series](#)