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## Not in front of the Children

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French social historian Philippe Ariès argued in his book “Centuries of Childhood” that for most of history what we now call childhood did not really exist and that it was only modern liberal ideas that created it. According to Ariès, medieval children joined the world of adults from the moment they were weaned and no one ever made a fuss about how little and cute they were.

Nowadays, there seems to be a certain amount of reluctance among adults to treat children as people. We dress them up (pink for a girl, blue for a boy), pamper them, talk at them in very strange - often condescending - tones and only speak about certain *children things* in their presence. Yet we have no problem plonking them in front of the TV for hours without really knowing what they are watching or the messages being transmitted. No, no, no ... wait! I'm not going to go on about television again, don't worry.

My daughter, now a teenager, used to get very frustrated with the way some adults used to *talk down* to her when she was a child. They would be having *adult* conversations about *adult* topics and then, suddenly, when she'd enter the room, they would change their tone of voice, simplify their language and start going on about how *guapa* she was, how *lovely* her clothes were and how *big* she

was getting. Now, this was fine when she was two or three years old, but by the time she was nine or ten it had started to grate on her nerves a bit and the result was that she thought that adults were all a bit strange because she liked to speak about all kinds of things in quite a normal manner.

For this reason, the grown-ups that she now has the best relationships with are those who, from day one, treated her as an *individual*, a *person* with ideas, opinions and feelings. People who saw her enthusiasm to speak, listen and learn and her potential to mature.

In his book, ‘Educating the Emotions’, Brazilian psychotherapist Dr. Augusto Cury, talks about how we as parents share the same *physical space* as our children, but seldom share their *lives*. An interesting distinction. His research shows that 50% of parents never talk (or *listen*) to their children about their inner feelings and thoughts.

It does appear that in our *modern* society, many of us have little or no real time for our children. We work around the clock to be able to *buy* everything we *think* they want while the best gift we can ever give them, our time and our presence, seems to be in short supply. We claim we'd *give them the world* but are incapable of giving ourselves.

We should spend time with our children. Quality time. We should *dialogue* with them about their own frustrations, their successes, failures, dreams, fears and mistakes and we should *enjoy* entering their world and seeing it through *their* eyes. Because in their own eyes, children have already become responsible, independent people long before we judge them to be and in order not to damage their fragile pride, we must treat them with respect and trust them to move on their own.

Treating our children like *real people*, yes, even children of five or six years old, encourages them to mature emotionally and helps strengthen our relationships with them. Treating children like babies makes them *act* like babies. Treating them like they are in an over-protective bubble, we are in danger of turning them into *people who cannot take care of themselves*. And that is the biggest disservice we can do to our children.