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Viewpoint 2

How My Parents Brought Me Up

By Zoe Phoenix

1. Introduction

In April 2018 I was invited by the Learning for Well-being Foundation to go to Brussels to participate in a panel discussion on '*What contributes to education settings being competent to nurture the well-being of young people*'. On the panel I was asked to think about how school and families nurture well-being. After the panel I was encouraged to express my opinions in an article, so I decided to address this by interviewing my parents and asking them two key questions:

1. What did my 'holistic well-being' mean to you and what was your ideal image for me to be fully myself?
2. How did you go about providing the environment, experiences and attitudes through which I could grow into being all I can/could be?

2. Holistic well-being

2.1 Opportunities

My parents always wanted to give me the broadest opportunities possible to develop independence and widen my horizons. They have both always made sure that money was not an obstacle to enabling me to try new activities and experiences. I was a very privileged child in the sense that I could try and do any new activities I wanted such as dance, theatre, martial arts, acrobatics, music etc. This doesn't mean I was particularly good at any of them, but I had the opportunity to try them all and was in fact encouraged to do so. Having all the possibilities from a young age helped me figure out what I wanted to do or didn't, what I was interested in or wasn't. It helped me understand who I was.



2.2 Personal space

In order to become fully myself my parents have understood that freedom and personal space is very important. Even though we are close as a family, my parents know the boundaries; simple things like micro-managing my homework and outings. As I get older, they see that in order for me to grow and figure out what I want, I must do most of it on my own. When it comes to school, for the past couple of years we have this mutual understanding that as long as my grades and behaviour in school are in check then there is no reason to be all over me. This helps me a lot because I work best on my own and I tend to procrastinate like everyone else, but if I had someone constantly nagging me, I would eventually just get frustrated. In terms of personal space my parents are very respectful. They understand that as a teenager I might not always want to do things and some days I would rather stay at home in my bed and binge on TV shows on Netflix.

2.3 curiosity & exploration

They respect me, so therefore I also have to do my part. One thing that is key to them is 'family time', my parents would ensure this through insisting on having meals together. When I was younger, I remember getting jealous of some of my friends because they would get to eat in front of the TV or whenever they wanted, and they didn't have to sit and wait for everyone to finish before going back to their lives. Now I realize how important this was because it really pushed us to communicate with each other. Family activities and vacations are also very big for us. Once a year we have one big holiday together in which we go explore new things; last year we went backpacking for 120 km across Spain, this year we went exploring Colombia and Japan. It was amazing. I had the opportunity to discover whole new cultures and ways of living. For a really long time my parents have always given me and brother amazing new experiences which have given us a hunger for explorations and a deeper understanding of different cultures.



2.4 Art

My father is an artist and he always thought it important for me to experience art in different forms so from the early age of 3 months I have been taken to theatre and music festivals. I personally am no artist and the best I can do is to draw a fantastic stickman, but those experiences really opened my eyes up to different worlds. They are a really big part of me because thanks to my parents I have an appetite for them.

3. All I can/could be

3.1 Positive & diverse environment

To be everything I could/can be my parents have always ensured that the environment that I was in was a positive one. To achieve this, they made sure I had other adult figures to look up to. This not only bought more love into my life, but it also bought more diversity. By having different types of people around me it gave me different perspectives and understandings. From a young age my mother and father introduced me to different cultures and ethnicities, which meant I never had any prejudice towards them. My mother really insisted on embracing everyone and someone's colour is not a bad thing and should be celebrated and respected.

3.2 Social environment

They also made my environment a welcoming one. Every Friday from the age of four, my mother invited a family friend who is an art teacher to come and do a class in our cellar with 6 or more children. These people were friends of my brother's and mine. The class was an hour after school and a chance for us to hang out while painting, drawing and doing other crafts. After the session my mother would set up an 'Apéro' in which she invited all of our friends and the parents of the children to come and share food, a drink and good conversation. This made me realise the importance of friendship and human connection. Seeing my mother being so sociable really encouraged me to be sociable too.



3.3 Open and communicative environment

Openness is very important for my family. Having an open attitude enables us to communicate with each other well. Open communication is one of the main things that I personally think keeps a relationship working whether it's a romantic or a family one. At one point in my life I cut myself off from my family and during that time I was lonely because I felt that there was no one there for me. I learned from this because after a while I couldn't do it alone anymore, so I let my parents back in by just talking to them and letting them know what was going on. This made me realise that they had always been there for me, but I had chosen to exclude them and if I wanted to have a relationship it had to go both ways.

3.4 Trusting environment

This attitude to being mutually open has also led to us mutually trusting each other. These days my parents generally know everything about my life – unlike many teenagers. Since I am a teenager I do go out and party a lot and even though many parents can guess what goes on, many parents actually don't have a clue. But I always share with my parents what goes on because in my case it benefits me more to be open as it means they trust me more. For example, if I am to go out, I will tell my parent where I am going, what is probably going to happen and what time I will be home. This system works well for us

because consequently they don't worry and stay up late wondering what is going on. It also works because there are three conditions, firstly if there ever is a problem, I call them or I update them on what I am doing if there is a change of plan, secondly I make sure that I am safe and most importantly I must always stay in control. I am quite responsible and over time my parents have realised this and from experience they know they can trust me, so I therefore have no reason to breach their trust.

I am so beyond lucky to have this life and I truly admire and respect my parents for what an amazing they job they do looking after my brother and me. They have given me everything I need and so much more. I truly believe that the key to having a strong sense of holistic well-being is to just have a supportive entourage, including people you love and care about and being open and trusting with them.



Author

Hello, my name is Zoe Phoenix and I am 16-years old. I was born in Switzerland of English and Italian/English parents. From the age of 2 years I have lived in France and been schooled in the French educational system. I am bilingual in French and English but have always considered myself British. I really love music and I listen to all genres from rock to Disney. I like sport and enjoy being part of a rugby club. My friends are an important aspect of my life and I socialize a lot with real people and online (Instagram: zoephoenix). I don't like school, but I work and want to do well so that I can have as many opportunities as possible when I leave. I want to travel and learn to speak Spanish and Italian fluently. I have a lot of anxiety, but I have a great friends and family that are always there to support me. I don't know what I want to do in life, but everyone tells me that's normal, so I guess we'll see where life takes me.