

# Five Keys to a Better Relationship\*

By Cliff Crain

In his book on relationships, David Richo explores the benefits parents often enjoy when they practice mindful loving and the use of the “5 A’s” relationship technique. Here I will attempt to summarize the 5 A’s -



**ATTENTION** is the first key. This means practicing noticing words, feelings, and experience without strong judgments. The mindful parent tunes-into their children, paying attention to them with eyes, ears, and heart. This is not an easy thing to do, and it takes effort on the parent’s part. The value of paying loving attention to your child, is that your child will have the opportunity to feel like they really matter to someone. Paying attention is *walking-the-walk*, and it goes way beyond just using words and telling your child that you love him or her.



**ACCEPTANCE** is the second key. When a parent practices real acceptance, this means that the child is received respectfully, with all of his or her feelings, thoughts, choices, and personal traits. A child’s ability to be intimate grows in accordance with how safe that child feels, and that sense of safety is primarily based upon how authentically the child was accepted in early life. A parent who wants to practice this type of acceptance must let go of preconceived plans and agendas for their child.

Acceptance is a form of approval at the *core level*, and feeling such approval from a parent is a necessary component to building healthy self-esteem. With ATTENTION, the child is noticed. With ACCEPTANCE, the child is embraced as worthy. This is not about being compared in a positive manner to a sibling, but feeling trusted, understood, and valued for their uniqueness. The child comes to see that they are perfectly unique.



**APPRECIATION** is the third key. Appreciation gives depth to acceptance. The mindful parent practices feeling grateful for the child, and uses phrases like, “I admire you; I delight in you; I prize you; I respect you; I acknowledge you and all your potential. I appreciate you as unique.” The child who feels honestly appreciated - *as they are* – develops a deep inner well of *I am OK-ness*. Such children learn to love themselves and to love others.



**AFFECTION** is the fourth key. A mindful parent delights in being near their child. Affection refers to nearness, or loving presence. A child receives real affection when the child’s parent is committed to being beside the child often. This is the opposite of feeling abandoned.

Compassion is a form of affection. A mindful parent will acknowledge a child’s pain and be willing to “be” in that pain if it helps the child feel cared about and loved. Children, who do not get the affection they need in early life, can spend years in their adult life trying to find affection in the wrong places, with the wrong people.



**ALLOWING** is the fifth key. If a child gets an abundant amount of the “5 A’s” during childhood, they grow into an adult who will reach out for healthy adult relationships: that is, relationships that include all five A’s.

Unfortunately, most children do not get these needs met in the early years. Well-intentioned parents sometimes set rigid rules about eating, sleeping, clothing, talking, asking questions, and grooming. These parents usually rationalize that all these rules are beneficial to the child’s well being. What happens more often than not is that the child feels that they must *conform to the rules* in order to be loved and accepted. The child develops a false self in order to get along with their parents, and he/she loses touch with the true self.

Children who grow up needing to hide their true identity become adults who always feel a sense of anxiety... as if nothing is ever quite right. If a child never felt safe and loved in their uniqueness – they become adults who go through life ever craving something that they didn’t get in childhood.

A child’s needs are best fulfilled in an atmosphere of joy and forgiveness. Without healthy ALLOWING in childhood, children often grow into adults who choose controlling partners. Somehow they have normalized having someone set the rules by which they live. Other children grow into adults who are depressed, hyper-vigilant, and/or feel the need to rebel against all authority.

Parents, who want to help their children find true intimacy, peace and true happiness in later life, will encourage their children to be *themselves*, not just fit the role that the parent has decided is best.

Now, it might help for you to study the chart below and see how you, as a parent, are dealing with the 5 A’s in your home:

<b>The Five A’s</b>	<b>and</b>	<b>Their Opposites</b>
Being attentive	vs.	Ignoring, refusing to listen, being a workaholic and/or unavailable, fearing the truth
Being accepting	vs.	Trying to get your child to meet <b>your</b> expectations, desires, and fantasies
Being appreciative	vs.	Finding fault, criticizing, blaming
Being affectionate	vs.	Acting selfishly, being distant, withholding closeness
Allowing	vs.	Seeking to always be in control, demanding that things are done <b>your</b> way

\* The concepts in this article came from David Richo’s book **How to Be an Adult in Relationship: The Five Keys to Mindful Loving**, Shambala, Boston & London, 2002. His latest book is **The Power of Grace: Recognizing Unexpected Gifts on Our Path**, 2014.

If you wish to explore any of the above concepts, and how to implement them in your own family, please contact the Center for Creative Living at 925-855-1745.