



Natalya Manukhina

# Parents and grown up children

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**Parents and grown up children**

«Издательские решения»

**Manukhina N.**

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This book is about the difficulties that modern parents and their adult children face in their path. The author reveals the possibilities and secret ways of turning communication between adult family members into a real pleasure.

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# Содержание

Introduction	6
Part 1. Deep reflection	10
Children against their parents	11
Parents of grown up children	12
Duty, investment or a bottomless pit?	14
It is never too late to start	17
Considering as “adults”	18
Separation in relations	19
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	21

# **Parents and grown up children**

**Natalia Manukhina**

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## **Preface**

Dedicated to all of us, children of our parents

## Introduction

...At the age of six my lifestyle as an active child was severely restricted due to heart problems caused by flu: I was no longer allowed to run, spring and jump, or scamper around the yard with other children. The limitations included skipping kindergarten and a “lifelong” exemption from physical education at school.

When I was nine Father, in spite of worries and fears of my mother, took me to swimming lessons. At the swimming pool “Moscow” (in whose place the Cathedral of Christ the Savior has been restored now) he saw an advertisement that read: “Boys and girls! If you want to become masters of sport come to the swimming instructor...” Father apparently wanted me to become a master of sport rather than an invalid, or maybe it was because he himself had learnt to swim from a teach yourself book at a mature age. Anyway, he took me to the instructor mentioned in the advertisement.

I must say that I was not doing very well. If I went swimming for two weeks, I had to stay in bed during the next four weeks. One foggy day as I was swimming in the lane (of an outdoor pool) I heard the instructor say to his assistant: “She misses more lessons than she attends. Nothing will come of her. And she yells! Her shouts make me deaf!” The assistant answered: “The girl is doing her best. She often falls ill, but she still comes to lessons. Let her train. If she can’t, she will clear out herself.” Suddenly I realized that they were speaking about me! It was me who missed the lessons, and who yelled (I could not see the instructors in a fog), it was me whom they wanted to expel. My God! It was me, who was so eager to learn to swim!

I started to disobey doctors’ orders: as soon as the temperature went down I would hurry to the swimming pool. I could miss lessons at school, but not swimming lessons. Not at any price!

As a result I “did not clear out”, but quite the contrary – at the age of eleven I became a master of sport, at 12 I was the champion of the USSR and at 14 participated in the European Championship. Everyone was surprised that “the twelve-year-old Natasha Kabanova (it is my maiden name) beat the famous Devjatova in the 200-meter butterfly!” By the way, fifteen out of the twenty members of our team became masters of sport. More than once the winners occupying all the pedestal of Moscow and USSR championships or even the top five were our team members. So we really had a first-class instructor!

All the members of the USSR national team regularly underwent a medical examination, which revealed that my heart functioned properly. Since then I have been aware that one can manage and regulate his or her own health, although it needs a lot of time and energy. Thus, I can say that my father saved my life by taking me to swimming lessons...

However, professional sports require enormous efforts. We had trainings every day all the year round plus team practice sessions, which left us too little free time.

I went to the European Championship alone. It was 1970 and because of the notorious “Section 5” they did not let my instructor (who indicated his nationality as “Jewish”) go abroad. I found myself in a foreign country. We lived out of town, 25 kilometers from the swimming pool, where they took sportsmen only on competition days. Others trained themselves as they could following the plan drawn up in advance by their instructors. I did not have such plan and did not know how to make it. Consequently, I came seventh in Europe, finishing on the same place as I had occupied before, while I was determined to win...

That was a good lesson for me: it turned out that my records were the result of the work done by my instructor rather than my own achievements. Maybe this is the reason why in my profession helping people I always try to teach them how to cope with their tasks on their own. I am very glad that families need minimal professional help in order to develop in a new way. Maybe this is why in my psychotherapeutic, consultative and instructional practice I try to encourage people to pass

to coaching at once or step by step. In the process of coaching a client does not only get assistance in fulfillment of a particular task, but gains an experience of overcoming difficulties by oneself.

Father was very proud of my sports achievements. He was glad that I was healthy and never spoke to me about the future, especially as I regularly received “fours” without making an effort. In the tenth form I found out that some of my classmates had been attending preparatory courses at different institutes since last year, while I had not even heard about such courses. Everybody expected me to make a career in sports and like all sportsmen end up as an instructor when I would be too old for my own records. However, I thought that I had an “instructor with a God-given talent” just as well as good school teachers have a special talent to teach. Perhaps that is why I could not at once find the courage and it took me so long to master my present profession of a teacher, instructor, coach and consultant... When my elder sister learnt that I was not going to enter the Institute of Sport she found me a private tutor to help me become a student of the Technical University, which she had graduated by that time. So I enrolled at that university.

When I met other students I suddenly realized that unlike the girls of my age I was not able to choose feminine clothes that would suit me, to do my hair, to put on make-up, could not flirt and easily get on with my peers, or, as they say now, hang out with them. My father had taught me in his own way: “Don’t swing your hips so that bad men don’t molest you. Don’t spoil your skin with make-up. Don’t show your emotions. If you undertake a task, carry it to completion...” My dedication was enviable. There was also too much toughness, inflexibility or as psychologists call it rigidity in me: if I decided to do something or set a goal nothing could stop me. Resolution and selflessness were men’s qualities implanted in me by my father who, having two daughters, was longing for a son...

Now, when I have worked so much on my own feminine identity, I often help others in my practice to decide how long and to what extent they should meet their parents’ expectations; what to do when their lives take the turn that could not have predicted by their parents.

When my first child was born my father said: “I didn’t think you would make such a good mother”. He could not believe that I had finally fulfilled myself as a woman. This change in me made our relations very different. Maybe it happened because now he was a grandfather and had a new role. Indeed, with his grandchildren he was a different man – he let them love openly, without restrictions and conditions, not demanding from them to follow his own strict rules.

Father died at the age of 65 after a difficult operation. It was the Easter Sunday. The next day he was to be discharged from the hospital. His last words were “I don’t want to die! I want to love my grandchildren, play with them!” Well, he spent all his life doing his duties, coping with difficulties and protecting us from troubles, so he had no time to play around and show his love... My father’s death was a terrible blow for his family. Only after we had lost him did we realize how important he had been for us. We found it too hard to live and work as we did before. It was even painful for us to communicate with one another. Only after a few decades were we able to recall and discuss the past, when Father was with us. I still miss him. Perhaps this is the reason why I continue following some of his instructions and prohibitions, which today seem quite old-fashioned. For example, I do not drive while my sister and my children are excellent drivers. My six-year grandson can sing, dance, type freely and play computer games without having ever studied all that, except from his parents. He asks me such questions and answers my questions in such a way that I begin to doubt that he learnt systemic thinking in his mother’s womb. Or, maybe the whole generation is like that...

We are all so different in every family, every community, at every age. We all try to achieve something; we are afraid of something and refuse to do something. Eventually our efforts produce results and we create something on our own based on the experience of our parents and ancestors, and our history. However, whatever happens – wars, scientific discoveries, technical revolutions or coup d’états, – there is one value that always remains unchanged.

“We all come from our families”. This phrase retains its vital importance during all our lives. There are periods when we forget about our families, but then the family becomes significant again.

The values of our family are those that we get from our parents, keep up for all our lives and use as a guide in all our new relations. These values are the foundation for our prosperity and success.

Swift processes of globalization drew the people living in different parts of the world closer to one another, but we can see that in today's overcrowded and transparent world, which seems to offer more freedom, we feel more isolated and helpless. Sometimes we do not notice our nearest and dearest, do not understand them and find their presence burdensome. We are so accustomed to the fact that this world is controllable that we expect everyone we meet in our life to be controllable. However, the more we expect that, the more evidence we receive that in every situation there is something we cannot control, something we cannot stop or change...

Unfortunately, our modern society still sees the conflicts, controversy and lack of understanding between different generations 1) as a norm; 2) as a source of problems for the younger generation and/or their parents, families, and the whole society. People seem to make the generation gap some kind of a standard.

I completely disagree with such attitude. Moreover, my opinions and my personal and professional experience prove to me that we can achieve everything! Well, if not everything, we can really amount to much if we have the will. Each of us is strong enough to move mountains. Of course, that needs great efforts and sometimes professional help as well.

Traditionally families seek consultation regarding their teenage children, but in the last few years (from about 2007) I have had more and more cases in my practice when parents asked me to render psychological help to them and their grownup children (aged over 20). Their request was to regulate relations between the adult members of their families.

Actually the "parent-child" problem is more serious and profound than it seems at the first sight. In order to meet my clients' demands I had to learn and understand many things myself. So, in this book I intend to share the experience and knowledge gained regarding the relations between parents and their grownup children, also grandchildren and great grandchildren.

In the First Part I have included the opinions I was offered by grownup children and their parents who needed my help to get on better.

In the Second Part I speak about the transformation of roles in families that occur when new generations are born.

In the Third Part<sup>1</sup> I have examined the dynamics of interaction of several generations from the point of view of different theoretical approaches. In this part of my book you will find answers to a number of questions that puzzle us. What is important to a particular generation? What is changed for the next one? Do values stay the same or do they disappear as they are replaced by new values? The modern systemic approaches allow us to make a significant conclusion: the evolution of Human Race occurs through interaction and not opposition of different generations. Thus, the task of making their communication more favorable and productive has become quite urgent today.

In the Fourth Part of the book I offer the readers several episodes from the lives of those families where grownup children and their parents have already made efforts to compromise.

In the Fifth Part I also share my own experience in elaborating psychotherapeutic strategies to help such families.

I think it would be advisable to consider every person, family and society in whole in the light of systemic approach. Each member of a family as a biopsychosocial system undergoes some changes during their life. Consequently, in order to maintain balance in a family system during its development it is necessary to change relations between its members who have changed with time.

Unfortunately, this seemingly simple and obvious decision is not so easy to apply in practice. Usually parents are recommended to stop controlling their grownup children and give them complete

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<sup>1</sup> The Third, Fourth and Fifth Parts are absent in the present English version of the book. They are included in the text of the original Russian version of the book: Манухина Н.М. Родители и взрослые дети. Парадоксы отношений. – М., КЛАСС, 2011.



freedom to live as they like and assume the responsibility as well. However, children cannot assume the responsibility until they admit that this is their own life with its difficulties and problems, success and failure, and not something they have inherited from their parents. For that reason they continue urging their parents to let them act freely and make decisions independently, while they make their parents responsible for their actions, in this way keeping them involved in their lives.

Strangely enough, more and more adults asking me to help them establish good relations with their parents are sure that it is impossible “to reform their parents”. The bitter truth is that we all want to have OUR OWN parents and are very afraid to lose them. Meanwhile, when people “change” they are lost forever for their family and friends since they will never be themselves again. What can we do about this?

Of course the answer is the same: we have to change our own attitude to our parents, or rather their behavior, demands, reproaches and requests, because people usually tend to love or at least want to love their parents unconditionally. The only problem is our parent’s attitude to things, or, to be more precise, the fact that they don’t share our likes and dislikes.

Try to recall when exactly you found yourself at variance with your parents. There must have been a period in your life when you obeyed them and did everything they told you, and tried to behave like them. Some of us undergo such period at a very young age, while for most people it continues until quite a mature age.

Thus, your variance is far younger than your relationship with your parents and it shows that you have become mature enough to have your own point of view and you want to create something new, something your parents did not know and could not do.

This means that your opinion, which is different from your parents’ opinion, is the product of YOUR OWN life. And the fact that your parents do not approve of your opinion makes it even more obvious that it is YOURS and not THEIRS. What do your parents have to do with your life?

You should accept their criticism as the proof that you can make your personal choice independently from them. So enjoy your independence.

You are the person in your family who is responsible for bringing up new generations. Consequently, if you leave everything unchanged and add nothing to what your ancestors did, then your family and, more generally, the Human Race will stop developing. That will be the end of the World since every living thing needs to develop and development occurs through change.

Let us thank our parents who gave us everything they had and could. Now, as we have grown up, our parent’s reaction shows us where we still follow family traditions and where we replace them with new ones. In the first case we win our parents’ approval, while in the second case the novelties we introduce cause their confusion and even disagreement.

This is the proof of our personal development.

*N. Manukhina*  
*January 2011*

## **Part 1. Deep reflection**

disagreement, denial, accusations, loss of values, suspicions, isolation, offences, rejection, fear, alienation, running after each other and from each other, freedom and solitude, rights and duties, the choice, the responsibility, contribution to one's own life, ups and downs... Who is accountable for all this? Am I? Or are they?

This is the incomplete list of problems mentioned by grownup people while speaking about their relationship with their parents, or parents speaking about their grownup children. However, in spite of despair they all hope and believe that they may still achieve peace, love and harmony.

## **Children against their parents**

Why do we try to find the justification for our failures in our parents and their attitude to us? Can't we see, that by ascribing the blame to them we refuse to acknowledge that these are our difficulties, problems and puzzles and when we give them up we give up our lives?

It is certainly interesting to find out what we "inherited from our ancestors": our appearance, personal qualities, ethical and moral norms, values, habits. However, it is up to us to decide how to use all that. We can use these potentialities instinctively or we can study them and decide which of them we need to change or develop. It depends on our goals, circumstances, situations and our relationship with others. It follows that only we are responsible for making choices in our lives. So, why should we hold our parents responsible for our actions?

When you realize that you can rely on what you have learnt from your parents and at the same time come up with something new, something that is only yours, your life becomes more exciting. Of course it is not easy to answer for all your deeds and people often evade responsibility. There is a saying: "you must reap what you have sown", but, whatever fruits we reap, good or bad, belong to us and nobody else. While we are glad to have good luck and success, why should we not admit that our failures are the difficulties which make us stronger? Indeed, when we make efforts to overcome those difficulties we can achieve real success.

Maybe our parents really have nothing to do with our lives?

Then a seditious thought appears: if it is our choice, which of our achievements and failures should we claim credit for and which of them should we ascribe to our parents? And why don't we celebrate our success together with our parents instead of complaining and blaming them for our failures? Celebrations are far more enjoyable than battles, pain and suffering, are not they?

## Parents of grown up children

Think of the first time when you saw yourself as a parent: mother or father. Who did you picture first, yourself or your child? What was your child like?

When thinking about their children most people imagine babies or young children. However, children grow up and become adults. Have you ever thought about being a parent of grown up men and women aged about 30, 40 or 50? When I ask my visitors such a question they smile awkwardly. No, we do not seem to have prepared for being the parents of grownup people.

Thinking about ourselves as parents we imagine how we will caress and spoil them, how we will bring them up, protect them and do everything our mothers and fathers did for us, together with what they write in clever books about the upbringing of children. But where to find books about maintaining relations with our children when they have already grown up and maybe have children or even grandchildren of their own?

It is strange that setting ourselves the task to “bring up the next generation” we do not think about the results we will yield: establishing “adult to adult” relationship with the people who will always remain our children.

It is a heavy burden indeed to bring up children without criticizing them and warning them about the possible failures. When we were children our parents always used to point out our faults and make us correct our mistakes. Good grades at school were taken for granted, which means that it was considered normal to be a good student and we *were expected* to be good. For that reason our efforts were never appreciated or praised. Now I cannot help wondering how it is possible to gear up for success and achievements when you live in constant fear of failure.

Only with time do we understand that if we criticize our children when they are small they will treat us the same way when they grow up. It is exactly as the saying goes: “As the call, so the echo”. Why do you expect gratitude and appreciation from those whom you criticize? How will our children learn to be thankful and to appreciate us if they only get rebukes from us?

It turns out that respect, gratitude and appreciation need to be taught, but before we teach our children, we should learn how to respect, appreciate and be thankful ourselves. But who can we learn this from?

From our children! We should teach them and they will teach us in return. If we change our attitude they will do the same. But someone has to start. Since we have lived longer and have more responsibility than our children we are expected to do that. However, it is not so easy to give up our old beliefs! We need the help from our children, but how to ask for help? We are parents, and we should be demanding, not asking.

Or maybe it is also possible to ask...

The main fear of parents is that if they change, their children will not understand them, will criticize and reject them. So we say: “Why should we change, let our children change and we will keep the old ways for the rest of our lives”. As a result, when our children become adults and offer us new kind of relationships, expecting us to support them in their personal formation, we respond with apprehension and anxiety. In fact we hinder them more than we help them to develop. Meantime, following the laws of life, our children and we too grow up and change steadily. So the children are forced to move away from us or even get rid of us like dead matter – they just leave us getting as far as possible.

On the other hand, those parents who let themselves be glad at their children’s success always remain wanted and needed by them. So, one day they find out that their children have learnt many good things from them. Indeed, they can see their children using what they have learnt from parents openly, without any criticism and denial. In this light children’s own achievements, including those

in the fields unknown to parents, become more obvious. Moreover, if children see that their parents are willing to hear about their achievements, they will gladly share with them.

Our children will become our Teachers if we agree to be their Students all our lives. Then the time will come when we will shift to adult-to-adult relations, where all members of the family exchange values and interests, enriching each other's lives and the entire world around them.

Maybe we can start thinking positively about ourselves and our children, about their and our progress and achievements.

It is true however, that we could have started earlier. One might want to exclaim: "Why did not we understand that we had to think and live positively? Why could not we see that before?" At the same time we are still glad that we are finally on the right path and there is still time to change our lives and relationships.

Join us and you will do even better!

## Duty, investment or a bottomless pit?

*“Parents and teachers, in the first instance, are givers, while children and students are takers. Although parents also learn some things from their children, just as well as teachers learn from their students, this does not restore the balance, but only makes its absence less visible. However, parents were once children, and teachers were students. They pay their debt by passing on what they learnt from the previous generation to the next generation. And their children and students can do the same”<sup>2</sup>.*

But what does this “balance” mean? How is it measured? Is it really necessary? Do we speak about constant balance or the one we need to keep from time to time? Or, maybe we are misled by the original belief that maintenance of balance is impossible. What really matters is what the *givers* (teachers, parents) want to get in return, that is, what kind of reward they consider appropriate for the effort they make. However, things they give away and thing they get in return belong to different categories: in exchange for education, care, material support and security they want respect, gratitude, appreciation and remembrance, also the success of those for whose sake they took such efforts. In this respect parents rather make an *investment* that should bring the wellbeing of their children and maybe grandchildren, but not their own wellbeing. Well, when people give back what they have received they pay back their debts; on the other hand, when they use the invested capital in such way that it should make profit, they increase capital gains.

By imposing a *debt* on our children, which they pay by passing on what they received “to the next generation” we evoke the following response:

- Expressions of protest like “I owe you nothing” or “by bringing me up you just did your duty as parents”;

- A protest and the sense that their children are indebted to them: “I don’t want to make them feel they are obliged to me”, “I had responsibilities towards my parents, now my children have the same responsibilities towards me”, “My children should repay me for what I’ve done for them, just as their children should repay them, so they *should* present me with grandchildren – to show me that I have not lived in vain, and to pass on their own responsibilities to them” or “I don’t want children. What do I need them for, the spongers living at my expense, who will love no one but their own children?”

- The idea that being a parent means making your children responsible, so that they are “over head and ears in debt”, those debts increasing from the moment of their birth till the death of their parents. By giving birth to their own children your children get a chance to pass their responsibilities to them. But the question is what childless people should do. Can we say that they die without paying their debts? Who are they indebted to?

- A whole number of sacrifices: people, who give up the right to create and receive something for their own pleasure and to enjoy their own achievements, actually give up the right to recognize those achievements and enjoy their results in future. This leads to their failure to experience satisfaction and pleasure. “I have dedicated all my life to my children, I want nothing for myself”. This means neglecting one’s own self and life, which makes ones’ life pointless. And all those sacrifices are offered in order to bear maximum responsibility, which will later be handed down to one’s children.

As a result we get a pit of debt filled up by many generations...

So what can we do to enjoy benefits instead of paying debts?

As babies we only use body language and make sounds in order to let others know what we want, but when we get old enough to speak, control our actions and develop conscious thinking, we quickly

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<sup>2</sup> Хеллингер Б. И в середине тебе станет легко. М., 2003. С. 26.

enter into negotiations. There are more and more situations when we have to ask for something, then we either get it or hear a refusal. If we get what we want we satisfy our needs immediately, while in case of refusal we seek other ways to achieve our goal.

The earlier parents start to “negotiate” with their children the more chances will they have to establish an equal relationship with them later. Such attitude will earn them the respect of their children at old age. In the same way, those who do not listen to their children will be ignored by them when they get old.

Meantime, recognition and acceptance of each other’s opinions does not mean agreement. On the contrary, it means being asked to express your opinion about the suggestions of your children. Then they will *merely get the answer* showing if you agree with them or are willing to comply with their requests. In case of disagreement or refusal they will have to find other means to get what they want.

In this way parents can either comply with children’s requests or turn them down. For instance, parents decide if they will: pay for their children’s education at the university; pay the expenses of their wedding party or holiday; or help them with advice how to find a new occupation or hobby. Parents’ refusal will give a child an incentive to:

- find the other source of funding;
- or continue negotiations with parents offering them to undertake particular obligations.

If parents and their children do not enter negotiations, their relationship is likely to suffer: they will start having conflicts with mutual accusations, or can even break up. This can lead both parents and children to question the importance of their relationship and the people involved in it, including their own selves. The life-giving relations will devalue, because the lives of those who gave birth and those who were born as a result of those relations will be devalued. They will be devalued as personalities and will be reduced to guilty debtors.

It is impossible to pay off one’s debts if you give money to someone else, instead of the person to whom you actually owe that money. Meanwhile, an invested capital is possible to accumulate and it can bring profit. A debt is a burden, while an investment is support.

Making an investment means placing one’s possessions at other person’s disposal on a contractual basis: at a certain interest, with the view of getting something valuable for the investor in future.

By making an investment the investor first of all receives approval and then the right to draw interest *in any form* and *at any time* s/he likes.

Thus, by investing money in a bank we get a card to draw our interest and a contract where terms and charges are mentioned.

The only difference between making a deposit with a bank and with one’s children is that parents make a lifelong investment in their children and cannot withdraw the full amount, except the interest.

However, parents don’t really need that. Making an investment in our children we hope to get “interest” from them at old age: attention, help, care or whatever we might need *at that time* and what *they* will be able to give us. I mentioned “give” and not “return”, because parents do not need nursing, feeding, rearing and teaching. Children receive all this from their parents when they are YOUNG. Then they do the same for their own children. This is the stage people undergo *just once* in their lives. The help that THE ELDERLY need is quite different as their demands are very different from the demands of children. There is only a formal likeness between them as both are physically weak and insecure. Nevertheless, that is an imaginary likeness since children are not *yet* able to create anything, while the elderly are *no longer* able to use the things they have created. Children are the foundation where we invest money in order to receive *our* interest later. However, we cannot take it all, since the whole amount does not belong to us – our children create more and more things on their own. We should learn to distinguish between what is ours and what is theirs. This is the case when the principle “divide- and-rule” can be changed into “divide-and-use”.

So, parents want “interest”: the possibility to request and receive what they need at some particular time.

However, negotiations between parents and children are also a lifelong process. For that reason both sides can agree or refuse to satisfy each other’s requests; or they might not be able to fully satisfy them and might offer something else instead. Not having received what they want from their children parents can try to get that from other people. Thus, along with making investments in our children we are impelled to work hard, save money, make contributions to retirement and other funds, get involved in public life, donate for charity, maintain the existing relationships and establish relationships with new people.

We can also make an “investment” with the expectation of growing interest earnings. We invest in our children and get the interest that increases with the arrival of new generations and people who interact with them.

When parents do not negotiate with their children but just give them what they need without getting their acknowledgement and confirmation that a deposit is made and, consequently, receive no reward from them, they begin to feel like their entire life *“has gone down the drain”*. They explain such state by their children’s *alleged* failure to accomplish anything significant. Thus all the efforts taken by parents are wasted as they try to find faults with their children and suffer because of their mistakes and failures.

Meantime children begin to feel empty and desperate. They start with ascribing their problems to unfavorable conditions and end up blaming their parents, claiming that parents did not give them what they needed, and whatever they gave them was useless and even harmful.

In this way, underestimating each other, children and parents create the sense of “black hole”, emptiness, incompleteness, vanity of life and even its absence. “This is not a life”, – they say.

What can we do about it? Is it possible to improve such relations?

The answer is yes. The clue is in acceptance, gratitude and respect for each other. Then both sides will find joy in their mutual relations.

It would be good if parents giving to their children all they can took notice of what their children find most desirable and useful. Then they would identify which skills their children have developed thanks to their efforts and what they do best of all. When parents appreciate their children’s achievements they accept their children as they are and at the same time get the “interest” for their efforts in the form of unique qualities displayed by their children.

When grownup children accept what their parents *were able* to give them with gratitude and respect, they use what they have received for further development. In this way they prepare to return the “interest” to their parents by showing appreciation and consideration to them. Admitting that their parents should be given credit for many of their achievements children reach harmony with their own personalities, which allows them to create something new, which is *their own* and is not dictated by their parents or any other circumstances.

In such case both parents and their grownup children are freed from mutual accusations, criticism and resentment against each other, which enables them to build the relationships where they will feel themselves as integral, independent and successful people.

Indeed, recognition of others makes us free.



## **It is never too late to start**

I often hear from my colleagues, who have learnt psychology at a mature age, express their regret that they had not been taught that subject before. Indeed, now we find out that we did not use to know many things when we were younger and how we behaved was incorrect, if not harmful to our children. It seems that if we had known more we would have been able to avoid mistakes and consequently would have better relations with our children, who are now grownup people. Now you will hear from parents of grownup children words like those uttered by my colleague – a 50-year-old woman whose daughter is 28: “How many things we did not know about people, family, relations and were not able to do for our children! Now it’s too late. My daughter is already an adult”.

But we did what we could and gave them what we could give. We gave our children everything we had, sparing no efforts and we have a share in all the best qualities and achievements of our children. However, we usually don’t appreciate our children’s merits just as well as our own merits and efforts. Then our children too fail to appreciate all the good things we did for them and take us for granted. Instead they don’t forget to mention our mistakes, faults and inability or unwillingness to give them everything they wanted. It is like a saying: “When people don’t have anything to discuss they start discussing problems”.

By the way, we can still give our children what we were not able to give them before. We can do it now if we think they need it. It is true that they have already grown up, but we can do the same just treating them differently. Now it will be an adult-to-adult and not parent-to-child relationship, which will involve more dialogue and less teaching or passing on our knowledge. This is how we should treat our children and how they should treat us.

It is not late but it’s just the right time now! Parents and children are learning in the same way. Hence, when we parents learn something new, we can share it with our children who, like us, are open for new knowledge, except we are 50 and they are 28. The ability to learn new things is not lost but develops as we grow older.

By the way, 28 years ago many accomplishments that are now strengthened by a great number of studies and are available to the “general public” were not known. At that time psychology was practically in its first stages and the achievements in that field were only accessible to scholars, doctors and “the powers that be”. There were no popular book series like “Assist Yourself” or “Psychology for Everybody”. So how could we give our children something what we did not have ourselves?

Now we have got all those things and can share them with our children. They have become available to us now, when we are already 50, while our children got access to them at the age of 28, which should be taken into account. Some of us already have grandchildren and the current knowledge about a Human Being, which seems quite normal for them, is such a novelty for us. They were born *in our time* and they naturally take many things for granted, though they will be responsible for further development of what they received without efforts. As for us, while we are alive it’s never too late to try to understand our children. By sharing our knowledge and experience we enrich each other’s lives. The main thing is to be willing and to start doing that.

## Considering as “adults”

Parents are the first to notice that their children are behaving like adults. Seeing this they either accept the fact or ignore it. They can encourage their children to become adults or can make fun of them and humiliate them. Parents sometimes demand from their children to behave like adults, but refuse to face the reality when their children announce that they are already grownups. Parents find it especially difficult to admit that their children are adults when those begin to confront them.

As for children, insisting that their adulthood should be recognized, they often refuse to behave like adults towards their parents and other adults. Influenced by the attitude of their parents and other older people they do not always appreciate their being adults. So they seem to try to remain *the children of their parents* forever.

Hence, we get a “triple paradox” (a unity and conflict of opposite desires). For their part children make the following demands:

- Parents have to accept the fact that I have grown up and I am ready to live separately from my family;
- I need to be sure that “parents will be always there” for me, to guide me and ensure my safety “as I am growing up”;
- I need to know that I keep my place in the family hierarchy: I remain the child of my parents. The “children’s paradox” is backed up by the respective “parents’ paradox”:
- To support children as they grow up and develop, and play the role of a “mature parent” letting the children live separately from the family;
- Be responsible for all and any actions of the children as creators and organizers of the atmosphere, environment and facilities enjoyed by them;
- Show to the children that they want to preserve their own and their children’s positions within the system and get their approval too. Parents can obtain support on this from other family members and friends.

In order to maintain balance which, on the one hand, allows everybody to keep their structural places and functions within the system, and on the other hand, ensure continuous growth and development, mutual relations should change depending on the situation. For example, in case of a dialogue involving the exchange of opinions and achievements both parents and children need to recognize “adults” in each other, which will enable them to communicate on equal terms. These are horizontal relations. The relations where they retain their family statuses (of a parent and a child) will be vertical in any circumstances (within and outside the family). However, it seems more natural to both parents and children to have vertical relations most of the time, because that is more like the initial, natural order of their lives and the structure of their families.

## Separation in relations

In the Russian dictionary compiled by S. I. Ozhegov we read: “Separatism – a tendency to separation, isolation<sup>3</sup>”.

According to our observations based on our practice of working with clients and our own experience separation in relations is more than just separation, it is:

1. Interdependency and not independence;
2. Communication (of adults) and not absence of communication;
3. “Having mutual relationships with others” instead of being isolated from them. It is not a separation or isolation from other people but having equal relationships;
4. Through recognition of the value of “Oneself” and other people, arrangement of communication between “integral selves”;
5. Implementation of one’s plans considering that s/he is not alone but is in a mutual relationship with other people. This is willingness and ability to take into account: (a) what effect the implementation of one’s plans will have on their relations with those who are important to them, that is the people with whom they have long-term relationships; (b) How they will maintain and if necessary reorganize their relations in the process of implementing their plans; (c) How, despite different plans and circumstances, they will manage to maintain relations and not allow them to end;
6. The ability to maintain different kinds of relations (at the same time) with different people and systems, the ability to be flexible in different roles in order to establish different types of relationships;
7. It is not a mere separation, but a “separation for some reason”. This is separation for the purpose of establishing relations and not ending them.

Children may come back after their parents let them go, or they may protest – not against the fact that they were allowed to go, but against the *form* in which their parent did it.

Children may want separation, while their parents cling to them trying to prove to themselves and their children that they will always stay together.

Parents *admit* that without children their life, or the life they have *as parents*, will become meaningless. However, they have to accept and create their own life (establish relations with other people including their children) where they will have different roles and will be engaged in other fields than their family. They may find it very difficult after many years of dedicating all of their efforts to fulfillment of their parental responsibilities. That is why parents are often reluctant to let their children go, fearing that *they* will be abandoned.

Taking pride in their children and knowing that they have a share in their children’s achievements can make it much easier for parents to overcome the difficult period of separation. It is also important for parents to see that their children have become what they are thanks to them and it is thanks to them that they are able to live on their own instead of just being a branch of a tree planted by their parents.

Children *subconsciously* know that their parents were always there and will always be there, just like branches of a tree feel, though may not admit, that below them there is a trunk and roots. They live and grow, stretch out towards the sun and seem to avoid obstacles independently. Then they begin to sprout up and bloom, and finally bear fruit, but the fruit belongs not only to the branches, but to the whole tree.

Children are not afraid to reject their parents knowing that they will be always there. In fact they have internalized (imbibed their image and values) their parents and bear a little bit of them

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<sup>3</sup> Hereinafter cited according to the edition: Ожегов С.И. Словарь русского языка. М., 1988.

all their lives. Even when they “fall off” their parental tree like fruit or seeds, or autumn leaves they inherit many things from it, which they do not realize and that is why are not afraid to leave the tree.

Children find it difficult to recognize their independence and responsibility for their own lives, actions and emotional experience, so they prefer to hold their parents responsible for everything: “They did not teach me...”, “They made me do that, so I don’t want to do that again” or quite the contrary “I am used to that”.

Unfortunately, grownup children make similar accusatory monologues against their fiancés (fiancées) as well, which prevents them from getting married or leads them to a family breakup. If people get married in order to separate from parents their marriage is condemned to failure or will be filled with mutual reproaches, power struggle and rivalry. Moreover, it is possible to fix *any* kind of relations – transform, change or in extreme case end them – with the people with whom you are in a relationship, but not with others, because those will be *different* relations with *different* people. One can create new roles based on the experience gained from the same *structural organization*. We already know that, among other things, the relations between a parent and a child are vertical, while the relations between spouses are horizontal, which means that the mentioned two kinds of relations are *differently directed*

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