Abstract
This ongoing study explores the experience of parenting with particular emphasis on implications and insights for spiritually oriented parenting. The research was conducted intermittently for over a year. During the course of this project, 7 parents were interviewed and observations with parents who were part of a DFACS parent education intervention program were made. Pattern recognition based on question/response grouping was used to determine the findings in this study. A few questions for exploration: Why are some parents more likely to view their children spiritually and others not? How can parents begin to see children and parenting more spiritually?

Introduction
When I found out I was pregnant with my first child I did not see myself as a parent or parent material. I was scared to death and did not think I would make a very good mother. I was 23 and had just graduated college and had entered graduate school. I was working my first full time job in the Psychology field at a school for behaviorally and emotionally disturbed children. I had high goals in mind for my life which did not include children so soon, if at all. Once we decided to move forward with this new adventure in our lives, I knew that I did not want to repeat the perceived mistakes of my own upbringing. I also knew that I wanted to be the best mother I could possibly be.

Not long after experiencing childbirth and taking this new little life home I found an overpowering need to begin exploring my own spirituality in a very different way and at the same time, I began to see my child as a spiritual being, fully capable of deep thought and deep feelings. I saw that parenting can be an important part of adult spiritual
practice and at the same time seeing a good role model as being an important part of my children’s spiritual practice as well. Rather than closing me off, motherhood opened me further. I discovered that parenting can be a positive and deeply joyful experience.

Not long after becoming a mother I began to explore my own spirituality in a very different way. I saw that parenting can be an important part of spiritual practice. Rather than closing me off, motherhood opened me further. I discovered that parenting can be a positive and deeply joyful experience. Being the first of my friends to have children (most of my friends began parenthood in their 30’s.) I did not have comparisons or support to work with, so I and my husband forged our own way through parenting issues as they arose.

Very few people have written about this topic to date. Of note, Mimi Doe as well as Hugh and Gayle Prather are the most well known authors who currently address the specific topic of spiritual parenting. In addition, Tobin Hart and Jim Dillon have written about the spiritual aspects of children. Jon and Myla Kabat-Zinn have become experts in mindful parenting, which is closely related to spiritual parenting.

Questions of interest asked to the participants in the study are: What is spiritual parenting?, What are some ways you try to incorporate spirituality in your family?, What are some ways you try to foster a solid sense of identity, good character, self confidence and closeness within your family? Who made a difference in your life as a child and what made that person special? What are some aspects of your family life you hope your children will take with them when they grow up and become parents themselves?

Other questions of interest in this study are: How does becoming a parent and the experience of parenting impact the parent’s own spirituality and development and how
does this translate to the children in their development? How do parenting and spirituality come together?

The biggest challenge experienced to date with this research is defining spirituality. While religion and spirituality are linked, spirituality can be something independent of religion. For this research spirituality is defined as a means for the individual to find solutions to problems, and meaning in life. It is a deep awareness of one’s relationship with self and everything other than self. “I take spirituality to involve the lived transformation of self and community toward fuller alignment with or expression of what is understood, within a given cultural context to be “sacred.” This transformation may be supported by doctrines, practices, and social organization.” (Rothberg)

This is a research topic I have been exploring for a year. While I have not found a lot of literature on the subject, this is a project that resonates personally and deeply. Several scholars and authors have written compelling books, given talks and workshops on similar topics such as mindful parenting, children’s spirituality, parental spirituality, morality, religion, and some aspects of spiritual parenting, but a real need in terms of the child’s effect on the parent’s spirituality and parenting has not been fully met. I hope to fill a spot in that gap from my research and experience.

I am a parent, and in watching my growth as a parent and those of my friends and acquaintances, I have noticed the changes that overcome adults when they become parents. After becoming a parent myself I noticed other children & parents in a new way. I saw how some parents paid more attention to the spiritual needs of their children than others, and the effects those styles of parenting had on both the child and parent (which ultimately affect society).
**Literature Review**

**Role Modeling**


**Resilience**


**Spirituality**
Adler, Jerry; Berrett, Dan; Campo-Flores, Arian; McGinn, Daniel; Marty, Martin E.; Raymond, Joan; Underwood, Anne. “Spirituality in America” *Newsweek Magazine*, Summer Double Issue, 2005: Pages 45-65.


Hart, Tobin PhD. "Spiritual Parenting". *Psychotherapy Networker*. May/June: 2004


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Friedman, Mike, Rholes, W Steven, Simpson, Jeffry A. “Avoidant Attachment and the Experience of Parenting” Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin. March 2006. Vol.32, Iss. 3; pg. 275


Methodology
The research was conducted via tape recorded face-to-face and occasional telephone interviews most of which have been transcribed and grouped. The interviewees were selected based on convenience sampling. There were 7 participants: 6 mothers, 1 father.

Findings
Some of the themes found through the interview transcripts were:

Awareness: Communication, different levels of the child and parent, being focused, attention, connection, seeing them as “actual people”, centeredness, letting it come from within, there is something bigger than us, children aren’t just to be manipulated, children are capable of “other levels”.

Balance: Openness, seeing the “whole child”, flexibility, negotiating conflict, integration, creativity.

Role Modeling: Communication, compassion, respect, morals, service to community.

Autonomy: Choices versus control, belongingness, where is my place, helping or guiding the child to find that, individuality, expression.

Other themes found in this research:
- Respect for self and others. Simply be polite to your children. You know, I hate hearing parents being rude to their children. Often I notice children of rude parents seem to act out more often.
- Looking at the whole child not just the surface: understanding the child from his/her level.
- Remembering being a child and acting from that experience.
- Consistency
- We are here for a reason
- Teaching and exhibiting compassion
- The Golden Rule
- Humor is important
• Boundaries and consequences are necessary but shouldn’t be too tightly controlling.
• Learning from mistakes and not blaming
• That children connect, they “get it” and they seem to do it naturally
• A warm, caring supporting family = a flourishing child
• We have a need for nature. We are not separate from creation we are part of creation.
• A reverence for the Earth and a sincere connection to life is important. The natural world and family acts as an anchor in our age of loneliness and alienation.
• Talking about the “big questions”

What is Spiritual Parenting and what does it mean to be a mindful or spiritual parent?

One of my interviewees stated it best, “I think it probably has to do with being aware of what the whole child is about. Not just being concerned with things like physical safety, and what they are going to have to eat today. But sort of an attention to what that child is on other levels as well as what you are on other levels and an attention to things that aren’t necessarily verbal or structured. But if you some attention to it you end up getting a lot.”

Spiritual parenting is about parenting with your eyes, heart and soul open to your children as they are. It is about embracing the connection we all have with each other as well as with the divine, the unseen and the sacred. This type of parenting perspective is about creating a strong center and a sense of connectedness for your children, teaching love through love and being in touch with the larger world. Spiritual parenting is conscious parenting. Awareness, understanding, unconditional love and joy, even through the tough times, are at the heart of this pattern of parenting. A spiritual parent is present and honors the child’s nature.
Tobin Hart writes, “Presence allows us to be more aware of what is called for in a situation and to engage deeply and spontaneously in the relationship. The opposite of this is to be disconnected, distant, unaware, self-absorbed, distracted, numb and caught up in the whirlwind of our own thoughts, reactions and agendas.” (2004)

The experts acknowledge that being a parent is a personal journey and it is also a spiritual journey, but it is not always an easy one. The up days and down days are met with focus, soul and love. Parenting with full presence is at the core of this type of parental awareness. Mindful parenting is as Kabat-Zinn says, “…the recognition of the relationship and the sacred quality of the parent/child relationship.” (1997) Another parent participant says spiritual parenting is about, “…keeping your mind open to the spiritual aspects of the person and not just looking at them as a physical person” Jim Dillon writes,

“Far from inhabiting an innocent and conflict-free world, children are deep thinkers and who wrestling with life’s mysteries and existential issues, especially the problems of freedom, death, and meaning. In addition, children hunger and search for meaning and values by which to live their lives. Children are highly empathic and emotionally sensitive beings who, while certainly capable of selfishness and even cruelty, are prone to inspiring acts of kindness, self-sacrifice and altruism. Children have a remarkable capacity for hope, and for heroically transcending adversity and even persecution. Children have the capacity to experience intense connection with others, the natural world, and with the ground of existence itself. This capacity for connection includes children’s openness and sensitivity to the experience of profound beauty, wonder, and enchantment with the natural and human world.” (2005)

Finally, Mimi Doe says, “Children feel as deeply as adults do, but they haven’t yet developed the vocabulary to share their emotions. What a relief it must be when their parents comfortably accept their expression of feelings.” (1998)

Spiritual or mindful parenting involves listening to our own intuition and our children’s wisdom. Spiritual parenting is about watching the wonder of the everyday unfold and participating fully in the celebration of life. This awareness involves helping your children...
discover meaning for their lives. Children, like adults, are striving for meaning and purpose; parents and caregivers are a vital part of that discovery process.

**What is Spiritual Parenting *not*? Misconceptions**

In my work as a Parent Educator with a local non-profit agency, I have seen what spiritual parenting perhaps is not. The following comments are based solely on my experience. Not knowing exactly what is happening in the minds of the parents I work with, I can only give my observations.

Most of the parents I have worked with so far appear to see their children as something to be molded, someone to manipulate and control. I hear “no” more often than “yes”. The difference is significant. Hearing no more often than yes could potentially translate to saying “No” to life rather than “Yes” to life for the child thus setting up a scenario of creating a further block to development, spirituality and adult satisfaction. This is an intriguing revelation and one that I am still unpacking as my research continues.

I also see more disrespect of the children by the parents. The children in turn more often disrespect each other as well as their parents. I don’t hear simple phrases like “Please” and “Thank You” or “Excuse Me”. There are more commands than requests, negotiation or questions. I hate to hear a parent say “MOVE!” to their child rather than “Excuse Me”. As one parent I interviewed said, “It is so amazing how many parents aren’t polite to their own children!” Tobin Hart writes, “When we recognize a child first as a complete spiritual being, rather than merely as our growing offspring, a powerful shift occurs...What arises is respect and reverence for the uniqueness of this soul in front of us, even though he or she may not yet have fully ripened as a human. Children do not belong to us, they belong to their own soul and calling.” (2004)
Too many times in my work I see the child trying to speak to the parent or get his or her attention, only to be ignored or tuned out more often than listened to. Pat answers are supplied rather than being attuned to the child’s natural curiosity. Although I recognize many of the parents I see in my work have to work very hard to survive, and survival usually takes precedence over everything else when we have to choose. From my experience, the parents I work with often seem to see their role of parent as yet another job. As a result, what I often see is more conflict in these homes than is necessary. Like many families in our fast paced society most of these parents seem to be disconnected from their children and from themselves, the difference is that these parents have behavior patterns as adults that come across as immature.

In an article on his web site Ron Kurtz says,

“So, when we ask, “what’s good for children?” the answer is clear. What’s good for children is that its caregivers are reliable. Reliable in this way: the caregivers can form a relationship with the child in which the child can rely upon its needs being consistently recognized and met. Among these needs is the need to live in a world that fits together and makes sense. If the parents’ world fits together and makes sense, that helps the child to create a world for itself that fits together and makes sense. That’s not all though. The child needs to learn to regulate his or her emotions. Consistent affect regulation on the part of the caregiver makes that possible. So, we know what is good for children. It is good for children, if the parents are reliably calm, reliably available, reliably sensitive to the child’s needs, and reliable providers.” (2005)

**How do we honor children’s spirit in our daily lives?**

One quote I found particularly intriguing from my interviews is this, “Some of our friends were very receptive to speak with our kids as if they were actual people.” Respect for your child and his or her feelings. ‘Please’, ‘thank you’, ‘I love you’ and ‘I am sorry if I hurt you’ are powerful words we can use everyday. Parents interviewed say that personal responsibility and accountability should be encouraged both in the way you interact in your world and with your children, as well as how your children interact within
their world. It is also beneficial to help children learn to listen to their intuition and inner voice.

One mother said, “It is important that our children grow up and be happy and productive and I think all of that is spiritual...If you don’t have something bigger than you to embrace you while you are doing those things you just feel lost. But respect and compassion, all of those things are spiritual.” Another parent states, “There is this need to submit ourselves to something that is bigger than us, but we don’t necessarily understand it. To show them a path that has worked for us.”

**Who made a difference in your life as a child and why?**

In my interviews those who made a difference to these parents as children seem to have a few things in common, they showed respect and acceptance, they had open conversation with children and adults, they were consistent about telling the why of things, and they spoke to children as if they are real people who are capable of understanding, compassion and deep thought. Asking for help with things which many said created a situation where the child is lifted up to a level that was more on par with being an equal or as important or as one parent put it, “She always made me feel special.”

Again Hart says, “What we know of resilient children, those who have grown up in very difficult, abusive, or neglectful situations but who have thrived nonetheless, is that they nearly always have had a “leg up” person, a spiritual friend, someone who made a difference in their life, who saw a spark in them, who noticed them, who offered a kind word or took genuine interest in their life.” (2004)
Target department store is sponsoring a program titled, “Start Something”, a free character building curriculum the Tiger Woods Foundation. Reviewing the web page and pamphlet it is offering a free resource for teachers, students and parents. Google will find a host of other free programs similar in nature. Character education is one of the newest and most embraced additions to our public school curriculums. That seems significant to me. Until recently schools did not have special curriculums for this. I wonder why? Are parents not providing it anymore? Are there benefits to this knowledge that “experts” now realize? It seems there must be a gap some where or why provide it? I seem to remember my teachers in school incorporating a type of character education into the school day and the expectations were that we would all act from good characters that we were taught at home. What changed I wonder? Perhaps that is a topic to explore later within this larger realm of spiritual parenting.

Conclusion
The potentials of spiritual parenting might be better decision making for all family members, seeing the value of teamwork as well individuality, and the ability to work well with others.

Parenting from a spiritual perspective can give children a greater sense of identity. In addition, by enhancing and focusing on the parent and child connection there is the promise of giving children a greater chance of holding their own against the social forces that can pull them into destructive behaviors.

The hope is that by creating this atmosphere, that family will become a center in which all members are attended to, valued and heard. Creating a joyful family center can have positive repercussion for years and generations to come.
Carol, who has 4 grown children, says as she reflects back, that she has always tried to foster a spiritual and mindful atmosphere at home through family life, church and community. Although none of her children attend church, one daughter has taken a very service oriented path and all are very compassionate people who are very involved in their community. The children all feel a sense of connectedness to home and family is still the center. She feels in this way she has been successful in teaching her kids the importance of spirituality. According to the parents interviewed, being a spiritual or mindful parent means you are as fully present as possible in your child’s life. The parents in this study overwhelming stated that it is important to pay attention, look deeply and try to understand your child from his or her point of view. Slow down and listen. Spiritual parenthood is about giving your child the freedom to be, but also setting limits in which to do so safely. Try to model behavior you would like to see manifested in your children’s lives. Spiritual parenting is about raising quality people and being a quality example. This type of parenting involves listening and using calm loving words as much as possible in your family. Acting appropriately rather than reacting to a child’s behavior requires attention and thoughtfulness. One parent said, “People don’t realize that having a child is like having a lover in a lot of ways. It’s a very open relationship”

Through this study I have also noticed that the distinction between educational level and socio-economic class between participants mark a clearer distinction between parenting attitudes that may not be inclusive of our society as a whole.

The future of this research involves the creation of a parent’s quiz that will hopefully open up new understanding regarding where the parents might be coming from in their parenting attitudes, potential publishing and work with groups in workshop settings.
References


Appendix

As part of this study a web site was established to publish portions of the findings to date. The site is updated often.

www.csosolutions.net/Spiritual Parenting.htm

Interviews:
Below are 3 transcribed interviews with answers grouped by question.

Background:

CB and LF have Masters Degrees in Psychology from the University of West Georgia.
LC has some college.

All participants are considered middle class families.

CB is a retired nurse with 4 grown children.
LF is a family therapist and became a mother in her 30’s. In addition LF recently lost her sister to leukemia and she often cares for her niece whom her sister left behind. LF also has a teenaged step daughter who lives in the home.
LC became a parent in her 30’s, is an out of state transplant and is a stay at home mother.

1. What is mindful/spiritual parenting?

CB: I think it probably has to do with being aware of what the whole child is about. Not just being concerned with things like physical safety, and what they are going to have to eat today. But sort of an attention to what that child is on other levels as well as what you are on other levels and an attention to those things that aren’t necessarily verbal or structured. But if you pay some attention to it you both end up getting a lot.

LC: Keeping your mind open to the spiritual aspects of the person and not just looking at them as a physical person.

LF: I would say that its about being to me being focused and being aware of your child’s emotions, and his or her point of view or state of mind and when it comes to discipline and encouragement and being aware of the things you need to do as a parent as far as the things your child needs. I mean we can yell and scream at them, but it’s their effect, and you have to pay attention to that as well. Spiritual for me I think of religion and that sort of thing. Having a religion, in my family it Christian. Values and morals and trying to teach children to be respectful of each other and of themselves.

2. What are some ways you try to incorporate spirituality in your family (not necessarily religion)?

CB: We have done some church related things partly because I grew up in the church, and even though as an institution I find it lacking in some ways, really there were some things that I found of value and I wanted the kids to at least see that. It was really difficult
to find a place that had those things that I value. There was just so much weeding out that needed to be done. But I think that exposure is important. I think telling stories of all kinds is probably real good and relating them to traditions of many people. Allowing the kids to express themselves. We did a lot of drama and music and stuff in our home. I think this is one of those issues too especially we were talking about the 70's where things were a lot more overt sometimes we did things and sometimes we didn't. I actually had a book called Meditation for Children. We did a lot of the exercises in there for periods of time, we would put off by the wayside for awhile. There were a lot of times when I would pay attention to things. They still tease me about like “Oh look at the moon!” Just that enjoyment of the natural stuff that happens around you. What you can see around you, some.. I'm sure I can think of more.

LC: One thing that is actually part of our religion is that we do spiritual exercises which is something that is supposed to help center you. And to come from a place of love or a place of spirit instead of other things. So we do like a chant that is like a “who” sound. Its an ancient name for god. We will do that sometimes at bed time if the girls are having a problem sometimes we'll do that. Sometimes I will suggest that they write a question and put it under their pillow we talk about dreams even though we remember them that often. And I guess those are some of the most concrete things. There is probably a lot of small subtle things we do but those are the most concrete.

LF: Of course there is the religious aspects, such as praying and going to church when we can. And around this house we talk about heaven a lot you know because of Marianne, and I think that having its difficult to explain that to Evan and Sydney as well, but I mean we talk about it all the time. That there is something bigger than us, which is a very spiritual concept to me. I mean I am not very religious, but I feel like I am spiritual. Its hard with Evan, but I think with Courtney, she's 12, you know I can help her find her own spirituality. She went to a private Christian school so she has that grounding. She brings up God, and what she thinks God would want her to do and her choices. And I think that is a lot of it, helping them making good choices, giving them choices, and help them see what is the best choice. But I don’t know if that is spiritual. It’s a really hard word to define.

3. What are some ways you try to foster a solid sense of identity, good character, self confidence and closeness within your family?

CB: Well I mean there are the celebrations of the birthdays and holidays. That are important. Our kids were often included in things that were more like adult parties. As you know your kids do too. Some of our friends were very receptive to speak with our kids as if they were actual people. It really does make a difference. I think that when that happens you know when they are small, that really makes a difference. You can do it all you want, its when they get out there and see other people, you know that when it all comes back. There is a feeling of being able to accomplish. Where each kid is different and trying to find that balance. Some stuff just happens just because of necessity you know when Amelia was born I went back to nursing school and I started working nights when I graduated. So there were times when the kids were pretty much on their own, I would be asleep in the house and Caleb would sort of in charge. Trying to create some things they could do with out leaving it all on him. I think he really got a lot out of that. And I was pleased that he didn’t just write off having children. I think there are other things. The other activities they did and all of that and tried to be present for all of that. It
is hard to make decisions about all of that. Roseanna wanted to do cheerleading and I just hated that, I encouraged the girls to do sports so someone would be cheering for them. Until High school, and said I have been riding the bench for years and I know how to do some gymnastics, I probably would enjoy doing the cheerleading, and so she did. It was so new for her, it was fun for her. I think talking to your kids when they make mistakes, well that didn’t work” Not that you did something bad, but that didn’t work. I think that is a good metaphor to help kids make decisions.

LC: For us I think a lot of it is being together as a family. And spending time together and doing things together. And trying to be a model, a role model. Positive type things you want, the type of character you want to instill. And just try to surround them with people and experiences that will enforce those things that you want.

LF: We try to ensure that our kids have positive reinforcement, um, you know Courtney is 12 and unfortunately it means for her a lot of how she dresses, what she is wearing and that sort of thing. Good table manners, I think positive reinforcement is one of the best things you can do. As far as sense of identity, you know we have a blended family and are going through a custody battle with Courtney’s mom, and its been very important that she feel as much a part of our family as Evan does. Even though she isn’t my biological child, we struggle with that a lot. I mean where do I fit in with her, so I think its important to always make sure that regardless of labels and titles IT doesn’t make any difference as far as how we feel about each other. With Sydney and Evan together all the time, its important to point out that they are different and its okay. Not just that he’s a boy and she’s a girl, but like who likes what and have them take turns what the other person wants to play with. So with Courtney it focuses on being a 12 year old girl. But you know with her grades and her sports. I mean sometimes I just commend her for getting out there and playing softball. I couldn’t do that, I didn’t have the confidence to do that. I think she has been really successful. In the past few years it has been evident that she has a strong sense of self. Maturity and self esteem and has good grades. I mean nothing has slipped. She is amazing. She really is amazing.

4. Who made a difference in your life as a child? Why? What made this person(s) special?

CB: Well, it’s real obvious to talk about mothers, but in particular my mother was really good about talking about why she was doing things, it wasn’t just these imperious decisions. They had some logic to them. My parents were both real involved in the church, and it wasn’t just for show level, it was obviously meant something in their lives. Through the whole time I would see mom pulling out her books ion Saturday night because she was teaching Sunday school the next day. Pulling from different resources, and stuff like that.

LC: My parents for one. They always believed in me and always believed I could do anything I wanted to do. And they were supportive of things. I think they also influenced me in other ways but by being supportive, but not really pushing me to do more. Which I think would have been good thing, to have a little more push. But yeah, they were probably the biggest influence.
LF: Oh, my grandmother, my mom's mom, I am the typical middle child, textbook, everything you read about it I am. It is really kind of crazy. I mean even when we were growing up we spent a lot of time with our cousins. And everybody else had a cousin their age except for me. There were 7 of us. I was always the odd man out. But when I was around my grandmother, I never, I was her special one. She always made me feel important and if I didn't want to do sports, she always recognized the things we could do together, yeah absolutely my grandmother.

5. Describe some obstacles you have experienced to your desired parenting style.

CB: Whenever there is a couple together even though you are together you are both individuals. And sometimes when you aren’t on the same wave length about some of these issues and personalities can clash its part of life and kids need to know that. I think its harder when you start talking about peers and the situations they get thrown into. You can’t control that. But again it’s a true thing. One of the things that you have to let it come from within. Sometimes you pick them up and say wow that was rough. Back in the time we moved here. It seems a lot of the churches and stuff were way more conservative looking at different backgrounds to find that unity of spirit, but back them I had a really hard time. To find some kinds of something to show the kids.

LC: Well I think it is different than I thought it would be. There are more conflicts as I thought there would be, things don’t go as smooth as I had envisioned. Another obstacle is that we live far away from family. A family around and a supportive family around would be helpful. I can’t think of anything else as an obstacle.

LF: Well of course the obvious is being a step parent. That is the most difficult. Of course losing Marianne, which tops everything, but something that I’ve done. Its hard to, there are so many times I have to take a step back and remember I am not her mom. Yeah I do all of the things a mom does for a child. Its not like she comes every other weekend and I just have to make her a sandwich, she lives here. Since she was 5, yeah so, that has been really difficult. It has been really difficult to have her mom come in and out every once in a while, it really hurts my feeling, because I think well wait a minute. But Courtney has always been really good about letting me know where I stand and where my place is in her heart. I am waiting for the day when she is about 15 and look at me and say “You’re not my mom.” That attitude. So that has been really hard. Many times I can’t make decisions because I don’t really have the right to, medically and all of that. There have been times where Robert and I don’t agree on things which makes things really hard. Like how the children should be disciplined or encouraged or whatever. Sometimes you just don’t know what to do. You can be educated and all of that, but sometimes I just don’t know what to do or if I’ve done it enough or too much. I know being a parent is 10 times easier than being a step parent. I don’t feel any differently toward Courtney than I do for Evan, but she isn’t mine and I get reminders of that and so it’s hard but totally worth it. The other biggest obstacle is work, and when I’ve been able to be home. It’s a really hard thing to face.

6. What are some aspects of your family life you hope your children will take with them when they grow up and become parents themselves?
CB: We laugh a lot. Laughter has been really crucial to get us through a lot of rough times. I think that it became real obvious when the kids got into the real rebellious stage but we showed them we will love them forever. Sometimes it was pretty nuts. You look at them now and they seem so nice but wow!
You just try to show them, there were times that were really uncertain. Just conversational style of talking with your kids, when things come up. Paying attention to what the child is worried about or interested in and even when we lose it well this is what this looks like!
What do you think your job is?
I think it really changes as the children's needs change. We used to say when they were really little, our job is to not ruin them. I think a lot of parents get really hung up on safety I think safety is an issue but you can’t let them run in the street but I think especially that it has become such an obsession we really don’t let the kids live. We need to pay more attention to those deeper levels and their real needs.
There is just so much more. It makes you so much richer when you are able to give that. It’s a gift. Open yourself to other people. People don’t realize that having a child is like having a lover in a lot of ways. It’s a very open relationship.

LC: I hope they will take into their life the emphasis that we put on family. The emphasis that we put on time together. The emphasis that we don’t put on materialism. As of right now my children seem to be much more materialistic than we are. Hopefully that won’t be something that they will continue, they will see more the importance of being family, having family. Spiritually I hope they will take some of their spiritual background with them. Those are probably the most important things.

LF: Wow, that’s a tough one I think if they ever are in a blended situation, I hope they remember how we’ve handled it and can do the same. As far as you know me being a step mom and having a child after we got married. I think that I want them to know its okay to disagree and you can still love each other, how to argue effectively, how to deal with problems. I think Courtney is an amazing example in our family and Sydney’s family about how we dealt with Marianne’s death. She has become even more compassionate towards others and even in dealing with Sydney, and the way she you know interacts with her. I think she is a strong person, she doesn’t turn a deaf ear when Sydney wants to talk about Marianne even though its painful. I think I am the only example Courtney has had of a good mom. And Robert has such a strong work ethic and such a good provider, and we always come first with him, always.

7. Is your child spiritual? How do you know?
CB: It is interesting to see. Not one of them attends church, but there are certain aspects of church that they carry with them. Like Roseanna has taken a very service oriented path. Amelia has too she is an artist and is really using it in a service capacity. I think that they have learned that to live a life just for yourself isn’t the way to go. I am really please with that kind of attitude or way of thinking.
Spirituality comes into everything we do. Even washing the dishes. And you are always modeling. No one is 100% all the time, we would all be Buddha’s. Its neat there is just so much more out there now. I think the more people who see this and can see that children aren’t just to be manipulated.
LC: I think so. Sometimes they will talk about their experiences. Beside that my belief is that everything and everyone is spiritual. It depends on their level of recognition. But everything and everyone is spirit.

LF: I know Courtney is, Evan I don’t know, he’s 3, yeah Courtney is. It’s very important to her that she goes by and lives her life like God would want her to do and I think she can enjoy things that I think are spiritual like music or creating things and I think in a lot of things that are spiritual. She is working on being very introspective. And recognizing her feelings and how her actions affect other people and accepting people for who they are.

8. How do parenting and spirituality come together for you?

CB: Well I think we are experience being children. We grow wiser as we grow older. I think that there is sort of that spiritual path there too. There is this need to submit ourselves so something that is bigger than us but we don’t necessarily understand. To show them a path that has worked for us. I just read this Rumi poem. Now a lot of his poems could be about children too.

LC: I don’t really think they can be separate. I think that they which goes back to something I said before, its more of an awareness of it. I think the more I use my spirituality and coming from a place of spirit than any other place is what parenting is all about. That is one of my goals, is to constantly be centered and balanced enough so that you can come from that place. Instead of from anger or from frustration from pressure, from other people and other people’s expectations.

LF: That’s a good one. Spirituality I think to me is knowing there is something bigger than us and looking to that and or feeling that and embracing it and leading your life in that direction. If we were just here for no reason then we wouldn’t need to be the same as we need to be. In parenting we want to see our children grow up and be happy and productive. I think those things are all spiritual. If you don’t have something bigger than you to embrace you while you are doing those things then you feel lost.
Not necessarily God but to me that is what it is, but respect and compassion all of those things are spiritual. You know, without a sense of safety and belongingness in this world we just feel so disconnected.

9. What do you think your job is as a parent in regards to spirituality?

CB: I think a lot of it is being a good role model. Showing them what you think, displaying spirituality. I think also to me spirituality is like a tool if you want to look at it that way. Its a way of looking at things. There are things you can do to make your life more spiritual, to help you make decisions, to help you decide what’s right for you, to find things that’s right for you.

LF: These are good questions Lisa, umm, I think it’s our job to expose children and teach the children our values and morals as well as other peoples. We would like them to have the same as us but whatever they have is okay too. To give them the skills and tools to make decisions for themselves. Expose them to opportunities to be spiritual or to experience spiritual things. Even with Evan going out and looking at bugs and he asks me why it rains, that sort of thing. Big questions. Its hard to figure out, I mean I could
say, well it just does, but taking those opportunities and embracing them as ways to teach them. And you know when Evan ahs a melt down, to give him time to be my himself and have his feelings. Instead of just telling him how he should feel. You better not be angry and you better not cry. I don’t like that, that is how I was raised. Bend the rules sometimes, don’t be so rigid. Eat chocolate and marshmallows sometimes if you want. Life is too short.