



# FAMILY!

## Hints from Two Members

### School Success Tips

by Bill Corbett

*This article has some tips for getting off to the right start in a new school year, with an emphasis on planning ahead before a semester begins. Although we're a little late, Bill's suggestions can still be implemented. He writes:*

The secret [to having a successful school year] is to help the child plan ahead and take an active role in preparing for the homework, before the semester begins. Here are three steps for getting children self-motivated about homework in the weeks prior to the start of the school semester:

#### The Supplies

Sit down with your child and help him come up with a list of supplies he feels that he'll need to  
*continues on page 6*

#### Fear or Caution?

### Dear Addy...

Guest author is Tina Feigal, M.S., M.Ed.

Dear Addy,  
How do we sort through all the safety information in the media to be sure we are doing our jobs as parents, and yet give our kids the freedom they need? Can't kids ride their bikes to the store or their friends' houses any more?  
— Concerned

Dear Concerned,  
It's a fine balancing act. The media has made a very big deal out of child abductions by strangers, which are quite rare, and has essentially robbed a generation of kids of opportunities to grow in the world. You can help your

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## Re-slicing the Responsibility Pie

by Linda Jessup

With the holidays fast approaching, thoughts of special foods, family traditions and lots to do in preparation for these festive occasions come to mind. But mixed with anticipation, parents often feel exhausted by the very prospect of adding more to do to an already overloaded schedule of responsibilities.

But stop a minute! Responsibilities within the family are like a big, nutritious pie. Everyone needs them to grow properly. We know that part of our parenting job is to teach children to become increasingly "response-able." Feeling overly burdened by almost anything we do (parenting, teaching, speaking, the workplace), usually signals we are taking too much of the Responsibility Pie for ourselves, and depriving others of their fair share. While we're feeling uncomfortably "full," tired, unable to function well, perhaps even resentful and mistreated, others are actually starving for the essential ingredients they need to develop. Every person needs to grow and flourish by contributing to the well-being of others and to the larger enterprise!

Hopefully, realizing that we are carrying more than our share of the load prompts us to stop, admit we are taking too much of the Pie and change our counter-productive habits. We need to appreciate, develop and utilize many more of the resources available to us. Let's see how this idea works in the family:

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**Member Memo**  
**TapTalk**  
*The NASAP TapTalk on January 19 will be on Family Education. Lois Ingber, LCSW, will be discussing "Planting Adlerian Seeds in China," relating her experiences on teaching Positive Discipline in China in 2010. Sure to be fascinated, you can also earn C.E. units by participating. Watch for an email from NASAP.*

## Also in this issue

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*New Co-Chair to be elected in Atlanta in June*

## FE Section Co-Chairs Report...

Dear Family Education Section Members,

Fall is a busy time as children get back to school and activities. Fall also is the time for the annual COR (Council of Representatives) meetings.

Our COR meeting this October in Hershey was exciting and interesting. There were 90 proposals for the 2012 conference in Atlanta – the most that have ever been submitted. Out of the 90 proposals, we had about 15 for the Family Education Section. It was great to see such a good representation from our Section.

As noted on page 7, we will be introducing a Parent Track at the conference. Interested parents can come to special Saturday sessions for a reduced fee and be able to take part in four parenting offerings. This is an idea we've been working on for quite a long time, and are looking forward to its successful launch – with an eye towards attracting the local community, and ultimately increasing our membership.

Each Section will be holding their business meeting first thing on the Saturday morning of the conference. New this year will be a Keynote Speaker along with each Section meeting. The Section Keynote sessions will follow the theme of the conference, which is *Social Equality: Still the Challenge of Today*.

Due to the flood of proposals, we will also have some round table sessions. Participants will be able to go to a room with numerous round tables set up with a different topic at each table. These will provide a small group atmosphere in a comfortable setting and allow for a personal connection between the facilitator and participants.

Our COR meeting saw lots of discussion about increasing membership. We were interested in how to attract new members to NASAP. We also wanted to encourage old members to come back who have let their memberships lapse and of course, of prime importance, to retain present members. We are interested in your thoughts on all of this!

This issue of *FAMILY!* provides you with resources to enhance your parent groups. Feel free to copy (with acknowledgement credit), circulate and discuss in your groups. We hope you'll make full use of this as one of the benefits of Section membership, and encourage your participants to join NASAP for even more. Thanks to all who responded to our editor in the call for submissions. There were so many, we had to expand this issue to 10 pages from its usual 8, and hold back others for a future issue!

Remember to take time to enjoy the season. It is easy as we get caught up in so many activities to forget to pause and enjoy the spectacular colors (while they last) or play in a pile of leaves with our children.

Let us hear from you. Please send us your Co-Chair nominations today! ■

Your Co-Chairs,

*Terry Lowe along with Patti Cancellier*

## Adlerian Wisdom

One of our most basic parenting principles stresses the benefits of Encouragement over Praise.

We are pleased to illustrate this point at length in this issue of *FAMILY!* thanks to the submission from Gary McKay.

*The Encouragement Process* (References: STEP Publishers, <http://steppublishers.com>, and *Calming the Family Storm*, <http://impactpublishers.com>) appears on the next page.

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## THE ENCOURAGEMENT PROCESS

*"A child needs encouragement like a plant needs water." Rudolf Dreikurs*  
*"Have the courage to be imperfect." Rudolf Dreikurs.*

*Likely Results of Discouragement:* Child: lacks courage; won't risk; fears failure; competitive and status seeking; angry.

*Likely Results of Encouragement:* Child: has courage; risks; handles failure; cooperative; has social interest.

Encouragement conveys the message that "I believe in you, I appreciate you, I recognize your effort, I celebrate your accomplishments, and I'm on your side."

**Encouragement is based on mutual respect:** Kids today will resist and rebel against all things forced on them. Any real influence parents have on kids comes when parents replace control with respect.

### Encouragement skills:

Accepting  
 Instilling faith and confidence  
 Building on strengths  
 Accentuating the positive  
 Recognizing effort and improvement  
 Promoting responsibility

## PRAISE AND ENCOURAGEMENT

### Praise

Verbal reward  
 Must be earned: "You are worthwhile only when you meet my standards."  
 Awarded for well-done, completed tasks.  
 Method of control – like punishment.  
 External motivator – child performs only to get reward.  
 Atmosphere of competition – focuses on self-elevation.  
 Only performers are worthy of praise.  
 Equates deed and doer.

### Encouragement

A gift – freely given  
 Focuses on strengths and assets: "You are good enough as you are." No value judgments.  
 Focuses on effort and improvement. Can be given when child is "down."  
 Instills faith.  
 Promotes evaluation of own performance.  
 Atmosphere of cooperation. Focuses on giving, doing, contributing – social interest, "people-esteem."  
 All are worthy of encouragement.  
 Separates deed from doer.

### Consequences of Overuse of Praise

Children may believe their personal worth depends upon the opinions of others. If praise not given, performers may stop performing. Discouraged children respond to praise by: rebelling; giving up; anxiety. ("Will I ever be able to do something like that again?")

### Mistaken Concept About the Difference of Praise and Encouragement

Praise focuses on the person, encouragement focuses on the act. Not true because: 1) When we praise the act we are still making value judgments; 2) encouragement may focus on the act of effort, but it also focuses on accepting children (adults) as they are and instilling faith in them as persons. Examples: "I like the way you tackle a problem." (act). "You can do it." (actor).

### Language of Encouragement

The language of praise and encouragement are different. Praise contains words which make value judgments: "good", "great", "terrific", etc. Encouraging language focuses on *acceptance* – "I like the way you handled that." (ownership); *improvement* – "You're improving" (tell how); *faith* – "Keep working, you'll make it."; *contribution* – "Thanks for helping me, you made my job much easier."; *assets and strengths* – "You have a talent for \_\_\_\_ would you do that for our family?"; *effort* – "It looks like you really worked hard on that."; *self-evaluation* – "How do you feel about it?" or, "You look pleased with your work." (These types of phrases may seem awkward at first until you get used to them.)

### The Real Difference Between Praise and Encouragement – Your Intention

If your intention is to accept the child, instill faith, focus on effort and improvement, etc. then the words you use are unimportant. But elimination of value judging words is a first step in developing more encouraging intentions. As you learn to be more encouraging, comments which would otherwise be interpreted as praise will probably be viewed by the person as encouragement.

NOTE: While encouragement often calls for a comment, it's more than language or an approach. *Encouragement is an attitude, an optimistic belief and valuing of human beings.* To be an effective parent, encouragement must underlie any action with the child. Also, be aware, that encouragement can be communicated through silent acceptance – for example letting a child attempt a task without interference. Hugs, smiles, nods, winks also send encouraging messages.

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© CMTI-West, 2009, Tucson, Arizona References: *The STEP programs* by Dinkmeyer & McKay, <http://www.steppublishers.com> and *Calming the Family Storm* by McKay and Maybell, <http://www.impactpublishers.com>

*Responsibility....continued from page 1*

Preferably at a Family Meeting, discuss your dilemma. Admit how, by over-doing, you are robbing other family members of their fair share of the Responsibility Pie.

Give notice. Let family members know you intend to follow Rudolf Dreikurs' sage advice to stop being insulting by doing for them what they can do for themselves.

Make a list (it's best to let others help with this part, too) of all the jobs that need doing in the household. Identify who does what.

Move into training mode. Encourage family members to choose one job they want or need to learn to do in order to contribute, and one job they need to learn to do in order to become more self-sufficient.

Work out training times for the week. Let someone more experienced train someone less experienced in a skill he or she has already mastered.

Rotate daily family jobs on a weekly basis.

Discuss how training is going at the next Family Meeting and make changes and modifications as appropriate.

Take time for acknowledgements of what people have learned and contributed.

Decide together which jobs will change and which will continue for now.

As children's portions of the Responsibility Pie grow, they become engaged in many of the interesting life skills and practical activities the adults around them do as well. Over the years, with guidance in this training process, they become skilled in breaking tasks down, prioritizing and organizing. They learn to manage time; to focus and complete tasks; to use a wide variety of equipment and resources; to cooperate with others and to work for the greater good of the household or community rather than just for their own benefit.

Gradually, they begin to see more broadly, to note tasks that need doing, supplies that need replenishing and items that need repair. They increasingly manifest some of the grit their ancestors displayed – initiative, perseverance, resourcefulness and courage. They also become more appreciative of the efforts and skills of others, showing more consideration and generosity because of their own first-hand experiences. These young people have many ways to connect with others, to contribute and "belong."

As in all things "nutritional," balance matters as well. Expecting too little participation from children disrespects their capabilities. So does over-loading them with too much responsibility. Privileges and independence need to grow (or shrink) along with the level of responsibility each youngster demonstrates over time. Dependability, competence, honesty, civility and reliability serve as good gauges of a teenager's readiness to increasingly make social decisions, to drive, to get a job and to manage later hours.

Children are far better prepared for real life when they are expected from

the beginning to integrate their household responsibilities with schoolwork, sports and social activities. Physically moving to do a task often provides a welcome break from studies. Staying up or out late or sleeping in are less likely to be contentious issues if young people have family or other duties that require their involvement. Spending hours playing video games becomes more difficult if one is accountable for having the family laundry completed by an agreed upon time. Responsibilities provide both balance and protection, supplying a "social out" for young people at times.

*Thirteen-year-old Dave stops twelve-year-old Bianca in the crowded school hallway as the buses are announced. He drapes his arm around her shoulders, leans close to her ear and says in his new low voice, "Hey Bianca, a fun bunch of kids are coming over to my place today. Nobody'll be home until late. Come with us. It'll be cool."*

*Bianca shakes her head and steps away. "I can't Dave. It's my night to cook dinner for my family. Hey, that's my bus. See you Monday," she says with a wave, hoisting her backpack and hurrying off down the hall.*

A useful guide to steer by is to remember that by the time a child becomes fifteen or sixteen, he or she should know how to do most of the jobs an adult can do, inside the house, outside in the yard and including basic car care. The work will not yet always be done with the ease or expertise of an adult, or without complaint, but the youngster at every age is "nourished" and strengthened by the resulting physical, mental and social development. When adults mistakenly perform tasks for children that young people are capable of doing themselves, they are actually depriving them of their rightful portion of the Responsibility Pie, containing vital sources of experi-

*concludes right column page 5*

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## Membership Matters

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### Co-Chair Vacancy

Patti Cancellier has been our Co-Chair for two terms, and is ready to hand over the reins to the next person eager to step up and actively help us work on the challenges of supporting family educators. Volunteer! It's an interesting, important way to contribute – and a résumé builder. Please send an email to our leadership team (see page 2).

### Finances

We will be updating our financial picture with the Section Treasurer's report in the next issue of *FAMILY!* Be sure to renew your Family Education Section membership dues along with your year-end NASAP dues so we will be in a strong position to perform our functions: production of this newsletter, scholarships to the annual convention, and reimbursement for travel to COR meetings for our Co-Chairs. ■

*Responsibility....continued from page 4*  
ential nutrients that help children grow, thrive and survive. ■

*Linda Jessup is a past Co-Chair of the Family Education Section, past Membership Chair on the Council of Representatives/COR of NASAP, the founder of PEP in Maryland, and co-author of PEP's new textbook, **Parenting With Courage and Uncommon Sense**, from which this article was developed. You can reach her at <[lindajpepwest@aol.com](mailto:lindajpepwest@aol.com)>.*

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## The Greatest Gift: Respect

by Vivian Brault, M.A.

This is the season parents and grandparents search for the perfect holiday gift for each child – something that conveys the true meaning of the holiday, expresses their love and caring, and brings joy. Such gifts are never found among plastic Ninjas, Barbies, or Rangers; the most perfect gifts come only from the heart. And the greatest we can give a child at holiday time or anytime is simple respect. From that, he learns to respect and believe in himself, and respect and value others. The former ensures he won't assume a 'victim' role in life, and the latter ensures he will not victimize others. There is no greater gift.

Most parents work hard to teach respect to their children; some are successful but those who aren't are usually at a loss to understand why. Episodes of extreme violence in our schools and universities over the past few years have given rise to many questions regarding why kids raised in "good" families do "bad" and disrespectful things. We could spend a lot of time discussing the virtues of "good" vs. "effective" families and parenting, but the bottom line is – knowing what works and what doesn't work is important for parents striving to rear children to have self-respect, and be respectful of others. It is hoped that the following will provide useful insights.

### Methods of Teaching Respect

There are basically four methods by which we teach the concept of respect; each is an integral part of the whole process. Those methods are: Informing, Modeling, Respecting the Child, and Respecting Self. Because each plays a role in the final outcome, if any one is excluded the result reflects it.

#### • INFORMING

Informing is the 'introduction' to respect – it prepares the child for socialization, but the real learning process occurs when the other three methods are used. Our words convey the concept of respect, help the young child understand how certain actions show respect, and clarify why respect for others is necessary and expected.

#### Examples

Begin when your child is a toddler; tell him that everyone has a right to be treated with kindness, and it's important to treat others in ways he wants them to treat him. Let him know you expect him to treat others with consideration (no hitting, yelling, pushing, biting or grabbing toys), and have confidence that he will. When he does, comment on how well he remembered and celebrate his progress! If he strikes others when he's angry, let

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*Tips for School...continued from page 1*

complete his homework. You do, however, have veto power as the parent and have final approval on what will be purchased and for how much. You'll also teach him much about money and shopping by letting him carry the basket at the store, pick out the items (with your guidance), and even use a calculator while he shops to add up his purchases. Depending on his age, you may even want to give him the money to carry and allow him to complete the transaction. Many office supply store chains have employees ready to serve, so why not allow your child to work directly with the salesperson while you tag along and say as little as possible.

### The Location

Homework is often done at the dining room or kitchen table, or worse yet, in front of the television. These high traffic and distracting locations are not conducive to concentration and learning. Allow your child to help you determine where the homework will be done on a daily basis and have her help you set up this special location. You want to be sure that the lighting is appropriate, seating is comfortable, and visual stimulation is low. Don't be afraid to mark it officially with a banner or sign that reads "The Homework Center." This adds to the reverence of the space.

### The Schedule

Allow your child to determine when it will begin and for how long. Sometimes allowing a 30 minute play or snack period before the homework allows them to wind down and get in the frame of mind for learning, especially if they are a "latchkey kid," home alone before you arrive. Let them help you determine one type of activity during this pre-homework period and limit their choice of snacks. And to help them learn to manage themselves, set up consequences together on what will happen if they do not keep to the established schedule. I encourage the use of a planner or calendar to begin teaching them about time management and task organization. It will allow them to keep a log of what they accomplished and how long it took. ■

*Bill Corbett is author of **Love, Limits, & Lessons: A Parent's Guide to Raising Cooperative Kids**, and creator and host of a cable TV show, **Creating Cooperative Kids**. You can reach him at <[bill@cooperativekids.com](mailto:bill@cooperativekids.com)>, <<http://www.StopTheTantrums.com>>, and (860) 265-2272*

**The article below, on the same topic, was recently circulated by Tina Feigal to her email list, and is reprinted with permission.**

*by Tina Feigal, M.S., M.Ed.*

Now that school has started, are you feeling good about the way things are going for your child or students? Would you like help making the home-to-school and school-to-home connection be as strong as it can for kids?

Here are three tips for assuring a successful school year:

1. Let your child own his or her work, even if it's poor. Teachers need to know the actual achievement level of their students, so if you do their homework, they can't help them.
2. Talk in advance about where, when, and how homework will happen, and then stick to the plan. The TV goes off at the decided time, with no discussion.

3. Encourage small successes wherever you see them. If your child is cranky, he is discouraged, not trying to bother you. Lift him up whenever you can and be sure to show appreciation around the things that have nothing to do with school! ■

*Tina Feigal is the author of **The Pocket Coach for Parents** and a parent coach at *The Center for the Challenging Child, LLC*. As Associate Faculty at *Adler Graduate School, Richfield, MN*, Tina certifies parent coaches and teaches *Developmental Psychology*. Email her at <[tina@parentingmojo.com](mailto:tina@parentingmojo.com)> or visit <<http://www.parentingmojo.com>>.*

*Dear Addy...continued from page 1*

child by teaching her what to look for, and mostly by giving her gradually increasing freedoms to go out into the world on her own. And find other ways to trust your child while she is at home to increase her sense of self-directedness. Ask her opinion on stories she tells you about friends, seek her advice on whatever comes up, and help her grow her view of herself as a contributor to the world, rather than a frightened victim.

Children need self-confidence to become contributing members of society, and parents can help them by "telegraphing" trust in their inner resources. ■

*—Addy*

*Tina Feigal has also contributed to the article on *School Success Tips*. Her bio is above.*

# Responsibility Training

by Liz Neville, STEP Group Leader

At times, parents in my groups express frustration with “ingratitude” from their kids, but, after all, it is the natural worldview of childhood that the planet, together with all the adults on it, revolves around them.

It is the natural responsibility of parents to gently correct that assumption.

Our STEP parenting approach advises us to take advantage of the innate desire of children to be involved in group activities, to “play house.” When our kids are little, it seems like more work than it’s worth to actually recruit their help with any household task. We tend to shoo them away, to engage them with toys or TV or another “parallel” activity that gives us liberty to get things done.

And it works well in the short run, until they reach an age when they really could be of use and suddenly we’re demanding their help. *Well, they may rightly think, you got along well enough without me all these years. Why are you bugging me now?*

Reasonable enough. But there are good and plenty reasons to engage our children in everyday household activities. To wit:

- We get annoyed after a while, constantly doing chores for our kids that we know they can competently handle. We have enough to do, anyway!

- Kids need to feel that they are a vital part of the life of the family. It adds to their sense of belonging, which in turn fosters their sense of

## Convention Atlanta! June 7-10, 2012

It’s hard to believe, but we are already anticipating our next annual convention in the second decade of this millennium. Wow.

The theme is *Social Equality: Still the Challenge of Today*, which references the last book written by Rudolf Dreikurs, M.D., our founder. And how timely it is!

The convention will be held in a terrific location, the Hyatt Regency, right in downtown Atlanta. If you haven’t been to Atlanta, this trip is a “must!” On top of all the exciting topics being presented, and the socializing we love to do, Atlanta is a lively city, well worth the visit.

New this year is the introduction of a Parent Track on the Saturday of the conference. Atlanta-area parents can attend that day at a reduced fee and take part in 4 parenting sessions. If you know of parents in the area, please help to spread the word and encourage them to come to the Parent Track.

At the Section meeting, we will be voting in a new Co-Chair to replace Patti Cancellier, who has generously been serving since 2007 (and was Secretary/Treasurer before that!). Traditionally, we’ve recruited our leadership from each of our two North American countries. Since Patti is from the USA, we are now calling for nominations and/or volunteers from the USA. We will also be approving Minutes of the 2011 Section meeting in Victoria BC, and having a Treasurer’s report from Secretary/Treasurer Kerry Mayorga. ■

confidence and self-worth.

- A family is a group that works best when everyone is pulling in the same direction.
- Doing even tedious chores together can be enjoyable bonding time, and as a side benefit improve communication.
- How else will they learn the basic tasks of independent adult living? They need practice at this, like any other skill.

The last one is often a tough one for parents, especially perfectionists, who like everything done “just so” and hate to delegate tasks. It’s especially hard in families where domestic help seems to take care of most chores. No matter. Find things kids can take responsibility for.

Spend some time thinking about and compiling all the things that need to be done to make a household run smoothly. Hold a family meeting to discuss, and use a job jar or volunteerism to assign tasks. Make it clear that it is not a “top down” regime but a family working together.

In short, kids should have responsibilities in the family just as the adults do. ■

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*Greatest Gift: Respect...cont from page 5*  
 him know it's alright to feel angry, but it's not alright to hurt others because he's angry. When such episodes occur, encourage him to tell you what he's angry about, listen, then suggest alternative responses such as using his words to express feelings, finding a way to share, or simply walking away. If aggressive outbursts are frequent, strive to put more emphasis on the following three methods of teaching respect.

#### • MODELING

Modeling is an important means for teaching respect; children may not remember what we tell them about respect – but they remember what we do that is respectful of them and others. They learn attitudes by observing ours, not by listening to what we say about attitude.

#### Examples

Emphasize the validity of what you tell your child about respect by living it. If you hope he will be courteous and respectful to others, show him how through your actions and attitude toward him and others. If you hope he will be a respectful, law-abiding citizen, let him observe your conduct when you're driving; shopping; attending church, community events, or just socializing. Parents are the child's first and most influential teacher, and what they do speaks more loudly than what they say!

There is probably no greater reason to examine our own actions and attitudes than knowing those are the legacies we are passing on to our children. Avoid teaching disrespect through negative comments about authorities including teachers and police officers, or neighbors, friends, and parents. Careless modeling of prejudices, 'white' lies, manipulation, or cheating become behaviors we will be confronted with in our own families. Monitor what is modeled

in your home; unfortunately some videos and TV programs (such as *The Simpsons*) model disrespect and put downs which undermine any parent's best efforts. And if the parent is present during viewing, the child has no reason to suspect she or he doesn't condone the disrespect, or that the parent expects any better treatment. When disrespectful episodes take place on TV, discuss with the child how he felt, tell him how you felt, and foster empathy by asking how he thinks the recipient felt.

#### • RESPECT FOR THE CHILD

Respect is something we must give in order to get; we only receive it from those to whom we give it, including our children. When a child lives in a respectful atmosphere, it shows in his treatment of others. Unfortunately, many of the well-intentioned things we do for (or to) children are actually disrespectful and generate disrespect. For example, reminding children of what they already know – implies they're too dull to catch on; doing for them what they could do for themselves – implies they're incapable; making excuses for unacceptable behavior – implies we believe they are incapable of anything better; stating a limit but not following through – implies they aren't important enough for us to bother; telling a child to "be good" – implies we believe he's intrinsically "bad"; shielding a child from consequences – implies he's excused because he's deficient. Whatever children believe we believe about them, they will become.

#### Examples

Show respect for your child by speaking to him in tones you'd like to hear from him. Affirm and validate him by listening, really listening to him! Minimize his mistakes, focus on what he does right, and encourage it. Express appreciation for his help; show your belief in his basic goodness;

encourage signs of progress and avoid demanding perfection. Give the child choices and trust him to learn from the results of poor ones, while the price is cheap. Avoid criticizing, 'nit picking', or fault finding; make requests rather than issuing orders.

#### • RESPECT FOR SELF

The last component in the process of training respect is demonstrating respect for ourselves through our unwillingness to endure disrespect. This involves training sometimes referred to as respectful or positive discipline. The more often parents model respect for the child, they less often they need to discipline.

#### Examples

Discipline, respectfully applied, is a critical component of training a child to respect the rights of others. When a child's behavior is disrespectful, the first step in the process is to inform him that his actions are not acceptable. If he continues, the second step is to tell him you're unwilling to endure his actions and what you plan to do if he continues (i.e., deny the current or next available privilege). And, if he continues, the third step is to take action; follow through with your promise.

Those times in which you ask a child to do something and he doesn't respond, model mutual respect by simply delaying the next privilege or pleasurable activity. Tell him WHEN X is done, THEN the next activity will be available. ("WHEN the toys are put away, THEN you can join us for dinner.") This is completely respectful of the child; dinner will be served and when he eats it is up to him! It's also respectful of the parent who neither struggles to get cooperation, nor does the task himself. Respect the strong-willed child's right to delay at his own expense; he'll figure it out.

*concludes on last page*

# Imagination and Creativity

by Cheryl L. Erwin, M.A., MFT

I've noticed a strange thing happening in my therapy office recently. When I work with children, I often do what is called "play therapy," which involves (not surprisingly) playing with children. The goal is to provide lots of intentionally neutral toys and then follow a child's lead as she plays to see what's happening in her head and heart. It's a bit more complicated than that, but that's a simple explanation. Play therapy is not only helpful and effective – it's often a lot of fun for both child and therapist.

Lately, though, I've begun noticing a couple of problems. First, it's getting difficult to find appropriate play-therapy toys. Everything in the toy stores, from board games to clay, seems to have a commercial marketing tie-in. You can't even buy a play kitchen set without getting fast-food logos on everything. Unfortunately, when presented with "Transformers" toys, kids tend to mimic the Transformers movies – which isn't helpful for therapeutic purposes.

But more important, and to my mind more troubling, children these days seem to struggle to come up with imaginative play by themselves. Sometimes, of course, this can be the result of trauma or the issues that brought them to therapy in the first place. But more often, it just seems like kids' imaginations are malfunctioning. They ask for hints about what to play, they ask where the computer is, or they sit and stare blankly at the toys. Or they begin acting out their favorite video, even though there are no "Dora the Explorer" toys in sight.

Children these days seem to be suffering from a lack of creativity and imagination. And it probably shouldn't be a surprise: from their earliest days, children are propped in front of televisions and DVD players, given computer and video games to play, and provided with fire engines that make a great siren noise when a button is pushed, or baby dolls who cry on cue. They are taken to play dates and play groups and organized sports, where there are rules, stop and start times, and carefully structured activities.

All this orderly recreation and sophisticated equipment might seem to be a great idea, and in fact there are parents (and toy manufacturers) who claim that all this computer-enhanced play is "educational." What we know from research, however, is that children learn skills best in active relationship with other human beings, and imagination is one of those qualities that can thrive only when it is given space and encouragement to grow.

So does it really matter if there just isn't as much imagination in the world as there used to be? Well, stop and think for a moment. Where will the next great music or art or books come from? Who will provide the spark of genius for the next great scientific or medical innovation? Who will dream of rocketing to the moon or beyond? Way too many of today's kids aren't dreaming; they're busy finding the magic coin so they can get to the next level of their video game.

Yeah, I know – I sound like a total curmudgeon. But it seems to me that much of the magic of childhood has been leached away by modern tech-

nology and our lack of free time. I grew up watching very little television, and what I watched were programs like *Star Trek* or *Little House on the Prairie*, shows that brought to life a different time and place than the one I lived in. I read constantly; the characters from **Anne of Green Gables** and **Little Women** feel like old friends to me. I had art supplies to mess with and a mom who loved to paint and didn't mind my occasional messes. I had piano lessons, although I grumbled about practicing. And I had no computer, no VCR, and no video games. We went outdoors to play and built forts, created carnivals and parades, and pretended to be pioneers behind the back yard fence.

I think our kids are missing out, despite their sophisticated technology and high-def graphics. If you're a parent, consider making room for imagination in your family life. Tell stories, both imaginary and historical. Provide art supplies and dress-up clothing. And yes, turn off the technology. Frequently. Read books together; have conversations. Encourage creativity and get involved yourself. The world we all share will be a much richer place if we make room for imagination in it. ■

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*Greatest Gift: Respect...cont from page 8*

Parents who are mystified by children who seem to be disrespectful, in spite of all efforts, are usually well-meaning parents who want desperately to be a "nice" or "good" parent and are willing to endure disrespect in order to try to achieve that. Unfortunately, in striving toward their goal, they often set limits but fail to follow through; they frequently nag and remind a lot; they often do for their child what he is capable of doing for himself; and they frequently make excuses for the child's behavior. Frustrated by lack of results, they may resort to verbal or physical punishment. Unfortunately, though well-intentioned, all such actions are disrespectful of both the parent and the child. The long-term result is disrespect for parents, others, property, and authority in general. The cost is

staggering for the child, and for the society in which he will live.

This holiday season, as you search for the greatest gift of all for your child, consider the value of giving him simple respect. ■

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