

From the Heart...

...Lifeskills for Today's Family
By Sharon L. Benedict MS



Letting your Children grow up—even when they groan about it!

(published in Boerne Star, Friday, Sept 4, 2015)

September has already started off way too busy!! So, I will need to resurrect portions of a 2009 article I thought you would again enjoy. What is offered here actually helped me remember that no matter how “grown up” our children seem to be, we parents still need to sometimes “let them grow up” further! Here goes.

You get a phone call from your son that he registered late at the university and couldn't get the classes he needed. Johnny also announced that he lost his part-time job. You asked him what happened. His story goes something like this, “I was only late to work a “few” times but my boss just wouldn't understand that I was caught in traffic and had to pick up my friend, Michael.” The story continues with a couple more assorted “reasons” why life wasn't going well. Your son then asked if he could again borrow a little more money to get by this month. You wonder how he used the last loan. The story goes on...

Does this sound familiar to you? I hope not. Yet, we parents have all heard something similar either from our own children or someone we know. Where do you draw the line on rescuing one's children? Whether it's a ten year old learning how to manage allowance or a nineteen year old starting the sophomore college year, the line of unhealthy parental enabling is not always clearly seen on the road of life. When does

helping out become rescuing—only to have the same behavior return for more rescuing?

We as parents always want the best for our children. Yet, what does that really mean for the children as they grow up and become adults. Have they embraced their own personal dreams and goals? Does their everyday behavior reflect a maturing, purpose-filled and emerging fulfilled life? Are they really intrinsically happy and secure in who they are and where they are going?

Here are a few questions to ask yourself just related to money (feel free to put in any other topic you believe is relevant to your child's development into adulthood):

1. How often do your children ask for money?
2. What is your usual response to their ask?
3. What is their response and behavioral outcome of your answer “yes”? Your answer “no”?
4. If you believe you have been too permissive (or hard), how would you like to change your own behavior with your children that will help them mature in a healthy, happy, responsible way?
5. Think about one significant incident with your children that had a significantly positive outcome because of the way they responded and the choices they made. Then, share with them your feelings and affirmation about it.

One of the most important things you can now do for your child is to find out what they think also? A few years ago a very insightful 90+ year old Guy, living right in the Boerne community, wrote an awesome book to help parents connect and communicate with

their children. This little book, *Well, what do you think?*, authored by Guy Chipman, doesn't have the usual "do's & don'ts."

Rather, it is specifically designed to get the family talking together with a series of "Life Questions" parents are to ask their kids, teenagers, and young adults. So often, as parents we have great expectations for our children as Brent Evans so astutely describes in Guy's little book—"What most of us parents want is to raise an angel who acts like Superman." Isn't it time to get to know your children, not as angels nor as a Superman, but as very unique, delightful human beings with dreams, goals, and very much independent thoughts and feelings? Wouldn't you like to experience your own unique relationship with them that only happens between parent and child, no matter how old you both are today?

The wisdom you will gain from this little book of inquiry and discovery into the heart and soul of your child will go a long way to forever impacting your whole family's relationship. Get this book! Pass it along. You will never regret it. Life is always an adventure and will be extra exciting when you incorporate this gem into your family's lives. You can purchase copies of *Well, what do you think?* at the Cibolo Nature Center (www.cibolo.org, 830-249-4616). All profits go to the center's ongoing programs and projects on behalf of our community.

Start today asking open, nonjudgmental questions and discover the heart and soul of your own very special children.

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Child Play for Children and Adults

(published in Boerne Star, Friday, Sept 11, 2015)

How do you play with your children? Maybe I should start with “Do you play with your children?” Maybe one day you happened to go out to your backyard to pick up the newspaper you left earlier and find your son running around as fast as he can on the lawn with his arms stretched out. He turns to you and yells, “Look, I’m flying!” He gleefully declares he is out to save everyone from dragons hiding behind that tree while he finds treasures buried in his sandbox.

What did you do? Simply smile, nod, pick up your newspaper, and go back into your house? Hopefully, you took advantage of the front-row seat for your child’s most imaginative, theatrical production performed just for you. What magic years these are! How about finding out why imagination is so important and what you can do to nurture these wonderfully creative young years.

According to Mary M. Gavin, MD in her article, *The Magic of Play: How It Inspires & Aids Early Development* (July 2014, Kidshealth.org/parents), “There’s a lot that very young children aren’t yet able to grasp about the world around them. As a result, they “fill in the blanks” and often make up their own sometimes magical explanations for how things work. This time, which peaks during the preschool years, was dubbed “the magic years” by child development expert Selma Fraiberg, PhD, in 1959 when she wrote a

book of the same name. Babies use their senses (touch, taste, smell, sight, and sound) to explore their world. As they develop, they begin to understand the basic function of things ("If I push this button, the pony will pop out of the barn!"). Now, as preschoolers, they take this knowledge and combine it with a growing imagination to come up with fantastical ideas about why and how things happen."

Children play out all kinds of roles like superheroes, animals, even parents. Gavin offers tips for nurturing their growing brains and lives through imaginative activities. The first one is to *Go Along With It*. "When young ones leap through the air and tell you they're flying, don't tell them they're only jumping. Instead, feed the fantasy: 'Wow, you're so high up! What can you see on the ground? Maybe you should take a rest on that nice puffy cloud.' Or even better, start flying with them."

The next tip is *Choose Old-fashioned Toys*. "Blocks, dolls, arts and crafts, and molding clay are all toys that require creativity and therefore spur imagination." Then there is room to *Limit Electronic Toys*. "Whether it's a handheld entertainment system or a "junior" laptop, try to avoid toys that need batteries. Creativity is stifled when the toy, rather than the child, directs the play."

A very important practice is to *Read To Your Child*. "And while reading, ask mind-opening questions: 'If you were the caterpillar, what would you eat?' and 'What do you think will happen next in the story?'" This not only encourages imagination but promotes language skills and fosters an interest in books."

After so much imaginative worlds created, it's time to *Schedule Downtime*. "Make sure kids have free time every day to play on their own. Aside from encouraging creativity, it teaches them to use their own resources to amuse or soothe themselves." It

also may be time to *Limit Screen Time*. “When kids watch a movie or even an educational program, they experience someone else's make-believe world instead of exercising their imaginations. Some subjects on TV are not appropriate for preschoolers. Young kids also are more influenced by advertising since they can't tell the difference between commercials and actual programs. The same goes for digital advertising inserted in online games and apps. Experts recommend that children over age 2 limit screen time, which includes TV, DVDs, computers, smart phones, and tablets, to no more than 1-2 hours of quality programming per day.”

These “magic years” go so fast. So, be sure to connect with your children and become that child again filled with wonder and imagination that can reignite your own adult world of wonder and possibilities. The “years of reason” will come soon enough for your children and for you as well. How about finding a place in life for a little of both, magic and reason, together?

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Glad & Sad Memories from Childhood

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As the years of my life so vividly reflect in the mirrors I happen to pass by, I return in that moment to certain childhood memories. Some memories are crystal clear while others seem to float in a foggy mist, hard to detect the details. No matter how much I try to whisk the fogginess away, the pieces of the memory puzzle still remain detached.

What kinds of childhood memories pop into your head when you least expect it? Like mine, are they often a mix of glad ones, bad ones, sad ones? Are the memories more glad than sad? Or the other way around? And which memories have impacted if not formed so much of who you are today? And if they are more sad, what journey to adulthood did you travel to help you reconcile those more painful recollections?

I know for me, much of my childhood was a paradoxical mix of abuse and affection that was very difficult to unravel as I grew into adulthood. One thing amazingly held me together. Deep inside me, whether it was fueled by my whimsical, optimistic, sanguine personality or a gentle prompting from God, I somehow knew that all will be well. More likely, it was a combination of the two, and the fact that one of God's sweeter gifts to a child is to block the memories from conscious awareness until the adult child is ready to get free. For that, I will always be ever grateful . . . when at 36 years old the

memories and the mending began. I also began to recall sweet times along the way to be cherished. I found my future in faith and forgiveness that forever changed me and my family.

For those whose childhood memories were filled more with glad times where you were securely held and loved, and free from abuse, be sure to share those memories with your own children, parents, and others. You will provide a solid legacy for future generations to foster.

Everyone has a story to tell that can build a bridge out of beauty as well as brokenness. That includes you. May the reflections from these notables below strike a memory cord for you that will offer resounding music to all who need to hear your childhood story. No matter how happy or horrific your story may have been, may you see the redemptive threads of childhood so gently interwoven in your life today and in those who come after you.

“Childhood memories were like airplane luggage; no matter how far you were traveling or how long you needed them to last, you were only ever allowed two bags. And while those bags might hold a few hazy recollections—a diner with a jukebox at the table, being pushed on a swing set, the way it felt to be picked up and spun around—it didn’t seem enough to last a whole lifetime.” — Jennifer E. Smith, *This is What Happy Looks Like*

“Because you are defined not by life's imperfect moments, but by your reaction to them. And because there is joy in embracing - rather than running from - the utter absurdity of life.” — Jenny Lawson, *Let's Pretend This Never Happened: A Mostly True Memoir*

“That night I looked up at those same stars, but I didn't want any of those things. I didn't want Egypt, or France, or far-flung destinations. I just wanted to go back to my life from my childhood, just to visit it, and touch it, and to convince myself that yes, it had been real.” — Jenny Lawson, *Let's Pretend This Never Happened: A Mostly True Memoir*

“No matter how long it's been or how far you've drifted, no matter how unknowable you might be, there were at least two people in the world whose job it was to see you, to find you, to recognize you and reel you back in. No matter what.” — Jennifer E. Smith, *This is What Happy Looks Like*

“Some of my earliest and fondest memories of my mother are of her kneeling at the side of her bed every night and praying. As a child, I would always get very close to her as she prayed. I would put my ear as close as I could to her mouth and try my best to hear what she was saying to God, but I never could make out the words. Today, being married to an addict myself, I'm pretty sure I know exactly what she was praying.” — Barbara Bice, *Just Right*

“Memory is capricious. I can look back and see decadence, old bigots, the constant racial slurs, the bores, the wild cards, the bighearted, the family album of alcoholics, the saints, the old aunt propped in a chair saying only "da-da," the slow-motion suicides, but at four, six, ten, they loomed, powerful, not as types but as themselves. Among them, logic takes wing.” (pg. 31) — Frances Mayes, *Under Magnolia: A Southern Memoir*

“At a few times in my life, I've not been aware that I've just stepped onto a large X. Change might not be on my mind. Why change? I've always admired lives that

flourish in place. The taproot reaches all the way to the aquifer, the leaves bud, flourish, fall, and grow again. I like generations following one another in the same house, where lamplight falls through the windows in squares of light on the snow, and somebody's height chart still marks the kitchen doorway. But there I stand on the X, not knowing it's time to leap, when, really, I'd only meant to pause."

— Frances Mayes, *Under Magnolia: A Southern Memoir*

"The child is in me still and sometimes not so still." — Fred Rogers, *The World According to Mister Rogers: Important Things to Remember*

"In the external scheme of things, shining moments are as brief as the twinkling of an eye, yet such twinklings are what eternity is made of -- moments when we human beings can say "I love you," "I'm proud of you," "I forgive you," "I'm grateful for you." That's what eternity is made of: invisible imperishable good stuff."

— Fred Rogers, *The World According to Mister Rogers: Important Things to Remember*

"Music is the one art we all have inside. We may not be able to play an instrument, but we can sing along or clap or tap our feet. Have you ever seen a baby bouncing up and down in the crib in time to some music? When you think of it, some of that baby's first messages from his or her parents may have been lullabies, or at least the music of their speaking voices. All of us have had the experience of hearing a tune from childhood and having that melody evoke a memory or a feeling. The music we hear early on tends to stay with us all our lives." — Fred Rogers, *The World According to Mister Rogers: Important Things to Remember*

“My dad always used to say that with everything in life, there’s a game-changing moment. The one moment everything else hinges upon, but you hardly ever know it at the time.” — Jenny Han, *It's Not Summer Without You*

“But I loved that house, and I hated to say good-bye. Because, it was more than just a house. It was every summer, every boat ride, every sunset. It was Susannah.”
— Jenny Han, *It's Not Summer Without You*

“Kimberly Reed explains why this love has transferred to adulthood, saying, “When you love something as a kid, you never stop loving it; you just tuck that love away in a different spot in your heart.” — Nikki Van Noy, *New Kids on the Block: Five Brothers and a Million Sisters*

“So much of our early gladness vanishes utterly from our memory: we can never recall the joy with which we laid our heads on our mother's bosom or rode on our father's back in childhood. Doubtless that joy is wrought up into our nature, as the sunlight of long-past mornings is wrought up in the soft mellowness of the apricot, but it is gone forever from our imagination, and we can only BELIEVE in the joy of childhood.”
— George Eliot, *Adam Bede*

“...the wind has a purpose - to rattle the window panes, disturb the cat and make me miss you ...” — John Geddes, *A Familiar Rain*

“In life, finding a voice is speaking and living the truth. Each of you is an original. Each of you has a distinctive voice. When you find it, your story will be told. You will be heard.” — John Grisham

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Kids & TV . . . It can be a good thing

My grandson loves to play video games and watch movies, big time. His momma is determined to broaden Jasper's horizons no matter how he initially reacts. Both are so busy with work, school, soccer and karate practices, sometimes they are just too tired to do anything except order pizza delivery and turn on a movie.

Sound familiar? I was raised on TV trays and Bonanza! I know, I am showing my age here. But my parents did throw in Wild Kingdom now and again. How does your family fair with kids and TV? Want to make some changes? Even small incremental changes can make all the difference in your child development and life choices.

Let's see how to make that first step. First, find out what other things interest your children. Sometimes, you may need to introduce a variety of topics and environments to see how they react. You may get a "oh-hum, is it time to leave yet?" response. You may luck out and see their eyes light up with curiosity and even creativity. That's when you grab the moment and ask "You seem to really like this. How would you like to do this again?" Then step up to help make it happen for your children. If they don't know the "how," then find someone in that area to connect with who works well with the age of your children.

This is where the TV steps in to help encourage the discovery. Yet, you may need to do a little homework yourself with the endless programs out there to get a good match for the area of interest, their age and development stage. For Jasper, a few years ago, grandpa or “Papa” wanted him to share his own interest in nature in some way. So, Papa sent Jasper a book on how to identify animal scat. That’s right, animal poop! Jasper loved it and started taking more hikes with Mom, looking for animal “leftovers.”

Then, Momma decided to pay for Netflix and start watching nature programs with Jasper, not just movies. They found one series called “Life” listing Reptiles & Amphibians. Which, of course, is one of Papa’s favorites in the animal kingdom. Our daughter remembers many camping trip where we would hike and Dad would turn over some rock to find a fascinating creature and give our daughters a quick animal ecology lesson. Somehow John was always able to weave an animated story into that newly discovered creature under the rock. Needless to say, our daughters never forgot those camping trips. They will routinely watch nature programs even today.

Each child has a particular personality and bent of curiosity that work together. One child may be more introverted and loves to draw, paint, work with clay. Another child is more extroverted and physically outgoing who is fascinated with field track or the high-jump; and loves to watch the Olympics. Your child may be one who would rather write than talk, while their sibling is just the opposite, being a chatterbox. One child may write a story, and their sibling will love to act it out.

Whatever you discover about your kids, check what is out there on the TV. You just might be amazed at the possibilities. You just may drop the term “boob tube” that has coined your TV for many years. Here’s a bit of trivia for you. Although some used

the term boob for another word, idiot. The other word “tube” comes from the fact that TVs actually had tubes instead of electronics inside. They, therefore, called the TV a boob tube or boob box. The TV screen was also a large tube, Cathode Ray Tube, adopting the word “tube.”

For us all, we have a choice to make. How do we utilize this piece of technology in our lives that will nurture our neurons both mentally and physically? Like all things in life, balance is beautiful. We all, including our children, need to work our brains and our bodies. That way, both will do some amazing things in the one life we have here on this wondrous planet of ours and on behalf of the people who live on it.

Check out these links to see the good and bad side of TV and how to make Kid TV watching worth watching.

<http://kidshealth.org/parent/> [just type in search field “TV Watching]

<http://www.raisesmartkid.com/all-ages/1-articles/13-the-good-and-bad-effects-of-tv-on-your-kid>

<http://www.raisesmartkid.com/all-ages/1-articles/12-tips-on-kids-and-tv-watching>

<https://www.common sense media.org/blog/yes-you-can-make-tv-time-count>

<http://www.tidbits-cami.com/2015/06/the-top-10-tv-shows-for-kids-that-teach-good-things-on-netflix.html>

<http://kidstvmovies.about.com/od/healthytvhabits/a/tvgoodforkids.htm>

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