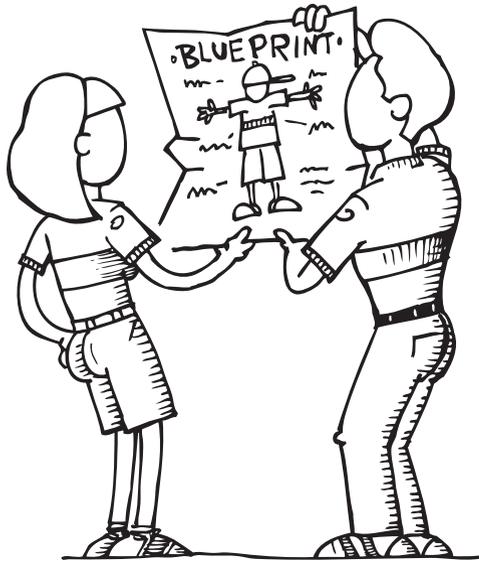


Part One

Parents With a Mission and a Plan



CHAPTER 1

What It Takes to Raise a Child Today

*When you do the common things in life
in an uncommon way,
you command the attention of the world.*

—Unknown

Raising a child is not as much about
doing the right things with your child as it is
about being the right kind of parent.

It takes passion and purpose to be a parent today. It's your role to guard the future welfare of your children and strengthen the family. There are many men and women who simply enter into parenting, and then there are some who enter it armed with a willingness in body, mind and soul to make a difference for their child. More than ever, your job as parents requires a combination of vigilance, preparedness, intelligence and integrity. The role of parent is serious business that takes courage and determination.

It Takes Determination!

You must acknowledge that destructive forces impinge on the strength of today's family. Senseless violence, absent parents, early abandonment and neglect, high tech entertainment, robbing young children of their most creative, imaginative years; single dimension screen stimulation disallowing any chance of human interaction; stress-filled routines and dumbed-down education are all tragic influences on family stability.

Today's youth exist in a very confusing world. It must seem that relationships are interchangeable, and people are disposable. Weapons are so prevalent that having our bodies scanned by metal detectors at entrances to office buildings, airports and even schools is now commonplace. With a "click" on a home computer, a child can bring a world of knowledge and information into their grasp, and with another "click," they can be exposed to every kind of sexual exploitation possible and invite perpetrators into their lives.

Topics addressed by books in my library alone provide a dramatic statement of the plethora of problems children face: loss of a parent, cutting and self-injury, overcoming bulimia, anger management, defending against bullying, the impact of TV and movie violence, mismanaging the internet, "babies" having babies, earlier and earlier exposure to drugs and alcohol. What for generations were considered tragedies of childhood are now common elements. Teen pregnancy, weapons in schools, adolescent suicide, mood disorders and addictions are all commonplace for children in our society.

Your willingness to look at these destructive influences puts you in a better position to prepare and protect your children. Definitions from your youth of right and wrong, moral and immoral, beneficial and harmful, good and bad do not exist in the same way for your child. It is imperative that you acknowledge this difference, because within this confusing, indiscriminating, distorted chaos your child has to become an adult.

Though changes in our world are happening at break-neck speed, the developmental stages of childhood and adolescence are changeless over generations. Each task is mandatory for everyone regardless of their environment. The tasks can neither be slowed nor hurried. You have the responsibility to your child to provide a sane context within which development can occur. Now, more than ever, being a parent is a tough job.

It Takes Getting Quality Information!

It's not that people don't want to be good parents or build strong relationships; they simply don't know where to begin. Too often, the model of parenting provided by previous generations is not effective and reliable sources are hard to find. Children with ineffectual parents and parents with unmanageable kids are featured on TV programs 24 hours a day. Unfortunately, that's where most people are getting their examples of parenting, marriage relationships and family interactions. Prime time sit-coms and TV talk shows make up the bulk of expert sources accessible to most parents. Problems seem to be so big and overwhelming that even most parenting texts address only

a single problem, and then only when it is completely beyond control.

Too often, we find adolescent girls single-handedly and suddenly faced with pregnancy and motherhood. Naive and unprepared couples enter into marriage and parenthood with little sense of the tests and responsibilities to be faced. They don't know how to incorporate a new little being into their lives.

No preparation is required for parenthood. Isn't it ironic? Parenting classes are court-ordered only when a divorce is taking place or when there has been a domestic violence charge. Parenthood comes with little or no preparation, yet the welfare, health, happiness and stability of the lives of children depend upon their parents' willingness and ability to create and nurture strong personal relationships within the family.

It Takes a Strategy!

It is time to address parenting from an assertive, courageous perspective. It is time to declare the mission for raising a child today. You have to know what you are trying to accomplish as a parent. What is your fundamental vision for your child's life at a point eighteen or more years down the road? Respectful, purposeful parents are resolute in their goal to raise up a child to be an adult who is responsible, productive, contributing and caring. This bold mission, simply stated, is the solid foundation from which parents launch into the challenging task of raising a child to adulthood.

In concept and practice, I invite you to accept the call to truly know your child, to understand your child at each

developmental stage, to recognize your child's challenges as they grow and appreciate their distinct, unique abilities. Most importantly, be a respectful, purposeful parent by answering the call to cultivate within yourself the attitudes and attributes that match the needs of your children at each developmental stage.

You can do a lot to "problem-proof" your kids. By using the term, "problem-proof," I'm claiming that a parent who utilizes the principles proposed in this parenting approach will insulate their child from many common problems and reduce parent-child challenges.

Purposeful parents want to know how to do that and need a solid strategy that carries them through their child's life from conception through adolescence. Parents who take their job seriously know what they want to accomplish and develop a strategy to give their children a foundation to be relatively problem-proofed.

It Takes a Plan!

We see so many kids with problems that derail their lives. When you have a plan that effectively prevents these problems, even when the plan is implemented late in your child's life, you have succeeded as parents and have made your job easier. My experience tells me that parents want such a plan. They want to be assured that their best parenting efforts will defend their children against all kinds of difficulties.

When children are raised without respect and understanding, they are left lacking in many areas of their lives, resulting in potentially serious difficulties:

- lack of acceptance among peers leading to aggression, violence, and bullying;
- lack of self-esteem leading to school failures, isolation behavior, and self-harm;
- lack of a sense of belonging leading to group and gang affiliation and involvement with the drug and alcohol culture;
- lack of understanding of purpose leading to rejection of responsibility and self-discipline;
- lack of regard for true authority creating a defiant attitude and rebellious behavior; and
- lack of a true understanding of LOVE increasing the risk of unexpected pregnancy and early emancipation.

It Takes Secure BOUNDARIES!

The responsibility for securing your home lies with you, the parents. You need to be in charge of constructing boundaries around your home and family members, boundaries that are strong, yet flexible; secure, yet permeable.

The best defense is a strong offense.

Boundaries are like fences that enclose a piece of property. They are the invisible fences that surround the emotional

system we call the family. The area within the boundary defines the environs which will receive attention, be nurtured and preserved. The area within the family boundary includes the home and the household of interrelating individuals and roles. Attention to the area within the boundary is paramount for the health and thriving of all included.

The family boundary serves a couple of purposes: one, it marks the area to be fostered, and two, protects it from encroachment.

I often use the analogy of growing and tending a rich, lush pasture in which cattle or horses can flourish. So it is with the attention and nurturing given to the home, the household and the relationships within which children grow. A child flourishes within a home and household that has time and attention given to it.

Picture the various types of property fences that you see in your neighborhood or community. There are chain-link fences, picket fences and brick walls. There are fences with gates and even fences with gate-keepers. Some fences are designed to keep something in and others are designed to keep something out; some built just to create a visual barrier. Each type has a specific purpose, and everyone is benefited by a fence that serves its purpose.

So it is with the invisible boundary line that surrounds a family. It is constructed and maintained by the adults providing for the specific needs of the family. There is no one family boundary that serves all families at all times,

anymore than there is one type of fence that serves all purposes at all times. It is important, therefore, for parents to give thoughtful consideration to their family's needs and vulnerabilities; and structure the most effective boundary to provide the greatest benefit.

Changes in situations, in relationships and in cultural influences often prompt a boundary change. So does growth and development of each family member. Sometimes rapid change requires us to adjust our family boundaries. "MY SPACE" and "FACEBOOK," the popular web-based social networks have completely blown a hole in protective boundaries once established by parents in previous generations. Parents of teens used to naturally have more control and influence over the friends and relations their young people were engaged in. Now, vigilant, attentive, caring parents welcome their jobs as "gate-keepers" early in their children's lives so that their children value that important job and become adept at it as they mature.

*Twenty-first century technology is
challenging family boundaries like nothing
ever has before in history.*

Securing the "homeland" against encroachment and invasion by harmful forces is an important purpose of boundaries. One approach to building an effectual defense against these threatening forces is to understand what leaves our children vulnerable. The respectful, attentive parent understands that influences within the family boundary are far greater than any outside force.

While most parents will protect their children from the constant barrage of news around the globe, or the graphic violence displayed on TV and in the movies, they fail to recognize that hostile words and combat between mommy and daddy is an even greater threat to a child's security. While some parents of small children will prohibit their children from playing imaginative games with toy guns and toy swords in order to curb violent tendencies, they ignore the violent words exchanged in the presence of their children.

Vulnerability increases with proximity. A war between parents is more traumatizing and injurious to a child's sense of security than a war between nations or the animated shootings on a computer screen. Mom and dad's watchfulness of strife within their relationship and within their children's relationships is crucial. A child, who lives in fear and anxiety cannot play, cannot learn, cannot trust their peers, and cannot even drop into restful, peaceful sleep.

It Takes Attention!

Two men I know, one a colleague, the other a client, serve as perfect examples of the outcome of a home filled with threat and fear. Both men grew up with older brothers who taunted, teased and physically abused them. For Terry, a fellow therapist, the insecurity and lack of safety he felt into adulthood made him hyper-vigilant. He never sat with his back to the door. If arriving to a meeting when most everyone was seated, he would initiate a sort of "musical chairs," playfully re-arranging the attendees to assure that he faced the door.

I identified this hyper-vigilance again with Burt, a 43-year-old client who had received the same abuse at the hands of his older brother. For Burt as for Terry, there was the deep resentment toward his parents for not providing protection. Both of Burt's parents worked long hours and left him and another sibling in the "care" of the oldest brother. Burt could never convince his parents, even in the face of physical evidence, that his brother was physically abusive. The resulting fear and anxiety governed his life.

Vulnerability should be a choice made by an individual. When a person chooses to be vulnerable, true closeness can occur. It is when we are willingly and openly vulnerable that we fall in love or give ourselves over in friendship. Parents have the duty and responsibility to provide safety and protection for their children so that, with maturity, their children are secure in choosing to be vulnerable in a relationship.

The safeguarding and securing of the "homeland" takes place in two ways: providing a family boundary that is strong, flexible, secure and permeable, while fostering and nourishing the relationships that inhabit the family environment.

It Takes Respect!

With the concepts presented in this plan, you as the parent have the advantage of a basic format that provides a guiding force for raising responsible, productive, contributing and caring young people. This format of respect includes self-respect and respect for others. By its nature, respect is the basic, fundamental essence of all human interaction and relationships.

Respectful boundaries promise children a fortified sense of security in all areas of their lives:

- a sense of acceptance among peers allowing for leadership qualities to come forth;
- a sense of self-esteem leading to success in school, sports, music and in all chosen areas of interest guaranteeing self-respect and respect for others;
- a sense of belonging leading to appropriate and healthy social affiliations and strong friendships;
- a sense of purpose pointing the way to responsible behavior and decisions, and sound self-discipline;
- a regard for authority producing a cooperative attitude; and
- a true understanding of LOVE creating a compassionate, caring spirit for family, friends and every person.

An adult with self-respect understands that parenting comes with the responsibility of gaining knowledge about children's development and growth and about the abilities and individual needs of their child. Self-respecting parents have the confidence to cultivate within themselves the attitudes and attributes necessary to take their child through the challenges and opportunities of each age and stage of development.

A child is never left lacking of acceptance, self-esteem, a sense of belonging, an understanding of purpose, regard for authority and a true understanding of love when raised with respect.

The nature of respect in parent-child relationships, the blueprint for implementing respect and the principles of respect are addressed in the next two chapters.

What does it take to raise a child today? You have the courage to ask the question. Congratulations! You deserve a straight answer, which I provide in this bold, positive, proactive approach to parenting. I offer a way to achieve emotional, mental and physical health instead of laboriously attempting to fix problems and dysfunction.

It requires fierce determination for parents to see their mission through, from conception to adulthood. It requires more time, especially during your child's younger years when you are more important than peers. It requires you to know your child, to know what he is exposed to, to know who she is with and to know when changes are taking place. *If ever they needed you, they need you now!*

Parents who know they are needed and know how they are needed, cultivate within themselves a deeper understanding of parenting, not just how to do the right things with their children, but how to be the right kind of parent. With the determination and devotion to raise up boys and girls to be responsible, productive, contributing and caring adults, their worthy mission is fully accomplished.