

Children First

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Written By

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“Working with education leaders to keep children first.”

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To Get The Greatest Value From This Newsletter

When you receive this newsletter, print, three-hole punch and place it in a binder for future review. Reviewing the messages reinforces the content and expands the possibilities of retention and implementation of information shared. Put the ideas to work for you. This is how winners learn and grow and I believe you are a winner!

The Monster Overpowering The Future of Children

I am not a pessimist. But I am a realist. And, what is real to me is that we have many children who are in the grips of a monster that is ruining their future—*DRUGS!*

Addiction to drugs is nothing new to society. And, as parents, we must be vigilant 24/7 regarding the behavior of our children. My family was blessed with not having to face this monster. My wife and I began to discuss the dangers of addiction to drugs with our children while they were very young. We encouraged them to be responsible. We asked them to tell us if anyone offered them drugs—and they did.

We were very lucky. We had no blueprint. Many times all we had was instinct and our own personal values. I share the following parenting tips not to place accolades at our feet. Rather, I'm hopeful they will enable you to develop more insights to prevent use of drugs.

- We advocated an open discussion on all issues facing our children. Our door was always open to talk about any subject.
- We made every effort to have a conversation about what was going on in their life every day.
- We stressed the destruction drugs bring to one's life.
- We got to know their close friends and their parents.
- We took a very strong interest in the development of their character. Our philosophy of life is heavily blanketed with a strong spiritual belief. We emphasized this by encouraging personal prayer and regular attendance of Sunday service. No one ever sleep in on Sunday morning.
- We encouraged participation in sports and extra-curricular activities. Staying busy lessons the time to think about and become involved with drugs.
- We encouraged them to become leaders and take responsibility for their actions.
- We hugged, kissed, and told our children that we loved them quite often.
- We strived for consistency in our discipline. There were rules that everyone had to follow. When discipline was necessary, it was followed with a hug, kiss, and an explanation of why we did what we did. We asked for a commitment to not repeat the behavior in the future. If they failed again, we took the same approach. There was always accountability for their actions.
- We encouraged and expected our children to do their very best at all they undertook. However, the results were never as important as the effort.

- We stressed the importance of family and support of each other.
- We strived to emphasize the positive while acknowledging that life doesn't always go the way we'd like it to go. We encouraged persistence to reach goals.
- We supported them even when they failed at one of life's challenges.
- We walked the talk by never using drugs ourselves.
- We prayed a lot.

While we made many mistakes in the thirty years we raised children, our overall effort was successful in preventing experimentation. As I've said, we were blessed and lucky. I wish all of you much success in doing probably the most difficult and most important job in the world.

Building Appreciation

Perhaps some of you grew up in households that were economically challenged (That's big words for being poor!). I lived in such a household. The 1940's (yes, I'm old) were blanketed with WWII and the post Depression years. These were challenging times for many American households.

We always had food and a place to live. We felt fortunate to have both no matter how meager they were. There were no electronic games, TV, computers, jets, credit cards or cell phones—all of which we now take for granted. Movies in my day cost twelve cents but often we didn't have enough money to go. (Are you ready to start playing the violin for me?)

Because we had so little during my childhood, whenever I received something, it was very special. I treasured the baseball glove that took me six months of working and saving to purchase. (It's still in my attic. I can't even throw it away because I remember how difficult it was to find the money and how much I wanted that glove).

OK Billy, we've read enough! What's your point? I hope that by sharing a bit of my childhood you will see that not having too much can be a good thing. Too many possessions lesson our appreciation for them. And appreciating what life has provided is a very important characteristic to develop within your child.

Working to achieve a dream and reaching that destination is a natural high that no drug can duplicate. Being given something without effort can lead to a lack of appreciation. Where are you on the scale of appreciation? What lessons are you teaching your children about appreciation? Do you believe America is the land of opportunity? Are you encouraging the idea that working for an achievement is better than being handed the keys to the castle? Important questions to consider as you work to develop your parenting skills.

Building Bridges

All four of our children are grown and on their own. We are blessed to have a very close relationship with all of them. A highlight of our life is to have all ten grandchildren, our four children and their spouses over for a visit. It's a crowd but everyone enjoys being with each other. Have we had our tensions? You bet! There have been disappointments, misunderstandings and everything in-between. But in the end, we work it out. Everyone eventually has to give a little but the glue that makes this whole thing work is the love that we share, the strong desire by everyone to have a meaningful relationship and the pull of family. I clearly recognize that some families are not so fortunate.

What does one do if the relationship with their grown children is strained or non-existent? I don't profess to have all the answers. And, as I always say, the list is a start to help you focus your thinking and probably generate a better solution than I can offer.

- You cannot go back and re-live the childhood of your child. But it's never too late to build that relationship bridge regardless of the past.

- Don't be guilty about what you did or didn't do. If you made mistakes, admit them and move on. You can't saw sawdust so forgive yourself.
- If upon deep reflection you feel that you were not always the best parent, apologize to your child. Let them know that you are sorry and want to begin anew. This is not easy but a necessary step to cleanse your soul and to enable you to start the relationship at a new level.
- Let your child know how you feel. Don't concern yourself about being vulnerable. Be honest, truthful and genuine. Start with your child. Get the air cleared with them first. Then you can move to your "in-law." The last step is to meet with both of them and seek finality of any tensions that might still exist.
- Show up. Knock on the door and visit. Refuse to let them shut you out.
- Keep your money. If they work, let them figure out how to live on their earnings. Handing them money creates an enabling posture that often lacks appreciation for what you've done.
- If they have children and are struggling financially, help your grandchild. Purchase clothes, help pay for school—whatever you can afford. Just don't give money to your unappreciative child.
- Understand that a spouse can change your child. All of the effort you've put forth for twenty-five years can disappear over night. I can't explain this. I only know it happens.
- If all else fails, seek professional counseling for other ideas. If you can talk your child into coming with you, that is the ideal approach.
- This last idea is the most important yet perhaps the most difficult to accomplish. Practice discernment. When you discern, you pray for the ability to accept either situation—a strong relationship or no relationship at all. When you can genuinely be comfortable with either, you will be at peace with that decision and I firmly believe something good will happen. You will get back your child. It's an amazing process that has worked for me in some very difficult and troubling situations in my life. I've prayed for acceptance of whatever outcome occurs and in every case, my prayer was answered. The outcome I wanted prior to beginning to discern always happens. It's truly unexplainable.

Closing Thoughts

As I reflect on my writings in this issue, I find it to be one of the more personal messages I've shared. *The Monster Overpowering Our Children* came about because two teenagers in a nearby city recently died from a drug overdose. And, I personally know of people addicted to cocaine as teenagers, who had fatal heart attacks in their 30's. I couldn't help but feel sorrow for the parents in both situations and struggle to think how I might handle such a situation. *Building Appreciation* was written from watching children open packages at Christmas or on a birthday and not appreciate the many gifts they receive. *Building Bridges* resulted from a question posed by one of my readers. I hope my answer provided you with some insights.

It is such a genuine pleasure to have you as a reader. Thank you for allowing me to come into your life each month. I share because I care. My fondest desire is to help every one of you have a better time raising your children. My words come from the heart and from an orientation of love for children. My family is my greatest asset and blessing in life. Family is the one thing I thank my creator for giving me each and every day of my life.

May you continue to experience the joy of parenthood.

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