

Parent Education Gurus: You Choose

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For over 25 years I have been providing parent education. In that time I have seen trends in bringing up children proposed from one end of the child measuring stick to the other. Here's a look at some of the thinking that has been offered to parents in the last 40 plus years.

In 1960 ***Summerhill: A Radical Approach to Child Rearing*** was released in which the author and educator, Alexander S. Neill proposed we should focus on a child's emotional well-being more than academic development. His school in England allowed children to vote equally with staff to make rules, to decide when and if to attend class and to learn in their "natural way." Neill once said "I have converted a hard-working school into a playground, and I rejoice." In Neill's later years a research study was conducted that indicated that his graduates seldom completed university degrees. Neill responded to the report saying something like "Go back and ask 'Are you happy?' That is the important question."

The American, James Dobson, authored ***Dare to Discipline*** (1970) in which he encouraged the belief that if you spare the rod you will spoil the child. His language included phrases such as "willful disobedience" and "how to use corporal punishment." Recently a ***New Dare to Discipline*** has been released and many of Dobson's parent programs are offered through fundamental Christian organizations.

Between Dobson's and Neill's philosophy was Rudolf Dreikurs who in 1964 published ***Children the Challenge*** (1964). Dreikurs, a student of the analyst Alfred Adler, proposed a middle ground when he wrote, "We do not suggest that parents be neither permissive nor punitive. What parents have to learn is how to become a match for their children, wise to their ways and capable of guiding them without letting them run wild or stifling them." ***Children the Challenge*** became a classic with its concept of logical consequences.

The beloved Haim Ginott offered ***Between Parent and Child*** (1965) which was an easy to read book on communication with children. Later two students from Ginott's parent class, Adel Faber and Elaine Mazlish, wrote the best seller, ***How To Talk So Kids Will Listen and Listen So Kids Will Talk*** (1980).

Thomas Gordon proposed in ***Parent Effectiveness Training*** (1970) that if parents used active listening skills, clear "I" messages to speak and negotiating skills, all would be well. Then Don Dinkmeyer and Gary McKay published and packaged a program called ***Systematic Training for Effective Parenting*** (1976) adding back the element of logical consequences.

Also of huge persuasion was Dorothy Corkille Briggs in ***Your Child's Self-Esteem*** (1970) and Jean Ilsley Clarke in ***Self-Esteem: A Family Affair*** (1978) in which they emphasized the importance of encouraging children's feelings of lovableness. Having recent and significant influence on parents is Barbara Coloroso in ***Kids are Worth It*** (1995), Dr. Stephen Glenn in ***Raising Self-Reliant Children in a Self-Indulgent World*** (1989), Mary Pipher in ***Reviving Ophelia*** (1994) in regards to raising girls and William Pollack in ***Real Boys***(1998).

Of course children don't come with instructions and the way we were raised probably won't work with the next generation. Change is inevitable and as described above there is more than enough advice on how to handle the next gaggle of offspring. However, it rests with parents to find the voices that resonate with wisdom, knowledge and a sense of good fit for their family.

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