



Raising Kids Who Will Make a Difference: Helping Your Family Live with Integrity, Value Simplicity, and Care for Others

By Susan V. Vogt

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Editorial Review

From the Back Cover

Yes, your kids can
make a difference!

As a mother of four children ages fifteen to twenty-seven, author Susan Vogt knows intimately what it is to feel vulnerable and unsure in parenting. In her unique and thoughtful guide to raising socially conscious children, Vogt acknowledges that there are no guarantees in parenting while offering creative and realistic parenting strategies. With insights based on years of experience as a counselor and family-life educator, personal anecdotes, reflections by her children on what worked and what didn't, and the stories of other families, she sets out to inspire, equip, and comfort parents in their awesome task of raising kids who will make a difference.

“This is one of the most creative and engaging books that I’ve read in a long time. The author and the entire Vogt family speak through its pages, offering us their hard-earned treasures of parenting and being parented.”

—H. Richard McCord
Executive Director, Committee
on Marriage and Family Life,
U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops

“Vogt writes with a delightful blend of wry humor, candor, and sensitive self-revelation. The section in each chapter written by Vogt’s children on her efforts to be a responsible parent add to the fun and practical value of this book.”

—Joe H. Leonard
Director, Family Ministries
and Human Sexuality, National
Council of the Churches of Christ
in the USA

“This book is more real than any other book on parenting I’ve ever seen; it helps parents aim high and think through possibilities without a guilt trip about being less than perfect.”

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Author, *The Seeker’s Guide to Building a Christian Marriage*

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About the Author

Susan V. Vogt is the director of the Family Ministry Office of the Diocese of Covington, Kentucky. She presents workshops around the world in connection with the Parenting for Peace and Justice Network. She is the author of *Just Family Nights* and a coauthor of *Kids Creating Circles of Peace*. She and her husband, Jim, are the parents of four children.

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Preface

“Parenting is a hard job. It’s often hard to know if you’re doing the right thing.”
—Susan and Jim Vogt

I had hoped to cowrite this book with my daughter, Heidi, since she has a reflective personality and loves to write. I thought it would be valuable for readers to see the art of parenting from both sides—not only through the eyes and memory of the parent, but also through the eyes of the child. Perhaps values and strategies that I thought were marvelous didn’t feel so marvelous to our children—at least at the time. It would be interesting to see from a young adult’s perspective what really made a difference to her and what backfired. Then my guinea pig, er, coauthor, joined the Peace Corps and ended up in Africa during the prime writing time. Communicating by snail mail and not having electricity, much

less a computer, limited the way in which she could contribute. Thus Heidi's part takes the form of essays. Even though we were seldom able to communicate in person, Heidi kept giving me her perspective and thus influenced what I eventually wrote. Although her contributions are shorter and her name is not on the cover, I consider Heidi V. Vogt, age 24, my coauthor. Our other children are making a difference in their own unique ways. Brian, 27, is a graduate student at Princeton. Dacian, 21, is a senior at Earlham College, and Aaron, 15, is a junior in high school.

Hints for Reading This Book

If you're like me, you don't necessarily read a book from front to back. I skim, pick out the parts that seem most important, and then perhaps go back and fill in the gaps. If this sounds like you, it might help to know the structure of this book and how different audiences might approach it.

Each chapter that deals with a parenting theme is divided into three parts:

1. Foundational principles that are gradually expanded on in both depth and difficulty. My daughter, Heidi, elaborates on each theme from the perspective of a young adult; our other children add comments where they feel inclined.

2. "Other Families' Stories," in which parents and young adults from many different family backgrounds share their insights on the chapter's theme.

3. Questions for reflection that can help parents apply the chapter's theme to their own lives.

If you are a relatively new parent:

Start at the beginning and read straight through or jump in anywhere you like. What freedom!

If you are the parent of a teen or young adult:

Read the epilogue first and reread it after every chapter. Many parents feel vulnerable and wonder if they've done a good job of parenting at this stage. I remember coming home from professional conferences feeling bad after hearing all the marvelous things my colleagues were doing. The cumulative effect of everyone's accomplishments made me feel inadequate.

It is important to remember that all the wonderful things other families have done did not happen in the same family or in one year.

If you are a parent with a particular interest or need:

Go to the chapter that deals with your concern.

If you enjoy gossip:

Go straight to Heidi's comments and those of the other Vogt children.

You'll laugh and feel better.

If you have a voyeuristic streak:

Start by reading "Other Families' Stories." Some will inspire you; some will help you realize that your own situation could be worse.

If you are a teacher or very motivated parent:

Check out the exercises at the end of each chapter. They might give you grist for classroom or adult small-group discussion.

The Jones Family Christmas Letter

Greetings to you all at Christmas. We'd like to fill you in on our family's comings and goings this past year.

Scott was just awarded a Fulbright Scholarship to study in England for a year. We're looking forward to taking the whole family over to visit him in May. Of course we'll need to take his brother and sisters out of school, but they're all very studious and conscientious, so I'm sure they'll make up the missed work quickly.

Mary led her soccer team to the state championship and was voted most valuable player. I don't know how she squeezes it all in between dating and being chosen homecoming queen.

Jenny won the city spelling bee for the second year in a row; but science is her real love, and she spent weeks working on her awardwinning science project last year. We didn't mind the mess because we knew she would clean it all up when she was finished.

Jason's piano recital went so well that his teacher recommended him for the Governor's School for the Arts. He's not sure if he wants to go, however, since he has such a great group of friends at home who inspire him to do his best.

As for us, Bob just got a promotion at work, and we figure the extra money he'll make will pay for our trip to England. And here I am, busy writing Christmas letters and finishing my book.

How do you feel right now? If you're the writer of the above letter, you probably feel very proud of your children and pleased that you've done such a good job of parenting. If you're anyone else, you may be ready to vomit. It's not that you don't believe all the wonderful news about the Jones family. But you have to ask yourself, How realistic are the parents? Are they telling the whole truth? Are they blinded by pride? Was it really their excellent parenting that created such accomplished children? Maybe. Or maybe it was good genes, privilege, intense parental control, or blind luck. What parent doesn't want his or her child to grow up to be successful in a career and in relationships? But is that really all we want for our child? Even if our child achieves great career heights, marries the prettiest or most handsome spouse, works hard and becomes wealthy, and so forth, will it bring abiding happiness?

The older I get, the more I realize that my hopes and dreams for my children need to be broadened and deepened. Success in the eyes of society is not enough. Happiness is fleeting, and in the end I think our greatest hope is that our children be people of integrity who know how to genuinely love. The prophet Micah said it poetically in the Old Testament: "What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8). This may not sound like a recipe for worldly success, but deeper happiness will be the unsought side effect.

Burning Questions in a Parent's Mind

If you cared enough to pick up this book, you likely have some of the same questions we did (and do). They are big questions with multiple answers.

How does one raise children who will become people of integrity?

As an energetic new parent, you might say, “Just give me the directions, and I’ll follow them faithfully.”

As an older, tired parent, you might say, “Hey, I’ll settle for success in a career and in relationships. I’m barely hanging on and can’t imagine doing one more thing. Our family life is already too complicated.”

Often even the energetic, conscientious parent eventually becomes the older, tired parent who is tempted to settle for less.

The challenge is to focus on enduring values and character—the success that counts will fall into place. Less important concerns that crowd our lives will gradually disappear. Even if we’re too busy, or if our children are not succeeding in the eyes of the world, by focusing on important values we will develop new eyes with which to see and understand our children. This is the grace that comes with aiming beyond superficial happiness.

This is not a book of answers but a book of ideas. I’ve selected key values that nurture a child’s spirit and have tried to show ways that our own family, and others who have struggled with these same concerns, have tried to weave them into the fabric of everyday family life.

How do I know that if I do it, it will work?

Parenting theories come and go. One season it’s permissiveness and the next it’s tough love. Who knows what’s right?

There are no guarantees in parenting. That’s the frustration; that’s why it takes maturity. You don’t know if what you’re doing is right until after your children are adults—and perhaps even later! They are the true test of whether anything “works.” The unique gift of this book is the reflections of our own grown children on how the values we tried to share with them worked, or didn’t, and what we all learned in the process.

I’d be a fool to set up our family as a model. If being a parent has taught me anything, it’s to be humble. It drags all pride out of the honest parent to be called a hypocrite by one’s kids, to have a child suspended from school, or to have them wear hairstyles and clothes that embarrass grandparents and pastors. But I can say that our children are honest and will give it to you straight. Make up your own mind about whether the various strategies we’ve used would be helpful with your own children.

Do remember, however, that sometimes the short-term resistance of a child may turn into appreciation later in life. We’ve all heard stories of how an adult looks back on a favorite teacher and says something like, “I hated that she gave us so much homework and was such a stickler for quality, but I’m the better person for it.”

I can assure you that our children have made their share of mistakes and have had to live with the consequences, as have we. Our family crises have been embarrassing, even painful at times, but I’m confident that our children’s hearts are in the right place. They are loving, young adults who want to make the world a better place. They want to make a difference.

In the end we can never control how our children will turn out. That is up to them. We are responsible for the process we use in parenting, not the outcome.

Our friends were just a few years older than us, but their kids were a stage beyond ours; their oldest was in junior high while ours were still preschoolers. We shared the same values of wanting to raise thoughtful children with consciences, who would make this world a better place.

They were exemplary parents in our eyes.

I was amazed, therefore, to hear them describe how disappointed they were that their oldest child seemed to resent some of the values they held so dear. For instance, the parents had a strong commitment to live a simple lifestyle, yet Caroline was complaining about never having what her schoolmates had and boldly stated that when she grew up she would make sure, above anything else, that she was rich. The parents were crestfallen, and we were surprised.

They seemed to have done everything right. They modeled what they believed by living frugally themselves. They took lots of time to play with their kids and have family outings. They cooked from scratch and made their own bread. They didn't even own a TV!

I watched and I learned: be careful of how you express your most dearly held values.

Because of the strength of these convictions, parents are tempted to impose them rigidly and in an extreme way on their children. During the early teen years, young people often choose to assert their independence in this area.

As a result of observing our friends, we decided to be cautious about how vigorously we enforced countercultural values. It doesn't mean that we gave up on the value, but rather we tried to listen hard to our children's deeper needs and make adjustments where appropriate.

But I learned another lesson beyond the obvious: It's worth paying attention to the experiences of older parents. Not everything in parenting is intuitive or can be learned in books. Talking with other parents who have been through it and watching what does and doesn't work contributes to wise decision making.

Years later, I would add a third insight: Not everything a child resists need be avoided. The challenge is to know when to compromise and when to hold fast. Most children don't like strange-looking vegetables, but they love desserts. Of course we don't feed them only desserts, no matter how much they plead. We know they'll thank us for it later as their bodies grow strong. Well, it may be much later when they are young adults or have children of their own.

One of the dilemmas of parenting, however, is that later is so long coming that we don't know if we're doing it right along the way. One of the goals of this book is to offer the reader the advantage of the reflections of both parents looking back on what worked and what didn't in raising responsible, caring, young adults; but also what the young adults themselves think about what made a difference in their lives for good or for ill.

What is the measure of a successful parent?

Is the measure of a successful parent a successful child? And how do we measure success? By income, awards, personality?

Parents want their children to grow up to be happy and healthy. But I believe that caring parents also want their children to care—and not

just about themselves. We want them to make a positive difference in the world. Will the way we parent make a difference to them? Yes. Will they actually thank us for it later? That depends.

Although most of what I've written in this book is a result of my reflections on the journeys of our own children and others that I have observed or listened to, I am aware that my gleanings are vulnerable to parochialism. Perhaps my circles of friends and contacts do not accurately reflect the diversity of the contemporary culture that faces today's parents in the United States. I was delighted to come across research, therefore, by Parks, Daloz, Keen, and Keen (1996) that studied the lives of one hundred adults known for their commitment to the common good and whose lives had already made a significant difference. Although their categories are structured differently, their findings are consistent with my own. When asked "what single most crucial thing" a parent could do to raise a socially responsible child, they said:

No single event can ensure that a person will or will not live a life of commitment to the common good. It is a mix of key ingredients that matters. Taken in isolation, many of the important experiences that we describe here—a loving home, for example—are desirable components of any healthy life. Clearly, there is no certainty that a child from a loving home will grow into a life of commitment, but add a parent who works actively for the public good and the possibility increases. Then add opportunities for service during adolescence, cross-cultural experiences, and a good mentoring experience in young adulthood, and the likelihood grows still stronger. In general, we have become persuaded that the greater the number and depth of certain key experiences one has, the greater the probability of living a committed life. . . ."

Read on and hear stories of our family and a variety of other families—of how some lessons stuck, some didn't, and what made the difference.

A Daughter's Response

My mother has been writing this book in her head since 1974—the year my older brother, Brian, was born. I, of course, wasn't there, but I can imagine her looking into her son's fresh blue eyes and asking my father, "Now how do we keep him from turning into a money-grabbing nuclear warhead manufacturer?" or something like that.

I have it on better authority that when I was born, two and a half years later, one of my parents' friends expressed relief, saying, "It's good that you have more than one child to save the first child from overzealous parenting." A few years later, with a third Vogt crawling around in diapers (the ecologically friendly cloth kind), my parents professionalized their dedication to their children by becoming family-life directors of a Catholic diocese in Kentucky.

My mother read Dr. Spock during pregnancy and kept reading and trying out new child-rearing techniques as we grew up. She and my father were passing on their successes in workshops while I was still in elementary school. My brothers and I served as guinea pigs for this new type of parenting that promised happy families and concerned kids. My childhood was the values of Family Ties crossed with the experimental method of

Cheaper by the Dozen. I can personally attest that my mother's book has been well researched.

So if this is the book my mother's been waiting so long to write, what am I doing here, usurping part of her introduction? Well, she made one mistake. She waited just a little too long, until her guinea pigs were old enough to give their own opinions of the experiments.

And test subjects aren't known for being too complimentary of those who prod them. I wrote a good number of these reminiscences in my parents' basement, periodically interrupted by my mother coming downstairs holding my words in her hands, a worried expression on her face. "But Heidi," she said, "You make it sound like this rule didn't work? You'll ruin my credibility!" "Uh oh," I said, "that was one of my nicer ones."

As we traded drafts back and forth, we debated about things that happened fifteen years ago. "Heidi, you're exaggerating your dishonest streak," said my mother. "Mom, you have no idea how much we got away with," I replied. And this was just about TV.

To anyone who does not have a strong relationship with their parents, I strongly advise against attempting the endeavor my mother and I put before you.

But that, as I said in frustration to my mother as we poured over red-inked pages, is the point. I am close with my parents. Even more, I have great respect for them. I tell friends that they're two of the least hypocritical people I know. This isn't because their experiments worked, but because they never gave up on the test subjects.

And they must have been tempted. For every conversation my mother managed to wring out of me in the car when I was twelve and thirteen, there were countless drives of sullen silence and a few shouting matches. While I happily helped my father sort recyclables, I also cranked up the thermostat when he wasn't looking and insisted on driving rather than walking the four blocks to the corner store. Many of my parents' attempts to make us care about the world around us were lost on us—at least in a conscious sense.

And the impact those attempts did have wasn't always what my parents had planned. They often weren't prepared to deal with the impertinence that came with their emphasis on independent thought, the anger that came with their ever present community service, or the alienation that came as we decided that our parents "just didn't understand" the desire for designer clothes because they obviously had never wanted them.

But because they kept trying, one thing came across: they felt that certain ideals were important enough to accept short-term failures and aggravation. They took the good with the bad and gave in when they had to.

As a child, I saw their readiness to compromise as a weakness that I could exploit to get my way. As an adult, I have to admit that they slipped a little social responsibility under my skin when I wasn't looking.

Heidi

chapter 1

Identity

Nurturing Values of Honesty, Courage, Humility, and Integrity

Here's an actual Christmas letter we received one year.

MJ suspended her work at St. Al's to stimulate a process of mediation for a divisive conflict within our community. She's focusing more strongly on Peace Education, especially at the Peace Room of a new community service center in St. Al's neighborhood.

Jerry's building the Peace Room, which we opened in September, then temp nursing at Montgomery County TB clinic.

Both of us underwent a robbery at gunpoint before Christmas and are grateful for our new lease on life—thanks in part to the peaceful Spirit we could feel that calmed our assailant.

Sarah's graduating from Oberlin, renting an apartment in DC, and starting her first job at Ayuda—helping immigrants with legal work to avoid deportation; she's also taking classes, jogging, and reexploring DC. Jonathan's moving from prison in Hagerstown, MD, to a closer one in Baltimore, waiting to go to "Boot Camp" before release (mixed feelings because of lack of preparation and structure to support his freedom). We get to talk with him weekly and hope with him that he is building his base for independent living. He may be released within two years.

P.J.'s graduating from high school, doing a summer service project in Brazil, and starting at Oberlin, playing soccer and enjoying his roommate from Japan, exploring psychology and spirituality.

Jimmy had an energetic spring outdoor adventure to Yosemite and did summer camping in North Carolina. He's a sophomore at Sidwell and playing soccer and basketball. He still enjoys art and now history.

Timmy graduates from Ivymount into a new special education school—Harbour School—in Annapolis (really a new light in his life, and he is shining). He's coping with his Asperger's syndrome with a lot of recreation therapy, structure, and help from his brothers. . . .

What I love about this Christmas letter is its honesty. The good stands side by side with what some parents might consider embarrassing: a child in prison and a special-needs child. The Park family's children are valued simply because they are.

Where Our Values Come From

So where did the Park family get their values? Where does anyone? The supermarket doesn't sell them. You can't buy them on the Internet. Our values come from somewhere, even if we can't always pinpoint the source. For most of us, values start with parents, are taught by schools and churches, are reinforced or negated by friends and experience, and are stimulated by the culture and times. Not all these influences are positive ones, but they form us regardless. In time, we make personal choices. Do I focus primarily on my own comfort and getting ahead, or do I want to make this world a more fair and livable place for everyone including

myself? What is the right thing to do?

As for me, the foundation was laid by my parents. They never said much directly about how I should live, but I never doubted their love for me and I knew that they expected me to do the right thing. Ours was a safe and loving home.

That's where it started, but that's never enough. Somewhere along the line, the notion that life is about more than my own achievements or comfort started knocking on my head. Because I was brought up Catholic, it started with traditional religious teachings about Jesus and how he taught his disciples to live. I accepted these teachings because they were all I knew and everyone around me believed the same things. It was easy: God was real, and life was good.

But I didn't know what I didn't know. I didn't know the whole story. I believed the Christian precepts about feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, and turning the other cheek, but I didn't know any really poor people, and seldom got into fights, much less was I tempted to kill someone.

Eventually my world got bigger and more complicated. I started seeing that there was selfishness and evil and pride in the world and in me. My understanding of religion had to grow to meet this new awareness or I would have to let it go. Whether it was grace, luck, or the prayers of my holy ancestors, I'll never know. I do know that I started to pray more genuinely and to understand that the scriptures were not just for good times or good people. The story of Christ's life was one of service, even self-sacrifice, and ultimately these values would bring me peace. Living for myself alone would leave my soul restless.

As my world widened even more, I started to see real poverty and real injustice in our world. I also saw that Christians were not the only ones who cared about addressing these needs but that people of other faith traditions said it in different words with different symbols. The instinct to serve humanity, even at one's own inconvenience, was common. Although the roots of my own values had been deeply planted, I saw that others shared a similar inspiration.

Fortunately, during my young adult years I found the company of soul mates in the form of a spouse, a vibrant faith community, challenging literature, and spiritual guides who honed and directed my understanding of what it meant to honestly live the Gospel. It would mean caring about others enough to make their lives a little better.

With the advent of our own children, however, making a difference in the world seemed too ambitious a task. I had diapers to change and kids' games to attend. The world would have to wait. Then the obvious dawned on me! I was making a difference. I was making a difference to our children. I was still making some contributions to the community, albeit not as grandiose as I had earlier imagined. I hoped to have time to make a more significant impact on society as the kids grew older, but I would also try to instill in them the desire to contribute to the common good—to make a difference—so that the transformation of the world might continue.

I imagine I could have come to similar values by a different route. I'm sure that others have come to very worthy values by taking different paths;

but this is how it worked for me. I suspect that it will be harder for the next generation because there is not an easy consensus on what the best values are. But the odds are good that if they come from a searching heart and not just habit, the values will stick.

Mom Always Loved You Worst

When we had only one child, I was convinced that I had been given an exceptionally hard-to-raise child as some kind of test or joke. When a friend introduced me to the term high-maintenance child, I knew it was the definition for Brian. By the time our second child, Heidi, came along, I started to realize that the first wasn't really so difficult (it was just parenting that was hard) but that certainly girls were harder on the nerves than boys (they whine a lot, especially during the preteen years). By the third child, Dacian, I realized I had a real challenge because he had a learning disability. After a few years with Aaron, number four, I realized that the youngest child would challenge us most since we were getting tired as parents and had begun to relax a lot of the rules that the older children took for granted.

We barely had a TV with number one; with number four it was hard to keep track of TV time because someone

else often had it on and the youngest would say, "Oh, I was just walking through the room, not really watching." Number one barely had a cookie before his second birthday as we guarded his teeth like dentists. Number four ate snacks with the older kids while he was teething and grew up much more quickly than we would have liked.

Eventually, I stopped making rash generalizations about our children. But it often seemed that other parents were having an easier time raising their children; their kids always seemed to be neatly dressed, polite, and brilliant—according to their parents. That's until I got to know the parents better and heard all the angst they were going through with one problem or another. They too wondered if they were doing it right.

Does adoption make parenting any easier? Other than not having your own genes to blame for any problems, probably not. The issue of identity—who am I and where did I come from?—looms even larger for adoptive children. In traditional closed adoptions, children may not even know the circumstances of their birth or whether they have biological siblings. Some of the parents I've known with the best parenting skills have been adoptive parents, and still many of their children tested their mettle, especially during the teenage years. Now that open adoptions are more common, the adopted child's identity is strengthened with knowledge about his or her biological history. We can hope that this will temper the crises that so many adopted children used to face.

Each child is worst and best in his or her own ways. This chapter is about helping children to know their true self, to maximize the best and minimize the worst. Growing up can be like walking through a labyrinth; when you get to the center you say, "Oh yes! Now I know who I am and where I stand. I'm centered." But we can't stay forever in the cocoon of the center. The rest of this book is about finding our way out.

Starting the Search

To a great extent, raising children who will contribute to society in positive ways involves helping them to find themselves and to like what they find. The foundation of a healthy self-concept frees children to go beyond trying to constantly prove themselves worthy of love to extending care to others. Because they have experienced unconditional love, they feel secure in who they are and don't get hung up as easily on the question of who is worthy of their help. This doesn't guarantee that every child will turn out the way a parent wants. We are responsible for the process we use in parenting, not the outcome. Our children have free will and can choose their own paths, even destructive ones. We can guide, but we can't control.

So how do we raise children to become people of integrity with healthy identities? A lot of it involves standard parenting practices that are included in many books and classes. Most parents who have been nurtured well themselves know these practices almost by instinct. Lots of affirmation, good communication skills, sensitivity and care for the people in our neighborhoods, the cultivation of a generous and respectful spirit: these are all building blocks that support children's growing awareness that they can really make a positive difference in the world. When children grow up around these attitudes in their parents, they also receive the underlying message that working to improve our world is not going beyond the call of duty; it is our duty. We must give because we've been given to.

Affirmation

Most parenting educators start with this concept of strengthening the self. We love our children and would sacrifice anything for them, but do they know it? In the course of ordinary events, parents communicate love to their children in two ways: they affirm how good the children are, and they impose restrictions for the children's protection. We do the former naturally through compliments, hugs, celebrations, and so forth. The latter sometimes involves tough love, and it doesn't feel as good to the parent or the child at the time. It involves saying "No, you can't go to the party since you've been sick at home all day" or, "You must return this candy to the store and explain to the clerk that you didn't pay for it" or, "No, I won't lend you money since you used up your allowance prematurely." It means looking like an ogre to your child.

Complimenting or praising our children seems like the easy part when compared with tough love, but it's also easy to let affirmation slide and to take one another for granted when we feel busy and overcommitted. And sometimes, in our determination to deal with negative behaviors, we forget about the day-to-day affirmations.

It's also easier to gush over our children when they are young: "How wonderful that you've learned to tie your shoes!" or "Mommy really appreciates your help with your baby brother." It may get harder to find things to genuinely praise as they grow older.

As we were just starting our own family, I looked up to the Foleys. They were a slightly older couple with six children. For us, they were mentors. Joan Foley told me that she looked for three things she could

compliment each child for every day. One was a personality quality, one was an action, and one was a physical attribute. I thought this was admirable and decided to incorporate this into my own parenting repertoire. I quickly found out how frail was my human will and how forgetful my mind. I settled on just finding one thing a day for each child. Even this slipped through my fingers on many days, and I had only three children at that time.

Eventually, I used my morning-prayer time for thinking of things to praise in my children. I figured God would understand this as prayer because it was my attempt to look for the good in our mutual creation. Most of the time this worked. Although I tried to voice my compliment to each child sometime during the day, I found that even if I forgot, the discipline of looking for the good in someone who might not appear that lovable on a given day improved my attitude toward each child. I don't know if our children ever realized that I was consciously doing this.

To help our children appreciate their strengths, we invented something we called "Sweet Talk." We'd sometimes do this on Valentine's Day or a birthday. It involved focusing on one family member at a time and brainstorming all the positive qualities each of us recognized in that person. I suppose it would be better if this happened naturally, but some of us need a prompt to share what's in our hearts. In regard to tough love, I still remember the guilt I felt the day I made one of my children walk to school because he had dawdled too long and missed the school bus. The school was not that far away, but it meant he would be late. This was not the first time he had missed the bus, and he had been warned of exactly what would happen, but I still wanted to get in the car and rescue him. It was quite a while before this child missed another bus. We went through subsequent variations on this with each child. You'd think they'd learn. I did; with each child it got easier for me to stick with the discipline.

Tough love is not about being vindictive but about showing children the natural or logical consequences of their actions. They learn that love doesn't mean always rescuing someone from mistakes and foolishness but letting that person learn the hard way sometimes. Tough love helps children face the realities of cause and effect.

In the long run, a combination of affirmation and tough love helps children understand that love involves much more than showering someone with gifts. Real love hurts sometimes, and it requires time and thought.

This kind of love experienced at home makes it easier for children to understand what it really means to help others. Sometimes the best way to help a panhandler may not be to give a handout but to offer training that could lead to a job or help change the system that makes it hard to climb out of poverty. It's much easier (and it often feels better) to just hand out money, but lasting difference—and personal development—require effort.

Honesty

No one likes to see their child lie or steal, but most kids at least try it when

they are young. When my husband and I suspected lying we would tell the child that there would be a punishment for what they did wrong but that there would be a bigger punishment if he or she lied to cover it up. This usually took care of the run-of-the-mill lying associated with immaturity. If lying persists, it's often connected with a lack of self-esteem. Children think that they have to make themselves look better than they really are, so they lie about themselves or steal something that will give them status among their peers. In addition to dealing with why children don't feel good enough or important enough, it can help to talk about what is fair. Children are competitive and sensitive to not fitting in. They also pick up from the adult world that a person is what he or she owns. Parents can talk about how it isn't fair that some people have less than others, but that this isn't because of laziness or other personal flaws but due to circumstances that are often beyond a person's control. A person's worth is not dependent on looks or how much stuff he or she has.

The virtues that we try to nurture in our children sometimes get turned back on us. I remember when my husband, Jim, had just finished cowriting and publishing the Family Pledge of Nonviolence. We had already had several family meetings to discuss the pledge, and it seemed natural that our own family would take it. As parents we had been so concerned about the TV/media part of the pledge that we hadn't talked much about the final element: "To challenge violence in all its forms whenever I encounter it, whether at home, at school, at work, or in the community, and to stand with others who are treated unfairly." Just when we thought everyone in the family was committed to the pledge, Dacian (seventeen at the time) stated, "I can't sign this!"

He calmly explained that he didn't want to be in a position in which the pledge forced him to act in a way he considered ill-advised. "What if there is a fight brewing at school and I'm nearby? I don't know that I necessarily should try to break it up myself. I might, but I also might not think that's wise to do given the circumstances. I won't sign the pledge unless I can write 'as I see fit' after the 'Be Courageous' element." As an adult, I probably would have made this mental reservation automatically when signing something. As a teenager, though, he was really taking this seriously and wanted to be true to himself. His honesty helped us all look at the pledge more deeply and consider its consequences. It took courage to stand up for what he believed in, in the face of at least implicit parental pressure.

Courage

It takes courage to tell the truth and face the consequences. *In Parenting for Peace and Justice: Ten Years Later*, Kathleen and James McGinnis tell us that Gandhi used to require that five times a year each child in his schools do an individual thirty-minute performance of some kind.

In this way, at least five times a year each child makes some public presentation at the daily assembly. Gandhi wanted to educate a nation of people able to stand up for what they believed, to stand up in public and not be embarrassed and speechless, to overcome the fears that keep people from acting courageously. We can imitate the spirit of this in many ways. Encouraging our children to act publicly—like reading during worship services, availing themselves of dramatic and musical opportunities,

writing a letter to an editor, standing at a public vigil wearing a button on their shirt or coat—helps them develop confidence in themselves.

Sounds very noble coming from Gandhi, but I remember not being so fond of this “Speak truth to power” idea when our children first started to talk—and talk and talk. It seems we were raising a household debate team that would challenge every direction and every rule that we presented. Since we didn’t want to stifle their spirits and hated to hear the words “Because I said so” come out of our mouths, we put up with it. But it started to wear us down. Must every decision be a debate? Consolation came much later when I realized that this same spirit that refused to accept my will just because I said so would also resist peer pressure to go along with the crowd and indeed would stand up for unpopular causes or the underdog. If I had it to do over again, however, I would have tried to discriminate between which decisions were up for debate and which were nonnegotiable or frivolous and not worth the arguing.

“But it’s cold, I don’t want to stand for an hour in silence protesting the cross that the KKK put up on Fountain Square!” There were several responses we usually had to these complaints.

n “You don’t have to come, but here’s why we think it’s important to peacefully protest a hate group.”

n When they were young: “Let’s break it up with a half hour of standing and the rest of the time skating at the nearby ice rink.”

n When they were older: “Your friend, Luke, will be coming too.” Sometimes courage takes a more subtle form. I learned only after we sold the car that Aaron, at age fifteen, felt embarrassed by the bumper stickers we had on it. One was in Spanish, and his friends all took French, so that wasn’t a problem; but the one that read “Feminists for Life” hit a raw nerve. He wasn’t opposed to the concept but was afraid that he would be seen as a wimp for being a feminist. He put up with it as long as I allowed his rock-band sticker.

Kids can turn the tables on their parents, however, and cause the parents to summon up their courage. In 1991, we had been talking at home about the Gulf War—its connection with our country’s need for oil and what should be done. Brian and his friend Shane decided to write a letter protesting the war and send it to the editor of a local newspaper. This seemed like an appropriate civic response until Shane learned that the essay prize he had won in the “Voice of Democracy” contest was in jeopardy because of the opinions expressed in their letter.

Nonetheless, the two of them took it even further and decided to put up posters and a banner protesting the war at their high school. Although it was an unpopular stance at their school, it was a nonviolent act. Unfortunately, it was also prohibited since all posters were supposed to be approved. I started feeling nervous because they brainstormed even more dramatic symbolic actions, and I was aware that Brian had several college scholarships pending and needed good recommendations from the administration. Had we raised him to make too many waves, to make too much of a difference?

Humility

Humility is the virtue of parenthood. It usually comes unbidden after the pride of being the perfect parent is punctured by our children's honesty and raw edges. There is little need to pass humility on directly because most people learn it soon enough just through the bumps of life. For those blessed with a smart or attractive or athletic child, the message that should permeate the air is that we rejoice in your life, but you aren't any more valuable or worthy than any other human being. For those blessed with a mediocre or awkward or less attractive child the message is the same. Each person is responsible for making the world a better place.

One of the hardest things I ever did had to do with jeans. I bought our teenager Aaron the jeans of his dreams and then later had to admit that I altered them so they wouldn't hang three inches below his shoes and be a walking hazard. They were expensive, and he loved them—but he wanted them long. Admitting I deceived him and taking them back to exchange them was hard. What was even harder was when my husband asked if I had told the clerk that I had altered the jeans. I sheepishly said I hadn't. I knew I had to call the store and offer to pay for the returned slacks. My son overheard the call.

Another time we were really short on money. I think this was during our unemployed/student/part-time-work phase of marriage. We had been offered a rather high speaking fee plus all expenses paid to talk at a conference. Since we weren't real familiar with the sponsoring organization, we checked into it and found that its values were at odds with ours. We decided to turn it down. Our kids overheard us discussing this decision. Maybe that's why none of them make a lot of money.

Integrity

Integrity is about how our actions match our words. In fact, actions trump words.

Again and again, the parents I interviewed said that the biggest waste of time for them and the biggest turnoff for their children was lecturing and preaching. Actions were what counted. How do we teach that each person has worth regardless of status? By seeing the dignity in everyone, especially those who are unattractive to us, and meeting them with respect. By telling the truth about the flaws of a used car or appliance when trying to sell it. By publicly standing up for an oppressed person or unpopular cause at the risk of others making fun of me. By owning my limitations and mistakes as a parent or worker and then working hard to improve my work. By being a person of my word, following through on that promise to spend more time playing with my children. Accepting the consequence of less pay because I took time off work to do it. These are the times we teach, often without knowing it, and the lessons will stick.

The Vogt Kids Speak

I remember when Mom and Dad brought before us the finished version of the Family Pledge of Nonviolence. It seemed like just another one of the hokey things our family did, like the prayer chain during Advent, or the family meetings that always seemed to run around in circles before we

finally came back to the starting point. However, I've never been one to go along with something simply to appease my parents, so I took the pledge seriously and noticed that I could not agree with the "to be courageous" statement. It seemed to me that in order to accomplish anything you need to pick your battles carefully and not go at it in a berserk state, attacking everything. If your friends are going to a movie that has violent content, standing up and denouncing them for their evil ways isn't going to get you anything. Likewise if you try to break up a fight between a couple of people you don't know, you'll probably end up with a black eye. To me being courageous also means being intelligent. When I was seventeen, I refused to sign the pledge unless I could put "as I see fit" next to my signature.

Dacian

One of the things that taught me honesty more than anything else was the fact that I knew that my parents were always 100 percent honest with me. Most parents don't intend to lie or mislead their children, but, often, difficult situations lead parents to commit white lies in order to maintain harmony or avoid an unpleasant issue. I knew of friends who didn't have this confidence in their parents. Leading by example in this arena, I feel, was very influential.

Brian

A Daughter's Response

"Of Barbie Dolls and Beauty Pageants"

The average American woman measures about 34-24-37. A life-size Barbie doll would measure about 38-18-24. She wouldn't be able to stand up, much less get chased around the pool by Ken. Her legs are too long, her breasts too big, and her waist too tiny. Barbie is everything that is antifeminist and bad body image. So of course, my mother never gave me a Barbie doll. True to the rules of childhood, I therefore prized Barbie dolls over any other toy. I saved up my allowance for months to buy one Barbie doll. I rushed straight to my friends' Barbie mansions and jealously looked over the seven or eight Barbies they might have lounging in different rooms or poolside. I tried to save money by using scraps of fabric or Kleenexes to create Barbie outfits, but they were never as good as the real thing. I could've spent hours in the Barbie aisle of Johnny's Toy Store just taking in all the Barbies, Barbie cars, Barbie clothes, and Barbie accessories. I was obsessed.

My mother wasn't pleased. She tried telling me I couldn't buy Barbies with my allowance money, only the clothes (hoping I would put them on other dolls). Luckily, my aunt occasionally overruled my mother by giving me a Barbie doll for Christmas or my birthday. Thanks to her, I owned Peaches 'n Cream Barbie, Day-to-Night Barbie, and Hawaiian Barbie. Peaches 'n Cream was my favorite. But Day-to-Night had smokier eyes.

My mother tried sitting me down and explaining why she was anti-Barbie. "Women are more than their looks," she said. I listened attentively and then begged her, couldn't I please have Astronaut Barbie?

At a certain point, she gave up and waited for me to grow out of it. Instead I grew into the idea of life-size Barbies. I became enamored with beauty pageants. I asked my mother about how to enter and when I would

be old enough. She groaned. Miss America, Miss USA, Miss Teen USA, Miss World, Miss Universe: I wanted to watch them all. I wanted to live beauty vicariously through the women strutting down the runway. Unfortunately, these pageants were all two hours long and started after my bedtime.

Tentatively, I went up to my mother and asked her if I could stay up and watch extra TV in order to see the Miss America pageant. She said she'd think about it. I pouted. Eventually she agreed on two conditions: that she watch it with me, and that we discuss the show afterward. I jumped at the compromise. I planned to ignore her and enjoy the pageant. I was home free. At 9:00 on the big night, my mother and I sat down to watch the Miss America broadcast live. We ate popcorn and drank Cokes and compared the evening gowns. We both agreed that the swimsuit competition was boring because they all wore the same bathing suit. My mom laughed, shocked at the idea of bathing suits and high heels (I was unfazed by this concept, having dressed my Barbies in very similar attire). She said she used to watch these pageants all the time at my age, and I realized she was enjoying this as much as I was. We tried to guess who would win. I didn't think our Miss Kentucky was beautiful at all. Then my mom explained that she had "poise," which the judges always liked. Miss Virginia had the best talent; she was a ventriloquist. My mother explained that singing and playing the piano were your safest bets. We forgot about body image and cheered them on. When Miss Kentucky was declared the winner, we smiled, proud that our state had produced the poise-filled beauty. Tired, we took the popcorn bowl and glasses to the kitchen and headed off to bed. My mother had completely forgotten to talk to me about the evils of pageants. I began to consider that my mother wasn't enemy #1 after all.

Heidi

Other Families' Stories

As a single parent I had that guilt, heaped on top of the normal uncertainty, that parents feel about whether they are doing the right thing. Then my son Keith told me a story. Keith had always been shy and found it difficult to speak in public. It seems that when he was taking a college class the professor made several references to "broken families" as a result of divorce. Keith summoned up all his courage and said, "My family is not broken! It was broken when my father was with us, but now it is whole."

M. N., soup kitchen director

It's hard to have your children question your decisions and put up a fight about discipline, but I figure if they're marshmallows for me now, they'll be marshmallows for peer pressure later.

Susan Brogden, mother of two teens, Harrison Ohio

Although my parents did a great job of parenting, the dumbest thing they did was to suggest, verbally and nonverbally, that they wanted at least one of us to be a minister or otherwise an important public figure. I think it got us all too obsessed with how we appear regardless of whether it's what we needed emotionally—the result has been too many martyr/Jesus complexes in our family over saving the world, and beating ourselves up over whether our lives fall short. I resented being shown off to others with the

implication that my role was to reflect on my parents' value rather than do what I wanted to do. It took me about thirty years to learn how to listen to my own desires and emotions, rather than do what I thought others wanted me to do.

Anonymous lawyer, New York City

I would desperately like to see what Peter Maurin wanted: "A world where it is easier to be good." And I feel about God as Dorothy [Day] did when she said, "I don't have a conscience. A conscience has me." At times I'm sick of this conscience, but it's me and I see no way out.

John Stith, 26, Green Party organizer Montgomery, Alabama

Even though my parents acted like the "typical" Asian parents at times—overprotective and demanding—they gave my sister and me a lot of opportunities to pursue what we wanted to do. For instance, the fact that both my sister and I play both the violin and the piano—sure signs that the hand of an Asian parent is at work—the desire came from us, not from them. They encouraged us to travel in high school. They didn't pressure us to be in the honors classes at school, but somehow we always ended up in them. I think it was because early on they were so generous with their time and energy—always willing to help us with our homework every night. We also probably realized that our parents weren't exactly dummies (they both have doctoral degrees in engineering). That might have also been why we pushed ourselves to excel at school.

Jayme Linlin Yen, 23, graphic designer and rowing coach

I remember that my Dad always encouraged me to explore and discover. Once, as we were hiking, I started to climb a big rock and my Mom shouted something like, "Oh, Julia, honey, be careful, get down!" But my Dad replied, "Let her climb. She'll discover her own limits." Climbing up trees and rocks can be scary and intimidating, but only by doing it can a child learn to trust her instincts and come to know her capabilities and limitations. Because of subtle parenting skills like that I did learn to be confident and know myself. I'm not a parent, but I'm sure that this must be the most difficult aspect of the whole endeavor—allowing your children to take risks, knowing they may get hurt. Still, we often learn more from our bruises, scrapes, and scars than from our trophies, awards, and scholarships. My parents were also proactive, involved citizens, and thus I learned that the common person was capable of creating change. Somehow I got the message that I was in the good situation I was born into out of sheer luck, and that my good fortune carried with it certain social responsibilities. I was always told I should share my talents and use my opportunities to help others.

Julia Marie Graff, 23,
volunteer with Witness for Peace, Bogota, Colombia

My dad taught me a lot. When I was about eight, he took my sister and me to the Natural History Museum. With our curious, grubby hands we began touching the glass of the exhibits. My dad told us not to put our hands on the glass because "It's somebody's job to clean up around here."

He refuses to buy products manufactured in countries he knows to have coercive population-control policies, no freedom of religion, and unfair labor practices. More than once this ethical consideration has caused him to continue wearing worn-out shoes and clothes for many months while he shopped for acceptable items. He plants trees that will never be tall enough in his lifetime to offer him shade. He once told me, "It takes a lot of work to be a principled person. Sometimes it's frustrating; other times you realize it's the only way to be." From my father I've learned the importance of striving to love and live truth even when it hurts, even when others won't understand, even in the face of ridicule, and even when the world will try to use you up and forget about you.

Kate Bergman, 24, graduate student and Residential Counselor for Senate Pages, Washington, D.C.

reflection

Knowing Yourself,

Knowing Your Child

Have You Figured Out Who You Are Yet?

What did your parents do while you were growing up that had a big influence on you becoming the person you are?

What was the smartest thing your parents did when you were growing up?

What was the dumbest?

Is there anything your parents insisted on when you were growing up that you disliked at the time but now thank them for?

What are the top five values that guide your life?

What Do You Want for Your Child?

If nothing else, you hope your child will be . . .

What did you like about your upbringing that you want to pass on to your own child?

What did you dislike about your upbringing that you want to avoid doing to your child?

What do you hope your child will thank you for later?

Number the following qualities or values that you might pass on to your child in order of their importance to you:

honest

generous

committed to a religious/faith

system

loving

successful

sacrifices for others

physically attractive

hardworking

cares for the poor or powerless

has a spiritual core

has integrity

good communicator

physically healthy

intelligent
self-sufficient
loyal
committed
self-aware
compassionate
open
peacemaker
cares for creation
good friend
sexually chaste until marriage
creative
fair
other

If you feel frustrated doing this exercise, don't despair. As a parent you can work at all of the above. But knowing the values you hold most dear will help you choose your battles carefully and avoid trying to raise your child in your own image.

MONDAY B—academic team,

H—band,

D—soccer practice

Family Night

TUESDAY S—nursery school car pool

B—play practice

H—band

J—7:30 mtg

S—7:30 mtg.

WEDNESDAY B—academic team

H—piano lesson,

D—soccer practice

D—Boy Scout mt

S—aerobics class

THURSDAY S—nursery school car pool

J—Take car to shop, get ride to work, arrange for neighbors to pick up kids from band and play practice after school

J—7:30 mtg.

FRIDAY A—vaccination

H—band

A—birthday party

J&S—date night

SATURDAY B—play practice,

D—soccer game (bring oranges)

SUNDAY Church

B—soup kitchen,

H—Girl Scout banquet

Users Review

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Ricardo Hamilton:

The experience that you get from Raising Kids Who Will Make a Difference: Helping Your Family Live with Integrity, Value Simplicity, and Care for Others could be the more deep you digging the information that hide within the words the more you get thinking about reading it. It doesn't mean that this book is hard to recognise but Raising Kids Who Will Make a Difference: Helping Your Family Live with Integrity, Value Simplicity, and Care for Others giving you buzz feeling of reading. The article writer conveys their point in particular way that can be understood through anyone who read the item because the author of this e-book is well-known enough. This book also makes your own vocabulary increase well. So it is easy to understand then can go with you, both in printed or e-book style are available. We recommend you for having that Raising Kids Who Will Make a Difference: Helping Your Family Live with Integrity, Value Simplicity, and Care for Others instantly.

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