

## Empowering our Children With Responsibility

By: Benjie Stern, PhD

A local school has decided to make the job of the secretaries easier by breaking down the options on the school's answering machine by creating extensions so that the parents can be transferred to the proper department. The staff looked at several possibilities and finally agreed on the following:

To lie about why your child is absent – Press 1

To make excuses for why your child did not do his work – Press 2

To complain about what we do – Press 3

To degrade staff members – Press 4

To ask why you didn't get information that was already enclosed in your newsletter and several flyers mailed to you – Press 5

If you want us to raise your child – Press 6

If you want to reach out and scream at someone – Press 7

To request another teacher for the third time this year – Press 8

To demand that your child get a higher grade – Press 9

Though this is a joke, staff members are all too familiar with many of these requests. School personnel have been concerned, that over the years parents have been relinquishing more and more responsibilities from their children, and have been throwing it back onto the schools and teachers. Besides the lack of respect and compliance the child will have for the school, the parents are modeling for the children how to claim blame as apposed to taking on responsibility and accountability.

In the real world, in order to be successful in all areas of life one must be able to be accountable. The time to learn this very important lesson is during the vital years of childhood. We must teach our children to be responsible for his/her own behavior, class work, and homework, and that it's not always the teacher's fault for the child's lack of effort.

Sad to say, the teachers are recognizing a national epidemic. Dr. Jim Fay (2003) calls it the "Jet-Powered Turbo-Attack Helicopter Parent Model" epidemic. Many of today's parents are obsessed with the desire to create a perfect image for their kids. We, the parents, want to see the best for our children, and want to give them the perfect life, one in which our kids never have to face struggle, inconvenience, discomfort, disappointment or give. This perfect image, or perfect life, is one in which our kids never have to face struggle, inconvenience, discomfort, or disappointment. It is a life in which the child can be launched into adulthood with the best of credentials. These kids look great on paper. Their high school and college diplomas show high grades even if they were not earned. They lead a life where their mistakes are swept under the table.

Dr Fay explains that these parents, in their zeal to protect their young, swoop down like jet-powered, attack helicopters on any person or institution who might hold their children accountable for their actions. Armed with verbal smart bombs, they are

quick to blast away at anyone who sets high standards for behavior, morality, or achievement. Declaring their child a victim is a favorite tactical maneuver designed to send school personnel diving into the trenches for protection.

Do not get me wrong. It is extremely important for parents to be the child's advocate and be able to work with the school to make sure that the child is safe, and that the school is giving them the proper support and accommodations. If we are not the child's advocate, who will be! However when parents go so far as to not model accountability, we end up being disappointed as we watch kids learn to blame others for their lack of success, instead of becoming people who reach goals through effort and determination. Some parents are not satisfied with protection, but even prefer to destroy the infrastructure of the very agencies that are dedicated to helping their children grow into educated, moral human beings.

I have worked with many parents who have fallen into this trap. They all love their children. They all want the best for them. They talk about how they don't want their kids to struggle like they did. Once they are made aware of the results of their actions and see the crippling effects of this parenting style, they are often willing to change their parenting style. Many of these parents have said to me, "I now realize that changing my parenting style will help my child develop the character and resilience to compete in the business market."

Is it possible for children who have never had to stand on their own two feet, never had to be responsible for their own actions, or never had to face and solve the smaller problems of childhood, to have the tools to face the rigors of adult life? We all know the answer to that. Can the young adult who gets that perfect job perform well enough to keep that job if his grades from school were the result of teacher intimidation instead of vigorous study? The company who hires this person, or the spouse that marries this individual, won't be easily intimidated by parental pressure in the face of substandard performance or commitment. A perfect image and perfect school transcript are poor substitutes for character, struggle, and perseverance that true achievement really comes from.

Fay, J. (2003) *Parenting with love and logic: Make Your Kids Responsible For their Actions*.