

How Parents Can Help Their Children At Home

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1. Author of 'Tips and Tidbits for Parents and Teachers' – celebrating 50 years in the classroom and sharing what I have learned.

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This writing is adapted from presentations I give to parents of children of all ages.

The school year is well underway now and all parents have a sincere focus on what they can do to best help their child in school. It is said that "Our children are the heart of the future". They need our guidance, our support and our encouragement to help them succeed. Perhaps you have heard of the 3 D's to succeed - Desire, Discipline, and Dedication. Most parents have and do exhibit these qualities and try to instill these in their children as well.

Dr. Roger Taylor, a leading expert in Gifted Education, whom I have had the good fortune to listen to a couple of times in my career, used an old fairy tale to make a point, and it is this: 'If you don't kiss all of the frogs, you won't know which one will be the Prince or the Princess'. This may sound vague or silly but what he is saying is that we have to look after the needs of all children. That tells us how much work we as parents and teachers must do to tap or find that talent and/or potential. We must find out what 'turns their crank' or what 'lights their fire', so that we can nourish it and foster that ability so that it will not be wasted or go unnoticed and can be developed productively. This, Dr. Taylor maintains, is not just for gifted or very bright students but he believes this is essential for all students.

Learning, of course, began the day your child was born, and it doesn't stop: so your work as a parent began that very day. Was there a test you wrote and passed for becoming a new parent? Absolutely not! None of us did!

Did you get a manual from the hospital on how to raise your child when they sent you home? No! None of us did. Back in those days of the 70's when I had my babies, I got a case of stout beer to take home from the hospital to stimulate breast feeding. That's what I got!

The following is to simply review the things that you probably already know but might have forgotten – some TIPS and TIDBITS!! Yes, the first three words of my book title. Consider my book as a cookbook- tried and true recipes! What I may have found that works and what doesn't work. You may not agree on everything and I accept that.

Now let me preface with the fact that I am also a parent - the mother of two married daughters in Canada and also the grandmother of six delightful grandchildren, so I come well qualified on a few fronts.

However, I well know that there is no perfect family. Someone once said "Families are like fudge, mostly sweet, but with a few nuts.

I will be the first to tell you that I was NOT a perfect mother, nor was I the perfect teacher, but in those fifty years I spent in the classroom, I did learn a few things which I will share with you. Your child is a very special person. I will tell you just how special your child is and that **YOU** are too - both Mom and Dad. Let me say what isn't said enough about parents. Some of you might be working mothers or stay-at-home dads and that is not a bad thing. However, you may tend to worry at times that you are not all that you can be for your child. I think that is natural. When is the last time somebody told you, you're a good Mom or a good Dad? Well you are! Just know that. You are doing the very best job of raising your children that you can at this point in time. Oh sure, there might be things you could have done better or things you regretted doing or saying but you must let it go - like the song we keep hearing now from the movie, Frozen. "Let It Go"! Stop heaping guilt on your shoulders and beating yourself up. Why do we do that?

There is a short video that came out on Oct.22nd, 2015 on U-tube entitled "One Day in the Life of a Mom" – so poignant. The caption reads: "This mom feels like a failure until she overhears her son say something that leaves her in tears". It also says, "Our worth is not summed up by a mundane list! Life isn't about how much we get done in a day!" This can be found on Google Oct. 22 SF Globe.

When parents work, children have to share the work. The experts all agree that children should have chores and responsibilities – feed the pet, make your own bed, take your dirty plate to the sink and so on. Just look at the independence right there that you are fostering in your child. In my book I include an **Overindulgence Test** for parents and let me tell you that most working moms pass this test with flying colors. Why? Because they just don't have the time to overindulge.

There is a saying that goes like this: "If you give a starving man a fish, you feed him for a day. If you teach him to fish, you feed him for a lifetime". We have to teach our children to "fish".

Overindulgence can make parents become their child's arms, and ears, and brains. Some experts say by overindulging, parents are "re-creating the womb!" Overindulging parents want to jump in and help at the slightest frustration and they forget all the positive spinoffs of a child experiencing a certain amount of frustration. Every time you "help", your child could feel more helpless and then you start hearing those familiar cries of "I can't do it", "I don't want to try", "Do it for me!" and so on. Your child needs to learn what the following quote is teaching us: "The highest fences we need to climb are those we've built with our minds!" If you think you can't, you can't. And I firmly believe that. If you're told you are stupid, you can become stupid! I have personally seen this happen to people.

Overindulgent parents tidy up for their child, pick up all the toys for them, and even pack the backpacks, so that very often that child has no idea what's even in the bag. As a teacher I would say, "Where's your homework?", and I would hear, "I dunno, maybe my mom forgot to put it in" – no clues! They have not been taught to take ownership of their own things and learn responsibility early on in life.

Overindulgent parents or “helicopter parents” as they are commonly referred to, are constantly hovering over their children. They do their child’s school projects and the teacher always knows who they are, believe me. It does not take rocket science to figure it out. They do their assignments and the teachers then get a false sense of what the child can really do. They tell the child homework answers before the child even has a chance to figure it out. They ‘baby’ their child. They ‘smother’ the child with praise that is often overdone and not always honest and genuine and not given for real successes or real accomplishments. Some recent research on the topic of praise says that too much praise, the wrong kind of praise, or praise that is not deserved, can even be detrimental to the child.

The child can even feel a false sense of accomplishment and may even become a very needy adult wanting praise constantly. Ann Landers, a famous advice columnist for many newspapers long ago, once said: “It is not what you do for your children, but what you have taught them to do for themselves, that will make them successful human beings”.

Someone once said, “The best lessons we learn, come from the biggest failures we have”. The famous singer, Rhianna has a tattoo that says: “Never a failure-always a lesson.”

An excellent book for parents is called “Don’t Kiss Me At The Bus Stop: over 700 things parents do that drive their kids crazy”.

There is an old Chinese proverb that says “Teachers open the door. You enter by yourself.” I’m old and this is not a Chinese Proverb, but I personally have followed just ten words for attaining most things in my life so far and I recommend you instill these ten words in your child as well. Ten Two letter words – and they are: **IF IT IS TO BE IT IS UP TO ME!** I cannot tell you how many times I have said and followed those ten words in my lifetime. A good example is my book – it never would have been written. We want our children to be inspired, motivated, self- reliant, and to use their own initiative to get something done or accomplished – ten two letter words. If it is to be it is up to me! We want our children to have that attitude.

One thing I did to motivate and inspire my students when I taught Gifted Students for 15 years in Canada was to show them a huge poster with another great statement on it with each word in a different color and we would repeat the statement five times each time stressing a different word. The statement is simply, **YOU HAVE TO MAKE IT HAPPEN!** It’s a great statement for parents and teachers because we **DO** have to make it happen, and we also want our children to want to make it happen too. They say there are 3 kinds of people: those who **make** things happen, those who **watch** things happen and those who **wonder** what happened.

There’s another test for parents in my book which your own child gets to mark, and it’s called “How Well Do You Know Your Child?” It’s a fun quiz by Judi Bailey. Some of us parents, at times, don’t know as much as we think we do about our child so this quiz could be a needed reminder for us to listen more often to our child, to ask our child about his or her opinions and feelings on a variety of topics, and to be more observant of their actions, habits, and behavior. Communication is vital as you encourage your child to converse and share thoughts with you. Just think for a second! Do you know what your child’s favorite color is? Who is your child’s best friend? What color pajamas did your child wear to bed last night?

Mothers must remember that they need quality time with their husband. He came first before the child and he will be there after the child has left for college and long “flown the coop”. So have those date nights, buy that lock for the bedroom door, and take steps to stop your child from sleeping in your bed. Remember that you have to also do things for yourself. You need a life too; so take those music lessons, join that book club, and don’t think your family needs a gourmet meal every night and a spotless house all the time. I so wish I had learned all that back then! Hindsight is great isn’t it!

Parents must remember “quality time versus quantity time”. You can be home all day and not do a thing for or with your child. Now I personally never stopped working, so it had to be quality time for my girls - there was no choice.

Here is one of my secret tricks. If the worst comes to the worst in terms of stress, tension and exhaustion and you need to escape for a bit, just remember the old trick of a soft quilt and pillow and head to the bathroom – lock the door, line the bathtub with the quilt and pillow, and crawl in with a good book or a magazine or just rest there and breathe deeply or have a cat nap or just think the thoughts you want to think and enjoy a few free moments alone. They won’t even miss you and they won’t bother you if you’re in the toilet, will they?

Two books, one for Mom and one for Dad which well worth reading are the “Don’t Sweat the Small Stuff Treasuries” by Richard Carlson. Enjoy!

We move now to why your child is so special and this poem is entitled **I’m Special:**

I’m special. In all the world there is nobody like me. Since the beginning of time there has never been another person like me. Nobody has my smile. Nobody has my eyes, my nose, my hair, my hands, my voice. I’m special. Nobody can be found who has my handwriting. Nobody anywhere has my tastes – for food or music or art. No one sees things just as I do. In all of time there has been no one who laughs like me, no one who cries like me. And what makes me laugh and cry will never provoke identical laughter and tears from anybody else ever. No one reacts to any situation just as I would react, I’m special. I am the only one in all of creation who has my set of abilities. Oh, there will always be someone who is better at one of the things I’m good at, but no one in the universe can reach the quality of my combination of talents, ideas, abilities, and feelings. Like a room full of musical instruments, some may excel alone but none can match the symphony sound when all are played together, I’m a symphony! Through all of eternity, no one will ever look, talk, walk, think or do like me. I’m special. I’m rare. And, as in all rarity, there is great value. Because of my great value, I need not attempt to imitate others. I’ll accept –yes, celebrate my differences. I’m special. And I am beginning to see that God made me special for a very special purpose. He must have a job for me that no one else can do as well as I. Out of all the billions of applicants, only one is qualified; only one has the right combination of what it takes. That one is ME, because... I’m special.

So let your child know you realize that we learn differently, at different rates and with different learning styles. I think I’m Special should be read once a term to your child or with your child. Every parent wants their child to be a productive contributor to society someday. Show your child that you value school and how important you feel it is. Make sure school comes first in your family’s priorities; before sports, before socializing, and before the job your

teenager has after school. Show support for your child's teacher. This is crucial and remember how thin those walls are in your house when you're talking about your child's teacher or the school. Their hearing is excellent when you don't want them to hear. There is button or pin out that says, "You can't put students first if you put teachers last!"

The following are tips and tidbits on getting your child off to a new school year.

First and foremost, parents must make sure they are sending a healthy child to school, and that the home environment is healthy as well.

Medical Check-ups? This is money well worth spending. Yearly appointments for teeth, eyes, ears, and general wellness should be a matter of course. Try to do it in the summer so they don't miss school.

Parents should be prepared to inform the teacher in writing of any medical situations that affect the child. The teacher should know if your child is on medicine or if there is special treatment your child is receiving outside of school for a medical issue, ADHD, Diabetes, Asthma, Epilepsy, Allergies, Fears or Phobias.

Parents can routinely check their child for common problems like head lice and pinworms or thread worms. The old flashlight trick in the night while they are sleeping is well explained in my book for detecting worms.

Is your child getting enough sleep? You as parents must know how many hours of sleep their child requires at each age level and valuable information on this is laid out in my book as well (small children absolutely do need 10 to 12 hours of sleep each night. Sleep deprivation in children in some places like Hong Kong, is a major and chronic problem and is so often written about in the newspapers. A lack of sufficient sleep can really make your child ill and unable to learn at his or her best. However, one of the characteristics of Gifted Children is that they often require less sleep. After you tuck them into bed at night and turn out the lights, you may find they're up reading half the night.

Are you monitoring the junk food, the sugar intake, the fat intake, the carbohydrate intake? Obesity is a pressing problem now so this is important. As parents we have real responsibilities in terms of this monitoring and no one else can do it for you.

Teachers for years have been saying that the day after Halloween brings hyper and uncontrollable kids to school with major highs from all that candy, but I read an article recently that said - NOT TRUE – it's just the excitement and lack of sleep. Well, I don't believe a word of it but that's just my opinion.

Is your child exposed to dangerous things like cigarette smoke in the car or the home? We all know about the dangers of second hand smoke. Are there moth balls in your house? Get rid of them! I think this is one of the most informative chapters in my book; The Dangers of Mothballs! When is the last time you saw moths eating away at your clothes and besides, there are ways to combat this without using these very dangerous little white pungent-smelling balls.

Does your child get car sick or bus sick? This too can really affect their day at school. If so, he or she should not be reading on the bus then and may need medication to help. Some

children have allergies to specific things like the orange food coloring in cheese which is one example that I experienced with a child who was really uncontrollable until this discovery was finally made and it changed his life completely after his diet was changed.

Are you providing good lighting for doing homework with the proper desk and chair and school supplies for working or is a computer taking up most of the desk? Is doing homework free of interruptions and distractions and are the T.V. and the computer and electronic gadgets turned off? Does your child need a special pencil grip to maintain that proper tripod grip? I have found that if the proper pencil grip is not established and/or corrected by age 4 or 5 years, it is almost impossible to change. An incorrect pencil grip can result in a child not wanting to write much because it can be awkward and even painful. Thumb and 'peter pointer' should be on the pencil with middle finger underneath for support. The pencil should be held just above the shaven part.

Do you need to use a timing device to motivate and encourage your child to complete homework tasks? There are plenty ways to have a beeper go off. There are lots of devices out there including the kitchen timer and your phone. Does your child need a pop-up motivator or re-enforcer as it is sometimes called to help with getting homework and other tasks completed? One example is a plastic pill dispenser with little compartments and lids. You just label the task on the outside and put the reward inside. Your child will gradually want to move from tangible rewards like candy and money to intangible rewards like praise and pride of accomplishment and this comes with maturity.

Do you need to be involved with overseeing and guiding the homework? Some children need this kind of assistance longer than others.

The topic of sickness or illnesses is worth discussion. Parents must be very careful not to blow illness out of proportion. Children can LOVE to be sick. Try to ensure your child's school attendance is excellent and punctual. Don't encourage your child to stay home at every little ache and pain. Don't be an enabler as it can manifest itself into chronic absenteeism and become a vicious cycle. Show your child how proud you are for NOT missing school. Hopefully your child's teacher or school gives rewards or certificates for good attendance. I still have mine from elementary school and if I'm any indication I seldom missed any school in my whole 50 years of teaching. My mother, who was also my Grade One teacher, had no sympathy for little aches and pains and off to school we went.

Gifted children or children who are bored with school because they find the work too easy, can sometimes develop those quote "tummy aches" in the morning and want to stay home. Parents must look into this and get answers from the teacher. Are they just bored because the work is too easy? Another interesting fact about gifted students is that they often judge themselves by what they have not yet accomplished so they can be very hard on themselves. They can even feel responsible for Dad's drinking or Mom's smoking as they may have a tendency to take the world's problems on their shoulders. When your child misses school or constantly arrives very late, he or she may miss new information, may miss mastering new concepts and can fall behind very easily. If you are in the habit of withdrawing your child for multiple holidays during the year, and believe me this happens more often than teachers would like it to happen - at least make sure your child writes a holiday journal each night and reads

every day on that vacation. Make it a real learning experience. I have had students who came back from a holiday and couldn't even say where they had been as this was never shared with them.

When it comes to the report card and meeting the teacher, many times parents come to an interview to discuss their child's progress report and are completely blown away, or even embarrassed by the fact that educational jargon is used by the teacher that they just don't understand, have never heard of before, and perhaps are even too shy or embarrassed to ask the meaning of. In my opinion, the teacher should never assume a parent knows these terms, and should always include a simple definition without even asking the parents if they know it or not. For this reason, I have provided an extensive glossary in my book of 225 educational terms with definitions to help both parent and teacher. When some of my tutoring students bring their school report card to share with me, I even have trouble understanding it. There seems to be so much professional jargon that I am wondering how most parents even know what it is saying.

It is my opinion that some schools should really consider changing the format to make report cards more parent-friendly. I think parents have to demand that.

John Rouecki helps us understand how children learn when he says this:

- 10% of what the learner READS is retained – retained meaning remembered.
- 20% of what the learner HEARS is retained
- 30% of what the learner SEES is retained (visuals – so showing pictures diagrams, or charts does help)
- 50 % of what the learner SEES and HEARS is retained.
- 70% of what the learner SAYS is retained – so those presentation projects your child does in front of the class are real learning moments.
- 90 % of what the learner SAYS as he/she DOES is retained (the combination of the two is so important).

What is this telling us about how we teach and help our children? They need to be “hands on” and actively involved in the task at hand.

So what students are saying to us is this: “Tell me, I'll forget, Show me, I may remember, but involve me and I'll understand”.

Homework can certainly be a pressing problem for the family for many reasons. In order to be on the same page with your school's expectations parents should first check with the parent handbook or school guide-book to be aware of the number of minutes of homework expected for each grade. For example, your Grade One child may be expected to do 20 minutes each night plus oral reading. Therefore, it does not make sense to force your child to do more. If your child finishes an assignment in a “jiffy” and it was neatly and correctly done, it is not fruitful to start ringing alarm bells to the school about the work being “too easy” or “not challenging enough”. Let your child feel good about the fact that the review of the work covered during the day was successful – more time to read or play a game with Mom or Dad. What happened to chess and checkers, monopoly and doing puzzles together? I think families are often stressed and feel so much pressure over homework.

Rap it! Snap it! Clap it! Tap it! You don't have to have one musical bone in your body to use the 3R's of rhyme, rhythm and repetition when trying to help your child memorize facts. Children love this aspect of music and can readily help you compose a funny little rap song or rhyme which includes the information to be learned. They also love to see Mom or Dad joining in to help them in a fun or silly way with no stress or tension. The self-confidence that your child gains by learning something so easily that he or she thought could not be learned cannot be underestimated. In other words, children learn so fast through music. You would not find many lessons in my class without some aspect of the 3 R's. Is this a big chapter in my book? You betcha!! How unfortunate that some school boards are cutting the music programs to save costs. Parents should really protest.

Parents often ask me what I think are the most important things in helping their children and I have narrowed it down to these:

Let's start with **Routines and Consistency**: Routines transfer over to the classroom and help children get organized. Consistency helps the child to know what to expect in terms of consequences for their actions. My grandchildren all know that time out is sitting on the stairs - no ifs, ands, or buts. Try not to flip-flop on your rules and established routines. Once your child knows your expectations and knows that they will not readily change, he or she will abide by them. It reduces the confusion in the home and helps with organizing the daily living. Your child must know when homework should be done, and how to prepare for school the night before; like lunches made, clothes chosen, homework in back pack or ready and waiting on the top of the stairs or on the table near the door, books gathered to be returned to the school library, the non-leaking water bottle ready. They should know when their room must be cleaned, their teeth brushed, daily chores done, like feeding the pet or taking out the garbage. Children should know what TV show can and cannot be watched. There are wonderful channels for learning like the Discovery Channel. Establishing routines and consistency will be reflected in your child's progress without a doubt. It is that important!

Parents can really assist the teacher by helping the child to speak in complete sentences and not with one-word answers or physical gestures. Training your child to listen to instructions and follow them accurately, is not always easy. It helps to first establish good eye contact before even giving a direction and with no extraneous sounds and noises around for distraction. Start simply with one and progress gradually to two and then three. (e.g. Take your dirty plate to the kitchen, wipe it off in the rubbish bin and then put it into the sink.) By age six your child should be capable of following three directions well.

Poor listening skills is really a chronic problem. I have had parents say that they always have to repeat a direction at least 5 times to their child before they get any reaction at all. No, No, No. That has to stop.

Not only do children find following verbal directions difficult, but also written instruction. They fail to read them properly on tests and work sheets and can miss out on key words like NOT or Opposite which can change the answer completely and therefore, lose valuable marks on a test. Have the child look at you when you are speaking and when your child is speaking to you. You want him or her to have a good job interview some day and it's

not too early to even start practicing that firm hand shake. Some children have no clues about what hand to even use.

Another idea you can use to help your child with homework or studying for a test is the use of games. Just say the word GAME and your child will respond miraculously. When you are drilling flash cards of facts or sight words for example, a right answer allows the card to go to the child – a wrong answer and it goes to Mom or Dad. Who will be the winner? Don't forget to teach them to say "good game" or "congratulations" after the game.

There is a very useful website called **Understood For Learning And Attention Issues**. It's like chatting with the experts. You just click on to your child's grade and then select the issue your child is having or the subject he is weak in and up comes simple tools, what to try or use and possible solutions. It is very well laid out, easy to read and really helpful for parents and teachers.

Remember to try and balance work with play: Don't over-structure your child's life because that can result in stress or burnout. Your child wants to experience fun and laughter and see you having fun as well. Remember you are the best role model your child has. Include things in your family life like walks, nature hikes, picnics, and family trips to the library. Outings like sporting events, cultural events, movies, or just out for an ice cream cone are relaxing ways to add enjoyment to life and they don't always have to cost money. When I was very young, root beer had just been invented and so it was out to the A and W drive-in restaurant for a root beer - fond memories, but simple.

Don't forget parents, that giving your child choices is also important. Every child likes to have the power to make certain decisions. As I often say, there is no choice about what time to go to bed at night, but there can be a choice of whether to wear the red pajamas or the blue pajamas.

Negative influences on your child can have a devastating effect. I cannot stress how important having good friends is in your child's life. They can play such a valuable role and can carry such a very positive influence. If you find this is NOT the case when you observe and listen at playdates and sleepovers, then you must take steps to remove these bad influences as soon as possible and not let your child associate with those "so called" friends. My daughters still have the same good friends today that they had in elementary and high school - they email, they visit, they travel together, they skype. Good friends are so important.

Every parent knows of horror stories that can result when you do not monitor your child's use of the computer and other devices. Keep that bedroom door open or put the computer in the living room or buy the chip for your computer to protect your child from that undesirable or inappropriate stuff. There is a website you can log into that includes the **9 Most Dangerous Apps For Your Kids** along with information on learning what those texting acronyms mean that your child is using for communication with others. If all you know is LOL (laughing out loud or lots of love - not sure myself) then I think it is time you learned the other 28 most common ones that just might alarm you.

We have all seen families in restaurants where each member has a gadget or phone in his or her hands, where no one talks to each other and I have even seen complete meals not

touched by little ones because they were so busy on the gadgets. Only parents can change these addictive habits. “You have to make it happen!”

In terms of manners, etiquette and appropriate behavior, your child should not be the cause of someone not enjoying a movie, being disturbed during a meal in a restaurant, or shocked in a grocery store by tantrums, having a plane trip ruined by bad behavior, seeing a helper being hit or kicked or spit at, touching and tasting in a bakery shop, skate boarding in a grocery store, ripping and dirtying books or magazines without buying them or using profanity for all to hear. Yes, I have seen it all! Parents have to teach the proper ways to behave in public.

Now let’s talk about discipline, yes discipline and not punishment. The experts say that punishment is spanking, hitting, slapping, insulting, belittling and should not be a part of the discipline for your child as it is the least, effective, method. Yes, there should be consequences for inappropriate behavior and I quote Barbara Coloroso, an expert. She imparts these few words of wisdom that I have used with parents over and over during my career and they are: **“Say what you mean, mean what you say, and do what you said you were going to do”**.

Time-outs, rewards, incentives, and awards can play an effective and positive part in disciplining your child. Remember to try and keep yourself cool, calm and in control during these tense times. Do not attack your child’s character but the behavior only. Criticize the things they do and not them. Try not to correct your child in front of people but do it in private later and try not to compare your children. Try to put your responses to your child in a positive way. For instance, if your child has not made his or her bed in the morning and asks you if he or she can go out to play with a friend, instead of saying no , you can’t because you did not make your bed this morning, say yes, you may, as soon as your bed is made. See the difference?

Now Teenagers: raising them, someone once said, is like nailing jello to a tree; one of the great truths adults have learned apparently.

I have always called grade seven and eight kids “the wonderful world of walking hormones”. What are we dealing with? Well, changing voices for boys, interested in the opposite sex, on the telephone constantly, texting, playing with the electronic gadgets non-stop, watching TV too long and too often, the hidden tattoos, wanting more privacy, and some even wanting green hair or a shaved head. Parents must try not to over react. You can say you do not prefer that style or you don’t like it, but that it is their choice. Hair always grows back in too, remember. A general rule which I also learned from Barbara Coloroso is this. If it is not life threatening, and not immoral or against the school rules, it’s just not worth getting upset over. You have to choose your battles!

There is an excellent website called **expertbeacon.com** were you will see the advice for parents from 6 experts on:

1. Raising happy, healthy teens
2. Sending your teen off to college
3. Communicating about drug abuse
4. How parents can lead teens to a connected life free from addictions

5. How parents should talk with their teenager about substance abuse
6. How to help teenagers leave home with resilience and perseverance.

Each one of these writings has a bullet point Do and Don't list for parents so it is very easy to read and understand.

If parents suspect drugs, alcohol, anorexia or bulimia, they must, by all means, take steps to intervene: search those pockets, look under the bed, check the mattress, and search the closets or even read that diary. However, parents of teenagers at times just need to put on the kid gloves and keep saying to themselves “this too shall pass”, “this too shall pass” and it does. I have learned from the experience of being a mother that parents have “no brains” during those teenage years, but believe me when they turn 21 they suddenly start asking you for advice and you really do get some brains again – it's a miracle that happens! One of the things I learned at the week- long Creative Problem Solving Institute at Buffalo State University which I was fortunate to attend three times in my career was this: “**There is no problem so great it cannot be solved**”. I always had that quote up in my classroom on a big poster, and it was said ‘umpteenth’ times a year by both the students and myself. We really want children to feel that problems can be solved and it is not the end of the world when they are faced with a big one.

We've all heard that moderation is the key – this can apply to parenting as well. Not all children thrive with a “tiger Mom”. Author/professor, Amy Chua's shocking and controversial book about how she raised her daughters had most of us feeling it was over the top, excessive and extreme, and that a healthy balance is really the way to go – not too strict and not too lenient. Parents please remember that you are the parent and NOT your child's best friend and that both parents should be on the same page with a united front because you know how they can play one against the other. This is also very true for divorced and separated parents. The experts tell us that parents should watch for warning signs that might signal **divorce related depression**. These signs could be:

1. Sleeping problems
2. Behavior problems
3. Withdrawal from loved ones or from loved activities
4. Drug or alcohol use or abuse
5. Concentration problems
6. Eating disorders or self- injury
7. Angry or violent outbursts
8. Negative changes that are not normal

There is a whole book series for children who in grade 3, 4 or 5 called Amber Brown by Paula Danziger all about Amber Brown's life as a child of divorced parents. They are very good books and well written. She tells it like it is. I have actual quotes in the chapter on Divorce in my book from my students - what they actually said or what was in their journal writing - one of them being “I wish my mom and dad would just act friendly when they pick me up and

could just sit together at school events and come to my parent interviews together - is that asking too much of them?"

Have you ever tried a "WISH LIST" with your child for incentives and rewards? These wishes can be brainstormed with your child in the form of a list and written down. This list can include fun things that would be nice to do, have or experience as a reward for good marks, getting homework done on time, for good behavior or for some successful achievement. Wish list ideas do not have to cost money and can even be as simple and fun as a walk around the block with Mom or Dad alone, an extra bed-time snack or an extra bed-time story. Your child simply picks the reward from the wish list when it is deserved. This works really well I have found and the kids love it.

Now another suggestion is what my family calls a "Funny Book." One of the best things I can remember doing for my girls was having a scrap book and a pen handy in a kitchen drawer. From the earliest age I would quickly jot down the date and their age and what they said or did that was so funny, or cute, or amazing. We always think we will remember these things years later, but we don't. When my daughters were in their late teens they would sometimes pull out those "funny books" when their friends came over and have barrels of laughs reading all the cute or hilarious things they said or did.

I remember, one of her friends even said to me, "I wish my mom had done that when I was small." We still talk about the funny books, and my daughters are now doing that for my grandchildren.

Something that is not talked about as often as it should be and perhaps not taken seriously enough is **Emotional Intelligence** and I would highly recommend all of Dr. Daniel Goleman's materials like books and videos, on this topic. Some experts say Emotional Intelligence is even more important than I. Q. You will learn so much about your child by reading Dr. Daniel Goleman's material and learning about all the research he has done on Emotional Intelligence.

Self-Esteem: Remember we are not born with a high or low self-esteem. It is developed and fostered by all of those around us right from our birth. A child's self-esteem can be become low or even destroyed through a lack of encouragement by one or both parents, by a sibling, by teachers, or by a classroom bully. You know they used to tell us when we were children to always say "Sticks and stones will break my bones but names will never hurt me". Well that just isn't really the case a lot of times. Sticks and stones can break and bullying may be fatal.

Someone once said, "It is easier to build up a child than it is to repair and adult - choose your words wisely!"

Self-Esteem is simply how you value yourself and knowing that you have worth. There is a great book called "501 Ways to Boost Your Child's Self - Esteem" by Robert D. Ramsay.

There are also so many great books out there now about quote "Filling Your Bucket". Some include all kinds of activities that the children can do. Many teachers are really onto this now.

There is a delightful story in my book called ‘The Theory of The Dipper and The Bucket’ by Donald Clifton that I include in the Motivational and Inspirational section of my book.

Someone once said “A mother who radiates self-love and self-acceptance, actually vaccinates her daughter against low self-esteem”.

Many students now are quite familiar with Dr. Howard Gardiner’s Multiple Intelligences – the seven ways of learning. A few more intelligences like Naturalist or Nature Smart and Existentialist have been added in recent years. Teachers now really try hard to plan their lessons using Multiple Intelligences to cater to the students’ strengths and talents and it makes the lessons so much more interesting and meaningful.

Parents should also familiarize themselves with the different abilities their child might have. Gardiner says everyone has all of the intelligences but in different proportions. Logical mathematical Intelligence is Number Smart, Verbal Linguistic Intelligence really means Word Smart, Visual Spatial Intelligence is Picture Smart, Interpersonal Intelligence is People Smart and Intrapersonal Intelligence is Self- Smart. This Chapter in my book also includes a questionnaire to help you discover which of the intelligences is your strength. There is also a handout in the booklet today about Multiple Intelligences for you.

Now – the most important topic for the last – READING! Four simple words: BY READING WE READ! Or let’s make a rhyming couplet and say “Students who read are the ones who succeed!” That’s really the name of the game and it’s the key to it all – yes of course phonics is important. I cannot say how important learning nursery rhymes is for little ones and when they make the connection with rhyming families it is so much easier to teach them to read. (e.g. the part at the end of the word is the same - cake, make, take, bake, of the “ake” family) We even use rhymes when we are teaching them rules in phonics – When two vowels go walking the first one does the talking. Reading is the addiction we want our children to have! Read to your child daily and have your child read to you. If they need a card or marker underneath each line to keep them from skipping lines, do it. Have regular quiet family reading times, and discuss books together. Let your child see that you value reading. Make sure you all own a library card.

Albert Einstein said: “The only thing you absolutely have to know is the location of the library!” And I love what Tahereh Mafi said: “I love walking into a bookstore. It’s like all my friends are there sitting on shelves, waving their pages at me!” Books are a journey into your imagination.

Apparently the biggest mystery in the whole world, say the reading experts, is that nobody knows or has figured out how a child really learns to read. So we must expose students to many methods, a variety of techniques and approaches and they will take what they need to make it happen. There isn’t just one best or only way. Do you know exactly how you learned to read? I don’t! Mark Twain said “The man who does not read good books has no advantage over the man who can’t read”. If I had to choose three really good books for parents it would be these: Reading Magic by Mem Fox. She is also famous for the wonderful children’s books

she writes. The others are The Reading Bug by Paul Jennings and also The Read-Aloud Book by Jim Trelease.

Don't let anyone tell you that it is easy to be a parent. It is a daunting task and perhaps the hardest job in the world.

Now this little piece of writing has no title and I don't know the author, but speaks volumes!

“Children can be likened - to a handful of seeds from different flowers. At first, they seem more similar than different in many respects. Place these seeds in the earth and nourish them and they become very different. Some will become small and delicate blossoms. Some will be big and brilliant. Some will be early bloomers and others will be late bloomers. But one thing is certain! Given good conditions, they will all bloom with their own-individual-beauty”.

There is a Chinese Proverb that says: “A journey of a thousand miles starts with a single step”. Parents should not feel that they have to change everything at once. Remember, just incremental steps will do, little by little. In conclusion let's go back to the child one more time and listen to seven things every child needs to hear.

- #1. I Love You
- #2. I'm Proud of You
- #3. I'm Sorry
- #4. I forgive you
- #5. I'm listening
- #6. This is your responsibility
- #7. You've got what it takes – now go for it!

Happy parenting everyone and enjoy your precious child.

About the Author – Pat Kozyra

Possessing 50 years of formal classroom teaching experience, Pat Kozyra is now a freelance writer for SCMP and other Hong Kong magazines that feature articles for parents and teachers. She also offers private tutoring and education workshops. She has been a repeat guest on a radio program on RTHK123 based on topics from her book. She is a motivational speaker to parents and teachers.

Pat has taught primary grades, vocal music, art resource, and gifted education, has been a preschool coordinator, English as a Second Language teacher, and presented courses in Special Education at



Lakehead University in Thunder Bay, Ontario, Canada.

Recent Work of Pat Kozyra

- “Hold it together for the kids when you part” in Parents’ Guide of SCMP
- Webinar For Penn Foster College
- <http://www.sassymamahk.com/pat-kozyra-author-of-tips-and-tidbits-for-parents-and-teachers-shares-her-all-time-top-12-parenting-tips/>
- <http://ppp.com.hk/ebook/playtimes/Playtimes%20June%202014/index.html#32>
- http://issuu.com/educationpost/docs/parents_guide_26may14/32?e=0

About the Book - Teaching Guide Offers Advice From 50 Years in the Classroom

Teacher Pat Kozyra is now acting upon the many requests from family, friends, and colleagues that she write a book about her half century in the teaching profession. This seasoned professional has so many *Tips and Tidbits* to offer, so much to tell, and so much to share with colleagues!

For example, this book includes a glossary of educational terms which teachers can use in report writing. Teachers can benefit from many checklists, diagnostic tests, surveys, and inspirational and motivational materials. Classroom hints and ideas for effective teaching abound in this “must have” book.

Information on obtaining Pat Kozyra’s book entitled “Tips and Tidbits For Parents and Teachers” can be obtained as follows:

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- Book stores in Hong Kong – bumps to babes , Swindon Books, Kelly and Walsh
- Amazon books.com
- Barnes and Noble books.com