

# SYLVIA RIMM

## On Raising Kids



A Newsletter to Help Parents and Teachers

Volume 19

Issue No. 2

### How to Parent So Children Will Learn\*

#### TOP TEN LIST

Although there are many variations of “right” ways to parent and your personal family values should be your guide, there are some basic principles that underlie good parenting. With the complexion of our media-driven culture, it is particularly important for families to embrace these foundational principles. In my book *How to Parent So Children Will Learn* I emphasize the supportive concepts that can help parents raise happy, resilient, and achieving children. I’ve developed a Top Ten List to summarize these essential principles to assist parents. My book is now in its third edition and has been awarded a National Best Book Award by USA Book News in the Parenting and Family category. I know you’ll find it helpful for raising your families.

#### 1. Praise moderately to avoid pressure; postpone superpraise.

You are such a hard worker, Jaleessa.



Praise conveys your values to your children and sets expectations for them. Lack of praise conveys the message that you don’t believe in them. Reasonable praise, like *good thinker, hard worker, smart, creative, strong, kind, and sensitive*, sets high but reasonable expectations that are within your children’s reach. Words like *perfect, the best, natural athlete, most beautiful, and brilliant* can set impossible

expectations. Children internalize those expectations, and the expectations become pressures when children find they can’t achieve those high, impossible goals.

#### 2. Don’t discuss children’s problem behaviors within their earshot (referential speaking).

Discussion about children also sets expectations for them. If they hear you talking to grandparents and friends about how jealous or mean they are, if you refer to them as little devils or ADHD kids, if they’re constantly described as shy or fearful, they assume you’re telling the truth and believe they can’t control these problem behaviors.



\*Adapted from *How to Parent So Children Will Learn* (3rd Edition, Great Potential Press, 2008).

#### In This Issue

- 📖 **How to Parent So Children Will Learn**
- 📖 **Parent Pointers—Encouraging Respect for Teachers; Getting Involved with Your Children’s School**
- 📖 **Teacher Tips—How Do Children Think?**
- 📖 **Student Stepping Stones—How Time and Place Will Improve Your Study**
- 📖 **Sylvia Says....**

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### 3. *Take charge; don't overempower your children.*



Your children require leadership and limits to feel secure. Envision the letter V. When children are small, they're at the base of the V with few

choices, little freedom, and power, matched with few responsibilities that go with their small size. As they mature, give them more choices, more freedom, and increased power, paired with more responsibilities. Children will feel trusted as they are only gradually empowered. If you reverse that V like this—Λ—and children are given too much power, too many early choices, and too much freedom, they are overempowered before they are ready to make responsible decisions.

These children feel as if you're taking away their freedom when you set reasonable limits. They expect to be treated as adults before they're ready. In my research on over 5,000 middle-grade students, many children believed they should have equal decision-making power as their parents. In adolescence, the ordinary limits cause overempowered children to become angry, depressed, and rebellious because they feel powerless compared to the power they experienced too early.

### 4. *Build resiliency; don't rescue your child from reality.*

Although children need protection, overprotection encourages dependency and oversensitivity. The V of Love must expand its limits as children mature. You can be kind without being overly sympathetic. You can do for children without overdoing. Your children will need to learn to recover from losses and failures, without being rescued from reality. Developing resiliency will permit them to triumph over obstacles.

### 5. *Stay united, be willing to compromise, and say good things about your child's other parent.*

Leaders in a family that lead in two opposite directions confuse children. Children will not respect parents who show no respect for each other. Describing your child's other parent as an "ogre" or "dummy" may make you feel like a good and understanding

parent temporarily, but sabotaging another parent, or grandparent, will backfire, and your child will no longer respect either of you. This is especially hard after divorce, but it's even more important in divided families. Parents and grandparents being united is important for children.

### 6. *Hold teachers, education, and learning in high regard.*

Set your children's education as first priority. That will become most clear if they hear how much you value learning. Tell them about the best teachers you had and elevate their teachers as well. Set expectations for higher education early so they will assume education does not stop after high school.

### 7. *Be positive about your own work and that of your child's other parent.*

If you arrive home and complain about your work daily, your children will become antiwork kids. They'll complain about their schoolwork and household chores. If you don't like your work, attempt to find better work, and remind them that education provides more job choices. Try hard to keep balance of work and family fun in your lives.

### 8. *Be a role model of ethics, activity, and hard work. Locate other good role models for your children.*

Your children are watching you. When you "get away with" speeding, keep too much change, or are disrespectful to your parents (their grandparents), they'll notice. When you're interesting and energetic they'll be equally impressed. You can be a good role model without being perfect, but your imperfections are showing. You don't have to do it all. Introduce your children to friends and potential mentors who also will be positive influences.



**9. Enjoy learning experiences with your child.**

Too many parents of 20-year-olds have sobbed in my office because they didn't find time for their children when they were growing up. Make time for learning with your kids and they'll be learners forever. Enjoy and develop interests together and you'll not have regrets, only wonderful memories.



**10. Keep a separate fun time and adult status without giving your children adult status too soon.**

Enjoy adult life without your children. Weekly dates and a few adult vacations a year will keep you excited about life. Give your children something to look forward to. They can watch and wait and do child activities with the family. Kids who get adult privileges too soon have power beyond their maturity.



**Student Stepping Stones\***

**How Time and Place Will Improve Your Study**

A physiologist by the name of Ivan Pavlov was doing research with dogs to determine how much they salivated when eating. While the experiment was taking place, Pavlov's assistant observed a serious problem. The dogs began salivating when the caretaker entered the room *before* they received their food. Pavlov's assistant believed that the research was therefore spoiled. Pavlov, a very creative scientist, recognized what we call in science, a serendipitous finding. He discovered some very important principles which are now known as the laws of classical conditioning.

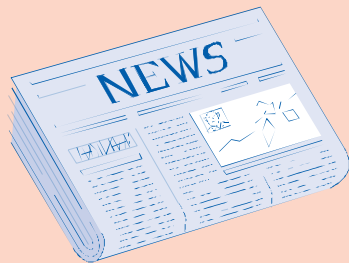
When two stimuli are paired together over time, the second begins to cause the same response as the first. In other words, since the caretaker always brought the food, the dogs associated the caretaker with the food and, therefore, began salivating at the sight of the caretaker (even before they had the food).

In the same way, when you sit in the same position for daily studying, your automatic responses will be conditioned to concentrate when you assume your study position. This will make it easier for you to concentrate automatically and make good use of your study time.



\*Adapted from: *Learning Leads Q-Cards—Student Stepping Stones*  
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## Parent Pointers\*

### Encouraging Respect for Teachers



Children will learn from their teachers if they respect and admire them. It's developmentally natural for them to wish to please adults. If parents suggest negative characteristics about teachers, children will feel caught in the middle,

as if in order to please parents, they cannot admire their teacher. Children's attitudes about teachers and school will mainly be positive if they hear these kinds of descriptions of their teachers and your former teachers. Try these positive modifications:

- 😊 Teachers really have a hard job. They must indeed care about kids.
- 😊 I remember my fifth-grade teacher. He was really special. I even remember many things I learned.
- 😊 Study can really be boring, but there's a good feeling that comes when you truly know you've learned a lot.
- 😊 That teacher's probably picky because she knows you're intelligent enough to meet her high standards.
- 😊 I bet that teacher doesn't realize you'd like a challenge. Why don't I talk to her about that?
- 😊 Some of the things I never thought would be useful turned out to really help me.
- 😊 I can remember the wonderful project I did in seventh grade. My teacher really inspired me.

The positive comments you make about teachers should be true, but if you think a little while, it will probably be easy for you to remember some wonderful experiences you had in school. Sharing these with your children, instead of sharing the negative memories about school, will help them to feel more positive about learning and school.

## Parent Pointers\*

### Getting Involved with Your Children's School

Parent involvement in school activities provides a clear priority message to children related to the importance of education. Your personal involvement will help your children achieve. Here are some suggestions:

- ✓ Write a letter to your school administrators telling them about your special interest. Tell them you're willing to contribute time to a school advisory committee.



- ✓ Make an appointment to talk to your children's principal. Ask the principal how you can help.



- ✓ Write a note to your children's teachers and send it with them to school. Offer to be of assistance in or out of class.

- ✓ Here are some volunteer activities you can become involved in:

- 🍎 advisory committee
- 🍎 board of education member
- 🍎 clerical activities
- 🍎 parent-teacher organization
- 🍎 leading or participating in parenting classes
- 🍎 in-class volunteer
- 🍎 tutoring children who need help
- 🍎 playground supervision
- 🍎 field trips
- 🍎 providing treats for special days
- 🍎 talk to students about a special topic or career

\*Adapted from: *Learning Leads Q-Cards—Parent Pointers* ©1996 by Sylvia Rimm.

## Teacher Tips\*

### How Do Children Think?

Young children's cognitive development affects their moral development. In early childhood, Kohlberg tells us that children define right by what is rewarded or punished. Later, right becomes what pleases or displeases the important "others" in their lives. They repeat what they've heard and learned. They combine and reorganize adult ideas and restate them. When we hear the words we, or someone else, have taught them, we respond to them as if the ideas were

theirs in the first place. Examine the information you have about your students before you respond to their expressions of feelings. There are many possibilities for the true meanings of what they say. Listen to the words of your students and interpret them with your adult wisdom. When children communicate to you about their home lives, here are some possible interpretations:



#### WHAT CHILDREN SAY

My parents love my sister (brother) more than they love me.

My parents make me work all the time.

My parents never buy me things.

My parents may be getting a divorce.

My parents never help me with my homework.

#### WHAT CHILDREN MAY MEAN

That may be true or...

The child may have been accustomed to total attention and now feels deprived.

The child may have been punished recently.

The child may have too many chores or...

The child may be required to do one chore a day and argues about that.

The child may never have had chores before and is being required to do something for the first time.

The parents may be economically disadvantaged and may not be able to buy the child basic needs or...

The parents may buy the child many things, but said no to something recently.

The parents may be concerned about buying their children too many material things and may be intentionally educating them not to be so materialistic.

The parents may be getting a divorce or...

The child may have overheard their parents argue for the first time.

The child's friend's parents are getting a divorce, and he/she may think all parents get divorce.

The parents may not help even when the child has an appropriate need or...

The parents may have helped regularly and are now trying to encourage independence.

The parents may have been out and couldn't help last night.

\*Adapted from *Learning Leads Q-Cards—Teacher Tips* ©1990 by Sylvia Rimm.



## Sylvia Says...

### Dear Dr. Sylvia:

*As a parent of elementary school children, I'm scared about what I hear is happening with children in middle and high school. Freshmen are having sex on the high school dance floor, and kids sit across the street from the school smoking while skipping school. I want to teach my children values and enforce the rules of our family to help them avoid being caught up in the terrible things going on around them.*

*I have a dream. I am an idealist, but I feel parents need to become parents again. There are good parents in our community and I want to get them together. These parents can go into the community, schools, homes, and workplaces, and encourage other parents to be good parents.*

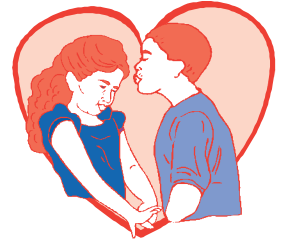
*What I would like to hear from you first is, do you think I have a chance at pulling this off? Second, so as to have a reputable basis for our plan, I'm wondering if you could provide our group of parents with information that you feel would be valuable to our specific cause.*



*I believe that we can change our community if we enforce realistic limits. I know that we'll be met with some resistance, but I imagine that many parents will welcome the support and guidance.*

I commend you on your responsible attitude, and I believe that parents can make a difference if they join together informally at friends' homes or at schools to set guidelines, limits, and responsibilities for their children. If they also encourage interesting activities and fun for their children, their children are also likely to enjoy becoming responsible and respectful. If parents within each school look to each other for support, it will prevent children's use of the usual manipulation that we've all heard before...."but all the kids are doing it."

Your observations of premature sexual behaviors and overempowerment are what I discovered in my survey of over 5,000 middle-grade children, which was published in the book *Growing Up Too Fast: The Rimm Report on the Secret World of America's Middle Schoolers* (Rodale, 2005). You've asked for my help, so I'll provide some basic guidelines. You can find more information in the book mentioned above and in my other foundational book, *How to Parent So Children Will Learn* (Great Potential Press, 2008). Here are some beginning principles, but I expect each community will want to review these and add their own:



1. Take charge; don't overempower your children. Start with small amounts of freedom, choices, and responsibilities; and increase them gradually, matching responsibilities with power and freedom.
2. Parents need to stay united. Be respectful of each other and of teachers and other adults that guide your children.
3. Hold education in high regard.
4. Encourage kindness, caring, and giving.
5. Enjoy learning and fun experiences with your children.
6. Be a role model of ethics, activity, and hard work.
7. Set limits for screen time; use parental guidelines for videos, television, and computers.
8. Teach your children to work hard and volunteer to help others.
9. Encourage your children to develop interests and become involved in extracurricular activities, music, the arts, and sports.
10. Be sure responsible parents are on-site for all parties.
11. Hold your children responsible for telling you where they are and returning home at an agreed upon time.
12. Be absolutely clear about no use of tobacco, alcohol, or drugs for children.

## Dear Dr. Sylvia:



*My two girls, ages 5 and 13, are constantly fighting. They cannot sit at the dinner table or even be in the same room together without a brawl starting, and it's always over nothing. My 13-year-old is usually the instigator. I'm at my wit's end; no punishment works.*

*We live in a very stable home. My husband and I have been married for 15 years, and we have a happy, healthy marriage, except when it comes to the kids. We disagree on a lot of discipline practices. I need some good advice on how to handle this. I can't take much more of their arguing. Sometimes I feel like they just hate each other.*

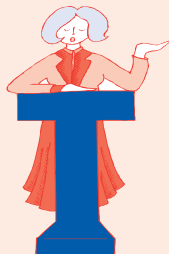
*Desperate in New Jersey*

Dear Desperate in New Jersey: Siblings do often argue, and siblings of the same sex seem to be even more competitive than a brother and sister. Part of your daughters' heightened conflict may be due to the large age difference. Your 13-year-old may have been accustomed to being an only child and a queen before her sister arrived on the scene. Tweens don't like to give up their thrones.

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[DrRimm@sylviarimm.com](mailto:DrRimm@sylviarimm.com)



The other reason for the increased conflict may be related to the differences between you and your husband in your approaches to discipline. When parents have very different responses to their children, attempts to discipline them are often followed by an adult brouhaha and, believe it or not, adult arguments about how to discipline their children will keep the children arguing more.



I'm sure you want to know how to improve your family situation. There are techniques you and your husband can use for decreasing the conflict between your children. Begin with a decision to stay on the same page with your husband. Even if you disagree with his approach at the time of the discipline, you should support him and request that he do the same for you. You should talk about your differences and resolve to compromise in the future, but be sure not to talk about those differences within your daughters' earshot. Here some more tips to encourage peace among your daughters:

1. Give your older daughter a few privileges and responsibilities that your younger daughter may not have at this time. For example, let your older daughter stay up later, permit her to go places with her friends more, and expect her to help with more home responsibilities. Point out that freedoms and responsibilities fit with her maturity.



2. Be sure to have private talks with your older daughter every day. Your younger daughter will enjoy her own private talks, but she probably isn't as needy for them as the older one.

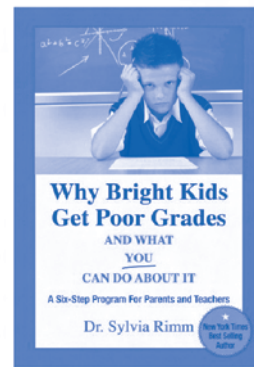
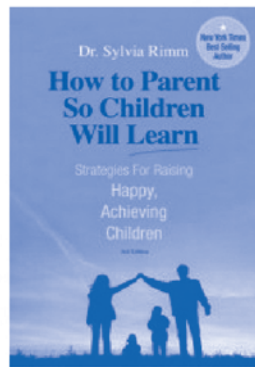
3. Do one-on-one activities with each child once a week. Your husband can also do that with the other girl at the same time. Get started doing these soon because if you don't, you'll soon find your teenager uninterested and unavailable.
4. Encourage the girls to plan collaborative secret surprises for their dad, a grandparent, a cousin, or a neighbor. Secrecy encourages children to feel closer to each other, and secrecy for planning something positive is more effective for bonding children than negative secrets about someone.
5. Ask your older daughter to teach your younger daughter a skill like cooking, sewing, drawing, ice skating or another sport. It will give your older daughter some important status, and your younger daughter will love learning the skill.

6. When the girls are assigned chores, pair one adult with one child rather than pairing them together. If they're paired together, they'll compete, and one will become the worker while the other takes the role of the shirker, thus discouraging the second one from taking responsibilities.



7. When you're not sure who started the ruckus, don't ask. Simply separate the girls for half an hour for the peace and quiet of the household. They'll soon be begging to play together and will realize they must solve their problems or they'll be separated again.

## - For A Job Well Done -



2008 iParenting Media Award for *How to Parent So Children Will Learn* (3<sup>rd</sup> Ed.).

National Best Books 2008 Award by USA Book News in the category of Parenting/Family for *How to Parent So Children Will Learn* (3<sup>rd</sup> Ed.).

National Best Books 2008 Award by USA Book News in the category of Education/Academic for *Why Bright Kids Get Poor Grades* (3<sup>rd</sup> Ed.).