



Empowering Parents Series

Part I- The Great Competition: Mom and Dad versus The Children!

I cannot tell you how many times I meet with parents who are struggling with the management of their children. Whether young, middle, or teen-aged, it seems as if in today's family the child has more authority and power in the daily life of the family than the parents do. There are a number of factors which contribute to this phenomenon. One is the ongoing development of technology and communications. Kids are connected in a way their parents were/are not and with connection comes empowerment. Secondly, with both parents working, the kids are given more authority at younger ages to care for themselves. A third and common reason is that parents assume that children have what they need academically, socially, spiritually, and psychologically and thus do not provide adequately for their children's needs in these areas. A fourth reason is that parents lose scope of their roles as parents and become disengaged to their responsibilities to age 18 and beyond. Additionally, it appears that in the competitive struggle for authority that the children are winning!

In the 21st century it is more difficult to be an engaged, intentional, role defined parent than in just about any other time in history. There are more competitions to children today than in the past. Technology and communications have brought the world to the very fingertips of your children. Cell phones, text-messaging, email, online video gaming, MySpace, Face Book, YouTube, and chatrooms have replaced the CB and Ham radios that once kept us connected just a few short years ago. Communication is more intense, personal, and intimate that it has ever been and at the same time it is also vulgar, rude, shallow, and fantastical – it has lost meaning and purpose in the midst of a society that craves relationship.

As parents, you are well aware that there is no manual or book that spells out in detail the how-to's of good parenting. The Bible does properly inform us but it, too, is not a step by step manual. Our only models were our parents (if they were good parents) and perhaps those we watched around us in our families. It is difficult to be a really good parent today. You need more support, more encouragement, and more resources in order to do your calling with efficacy, provision, and joy. It is supposed to be fun and it is supposed to be fulfilling and yet many parents just want to either upgrade their children to version 2.0 or quit. Unfortunately, many do just that. Divorces are at an all time high, some due in part because parents let their children's needs overtake the needs of the marital relationship.



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Part II - Where Does all the Time Go?

Yeah, where does all the time go when you think about raising your child/ children. I bet for some of you it seems like it was just yesterday that they were toddlers and now they are teenagers growing up so fast. Where did the time go?

Time is a concept that your children (in their teenage years and beyond) totally perceive differently than you and your spouse. Remember when you could say that bedtime was at 8pm or homework has to be completed before dinner? Those days are long gone. For the teenager, time is on and in THEIR hands or so they perceive. Starting somewhere around age 14 (if not before), your teenager begins this “rite of passage” into independence. You, as the parent, are the perceived enemy/adversary to their freedom and time. As a therapist, I hear it all the time. A common phrase I hear is something like this “But, Dr. Trey, Bobby’s parents don’t make him come in at 8pm. He gets to stay out until 10pm. My parents are so mean and strict!”

Though your children honestly think they have a grip on the full understanding of time, in reality we know differently - they DO NOT. They only perceive one thing in their world for the most part and that is him/herself. They are the center of their world and most anything that interferes with that is *perceived* as an adversary, including the well intentioned parent.

What I am saying is that your responsibility as a Parent is to help your children understand the importance of time management and time utilization. School and socializing is their job until age 18 and they must learn to figure out how to use time in the best way possible. So, though you may have pressure on you from hearing about “Bobby’s parents being so lax,” don’t give in. Keep your child structured. Keep the rules in play. Keep the learning active. Stay the course with curfews and time management. Though there are opportunities for flexibility as the positive outcomes of good time management are rewarded, do not abandon your children to their own recognizance. They simply cannot handle it on their own as well as you think they can.

Empower yourselves and empower your children by keeping quality management rules and structure in place only until your child at age 18 proves him/herself worthy of handling independence. As your children learn to manage little things, maybe they will be able to handle greater things as they grow!

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Part III - Parents who indulge too much

In a recent continuing education offering for us therapists sponsored by Cross Country Education, I opened the pamphlet to read the following words describing the upcoming conference entitled: Overindulged Children and Conduct Disorder Treating overindulgent families. *“Overindulgence of children has become a serious issue leading children and teens to conduct disorder symptoms. Overindulged children are creating complex community problems, complications for educators and are clogging our legal system. Bright and loving parents, with intense cognitive distortions, confuse love with overindulgence. Their overindulgences stop them from mentoring their children, leading children to develop what Dr, James Fogarty, EdD(a licensed clinical psychologist) has termed the “lord of the flies” syndrome – a life without boundaries, balance, and conscience. The complications of overindulging children include symptoms of conduct disorder, acute self-centeredness, intense detachment leading to anger and resentment fueling misbehavior, excessive dependency, “its-all-about-me” entitlement, manipulation, loss of self-esteem, missing social skills and impulsiveness.”*

Spartanburg has a problem with parental overindulgence with their children. Maybe you as the parent are doing it out of guilt or shame for how you grew up, vowing to provide for how you were not. Perhaps, you work so much and are not as emotionally involved in the lives of your children so you pacify them with anything they want and more. Putting your children at emotional risk with overindulgence creates more problems that they cannot handle. And so as parent, you wrongfully confuse love with giving them whatever they want. That is not love. It is indulgence whereby your child learns patterns they can manipulate. When off to college, these overindulged children struggle to manage a life and lifestyle that doesn't work like it did back at home.

In this Empowering Parenting Series, my goal is to educate and support parents to take back control of the ordering of the family way of life up until your child reaches 18 and goes off to college. That may mean appearing “mean” or being harshly judged as not being as good as “Billy's” parents. Build systems in the mentoring of your children whereby they actually earn various levels of increase. When they get out of college they will need to know how to earn a living through hard work.

Be intentional in what you display and teach your children. Let them learn authority, respect, and how to handle money, their car, and even the things they buy with their “own” money. Let them



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learn that they cannot nor will not have everything that they want. Set limits for them so they can learn to appreciate what they do have.

Part IV - Renew Your Marriage

At the beginning of each new year we make those useless resolutions to change some aspect of ourselves for “the better.” While there is much value in stopping smoking and even great value in losing 20 lbs of that overweight body mass, I would like to suggest something that is even MORE valuable than those - your marriage. A new year is a great time to refocus your energy and attention onto God’s gift to you -your spouse. If you have no idea of where to begin, may I suggest a marriage renewal seminar or communication course networked through your local congregation.

Another great place to start is for both spouses to buy the book “The Five Love Languages” and read the book, take the test, and determine your love language. This could very well help you in renewing your marriage.

If you want to be the most empowered you can be as parents, then strengthen the marriage relationship with your spouse. Only when you are able to express your love, appreciation, respect, and honor to your spouse can your children learn to understand those concepts for their own selves. Where are your children learning about love, boys, girls, respect, listening, and honor?

Should you need any assistance to begin the renewal journey, I would be more than happy to help. Start with reevaluating your communication systems. Once that is assessed, then move into how you are both respecting/valuing the other in the marriage with your time, your money, and the responsibilities of the family. If you need some starting places, feel free to check out my website for **The Little Blue Book Series of Secrets to a Healthy Marriage** found in the article section of this website.



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Part V - Privileged Communication

Renewal of relationships is important because it is a way to value those relationships. Think through those who are your friends. Take a moment to tell them how special they are to you and how you appreciate their part in your life.

Telling those we love how important they are to us is privileged communication. In legal terms, privileged communications are conversations that are protected in trust when one sees a counselor or clergy, in that signed release is required before such information can be made public. The communication is considered privileged or special because the conditions surrounding the conversation, its content, and the manner in which it is shared are private and held in that privacy much like our money is held in a secure bank vault.

I was thinking about this idea of privileged communication. I deal with it every day in my work. But I was thinking about how conversations with our spouses are also special and privileged. Without the sense of security and privacy enabled by the confidences of our spouse, our own sense of vulnerability could be found in jeopardy. What makes talking to a counselor so special? The strong and secure sense of confidence and confidentiality. Secrets can be shared where they wouldn't be shared otherwise. What is so special about talking to a minister or clergy? There is something powerful to be said about being honest, vulnerable, open, real, and free about our relationship with God and the struggles we encounter in everyday life living by faith.

Our relationships and our marriages are psychological, spiritual, and social opportunities of privileged communications. There is even a bible study group called "Call to Discipleship" where the small groups enter into strict confidentiality with one another so that openness, honesty, and a real sense of vulnerability can be shared with one another. Isn't this a benefit of our marriage as well?

It is an honor and act of respect to your spouse in marriage when you share with them in confidence. Opening up the secret, vulnerable, and private areas of our heart and mind shows to our spouse that we consider them worthy of privileged communications. This kind of trust builds a marriage and empowers each spouse. It is trust in its most basic form.

May this year be a year of more privileged communications with your spouse as you are empowered and strengthened in your marriage and family to the glory of God.

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Part VI – Taking Care of Yourself!

Though I am not a parent, I have tried each month to share some insight, learning, teaching, or idea to help parents address the elements of life in their world with this Empowering Parents series. Whether it is addressing your children, your marriage, communication issues, or just the stressors of life itself, the ongoing needs asked of you as parents is unending. So this month I would like to offer something a little different that may help right your world and equip you to continue to be an effective parent.

We are always on the go and on the do. Life demands that from us. Life demands and we give. We give to our children, our friends, our family, our church, our work. Always going and always doing. And yet, we have to stop at times to rest and to receive, to take in from the Lord in worship and prayer, to still our minds and still our bodies in physical rest. But with the schedules we keep, we don't have much time for receiving. Receiving takes time and effort and honestly we just are not very good at it. It's easier to give, it's more convenient to give.

So I would like to **strongly** recommend something that you can receive that feels good, is good for you, and, should you give it 30 minutes to 1 hour of your time, gives you immediate feedback towards better health. That is **massage therapy**. Under the care of a licensed massage therapist, massage is a gift for the self. Regardless of the type of massage you request (deep tissue, Swedish, sports, rehabilitation) or the particular areas that you may focus on (full body, legs, back, neck, etc) getting a massage is a way to experience a type of receiving that few other experiences offer. You lie down on a table and you put your face down in a special holder and you do not talk. You lie there and let someone minister to you, massaging the pains, tensions, and hurts away.

Massage feels good. It improves circulation. It helps to mend the pains and hurts of the areas of our bodies that we strain. I so believe in massage therapy for my personal well being that I have gone on average once every 3-4 weeks since 1999. Some consider massage therapy a privileged benefit but I consider it a necessity. It is as necessary as going to the chiropractor for my neck/back adjustments, to my family physician for general healthcare, to my counselor for my emotional pressures, and even to my oncologist for ongoing cancer treatment.

There are many state/national licensed massage therapists here in town or in your town. Perhaps you already have a massage therapist that you like. I have two persons that I have had personal experience with that I would highly recommend. One takes insurance and the other does not. The



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first is Katie Marvin, with Dr. Verticchio's Chiropractic on East Main St. For those with medical insurance, this is one option to consider. You can contact Katie Marvin by calling 864-948-0035. The other licensed massage therapist is Tammy Gilbert of Upstate Muscular Therapy. You can contact Tammy Gilbert at 864-621-9846. Both Tammy and Katie are very professional and highly trained.

Take time to take care of yourself. Give yourself and your spouse the gift of massage on a regular basis and see if it doesn't help make life a little bit easier to maintain.

Grace and Peace,

Dr. Trey Kuhne