

JAN 2003 EMAIL TEXT

From: Jskoh Softhome
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Subject: GFI Singapore - 1st mailer 2003

Hi everyone

You are receiving this because you either have attended / conducted a class like Preparation for Parenting or Growing Kids God's Way or something related. You may also have just indicated your interest to be with a group of parents who are raising morally upright children amidst the competitive nature in Singapore. Remember the website: www.gfi-singapore.org.

Welcome all to 2003. To begin with, most of you know of classes starting 9 Jan at Simei (GKGW - for parents with children aged 3 to 12) and one for parents with teenagers or children who are about to be teenagers, starting end of January / February at Tampines B737. Do drop me a note should you have any queries/thoughts. Do feel free to circulate this email too.

Thought of beginning this year with a regular note to all in the list just to keep in touch - like once a month and at the same time provide reviews of principles / concepts for all of us while sharing parts my family's journey in marriage and parenting. To start with, let's review two items:

1. A couple's relationship as the key to family health and
2. Parenting Styles

One of the key principles in all of the teachings is that the family's stability and strength remain with the relationship between the couple (and with God of course) - children are welcomed additions to the family. On this note, are we making time to be with our spouses to just see how things are going on a daily basis (alone and not interrupted by children even though they are around, but they are playing on their own). Are we making efforts to make our spouses feel loved? This is usually a struggle for men - we usually have the mentality that if all's well, don't touch it! So you will have the wife handling the children or doing housework and the husbands glued to the TV or a newspaper or sleeping on the couch - familiar?

Slowly but surely relationships become stale as a result and things are not as "exciting" anymore. I confess as a husband that through my 13 years of marriage, that has happened to me and I need to make a deliberate effort to want to find out more about my wife to renew 'interest' in her and with her. If not, I will be very selfish in my behavior. I will start to be critical and complain about everything - even though my wife is making her best efforts in ensuring that everything is working well at home. I am not there yet certainly but am a little more aware after going through GKGW. Point is, it is not so much our knowledge but a constant reminding and living out of the right principles in a community on a daily basis that make any marriage/parenting a success. So long as we remain 'other' centred, caring for others, including our spouses, we will not take them for granted.

Parenting styles is another concept that is well documented these days. I have included an article for our reading pleasure. But after reading it, you should let your spouse assess you as to what style you have - many times we are blind ourselves. We think we are OK but in fact we are not. Or we think we are one style and our spouse thinks otherwise - differences in parenting styles in dads and mums will potentially be an issue - thus the importance of the couple's relationship! Usually trouble starts this way: one parent will be lenient and one will be strict and the child ends up always approaching the lenient parent and the parents always quarrel because they simply cannot agree or one spouse simply give up 'interfering', losing interest and that's where marriage problem begins. That is why the first item is of utmost importance. If agreements can be reached, the family will be in harmony and as always, the Word of God will be the reference point to resolve any differences. In Singapore, we tend to see indulging parents giving many material things to their children so that they can be encouraged academically. Doing this in place of proper discipline and training (not punishment - want to know the difference, review or attend the course) and the results is disobedient and misbehaved children in schools and at home. Limits need to be set by both parents and adhere to. Alright, enough for this

round. If there are any disagreements/thoughts/questions, please respond to this I will try and clarify and that's how we all learn and grow, by interacting. God bless your year ahead!

Jeremy
on behalf of my family and families in Singapore!

PARENTING STYLES

<http://www.crosswalk.com/family/parenting/kids/794834.html>

Turning Your Natural Parenting Style into a Blessing
Dr. Greg Smalley

As parents, we are continually reminded of the treasure that God has placed in our lives. Parenting is the highest privilege or occupation a person can have. To be the guardian of another life from conception to adulthood--what a high and exalted position. However, it also carries with it some awesome responsibilities.

One such responsibility is found in Proverbs 22:6 "Train up a child in the way he should go, even when he is old he will not depart from it."

Unfortunately, many well meaning Christian parents have misinterpreted this verse. Instead of discovering the God-given bent of each child and adapting his training accordingly, many parents have attempted to force the child into a particular mold.

It would be like taking a branch of a towering oak tree and trying to force the individual branches to grow in a particular direction. If you don't take into account the branch's unique bent, it will break off or stunt its growth. Just like the tree branch, children have been uniquely created by God with their own natural bent. As parents, if we attempt to force the child into bending the way we want--then the result can be tragic.

As loving parents, how do we adapt our parenting "to the way they should go," without breaking the branches of our child's natural bent? The secret is found by first looking at the oak tree. This happened to my (Greg's) family while we were camping in northern California. One day, while we were driving, the family was started to get a little irritable. Quickly, we took a family vote and decided to stop and stretch our legs. Up the road a few miles, we found a beautiful river that had a special surprise.

As my brother and I were exploring the river, we discovered a natural waterslide. Over the years, moss had formed over the rocks, making the river bottom very slippery. In one section of the river, the water had carved out a nature slide. The slide went for about twenty yards. However, there was one minor problem. As you went down the slide, unless you landed into a small pool, you would pick up speed and eventually go over a waterfall.

We walked up the river bank and hesitantly tested the slide. It worked perfectly! Over the course of several practice runs we determined that we could slide about ten yards and still make it into the landing pool.

My brother and I were having a relaxing time until my father found us. As he watched what we were doing, he determined that it would make a great picture. As an otter, I definitely wanted to have my picture taken going down the water-slide. Getting ready to take the picture, my dad talked me into starting several yards further than we had done before. Looking at the steep slide, I realized that I would never be able to stop in the landing pool. Then my dad said something that would eventually cause me a great deal of pain. "Trust me. You'll do fine. If you don't hit the pool, I'll stop you!!" As my dad got into position to take the picture, I pushed off and went flying down--perfectly situated to reach the landing pool. Suddenly, without a second's notice, I hit a bump and went off course. Instantly, I flew past the pool. I nearly crashed into my father--who was still trying to take my picture--and headed for the waterfall.

Right before I went over, I was able to push off so that I might miss the big rocks. Unfortunately, the pushing action caused me to land flat on my back in the pool below. If there had been judges, I'm sure that I would have earned a perfect "10" for my back-flop.

My first thought when I hit the water was my father's words, "Trust me...I'll stop you!!" As a result of this trial, I instantly became very angry. When he got to me, I began to yell and scream at him. Without realizing the extent of my pain and anger, he smiled and said, "In all fairness, I wasn't totally

wrong when I said that you'd make it to the pool. You did land in a pool--it just wasn't the one we'd counted on!"

My dad quickly stopped laughing when my mother came running down the trail. The scene was like watching a mother bear protecting her young. After a couple of days--and the feeling returned to my back--I was able to forgive my father. As a family, the experience actually brought us closer together. We even laughed about it when we pulled into the next town and saw a sign which read: GIANT WATER SLIDE...FUN AND SAFE FOR THE WHOLE FAMILY!

As we examine each type of parent, it is important not only to examine the kind of parents we would like to be, but also to evaluate our lives in light of how we were parented.

1. The Authoritarian Parent: the person who runs along the shore screaming out commands for the woman in the water. This type of person thinks that he has the best plan for saving the girl. He gets angry and frustrated each time the woman is unable to follow his command. "Are you deaf. Do you want to die!" he screams at her. "Why won't you do what I say?" Each time the woman swallows water as she gasps for air, her thought is "Why won't this person stop yelling at me and jump into the water to save us?"

Strengths:

takes charge

action-oriented

enjoys challenges

initiates

takes shortcuts

self-confident

communication is usually direct. Child does not have to guess.

makes decisions based on very few facts

prefers to be in control

socially is blunt

desires an environment that has challenging activities

judges the child by results

greatest fear is being taken advantage of

greatest need is for personal attention, direct answers, step-by-step approach, enjoys change

Like the person running along side the bank yelling at the girls, this type of parent seldom offers warm, caring support and very few explanations are given for their rigid rules. As a result of their very high standards and expectations, they tend to produce the most negative qualities in children. They tend to be unbending and demand that their children stay away from certain activities because of their strong convictions. But because the children do not know the reasons why these activities are wrong, they may secretly participate in them.

Story: The Texas millionaire who offers anyone a million dollars or his daughter's hand in marriage if he will swim across a pool filled with piranhas. All of a sudden, they hear a splash and someone goes flying across the pool, and everyone starts to cheer. The person makes it, and the millionaire asks him what he wants, and the person says, "Neither, I just want the name of the person who pushed me in!!!"

A group of psychologists and psychiatrists studied 875 third graders in rural Columbia County, New York, from 1960 to 1981 and made several conclusions concerning "commanding" parents. They found that high aggression in younger children is caused by the actions of overly dominant parents. This high aggression can lead to major violence and usually lasts a lifetime. The study also showed that harsh punishment, like washing out children's mouths with soap, coupled with rejection can lead to aggressive behavior.

These are some possible reactions by children who have commanding parents:

- They rank lowest in self-respect. They have little ability to conform to rules or authority.
- The rigid harshness of the parent breaks the spirit of the child and results in resistance, "claming up," or rebellion.
- The child usually does not want anything to do with his parents' rules or values. He tends to reject the ideals of his parents.

- The child may be attracted to other children who rebel against their parents and the general rules of society. They may use drugs and participate in other illegal activities. The child may be loud and demanding of his rights. In a classroom setting, he may cause disruption in order to gain attention from others.

2. The Easy-Going Parent: "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Matthew 6:21). Imagine the anger and disbelief that the woman must have felt as she desperately screamed for help, only to find three people on the shore videotaping her struggle. Instead of wading out into the water to offer a life-line, these people neglected the woman by focusing on their own needs. Perhaps the videotapers saw images of their camera footage on the nightly news. Perhaps they might even be able to sell the videotape to a tabloid show or even write a book on the experience.

Like the people standing on the bank, "video camera" parents treat their children in a similar fashion. They tend to lack both loving support and control over their children. They show an uncaring or immature attitude, lashing out at a child when pushed or irritated. These parents tend to isolate themselves from their children by excessive use of baby-sitters and to indulge in their own selfish activities. Children are viewed as a bother, "to be seen and not heard."

Dr. Armand Nicholi, psychiatric professor at Harvard Medical School, helps us to understand that neglectful parents are not only absent when they are away from home. They rob their children of one of the most important factors in their lives--emotional accessibility. When they are home, they usually are not listening or paying attention to their children.

There are four main reasons why our children are being neglected today, according to Dr. Nidoli:

- a. The high divorce rate. Statistics show that there are more than thirteen million children in single parent homes. The divorce rate has been upwardly spiraling since the early 1960s and has increased 700 percent since the beginning of this century. Most divorces require single parents to work outside the home, allowing less time for the emotional development of their children. It's very difficult for single parents to provide their children with the necessary time each day for listening and emotional accessibility. However, it's not impossible.

- b. The increase of mothers in the workforce. More than 50 percent of all mothers in the United States are working. This also greatly increased in the 1960s, with a strong emphasis being put forth that women were unfulfilled in their homes. The economic pressures of the times also forced many women to seek jobs. By joining the work force, mothers are often less accessible to their children.

The suicide rate among children ages ten to fourteen has tripled in the last ten years. Dr. Nicholi says this can be directly related to changes in the American home. One study he quoted shows that American parents spend less time with their children than parents in any other nation except England. The study quoted one Russian father who said he would not even think of spending less than two hours daily with his children. In contrast, a study at Boston University found that the average father in the United States spends about thirty-seven seconds a day with his children.

- c. Excessive television and video game viewing. This also increased greatly in the sixties and now more than 90 percent of American homes have at least one television. The problem with television is that even though people are physically together in a room, there is very little meaningful and emotional interaction. As parents neglect their children by watching television or through other activities, the children experience an emotional loss similar to that of losing a parent through death. They often feel guilty when their parents are not with them. Some even believe the reason is because they are bad, and if only they were better, their parents would spend more time with them. Obviously, this awareness lowers a child's sense of worth.

- d. An increasingly mobile society. More than 50 percent of Americans change addresses every five years. This mobility robs children of their parents' time as well as the emotional strength and accessibility they have from friends and relatives in their former home. Yet even if we have to move our families, we can still provide emotional accessibility to our children. This can be done by setting aside time every day to spend with each of our children or together as a family. Dr. Nicholi stressed that this time should be used to counteract the effects of our mobile society.

To illustrate how prevalent the problem of emotional accessibility is, take a short break and try spending just five minutes concentrating on your family's welfare and how you can help meet each

child's emotional needs. You may find it very difficult because we're not used to doing this in our culture.

Here are some possible effects on children of neglectful parents:

- The harshness and neglect tend to wound the spirit of a child, resulting in rebellion.
- The neglect teaches the child that he is not worth spending time with.
- The child develops insecurity because his parents are never predictable.
- The child may not develop a healthy self-respect because he is not respected and has not learned to control himself.
- Broken promises break the spirit of the child and lower his self-worth.
- The child tends to do poorly in school because he has little motivation.

Did you know that children spell love differently than adults do? Most children spell love with a T, an I, a M, and an E. That's right. TIME is how kids spell love. We are not saying that family time is a cure-all for all family problems, or that the family will be free of hassles if they spend a lot of time together. We have problems in our families, as we're sure you do in yours. Being together as a family, however, creates a climate of closeness that makes family members think, "We will work this out because we care. We are a family." This closeness lasts even after the children are grown and the family is no longer physically together. Remember that now is the time to live tomorrow's memories. Tomorrow is too late!

3. The Permissive Parent: Although the woman who jumped into the raging water knew what she was doing, perhaps she might have been able to run down the river and pick an appropriate spot to rescue the girl.

Permissive parents tend to be warm, supporting people, but weak in establishing and enforcing rules and limits for their children. This was the type of parents that I had. My mother and father were very warm and loving and accepting of me. But as far as I can remember, there were no rigid rules in our home. They usually gave in to my demands. Even when I was in trouble, they would not spank or discipline me. My mother said she never spanked because her first child died of blood poisoning and she had spanked her two weeks before she died. She made my father promise to never spank any one of their five remaining children.

Although they meant well, that leniency affected me negatively. My parents left all decisions concerning how I would spend my spare time up to me. In fact I didn't start formally dating until . . . the third grade! This caused a number of problems in my life. Once my father caught me in a serious infraction as a young boy. From his firm voice I knew that I was in trouble. But later, he said he would let me off without punishing me if I promised not to do it again. I actually told him that I needed a spanking but he wouldn't do it. There was something in me that wanted to be corrected.

I found the same permissiveness in school. Once a teacher caught me passing notes in the third grade after warning me of the consequences if I didn't stop. She sent me to the principal. He talked to me for awhile, told me I needed to shape up, then said that he was going to spank me. I thought he really meant business, but about fifteen minutes later, he said he was going to give me another chance if I promised not to pass notes again. Of course, I promised the world, but inwardly I can remember being disappointed that he didn't follow through.

One of the major reasons why some parents are too permissive is an inner fear that they may damage their children if they are too strict. That fear of confronting their children may actually produce the very things they fear.

On the positive side, permissive parents are strong in the area of support. I am very grateful that my parents showed me warmth and love. They were very giving, very understanding, very comforting. Effective parents realize that a certain degree of permissiveness is healthy. That means accepting that kids will be kids, that a clean shirt will not stay clean for long, that children will run instead of walk, and that a tree is for climbing and a mirror for making faces. It means accepting that children have the right to childlike feelings and dreams. That kind of permissiveness gives a child confidence and an increasing capacity to express his thoughts and feelings.

Over-permissiveness, on the other hand, allows for undesirable acts such as beating up other children, marking on buildings, and breaking objects.

These are possible reactions by children who have permissive parents:

- A child senses that he is in the driver's seat and can play the parent accordingly.
- A child develops a feeling of insecurity, like leaning against a wall that appears to be firm, but falls over.
- A child may have little self-respect because he has not learned to control himself and master certain personal disciplines.
- A child learns that because standards are not firm, he can manipulate around the rules.

4. The Perfectionistic Parent

The young boy who was outside the service looking at the pictures of the past senior pastors when the new pastor walks up to him and tells him that these are the pictures of the men who have died in the service of the Lord. Young boy, "Was that the 9 o'clock or the 11 o'clock service?"

The Secret of Becoming a "Balanced" Parent

Balanced parents usually have clearly defined rules, limits, and standards for living. They take time to train their children to understand these limits-like why we don't carve love notes on the neighbor's tree-and give clear warnings when a child has transgressed an established limit. But they also give support by expressing physical affection and spending personal time listening to each child. They are flexible, willing to listen to all the facts if a limit has been violated.

The balanced parent is a healthy mixture of firmness with clearly defined rules like, "You cannot intentionally harm our furniture or anyone else's," but this firmness is combined with loving attitudes and actions.

Typical characteristics of children who have loving and firm parents:

- The warm support and clearly defined limits tend to build self-respect within the child.
- A child is more content when he has learned to control himself.
- His world is more secure when he realizes that there are limits which are unbending, and he understands why--the underlying principles.
- Because the spirit of a child is not closed, the lines of communication are open with parents. There is less chance of the "rebellious teen years."
- The children from loving and firm parents ranked highest in: (a) self-respect, (b) capacity to conform to authorities at school, church, etc., (c) greater interest in their parents' faith in God, and (d) greater tendency not to join a rebellious group.

The Two Most Important Factors In Raising Children

The purpose for understanding your natural parenting bent is so that it can help you balance the hard and soft sides of love. It is extremely important to be balanced in the way we love our family--especially our children. Providing only one side of love can cause real problems in a family. In relating to your family, are you shifted to one extreme or the other? Are you camped out in the far reaches of a hard ide life, easily issuing commands and criticism but not given to aring actions? Is it easy for you to be hard on problems but easy to be hard on your children as well? Or do you rarely move beyond an unhealthy soft ide, unwilling to confront someone or take the lead? Do you hesitate to act, even when you know you should be firm and others need you to be strong? Is your softness with your children pushed so far that you're soft on the problems facing you and your family--even serious problems? Respond to the following question according to how you currently and consistently act toward your children, not according to how you wish you would or occasionally do act. We also highly encourage that you have your wife or children rate you on the same scale based on how they see you. Note the difference (if any) of perception that exists.

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Hard Balance Soft
Side Side

Keep in mind that regardless of where you score today, you can move toward a healthy balance. The key to becoming balanced is learning that each one of us has a natural parenting bent. This is a God-given parenting style that we use every day in a multitude of situations. At different times and for different reasons, we all utilize many different parent skills. But we still seem to function from one or two different styles. The reason it is so important to learn our natural tendencies is to see what happens when our natural strengths get pushed out of balance, and the possible effects upon our children.

As Christain parents, trying to fulfill our responsibilities can be very difficult. In order to help in this process, we have found that learning about our parenting style can help to understand the two most

important factors in raising children. As we take a look at ourselves--the hands that rock the cradle--we can learn how to give our children these two extremely important things.

1. Establishing clearly defined and understood rules in the home, limits that the children know they cannot violate without some consequence.

2. A commitment to love each child in a warm, affectionate, and supportive way.

The supportive and firm parent reflects the very specific biblical instruction for parenting. It stresses two important ways that parents must take care of their children. First, they must discipline their children, which partly means setting clearly defined limits in the home. Second, they must follow the greatest instruction in Scripture--to love one another. By doing these two things, you will be helping your child from departing from your training when he is older.