

Dr. Dobson Answers Your Questions

Dr. James Dobson



Q: My sister's daughter went off to college at 18 and immediately went a little crazy. She had always been a good kid, but when she was on her own, she drank like a lush, was sexually promiscuous and flunked three of her classes. My daughter is only 12, but I don't want her to make the same mistakes when she is beyond our grasp. How can I get her ready to handle freedom and independence?

A: Well, you may already be 12 years late in beginning to prepare your daughter for that moment of release. The key is to transfer freedom and responsibility to her little by little from early childhood, so she won't need your supervision when she is beyond it. To move suddenly from tight control to utter liberty is an invitation to disaster.

I learned this principle from my own mother, who made a calculated effort to teach me independence and responsibility. After laying a foundation during the

younger years, she gave me a "final examination" when I was 17 years old. Mom and Dad went on a two-week trip and left me at home with the family car and permission to have my buddies stay at the house. Wow! Fourteen slumber parties in a row! I couldn't believe it. We could have torn the place apart — but we didn't. We behaved rather responsibly.

I always wondered why my mother took such a risk, and after I was grown I asked her about it. She just smiled and said, "I knew in one year you would be leaving for college, where you would have complete freedom with no one watching over you. I wanted to expose you to that independence while you were still under my influence."

I suggest that you let your daughter test the waters of freedom occasionally as she's growing up, rather than tossing her into the big wide ocean all at once. It takes wisdom and tact to pull that off, but it can be done. If you do the job properly, the time of release in six or seven years will be a gentle transition rather than a cataclysmic event.

Q: If you had to choose between a very authoritarian style of parenting vs. one that is permissive and lax, which would you pre-

fer? Which is healthier for kids?

A: Both extremes leave their characteristic scars on children, and I would be hard-pressed to say which is more damaging. At the oppressive end of the continuum, a child suffers the humiliation of total domination. The atmosphere is icy and rigid, and he lives in constant fear. He is unable to make his own decisions, and his personality is squelched beneath the hobnailed boot of parental authority. Lasting characteristics of dependency, deep, abiding anger and serious adolescent rebellion often result from this domination.

But the opposite extreme is also damaging to kids. In the absence of adult leadership, the child is her own master from her earliest babyhood. She thinks the world revolves around her heady empire, and often has utter contempt and disrespect for those closest to her. Anarchy and chaos reign in her home. Her mother is often the most frazzled and frustrated woman on her block. It would be worth the hardship and embarrassment the mother endures if her passivity produced healthy, secure children. It typically does not.

The healthiest approach to child-rearing is found in the safety of the middle ground between disciplinary extremes. I attempted

to illustrate that reasonable parenting style on the cover of my first book, "Dare to Discipline," which included a little diagram of a teeter-totter in balance, with "love" on one end and "control" on the other.

Children tend to thrive best in an environment where these two ingredients, love and control, are present in balanced proportions. When the scale tips in either direction, problems usually begin to develop at home. Unfortunately, parenting styles in a culture tend to sweep back and forth like a pendulum from one extreme to the other.

Send your questions to Dr. Dobson, c/o Focus on the Family, P.O. Box 444, Colorado Springs, Colo. 80903. These questions and answers are excerpted from books authored by Dr. James Dobson and published by Tyndale House Publishers. Dr. Dobson is the president of Focus on the Family, a nonprofit organization dedicated to the preservation of the home.

Dr. Dobson's column in The Valley News is sponsored in part by The Gospel Book Center, 407 E. Broadway, Fulton, which has a Focus on the Family Resource Center featuring materials highlighted on the Focus on the Family radio program, heard locally at 9:30 a.m. and 6:30 p.m. on WMHR-FM, 102.9.

Bodley Bulletins

Rachel Kestner

March is almost upon us, which gives anyone planning April Fool's jokes only a month to prepare. And believe me good pranks take time. Technology teacher Mr. O'Neil is a known prankster at our school. I asked him to tell me about his antics over his 27 years of teaching at GRB. With a mischievous smile he said, "Let me think of some I can tell you." One of my favorites is the time Mr. O'Neil had his classes blow up balloons and stuff them into Mrs. Stewart's (the English teacher) car. She had to drive home with balloons everywhere. Mrs. Trowbridge and Mr. Dodge have been victims of Mr. O'Neil as well.



Mr. O'Neil teaches transport systems, manufacturing systems, automotive tech 1 and 2, and advance placement auto tech 3. The give-away that Mr. O'Neil is in a classroom is the one chalkboard in the room. His surroundings look more like a workshop or garage. Students are everywhere, doing everything. This classroom is alive with the hands-on kind of learning that Mr. O'Neil swears by. Some students are working on a beat-up, red pickup truck, some are casting, sanding, and firing light bulbs filled with resin. There are even a few girls in the class working alongside everybody else—you wouldn't even notice if it weren't for their ponytails.

Mr. O'Neil didn't take technology classes when he was in high school, but believes his department is very important in today's society and everyone should try to take some technology classes. He thanks

his guidance counselor for the recommendation that led him to college and eventually to become a teacher.

Mr. O'Neil enjoys teaching a class where students grow significantly. He has students who have gone on to become technology teachers themselves and boasts about former students of his working in race car driver Jeff Gordon's pit crew. Mr. O'Neil believes the most important part of his job is to never underestimate students.

The mid-winter break we just had may have seemed like a time to just hang out, go to the mall, catch a movie or just catch up on your sleep, but for 14 lucky students at GRB, it was the trip of a lifetime. Members of the Spanish Club and three adult chaperones boarded a bus to New Jersey at 2:30 a.m. the Saturday morning vacation began. From there they flew to Houston, Texas and then to Mexico City. The group visited the stunning pyramids of the Yucatan Peninsula, the museum of anthropology, and even the Shrine of Guadalupe. They had a chance to pick up souvenirs from Taxco silver mining, and promised to take plenty of pictures of the floating gardens. The students learned about Mexican culture by visiting churches and just traveling through the streets of the city. And of course, there are the beaches; the students couldn't wait to hit the sand and surf of the Pacific. Everyone got in late Sunday night exhausted, but with lots of stories to tell. The seven days in Mexico flew by, but the memories will last a lifetime.

GRB's "German Invasion" is here again. Fulton will become home to 15 or 20 German foreign exchange students for three weeks. Some of these students still need a place to stay. If you or someone you know can help, please contact Mrs. Dau-

phin through the junior or senior high school. These students are fluent in English, so there is no need to worry about knowing the German language to host a student.

The Academic Booster Club is sponsoring an information night for juniors and their parents Wednesday, March 25. The main focus of the night is to expose audiences to topics they will be dealing with extensively over the course of their senior year. Three speakers have been scheduled: Debbie Parker Grimshaw of Cayuga Community College will give an overview of information on two-year colleges, financial aid and the SUNY component, and Donna Chilton of Nestle will address the issues relating to entering and functioning in the modern work force, the need for soft skills, and the concept of lifelong learning. Tom Muench of LeMoyne College will speak to the general concerns of individuals who are thinking about entering four-year colleges or universities. The process of gathering the necessary materials, what workshops to attend, and what tests to take and when will all be covered. More information and an update will appear in a column closer to the date.

It started with Kevin Bacon, but now people everywhere are tuned into the concept of Six Degrees of Separation. This theory is based on the principle that everyone is somehow connected to everyone else. If you wanted to meet a famous person you could probably think of someone you know who knows someone, who works with someone, whose mailman's sister is personal trainer to the stars. A few phone calls and, boom, you're having lunch with one of the Baldwin brothers. The same thing goes for the Olympics. Tuning into CBS, the names of the Olympic athletes may not seem familiar but with a little re-

search you may be closer to the gold than you thought.

It is well known that Norway has more gold medals than any other country, and it is not a surprise that this year they walked away with several. During a conversation in my journalism class, Mr. Senecal noted that Norway had scooped up the gold in a skiing event. Nonchalantly, Norway exchange student, Henriette Toesse, answered "Oh really, that's my mom's cousin." And there it is, I'm instantly connected to the Olympics. There is Shelby Lyons from Oswego that was in the Olympic trials for figure skating and Maureen Hangac, former student of GRB, tried out for speed skating. Both expect to try again in the future. Sophomore at GRB and member of the varsity wrestling team Danielle Bennett is working to establish a female wrestling event in the year 2000 Olympics. In the next few years it looks as though we will be able to tune into the Olympics and say, "Hey, I know them!"

Mr. O'Neil is known for his pranks, which makes getting him back all the more sweeter. Someone who has risen to this mission is Mrs. Parsons. The year of Mr. O'Neil's 45th birthday she gathered teachers and faculty together to sing "Happy Birthday" as Mr. O'Neil blew out the candles on a cake in the shape of the numbers 45. As he began to cut the cake, Mr. O'Neil realized something was very wrong. This "cake" was only a piece of wood with frosting over it. "I'll get her some day, that was funny," he responded.

Mr. O'Neil specifies that the essence of a good prank is to be extremely funny without seriously offending anyone. But what you have to worry about most is after the joke. They are out there and they will get you back.

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