

# A Parenting Sampler

by

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# Say “Yes” Unless You Have A Good Reason To Say “No”

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*Your children will be more likely to say “yes” to you, “yes” to life and “yes” to God - if you learn when to say “yes” to them!*

Say “yes” unless you have a good reason to say “no.” Over and over again that simple idea proves revolutionary in the lives of mothers to whom I speak at women’s meetings and retreats.

With two boys now in college and another in high school, I recall requests too numerous to mention to which it would have been easy for me to say “no” but without good reason.

Jesus comes to give us abundant life. He is the one who says, “yes” to a kaleidoscope of positive experiences. Yet, as parents, we often put on the damper.

“No, you can’t take out the Play Doh now.”

“No, the finger paints are messy.”

“No, you can’t have anyone over tonight.”

I received a letter recently from a mother thanking me for reminding her to save her “noes” for things that matter. There will be adequate times when we need to say “no,” because we are dealing with safety or moral issues. Illness or family commitments often make

it necessary to postpone a child's wishes. We must say, "No, you cannot stay out beyond the curfew, because that would be breaking the law."

"Mother is feeding the baby now so we must wait to read the story."

"No" or "later" are also often legitimate so that a child will learn his desire may not come before the convenience of others. But not always.

A neighbor once called to tell me my children were playing in the mud. I replied gently that I knew and was watching carefully. I had seen my preschool boys wallowing gleefully in the mud in the driveway. From the living room window, I watched the five-year-old throw a pebble in the mud puddle. The three-year-old ran through it. The two-year-old lay down in it. (Dozens of mothers have told me that their little boys did exactly the same thing in exactly the same order.)

Little boys are washable. So are their clothes. Mud is exhilarating - like dabbing in finger paints, in luscious earth tones provided by our Creator. Deny them such a God-given gift for parental convenience or because of a fastidious prejudice against mud? No, let's encourage them to have fun.

From a purely practical standpoint, where else can you find such low-cost entertainment these days? Children are all the better for such freedom that hurts no one and encourages creativity. Wide boundaries for harmless activities make it less imperative for children to test our rules in general.

My 20-year-old affirmed my muddy stance when he said, "I never could identify with those kids who said, 'My mom will kill me if I get my pants dirty!'" I rejoiced that he did not grow up with a prejudice against work or play that made him dirty. I often wished I

could harness the tongues of those who thoughtlessly linked dirty clothes with the death penalty when speaking to children.

Mud, sand, water, snow - lovely gifts, marvelous toys that a child can mess with and not have to put away. What a joy to watch a one-year-old sitting on the grass on a summer day with a dish pan of water and a plastic cup or a busy 21-month-old with the garden hose helping Dad wash the car. Parents would boost their own psyches and relationships with their children by diving into snow, sand and water with childlike enthusiasm.

My philosophy of saying “yes” was put to the test 15 years ago when my family and I arrived at a lakeshore cottage for vacation. My boys were six months, two years and four years old. I had packed finger paints in anticipation of possible inside activities on rainy days. As we unpacked the piles of gear needed to set up housekeeping for a week, David, my two-year-old, spied the finger paints and asked about them. Of course he wanted to “do it now.”

My first reaction was, “No, we’re not even unpacked.:

My second thought was, “Remember, you want to be positive with the boys.”

Thirdly, I realized we were on vacation and we were not in any rush.

We had plenty of time. So we did finger paints.

True, his attention span was brief and it was messy, but we had fun. David is a fine artist today. Did that one experience turn him into an artist? No, but he is an artist and finger painting is a small part of the mosaic that made him into the man he is today.

Saying “yes” provides a teaching moment with a child that may never again present itself in quite the same way. Children afford us

many opportunities to impress our ideas and teachings upon them. If we say “no” too much, those chances will diminish as the years go by.

When a child makes a request, don’t say, “Oh, all right!” Countless parents give mixed messages to their children. They are really saying, “Yes, but you’re going to pay a price because I’m going to be crabby about it.”

That reluctant answer contributes to children having mixed feelings about their permission to enjoy life. By responding with enthusiasm (without deep sighing which parents tend to do under pressure), we encourage children to keep relating because they enjoy being with us.

As a child grows we say “yes” to calculated risks like riding tricycles and bikes and driving cars. We say “yes” to athletic endeavors and adventures with which we can trust them, because we teach them gradually to become independent adults with sound judgment.

A house full of little friends of our children will mean a house filled with teenagers later. I praise God for the times they fill the four corners of my home. I welcome them, nurture them physically and spiritually and I know what’s going on at the high school. If the friends of our little ones and our teenagers are not welcome in our homes, our own children will not want to be there either. What a joy to have a home like a youth center and have no need to go elsewhere to serve God.

“What a giant commitment!” you say. “A house full of people for 20 years”?

Yes, that’s what being a parent is all about, if we do it right. That’s what we signed up for when we took on the job. It means saying “yes” often. It means not being so busy and over-programmed that we can’t often read a storybook to them or listen to a long

rendition of a sports event. Later we will hear bigger, more important things if we take time and invest in our children when they are young.

Merging with their world is like contributing to their emotional bank accounts. They will want us around them when they're big, if we want them around us when they're little.

Think before you speak. Say "yes" unless you have a good reason to say "no". Your children will be more likely to say "yes" to life and "yes" to God when that answer truly counts.

# *Will They Be Dry In The Morning?*

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*Or*

## *How To Build Your Child's Self Esteem*

When our little boys were just out of diapers, we asked the question that parents always asked at that point in life's journey. "Will they make it through the night? Will they be dry in the morning?"

To maximize the possibility of their being dry in the morning, my husband and I would pick them up at night just before we went to sleep. We carried them gently to the bathroom so they could relieve themselves while half asleep and half awake. During this ritual, we spoke words of love to them such as, "You are a fine boy."

"I love you very much."

"I enjoy being with you."

"You bring great joy to me."

As we returned them to their warm beds to sleep, have sweet dreams and wake up dry, we said more words of encouragement and instilled in them a sense of worth and value through these simple sentences. In their semi-conscious state, they were vulnerable to suggestion. Like the prophets of old, we said words of life and love and goodness to them, words of God's love, their value, our high regard of them and our joy in knowing them.

Do not wait until children are half asleep to say these words of affirmation. When they are awake, also, look deeply into their eyes and say, "I love you."

"God loves you."

"You are a person of integrity."

"You have a sound mind."

"I trust your judgment."

These words sink into their inner selves and they know they are persons of value because big people said it. Little people believe what big people say, so say positive words to them.

One day as I roamed the aisles of a discount store I heard a mother's angry tirade. "You are in so much trouble."

"You're going to get those white slacks dirty."

"If I didn't have you I wouldn't have to wash so often."

"If I got rid of you I wouldn't have so much trouble and work."

Beneath the rack of polyester blouses sat a teeny-tiny little person with a brain like a tape recorder. A beautiful three-year-old girl was learning that she was a lot of trouble to her mom; she was a bother and other things were far more important to big people than she was. My heart broke because I knew that the messages the little girl heard would likely cause her to feel inadequate about herself in years to come. It would become hard for her to feel good about life as she doubted whether she had an important place in the hearts of her mother and other family members.

We obviously need food, clothing and shelter for growth, but nourishment for the soul is often neglected. Little people each have an emotional bank account in which their parents make investments. As we give words and gestures of affirmation we build that account like putting money in the bank. The more we invest, the more likely we can make a withdrawal. The rare times when we need to say "no" or to have a confrontation, the child can hear us and give credibility to our admonitions and beliefs, because he has heard the positive answer so often.

If the early investment in a child has been negative, when he becomes older it is not likely that he'll respond in a positive way. Many teens show little respect for parental limits if the parents gave very little investment in their emotional well being through the years.

Words and actions show that we care. We make a lifetime investment when we bring a child into the world. We share ourselves. We cut the pie in enough slices to go around to each family member.

Whether it is a school play, a football game or a mud pie - whatever our child is invested in at the moment - should be an interest of ours.

In our family counseling practice we see children and parents who are strangers to each other. I ask those parents this question, "What is your child's area of expertise?" If they do not know, it is imperative to find out. Those parents can get to know by looking and seeking. I tell them to ask him questions about the field in which he is most interested. Sounds crazy? It's not. Here are a few areas in which your child is an expert:

- What he likes best.
- Her favorite musicians.
- His school.
- Her team.
- Her friends.
- His hobby.
- The picture your child just painted.
- What was the most interesting thing that happened to him today?

Every night I ask my son Scott what was the funniest thing that happened at his school that day. I learn all kinds of interesting, hilarious things about the marvelous world that is high school.

Scott runs track right now and played football last fall. My husband Dennis video tapes all of his football games and track meets.

All high school students enjoy watching themselves “do their thing,” whether it involves a touchdown or a quarter-mile run. They love to sit and watch themselves be heroes and as we learn to share their world they know we are interested in them.

Before videotape, we made audio tapes on simple tape recorders that we took to athletic fields along with the popcorn and thermos jugs of coffee and cocoa. Not only did we record touchdowns and races, we interviewed students and parents in the stands as well. Tape recorders make it possible to capture school plays, piano recitals, graduation or any other important event. What a great way to be totally involved in the world of the people we love! We also made scrapbooks of photos and newspaper clippings for a permanent record of whole seasons of athletic events. This era of recorded history will not be lacking because of us.

In family counseling, I encourage parents to find their child’s interest and become involved.

It is never to late to start.  
Find your child’s interests.  
Become involved.

# *Natural Consequences*

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The library books.  
Gym clothes.  
Lunch money.

When a child forgets these things, parents are famous for bringing them to school. Again and again my wise husband says, “Don’t...Let him learn by natural consequences.”

“If he pays the library fine or goes hungry, he won’t forget next time.”

Ah, but mothers are caretakers, keepers of order, rememberers! However, if we continue to do these things forever, we will have a child forever. Some mothers truly wish to have a child forever and that’s what they get.

Others are shocked and come for counseling to find out what’s wrong when they have a 20-year-old lump on the couch in the family room who won’t work, go to school or be productive in any way. The Scripture says we reap what we sow and they did.

The result of always doing for a child, long after he is capable of doing for himself, is a person of adult age with a dependent childish way of living life. This person comes to believe in what we call the Magic Mommy. The Magic Mommy always puts clean underwear in the drawer and causes clean dishes to be available in the cupboards. She sometimes does homework, pays parking tickets and bails you out of any problem. She finds it is easier to do for a person than to teach him to do for himself.

Children need to become competent and independent even when it is painful for parents to watch.

“But he’ll be cold if he doesn’t wear his jacket,” is a mother’s common experience. She must suffer the pain of watching her child learn that he lives with the consequences of his behavior.

Going away for a week of camp is a great way to learn how to live with natural consequences. If Johnnie leaves his towel by the lake, the Magic Mommy can’t restore it to its proper place. Chances are, Johnnie learns the value of taking care of his towel because it’s inconvenient to be without one.

Dot Chrouser, who for years ran Honey Rock Camp with her husband Harve, tells of holding up a towel or sweatshirt at lunch during boys’ camp to find out who lost it. Hundreds of boys would stare blankly at the lost item. No one claimed those lost items because they didn’t know who owned them. The Magic Mommy packed the suitcase and the camper never bothered to look into it. The job of packing should be turned over to the camper. Hopefully, by practicing with the camp experience he will be ready to handle the college experience when it comes.

Freshman college boys commonly do not know some basic personal maintenance skills. My son, Steve, a counselor in a college freshman dorm tells of doing seminars on how to use a washer and dryer! These basic skills may be at least as important as career planning.

The more children learn about independent living the better they will be prepared for adulthood. As they see capable behavior in their parents, they are more likely to emulate it. Boys learn how to be husbands and fathers - girls learn how to be wives and mothers - by 20 years of observation. The book, *Parents Are Teachers* by Wesley Becker, reminds us that we are teachers all the time. What kind of messages are your children receiving? What kind of lessons are they learning?

Raymond, in sixth grade, didn't do his homework very well. Mom and Dad began policing the process. His performance stayed the same, but he had lots of attention from his parents in the form of a power-struggle.

By withdrawing from the controversy, the parents let Raymond learn that his behavior brought its own results. His parents made it clear that school work was his job. They believed him to be capable and would be available as resource persons - if he should ask. This puts the responsibility on the child where it belongs and it allows parents to relate in positive ways without creating unnecessary hassles.

My son, Steve, the dorm counselor, observed that two kinds of freshman boys come to college. One boy has had all his decisions made for him - when to get up, when to go to sleep, when to study, when to come in at night. He is filled with his new-found freedom when he goes away to college. He stays up all night, doesn't study and generally remains undisciplined for the first six weeks until exam time. Then, hopefully, he makes the biggest step to maturity that he has ever made. He decides for his own reasons to lead a more orderly, productive life, because he must if he wants to stay in college.

The second type of student has had a great deal of freedom given to him, in gradual amounts as he capably handled it. This student was making most of his own decisions during his senior year in high school. Now, when he goes away to college, the transition is an easy one. Experienced at taking care of his own laundry, curfew, sleeping and eating habits and study habits, he operates as a capable adult. He is able to deal with whatever life offers him.

When children are little we must give them abundant opportunity to succeed and with that must come the possibility of failure. Only then, by running the risk of winning or losing, succeeding or failing, will they develop in personal maturity and growth.

Give your child this message: "I am confident that you have the ability to make good decisions. You make good choices. Even if you make a choice that is not the best, I believe you are competent to handle the results of that also."

Knowing that his parents, the most important people in his world, believe in him and his ability to deal with life, gives a child a tool that will help equip him for capable, mature adulthood.

# *The Cub Scouts Are Coming*

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The Cub Scouts are coming, The hatches are battened down. The Kool-Aid is brimming in the glasses. The Rice-Krispies squares are cut. The sandpaper is lined up by the pine wood, soon to become derby cars. I know my Scouts have been sitting still in halls of higher learning most of the day. Now they are wiggles, shouts and spasms. I will merge with their ways today. The adult model for compliance never worked before, but today will be different.

“Okay, boys, here’s the plan. Listen carefully.” Their punching and grabbing slows down a little.

“When I give you the signal. *(They don’t know what it is yet, but they’re interested.)* I want you to make as much noise as possible. *(Is this a grownup person speaking?)* The rules are: You must clap your hands and stamp your feet. You must not touch anybody else or anything in the room. The starting signal will be when I raise my arm in the air.”

All eyes are on me, mouths are hanging open in silent disbelief. *(Can this be a den mother saying these crazy words?)*

“You must keep making the noise while my arm is up in the air and when I lower my arm you will sit down on the floor.” They twitch with excitement. Silence, amazement.

“Now,” I throw my arm in the air.

“Eeeeyow! Yea! Ya! Wow!”. They yell, they scream. They

bob up and down, stamping feet and flailing arms.

“More, more, louder, louder, I can’t *hear you.*” I yell above the din. The seconds tick off noisily and I keep my arm up calling for more noise.

:You’re not nearly loud enough!” They jump – but slower, they yell – but breathlessly.

My arm goes down and they fall at my feet, panting, motionless and cooperative. Forever ready to do their merit badges, they listened to my words of wisdom because I had merged with their world.

Ruth, with her psychologist husband, Dr. Dennis Gibson, directs Wheaton Counseling Associates in Carol Stream, Illinois. They have three adult sons and six grandchildren. A former airline flight attendant, Ruth is the author of *Chipped Dishes, Zippers and Prayer* and *The Christmas Tree Ship*. She frequently speaks at women's meetings and couples' retreats with her husband. Together they have written *The Sandwich Years*, a book about caring for your aging parents, adult children and nourishing your marriage.

*The Sandwich Years* is available for purchase and immediate electronic download at:

**<http://www.caring-for-your-aging-parents-adult-children-and-marriage.com>**

For more information on Dennis and Ruth Gibson please visit:

**<http://www.dennisgibson.com>**

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