

## Parenting: The Non-Negotiables

Presenter: Sue B. Heath  
May 2006

### INTRODUCTION

This handout will include scriptures and quotations supporting the *non-negotiables* premise, aiding parents to understand:

1. their responsibility to teach children correct principles and obedience, and BE the parent,
2. that having rules in the home that cannot be negotiated is appropriate,
3. that obedience on a smaller scale within the home will foster greater obedience to gospel principles and better use of agency in all aspects of life, and
4. the use of consequences.

*To have successful homes, values must be taught, and there must be rules, there must be standards, and there must be absolutes... We must try harder to make our homes stronger so that they will stand as sanctuaries against the unwholesome, pervasive moral dry rot around us. Harmony, happiness, peace, and love in the home can help give children the required inner strength to cope with life's challenges. --James E. Faust*

Children flourish in an environment with structure and established boundaries, where obedience to *house rules* is expected. Such it is with God's plan, where obedience to His commandments reaps the highest achievement: Godhood. Wise parents start early and set patterns and values for life when establishing rules within the home, some of which are non-negotiable, in order that children may reach their full potential.

As a young mother, I read many *how to parent* books and took classes in child development and child and adolescent psychology, gleaning from them those things which *rang true* to me, in an attempt to formulate a *parenting philosophy* that would mesh with my own personal value system and my testimony of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Good parenting does NOT come naturally. To be a good parent requires study, research, practicum, and learning from your mistakes. It also requires application consistency.

From my research came the premise that parents must actively shoulder the responsibility to set up the *boundaries* and rules of their house, that certain things SHOULD be expected of the children in contributing to that household, that there are consequences to all action and inaction. After all, a clump of clay cannot become a work of art without the artist getting his hands dirty, molding, shaping, tempering, reshaping, refining. Neither can children become all that they are meant to be and understand their divine nature and their eternal destiny without a well-planned approach and the careful hand of a loving parent. It is our sacred responsibility as parents to teach the things that our children need to learn to do (and to not do) because of who they are, children of divine birth.

## PHILOSOPHY

Here was my ultimate goal: **to raise well-balanced, educated and independent children, who would leave the four walls of my home with well-rooted seeds of a testimony of Jesus Christ.** If you adopt this basic philosophy, your children are not going to be able to do this on their own, and society certainly won't help them along this path. Remember, you are, after all, the parent. **BE the parent**, utilizing the parenting techniques that will help you achieve your ultimate objectives.

*All are free to choose, of course, and we would not have it otherwise. Unfortunately, however, when some choose slackness, they are choosing not only for themselves, but for the next generation, and the next. Small equivocations in parents can produce large deviations in their children. Earlier generations in a family may have reflected dedication, while some in the current generation evidence equivocation. Sadly, in the next, some may choose dissension, as erosion takes its toll.* --Neal Maxwell. Ensign, November 1992, p66

*What you **do** speaks louder about what you believe than what you say.* (Bold added.)  
Ralph Waldo Emerson. Remember, your example is more powerful than your words in teaching children correct principles.

**NON-NEGOTIABLES:** The concept of *non-negotiables* first grew out of our own evaluation of appropriate Sunday activities so that we might teach our children to keep the Sabbath day holy. As we formulated a list of the do's and don't's for Sunday, other *rules of the house* followed. These *rules* were established **from birth**, and clearly understood: **This is what we do in our house. As long as you live in our house, these are the rules.**

**D&C 59:9-13:** *And that thou mayest more fully keep thyself unspotted from the world, thou shalt go to the house of prayer and offer up thy sacraments upon my holy day; For verily this is a day appointed unto you to rest from your labors, and to pay thy devotions unto the Most High; Nevertheless thy vows shall be offered up in righteousness on all days and at all times; But remember that on this, the Lord's day, thou shalt offer thine oblations and thy sacraments unto the Most High... **And on this day thou shalt do none other thing....***

**Isaiah 58:13-14:** *If thou turn away thy foot from the sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honourable; and shalt honour him, not doing thine own ways, not finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words: Then shalt thou delight thyself in the Lord; and **I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth...**for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.*

The Lord has spoken often about the Sabbath day in the scriptures, particularly to ancient Israel. Some Sundays when we have come home from church, rejuvenated by the Spirit from fulfilling our Sunday callings, having feasted on the words of Christ, having renewed our covenants with the Lord in taking the sacrament, having associated with the Saints, and having sung praises to God, we have felt that we were carried *upon the high places of the earth*, that our joy was full in the Lord.

## USE OF CONSEQUENCES

Each decision a child makes has consequences. If the natural consequence does not fully impress the child of the rightness or wrongness of the decision, then arbitrary consequences should be imposed, always with consistency. A parent can manipulate a situation to make a child think the *right* decision is his own decision. Do not threaten your children with consequences you have no intention of following through on—doing so makes the use of consequences meaningless.

Now some would argue that we took away agency by administering our rules as such, but they are in error. As a parent you would not allow your children to drive a car without any instruction, helping to ensure their safety. As important as agency is, why would you allow them to *drive* their lives without instruction and strict adherence to the *rules* first? Teach your children in their early youth how to use their agency so when they are sent out to *drive* on their own, they will be safe and use good judgment.

In teaching a child the principle of agency, initially a parent should guide his choices in non-eternal issues: What he has for breakfast, for instance, will not affect his eternal soul. You can give a child *choice* in things that will build confidence and self-esteem and improve family relationships within your home and social relationships outside your home.

But the choice to attend church, for example, is quite another matter. Where do you think he will receive a testimony of the Gospel if he is not at church? Are you equipped as a parent to provide a spectrum of spiritual experiences without using the resources of the church to assist you? **The church programs are the very best aid you have to raise your children.** If a child is given complete freedom to make all choices about his life from an early age without guidance and adherence, he may literally lead himself down a path of spiritual ruin and unfulfilled potential.

Speak to your children when they are very young in terms of the choices that you will want them to make: WHEN you go on a mission... WHEN you get the priesthood... WHEN you go to Girls' Camp... WHEN you go to college.... WHEN you get married in the temple.... It is a pattern of expectations, yes, but it becomes a pattern of their lives. Again, the dialogue is this: These are the things that we do in our house. These are the things Heavenly Father expects of us.

*Life, it seems to me, is like climbing a mountain. The longer you live, the higher you climb. The higher you climb, the more you see. The more you see, the greater your vision. The greater your vision, the greater your understanding... People that may be older than you, like parents or leaders, may not be smarter than you are, but they are higher up the mountain. They have seen more. Their vision is greater. And they can help guide you up the trail and keep you safe.* --Georgia Sauter, teacher and area speaker, Dallas, Texas.

*Remember, you have an advantage over your children—you have been a teenager; they have never been an adult. They do not know the pitfalls along the way, nor understand the grave consequences of poor choices, as you do. Guide them to embrace the virtues of the Gospel .--Albert R. Heath, author*

You, the parents, are *higher up the mountain*, and you have a better view. You know the consequences if a child does not ever gain a testimony of the Savior or learn to be a good person. You are the guardians of your children's care and keeping, so as parents you must guide your children toward the principles and practices of the gospel, enabling them to embrace and internalize its virtues, and steer them clear of the pitfalls that may be disastrous to their salvation.

**Curfew:** This is a hotly debated topic. Some have never used nor believe in curfews. I believe if your children were wise in their decisions about their friends and activities at night, then you were lucky. Use of curfews is an attempt to avoid possible problematic situations and poor judgment. Even the best of children do not always use good judgment. Curfew, by the way, is not only for the safety of the children--it is for the sanity and good sleeping of the parents, knowing the children are home safely for the night.

I believe children have to EARN your trust. It is true that bad things can happen before midnight, but almost NOTHING good happens after midnight.

If curfew is not kept (by YOUR clock, not theirs), then 30 minutes is taken off the next time. 30 minutes is also taken off for each verbal challenge. Curfews can be negotiated on a case by case basis, but only on rare occasions, as you do not want there to be any misunderstanding about the *rule*, even if it will be later on that the wisdom of the rule is understood.

### **SCHOOL NIGHTS**

Age 12 and 13	7 p.m. (YM/YW is an exception here)
Age 14 and 15	8 p.m. (YM/YW is an exception here)
Age 16 and 17	9 p.m.
Age 18 +	10 p.m.

### **WEEKENDS**

Age 12 and 13	Sundown
Age 14 and 15	10 p.m.
Age 16 and 17	Midnight
Age 18 +	Midnight—Yes Midnight!--with rare exceptions.

## **My Suggested List of Non-Negotiables (Implemented at birth, not age 10 or 16)**

- **We attend Church!** Sunday meetings, Scouts, Primary, YM/YW, Ward activities, Seminary, required meetings for callings, Temple, Service Projects. Unless you need a doctor, we go to church. What the activity is that day or night is irrelevant to your church attendance and fulfilling calling assignments.
- **What the prophet teaches, we obey**
- **General Conference—there are five sessions** (Which prophet's words do you not want your children to hear?)
- **No Sunday homework** (My kids were up very early many a Monday morning finishing up their homework or studying for a test)
- **No Sunday television** (Exception: church-related programming)
- **No Sunday shopping**—the *ox* is rarely *in the mire*
- **Family prayer, scripture study/discussion**
- **Family Home Evening weekly**
- **Sunday best dress to worship Heavenly Father on Sundays—Girls: no beachwear, flip flops, or denim. Boys: white shirt, tie, and jacket** (Follow the prophet's example) (You may apply cultural standards)
- **All dress is modest, at all times and in all places**
- **Saturday chores completed before Saturday activities attended**
- **No dating until age 16. Group dating only until after missions**
- **Music, either in school, community or church**
- **Foreign language in school**
- **Sports or extra-curricular or cultural activities, either in community, school, or church**
- **If Dad says no, then don't ask Mom, expecting a different answer**
- **Absolute respect for mother**
- **Meals have two choices: take it or leave it**
- **If you live in my house, you live by my rules**
- **Curfew—age appropriate**

Like curfew, any compromise of items on your own non-negotiables list should be RARE. Once you *open the door* for negotiation, it is difficult to go back, so live the *rule* rather than the *exception* most all of the time.

**CONCLUSION:** Many of you might argue with my basic premise or items on my suggested *Non-Negotiables* list. It is a concept that evolved over time. It is a philosophy we were admittedly imperfect in administering, but there are truisms contained herein that will *ring true* to your heart and soul, if you are searching for valid principles of parenting. Neal Maxwell's quote on equivocation continues to give us strength to stand firm and unwavering in giving our children the tools to be the best they can be, to reach for the heavens, literally, to serve their fellow men, to be faithful to their heritage, to become like God, and to embrace all that God has to offer them. I offer this concept with great conviction, and pray for God's help as you raise His precious children.