

## Proactive Parenting by Objective - Richard and Linda Eyre

Children are the greatest stewardship. Parenthood is the one calling from which we are never released. The Church is the scaffolding that supports the building of eternal families. Here in mortality we take upon us a title and a role that heretofore belonged only to God, thus “parenting” must be our highest priority. Yet it seems to be the one role for which there is no formal training. Hospitals issue no instruction book to go home with the pink bundle. We are expected to learn as we go. We need a license, it seems, for everything else we do – from driving to fishing – but not for parenting.

Ask a business person for his corporate objectives and he will roll out his mission statement, his pro formas, his five-year goals, and his detailed plans, but ask a parent for his or her goals as a father or mother and the answers are likely to be much more general ... “Be a good parent ... make sure my kids are okay.” To succeed as parents in today’s difficult world, and to out-influence the media and the peer group, we need much more specific objectives. *We need a strategy.* And we need to be *proactive* rather than reactive, to have an *offense* as well as a defense. Within the Church, we are able to base our objectives and family goals on eternal truths. We know that “men are, that they might have *joy* (2 Nephi 2:25). We know that the purpose of mortality and agency is that we might develop *responsibility* for ourselves and our choices. We know that *charity* and selfless love “is the greatest of all” (Moroni 7:46-47). And we know that our stewardship for children goes on long after they leave our nests.

The natural growth of a child presents parents with four phases or stages, each particularly suited to a clear and proactive objective: Preschoolers, full of wonder and delight, can be expanded in their capacities to experience various types of physical, emotional, mental, and social JOY. Elementary-age children, conceptual in their thinking and flattered by trust, can learn RESPONSIBILITY in most of its forms. Adolescents need so badly to escape their self-centeredness and learn service and CHARITY. And then comes the final phase of Empty Nest parenting. We invite you to adopt clear and specific objectives in terms of what you want to *give* your children in each phase of their growth. Use the following as a monthly guide or agenda.

### **Phase I: Preschoolers – Teach Joy**

### **Monthly Agenda**

Too much stress is placed on young children’s academic abilities, on their being able to put together numbers and letters quickly, on their manipulation skills. The world at large seems to have become overly sensitive to “How soon will my child read?” or “Just listen to how well he counts (or recites).” While these skills do have their place, we strongly believe that real happiness, contentment, and the ability to cope with the world are more closely related not to a child’s IQ but to his JQ (or Joy Quotient).

Ponder, for a moment, the quality of a child’s life once he becomes confident in his own ability to make decisions, to enjoy and be aware of nature, to set a goal and accomplish it, to share with his friends, and to see himself as a unique individual with a great deal to offer to others.

Each of these are *joys* that can be taught. In our opinion, the ideal time to teach children an appreciation for these joys is before the age of five, and before the beginning of their formal education. To the child who has a foundation in these “joy” concepts, the other abilities often associated with a high IQ can come quickly and naturally. By teaching a child to be joyful, we can give him both an active mind and a legacy of happiness.

#### 1. Physical Joys

- Month 1: Preserving the Joy of Spontaneous Delight
- Month 2: Teaching the Joy of the Body
- Month 3: Teaching the Joy of the Earth

#### 2. Mental Joys

- Month 4: Preserving the Joy of Interest and Curiosity
- Month 5: Teaching the Joy of Obedience and Decisions
- Month 6: Teaching the Joy of Order and Goal Striving

#### 3. Emotional Joys

- Month 7: Preserving the Joy of Trust and Confidence to Try
- Month 8: Teaching the Joy of Family Security, Identity, and Pride
- Month 9: Teaching the Joy of Individual Confidence and Uniqueness

#### 4. Social Joys

- Month 10: Preserving the Joy of Realness, Honesty, Candor
- Month 11: Teaching the Joy of Communication, Relationships
- Month 12: Teaching the Joy of Sharing and Service

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**Phase II: Elementary Age – Teach Responsibility****Monthly Agenda**

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Why are there hundreds of parenting books about babies, toddlers, and preschoolers – and hundreds more about adolescents and teenagers – yet practically none about elementary-school-age kids, those between the ages of four and eleven? Is it because preschoolers and adolescents are more difficult? Because parents worry more about toddlers and teenagers? Because babies are small and helpless and the mistakes of teens can be huge?

Actually, our elementary agers present a unique teaching opportunity! They are motivated by praise. They are old enough to take initiative yet young enough to take suggestions. They learn quickly from their mistakes, and at this age their mistakes will not kill them. This is the time to teach them responsibility!

We live in a society that gives license too early and responsibility too late. By consciously giving various kinds of responsibility to elementary-age children we can teach them character and prepare them for life.

1. Responsibility to Parents

- Month 1: Responsibility for Obedience
- Month 2: Responsibility for Things
- Month 3: Responsibility for Work

2. Responsibility to Society

- Month 4: Responsibility for Actions
- Month 5: Responsibility for Talents and Gifts
- Month 6: Responsibility for a Peaceful Attitude

3. Responsibility to Self

- Month 7: Responsibility for Choices
- Month 8: Responsibility for Character
- Month 9: Responsibility for Potential

4. Responsibility to Others

- Month 10: Responsibility for Smaller Children
- Month 11: Responsibility for Dependability
- Month 12: Responsibility for Contributing

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**Phase III: Adolescents – Teach Charity****Monthly Agenda**

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Virtually all problems of teenagers (from painful, withdrawn insecurity to aggressive acting out) stem from their strong tendency toward self-centeredness. If we can turn their “mirrors” into “windows” we can get them outside themselves and thus solve (or prevent) many of their problems. Another name for “windows” or extra-centeredness is “charity,” which should be thought of as the core value for teenagers.

We have discovered through our own children, our six hundred missionaries in England, and our work with countless numbers of parents and youth that it is possible to teach these young people charity. The principles and methods don’t work every time with every adolescent and there may be several failures for every success. But that one wonderful success can get parents through the next few crises with a smile and with the insight that sometimes failure teaches as much as success.

1. Understanding

- Month 1: His Pure Love for Us
- Month 2: Our Pure Love for Him
- Month 3: Loving as He Loves

2. Observing

- Month 4: Seeing
- Month 5: Listening and Visualizing

3. Feeling

- Month 6: Congruence: “How Do I Feel?”
- Month 7: Concern: “How Do You Feel?”
- Month 8: Empathy: “How Does He Feel?”

4. Communicating

- Month 9: Expressing What We See
- Month 10: Communicating What We Feel

5. Doing

- Month 11: Service
- Month 12: Anonymous Service

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**Phase IV: Empty Nest Parenting****Balancing hanging on with letting go.**

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