



JEFF LEVIN COACHING
FIND WHAT YOU LOVE—LIVE WHAT YOU FIND

RAISING KIDS IN THE DIGITAL AGE: SELECTED BLOG POSTS

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THE SECRET LIVES OF KIDS

One thing I am often asked to do is decode kids. Many parents struggle to communicate with their teenagers and 20-somethings, and I get called in to mediate—to decode. As a life coach, I do home visits, so I get to meet the entire family and see how everyone functions and how they relate to each other.

What I often find are kids who are digitized, anxious, addicted to gizmos, aren't resilient, and don't know how to push themselves outside the structure of school and sports. They are supremely focused on goals and ambitions to the exclusion of their dreams. They achieve, yet they often feel completely powerless, because achievement without connection is meaningless. They appear to be successful, yet so many are sad.

The funny thing is, many of these descriptors apply to their parents as well.

From the many discussions I have had with other professionals—pediatricians, teachers, coaches, school administrators, etc.—they are seeing the same things.

Why is this happening? It's due to a new dynamic I call The Bombardment.

We, the Analog Generation, knew that if we worked reasonably hard in school and stayed out of major trouble, we'd be fine. The messages we received, both consciously and unconsciously, from the adults in our lives went along these lines:

“The world is a good, fun, safe place.”

“You can trust most adults.”

“The people in Washington have the country's best interests at heart.”

“The earth will last forever.”

“Your parents have some issues, but basically they're there for you.”

“You can and should respect your teachers and coaches, and they're really looking out for you.”

The Digital Kids of today don't enjoy that kind of reassurance from adults and the world around them. The Bombardment with which they contend consists of the following:

- A constantly streaming “media” that reports the news sensationally in great detail 24/7 and promulgates fear.
- A fractured political system that has forgotten about respect and compromise and seems oblivious to the people it's supposed to serve.
- Everyone on his or her smart phone constantly (making Einstein, who said, “I fear the day when the technology overlaps with our humanity. The world will only have a generation of idiots,” very prescient indeed), trying to use communication devices as connection devices.
- Academic, athletic, and extra-curriculum achievement is to be achieved at the expense of relaxing, experiencing, and growing.
- A natural world that matters less and less.
- Parents that are on the same treadmill so model this kind of life.

The Bombardment promulgates stress and fear. Children experience this firsthand. However, it also causes parents to parent differently: Because of the onslaught, many parents are afraid—so afraid, that in their effort to protect their children from all of these awful things, they neglect to prepare them for adulthood. So The Bombardment both affects kids directly and indirectly. The result is interference with the psychological processes of childhood development.

Because of The Bombardment, digital parents have trouble allowing their kids to be kids. Many of these children might have every material gadget possible, but they rarely get to play outside. They are hardly, if ever, allowed to go out on their own, get into trouble, get out of trouble, find out who they are as individuals. They have not been allowed to fail or face consequences. To take risks. To have fun with their friends and learn about themselves in unstructured, unsupervised play. And we deal with the results every day: stressed-out, anxious, sad kids.

When we, the Analog Generation, were kids, we had secret lives from our parents. Whether it was a secret place no adults knew about, informal games we played with our friends in the outdoors without adult supervision, or countless other things, we all had secret lives of which our parents were ignorant. And that was healthy: our parents used to tell us to “be home by six” so we could all have dinner together, but they didn't necessarily know

what we were doing until six. Increasing autonomy, and with it, risk-taking, is an essential part of every person's path toward adulthood, as kids need to separate from their parents and learn what makes them tick.

Nowadays, the Digital Generation often doesn't have that opportunity. They don't have a healthy, external secret life. So what happens? They develop an unhealthy, internal secret life in order to attempt to separate. A life where Snapchat, sex, work, working out, stress, drugs, alcohol, and achievement are used to feel alive. A life full of dangerous risks that fuel kids' innate need to push limits.

Kids haven't changed: they still crave connection, communication, acceptance, and they love to help each other and the people in their lives. This is both the problem and the key to the solution. The problem is they not only have to experience these things, they have to know how they FEEL. So while they might have actually gone through the motions of some of these things, without an underlying connection so they can experience how they feel, they often don't really experience them. The solution is if we can get them to experience and truly feel these things, they will get better. It's that simple.

For instance, kids try to connect the only way they know how: through their devices. The problem—and this is as big a problem for their parents as for the kids—is that these devices are communication devices, not connection devices. They simply cannot truly connect one person with another.

When kids aren't allowed to connect the way they are hardwired to, they become stressed. And that's before all of the societal stressors—The Bombardment—kick into play. And when the achievement plan isn't going according to plan? More stress. And I call stress “the great isolator,” because when you are stressed, you are less likely to reach out for help. What follows? Depression. Anxiety. Addiction. Suicide.

Fortunately, we can use those things about kids that haven't changed—their desire for connection, communication, acceptance, and to help each other and the people in their lives—to teach them some Analog Generation skills.

As a life coach, I feel that my most important job is to teach parents how to find that balance between protecting their kids and preparing them for happy adult lives. There are many things parents can do to make progress on this front. Some may require a professional, but many don't.

Why is emotional preparation important? Unfortunately, life hasn't changed in some respects. Problem-solving skills are needed. The rug gets pulled out from under everyone at one point or another, in so many ways, and resiliency is needed when that happens. Perseverance is still needed to succeed at just about everything in life. Everyone needs to deal with people who both agree with them and disagree with them. And people still need to manage their everyday lives... every day. But when we are sending teens and 20-somethings who don't have any of these skills out into the world, this is incredibly stressful for them.

So what can you do?

The Solution

1. Talk about it.

When I facilitate workshops with adults or young people, two essential things happen:

- I describe The Bombardment, and we talk about how it feels.
- We talk about ways to re-connect, calm down, and develop a plan to make our dreams come true.

By talking about how disconnected and stressed we are, and allowing kids to talk about their secret lives, a glorious thing happens in the room: people's fears are validated. They begin to think, "No wonder I've been so stressed, so scared, so overwhelmed! Someone is talking about it! I get it now!"

Don't underestimate the power of simple truth telling, of naming the elephant in the room. So the first thing you should do is have a real conversation with your kids.

An important corollary about that is to *listen without judgment* about how The Bombardment has affected your child. And I mean *really listen*. Don't rush to reassure, offer suggestions, or to sympathize: let your child have his/her say, no matter how much you want to jump in. Gently probe if you feel that they are holding something back and don't interrupt or be judgmental, no matter what your child says. Here are two examples of things that might test your ability to keep your cool:

A junior at a Boston day school breaks up with his girlfriend of two years, goes on Tinder.com that afternoon, and has indiscriminate sex with a stranger in the back of his mother's Toyota Sienna.

Think this is unusual? Think again:

<http://www.npr.org/sections/alltechconsidered/2016/02/29/467959873/teen-girls-and-social-media-a-story-of-secret-lives-and-misogyny>

Chris Herron, the former NBA needle addict who talks to groups of kids, did his presentation in a very prestigious suburban Boston public high school. Out of the 1,400 kids in the audience, 17 came forward afterwards asking for help with an oral opiate addiction, and three kids came forward saying, "I'm shooting dope." If I canvassed the more than 2,000 parents of those boys and girls and asked them, "Do you think there are oxycontin and heroin available to your kids and their friends here in _____?" I guarantee you 97% would be in denial.

Don't you be in denial. Accept what your child is telling you without judgment.

2a. Put away your devices. ALL of you. Regularly.

2b. Get together as a family. ALL of you. Face to face. Regularly.

Putting away your devices applies to serious conversations, such as #1, but it also goes for regular interactions, such as dinner. You may need to teach your kids how to really connect. No devices. Make eye contact. Really discuss things.

This might be tougher than you think. During a workshop at a prep school, I took the boys' and coaches' cell phones. Many of the kids were visibly shaken. An eighteen-year-old boy who, by the way, had a verbal commitment to play D1 hockey, told me and his teammates and coaches, "Jeff, I call my mother three times a day; I need my phone!" He wasn't embarrassed; he found that normal. Eighteen. Three times a day. Hello?

If you are in this habit with your kid, why not suggest to your child that you save the report on the day for dinner, when you will all put your devices away and talk about the day face-to-face? Save the phone for quick communications such as saying you'll be late or requesting something at the market. Save the connecting conversations for when you can look each other in the eye.

3. Teach your kids how to manage their everyday lives. That includes how to manage a household, from housework to budgeting to shopping to

minor repairs. When you send your child out in the world never having done anything around the house, not only have you neglected some important life lessons, you are in fact adding to their stress by not teaching them how to manage their daily lives. Should 20-somethings have to call the police because there was a mouse in their apartment? This actually happened in Boston.

You may think these things are funny, but when you don't even have the resiliency to solve simple problems such as these, the most routine things become stress-inducing. When the smallest things are crises to unprepared kids, how will they cope when there is a real crisis? And remember, stress doesn't only affect your mind: it affects your entire body. When everything is a crisis, this invokes the flight-or-flight response and all of the physiological things that the body does when it is stressed. When stress is constant it causes physical wear and tear to the body. Over time, stress can be a big contributor to many chronic illnesses. (<http://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/stress-management/in-depth/stress-symptoms/art-20050987>)

4. Don't underestimate how The Bombardment can teach your child: for instance, the gridlock and polarization in Washington don't just affect how our government functions: it teaches our children that people who disagree are "the enemy" and always wrong. There is never the possibility of changing minds or compromise. People need to be able to differentiate between someone with whom they have a simple honest difference of opinion versus someone with the intent to do harm. When everything with which your child doesn't agree becomes a personal attack to them, they cannot function in a community system, be it school or college, a neighborhood, or a work environment.

5. Give your child space. I can't emphasize enough how important it is to give your children lives of their own without parental management. Parents today are spending more time with their kids than ever—and that includes those times when women in the workplace were rare. I would argue that parents are spending TOO MUCH time with their kids. Children should be given increasing independence and responsibility from the time they are little. They need to work through things on their own, even when they are tough. As Ellen Beate Hansen Sandseter, who has done a lot of research on children's risk-taking (ellenbeatehansensandseter.com), points out, children need to feel like they are taking risks—pushing the limits of what they can do. She has shown that that is critical to a child's development, from the time they are very young until they are teenagers. And if you don't provide constructive risks for your teenager, that is when they are more likely to take destructive risks.

6. Teach your children how to handle failure. Professionals say that kids haven't been allowed to fail enough to be resilient, to shed disappointment quickly, and believe in and depend upon themselves and their teammates. How can your young adult react positively to failure when they have no experience of it? Rather than shield them from failure, teach them how to handle failure.

“Failure” is not a four-letter word: in fact, rather than being shameful, it is an essential part to any discovery. Parents that don't allow their child to fail are just about insuring that their child will be a failure. You will not always be there to bail them out. They need to understand that trying something and failing is a good thing, because that failure teaches them what something is not, and that is often crucial information to their ultimate mastery. Or, as Mia Hamm put it, **“Failure happens all the time.... What makes you better is how you react to it.”**

7. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, parents must look at themselves. In over 35 years of working with children, as a teacher, psychotherapist, and life coach, what I have found to be the greatest predictor of whether a troubled child can improve is whether the parents are willing to work on their own issues and change. Your child's ability to shed stress is more dependent on your ability to change than theirs.

Today's society is based on fear, but the last thing you want to teach your child is to be fearful. And that's the big question you have to keep asking yourself over and over: Are your fears negatively affecting how you parent? What are you afraid of? When your fear is brought into the light of day, is it rational, or have you mistaken risk, which you can never eliminate, for a true danger? Are you afraid of what other people will think?

All of the things I have suggested above you can do on your own and cost nothing, yet are crucial to your child's healthy development. But there are times when you do need help. If your fear is that your child will hurt themselves or others, or you are afraid of your child, you need professional help. If you suspect your child is addicted to something, you need help. If you are afraid that you won't be able to catch your own unconscious behaviors that might impact your children, then you need help.

Finally, you need to remember: dreams are different from ambitions and goals. Your kid's dreams might be different from your ambitions and goals for them. The only way your children are going to be truly happy is if he/she is their own person. You simply must give them the space to do that. It is their life: help them to create it for themselves. Don't do it for them.

BLOG POSTS

Here are a couple of my blog posts that drill deeper on some of these concepts. More blog posts can be found on my web site, jefflevincoaching.com.

In Your Eyes: Mirroring for Confidence

Sigmund Freud said, “How bold one gets when one is sure of being loved.”

Boldness is the ability, the willingness, the love of taking risks. The risks don’t have to include sky diving or free climbing El Capitan, but boldness is an important component to happiness, because it means that you are living without fear.

I know what you’re thinking: you love your kids, so you should be all set, right?

Not exactly.

When “Toughen Up” Doesn’t Work

Your kids may have a measure of success in terms of NESCAC and Ivy matriculations, but that is not necessarily the boldness of which I write. Increasingly, people are acknowledging that there are many kids who are outwardly successful yet are fundamentally fragile and can’t create deep camaraderie nor find fundamental, internal confidence.

These kids are both materially spoiled and emotionally neglected. Flat screen TVs, all-expenses-paid vacations, fancy cars to drive around... parents working 80 hours a week, no family dinners.... Kids neglected in this modern way are not sure they are loved, and they are not bold: not on the playing field, not in relationships, not nowhere, not no how. They may seem bold. They may get into fine colleges, captain their teams, and have a GPA north of 4.0, but they’re not really bold. Or happy, in many cases.

If you look at them closely, you’ll see that many of them are simply not ready for the world. They race to Wall Street, but have no knowledge of their Own Street, and because they’ve been so groomed for “success” and are afraid of disappointing their parents, they’re embarrassed to admit it.

I also find many, many athletic coaches, teachers, and even parents who simply don’t understand their players, students, and children.

“What’s the matter with these kids?” they ask.

There's an long-standing tradition in this country to advise kids to toughen up. It's good to have mental toughness and confidence. However, that advice, not always delivered with patience, can't help these kids, who don't have the emotional skills to follow that directive. This results in frustration on both sides.

My answer: "How bold one gets when one is sure of being loved."

Mirroring

I once asked a teenage boy with whom I was working, "What do you feel when you really look at your Dad?"

"I can see myself in his eyes," the boy told me.

Shrinks call that "mirroring," a key component of letting kids know and feel that you love them. Children fundamentally drift around as their identity, their self-image, solidifies. If you want to hit that Freudian bar with your child, if you want to rectify the cultural neglect our generation has foisted on our kids, you need to mirror them, and they need to see themselves when they look in your eyes. The anchor that they need is as simple as that.

It is possible to do some mirroring even if you're not the parent, and that can make a huge difference, although it's tough to do. However, to mirror kids right, you, yourself, have to be solid: you have to know who you are and know what you're doing. You have to feel you're loved, too—because that gives you the ability to take the risk to love a child unconditionally. That's a boldness in and of itself.

Easier said than done sometimes. For the parent, coach, or educator who isn't sure of being loved themselves because of abuse, neglect, trauma, and so forth they experienced, life can be so, so hard. Trust issues develop, and it can be very challenging to mirror the children in their lives.

It is possible to rectify this, no matter what your age. Adults will need professional help. But it's well worth the effort:

One boy on a hockey team with whom I worked had an epiphanic realization during my weekend team-building session, but that's rare. He tearfully hugged his teammates, proclaiming he was done not working hard, he was done not living in the moment, he was done not loving them the right way. I spoke with his coach recently, and this kid fulfilled those promises. He saw himself in the mirror with my help.

But even if you can't achieve an epiphany for a child, with mirroring, every little bit helps. So the next time you rail against today's kids, try spreading some good, old-fashioned love around. Polish up that mirror.

The Kiln: Your Pathway to Contentment

Experience All of Life

Your pathway to contentment and wellness on every level has to be natural, dog-eared, hard-fought, and real. It *can't* come from a book. It's got to be an inside job. It comes from what I call being in "the kiln," where your triumphs *and* your tragedies are melded together and strengthened by fire, or it doesn't last and it isn't real, and it definitely won't cut the mustard with the kids you parent, coach, or teach.

What do I mean by "the kiln?"

It's been said a million times (because it's true), but the great ones get back up: they respond with courage and resiliency when adversity strikes. They embrace life. They are able to do that because they experience all of life, the good and the bad, and don't shy away from the difficulties. They take the heat, because those high temperatures of loss, defeat, illness, trial, and adversity both harden *and* soften them.

If you're a parent, teacher, or coach, you should be motivated to cure yourself in the kiln of experience so that you can be great at what you do, great at being you, a great role model—a great grown-up, period. That's right: great.

To be a great grown-up, you need to do this work. You need to be a courageous person who faces adversity, who models all the good things—courage, humor, loving-kindness, and patience—when things are good and when they're not so good. To be present. To help kids solve problems. To help kids get organized and focused. To help kids be good people. To help kids make their dreams come true. But you need to help them, not do it for them; they need to get into the kiln, too.

The goal for all of us is to take what life dishes out and, because we know about the joy and the sorrow, we can be soft and loving whenever our kids need us to be, but we can be tough and demanding, too. Just like a piece of pottery that has been properly fired, we can handle every liquid of life, no matter the heat, brininess, bitterness, or spice, and we don't shatter when we get banged around a bit.

Find the Cure

Put the name of your favorite adult when you were growing up in this blank:

_____.

List the qualities that person had and, for each one, write why it mattered to

you, how he or she helped you. For example, my father's brother, my Uncle Murray, was caring, strong, deliberate, devoted, and hysterically funny. He definitely made me feel like I mattered a ton, and that helped me navigate my own alcoholic family. Who were your favorite people?

Now put the names of the kids you can help here:

Be honest: What can you work on to provide for those kids, to be “that favorite adult” for those kids? How can you strengthen the softness in your character with some deliberate work? A piece of pottery is mushy and useless until it endures the heat of the kiln; you're not useless to the kids you love, but I'm betting, just like myself, you feel you can get better. Need to be more patient? Giving? More demanding? Lighter? Understanding? Better at setting limits? More generous with your time?

Besides helping the kids in your life, as you cure out your character defects and go from being a good parent/teacher/coach/aunt/uncle/administrator to a great one, you will be increasingly happy, well-adjusted, prosperous, and present.

In order to find the cure (pun intended) in the kiln, you have to know that suffering is part of the curriculum. Be a grown-up. Know it. Accept it, the whole catastrophe, as they say. Be like the adult you loved or, if you weren't fortunate to have an adult like this in your life, be the adult you never had.

Here's what you must do, and I'll give an example with each piece of advice:

- Set your roots deep into who you want to be. If you're trying to be more patient, catch yourself wanting to kick the dog or screaming at your son when he didn't clean his room.
- Make sure you're taking the time to connect with your friends and family. If you think you have to check your smartphone at all hours and eschew fun and social time, get a grip. You need that time.
- Give and receive a lot of love. Open up your heart, be cheerful, and mean it. You're not six feet under. Do something out of the box and tell the kids in your life you love them, or take them to the amusement park when you think you should be working.
- Learn to go with the flow. Curve balls don't mean you can't hit one out of the park. Stop bitching to yourself when things don't go “your way.”

- Like a little kid, you have to take delight in beauty and mystery. Really stop and look into every family member's eyes at least once every day, and see what's going on within him or her.
- Like your favorite aging relative, you have to have good common sense and live with all things in moderation. If you have a predilection for booze, too much work, or whatever, get a handle on it, get some help if you need to, and figure out a way towards moderate behavior.

Write down an example of how you'd follow each dictum:

To set deep roots, I'm going to

_____, and so on.

I'm reading Bobby Orr's autobiography. He said playing pond hockey with his friends for countless hours as a kid made him great, because it allowed him to feel free, to chase the puck and his dreams. But Bobby Orr was a small, frail child. That didn't stop him; in fact, I would argue that that early time in the kiln made him strong. You chasin' yours? Get in the kiln, kid.

Opiates and Outcome Fever

I spoke to a father of three teenage boys recently, a very reasonable, bright man. He expressed concern about the fact that opiates are out there, and we talked about striking that parenting balance around drugs and alcohol, about finding that sweet spot where you don't issue blanket prohibitions that are impossible to enforce, nor do you become overly permissive.

This brought up some things I've been mulling over:

1. Why are so many teenagers sniffing and shooting opiates, boys and girls who, a generation ago, wouldn't have even entertained a thought of using them?
2. What are the more complex dynamics in middle- and upper-class schools and families that are causing kids to use opiates?

Actually, I would argue that "good" kids are taking risks with many aspects of their lives, not just opiates. In fact, many of their choices can be seen through the lens of addictive behavior, whether it's sex, working out, drinking, video games, even schoolwork.

There are, of course, many reasons why an individual becomes addicted to something. One of the biggest reasons is to medicate pain. And in my experience with thousands of kids, one of the most painful things that can happen to them is Outcome Fever. The problem here is the kids are suffering, but it's the parents who are infected with it.

I find myself writing about this constantly: kids' emotional needs are not getting met. They are always on the go, chasing an ever-narrowing range of acceptable results—acceptable to their parents, that is. Over and over again, the dominant message I hear from parents is, “Go, go, go; do, do, do; achieve, achieve, achieve.”

For grades, what I often hear is for many teens, anything less than an A is a disappointment. In every subject. It doesn't matter what the child's strengths and weaknesses are, or how hard they tried.

In my athletic workshops, I see kids—even pre-teen kids—specializing in one sport, 52 weeks a year. It is common for parents to spend thousands of dollars a year on travel teams and “elite” tournaments. Do kids find this fun? Often, they think it's a lot of pressure, because this kind of focus is because parents want their kids to get an athletic college scholarship or make a D1 team. What started out as a game from which their kids drew a lot of joy has been transformed into a job.

The problem is all “do, do, do” and no “be, be, be” makes children depressed and anxious.

The discussions I have with many parents center around these questions:

- What is the nature of your relationship and interactions with your children?
- How much are you focused on outcomes vs. your child's particular journey?
- How much do you just hang out or do a relaxed activity with no particular aim or level of achievement in mind?
- What is your definition of “success?”

Many parents, when I ask them these questions, realize that they have Outcome Fever: that almost everything they do with their children is driven by the outcome they desire for their child, whether it is getting straight A's or excelling in after-curricular activities, all usually to fuel their goals and ambitions for their children's lives. Often, these goals and ambitions were set without consulting their children or set when kids are too young to truly consult.

Think about the now well-known “helicopter parent.” Have you ever thought about why they hover over their child’s every move? Why they excoriate teachers and coaches when things don’t go as the parents envisioned? Because that parent wants to control every outcome their child has. After all, if they weren’t worried about the outcome, why would they be hovering?

Now let’s look at Outcome Fever from a different perspective: how it influences your child. If you are so focused on outcomes they form the primary basis for your interactions—your very relationship—with your child, then what do you think is going to happen? Let me tell you: your child is going to start to worry about what happens if they don’t achieve the outcomes that you have set for them. And that enormous pressure, even if it doesn’t come directly from you, makes your child anxious about what that is going to do to your relationship.

Because, you see, with pressure like that they truly are afraid they’re going to lose you, that your love has strings attached. Even though every parent I’ve ever met would say—and mean it—that they love their children unconditionally, when you keep focusing on the outcomes—even the outcomes your child has said they want for themselves—and not your child’s journey, your child will start to believe that your love is conditional. Whether that is actually true is immaterial; your child’s perception is their truth.

And when you throw in all of the gizmos we now all constantly use that keep us from truly connecting, plus the frenzied schedules for both children and adults that allows days—dare I say weeks?—when you don’t have a meal or even a meaningful conversation with your child, so you don’t know what’s going on in your child’s life and can’t set a needed limit, you can see how this anxiety never gets alleviated.

I speak from experience when I say that kids today feel those strings, and when they start playing with fire, be it opiates, Tinder, or whatever, it’s because they don’t feel connected to their parents, to the guiding anchor of their family. I would add that many schools I visit don’t provide that anchor, either: a lot of educators, frankly, are feeding the achievement beast.

So, on a basic level, a seventeen-year-old putting opiates in his or her body is nothing more complicated than a three-year-old who’s scared his or her parents aren’t there for them after a nightmare and sobs uncontrollably in their bed. If no one shows up to comfort, the message is absorbed.

So put the smartphone or tablet down right now and write—*handwrite*—your answers to these seven questions. And be honest!

1. Am I spending enough down time with my kids and my partner?
2. Am I a relaxed, confident model for my kids?
3. Am I drinking or using drugs too much?
4. Am I focused too much on outcomes and too little on the journey?
5. Do I know what my kids' dreams are?
6. Is my behavior honest?
7. Do I play and do things with my family that demonstrate the joy of just connecting, with *no strings attached*?

Bonus question: How do you feel when your child's vision of who they want to be doesn't match your hopes for them?

How'd you do? Need to tweak anything, a little or a lot? Remember, kids need a combination of comfort and limits, so your list of changes might include:

- Establish a new tone, a new culture in your home that centers around relaxing and connecting. Yup, you'll all have to lop off some activities to accomplish this.
- Make a new set of rules:
 - Dinner as a family at least four nights a week.
 - No digital gadgets when you're gathered together; keep the TV off too.
 - Establish a family mission plan: each member, including parents, expresses his or her dreams, and you make a plan to support one another in their pursuit.
 - Tell your 8th–10th graders that booze and drugs are prohibited, and pee test them randomly.
- Say no often to stuff your kids want to do—or already do—that's bad for them. That's right: establish yourself as an awesome parent who's *not afraid to disappoint your kids!*
 - When they argue about it, tell them if it continues, they'll lose more stuff.
- Don't live through your kids.

- Don't bad mouth their teachers and coaches.
- Know their strengths and weaknesses and tell them B's and C's are OK if they're trying their best.
- Let them explore different sports, hobbies, and identities.
- Don't live through your kids!! I mean it!
- Don't use money as a weapon.
- Bravely look in the mirror at your issues and hang-ups.
- Live by the Golden Rule, particularly with your partner and children.

Goals and outcomes are not inherently evil. They are just much healthier when they are tied to dreams—the dreams of the individual who has to implement the goals and outcomes.

You, Dear Parent, get to call the cultural shots in your home. Buck the trends. Make your kids and connecting with them a priority. Cut the strings.



Jeff Levin

Born and raised in Newton, Massachusetts, and a graduate of Dartmouth College, Boston College School of Education, and the Smith College School for Social Work, Jeff Levin has devoted his professional life (35 years and counting) to supporting young people. He began his professional career as a middle-school English teacher in Carlisle, Massachusetts, and since then, Jeff has worked with individuals and groups in a wide variety of settings to help individual athletes, young people, families, and corporations. Jeff was a practicing psychotherapist for over twenty-five years; for the last twelve years, he has been a life coach based in New Hampshire and Boston who works with both individuals and groups. He has been a consultant and coach to kids, parents, families, schools, teams/athletes, and corporations all over the U.S.



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