

# AAA Parent Coaching Services

Exceptional Parenting Solutions

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AAA Parent Coaching Spring Newsletter June 2008

**Greetings,**



Thank you so much for taking the time to read this newsletter. It is an honor to be on this journey with you, and I hope to be able to provide you with some useful information in this edition.

I am pleased to say that Spring has ended on a positive note. The Whole Child Conference was an extraordinary opportunity to connect with a multitude of brilliant and dedicated parents and professionals.

In mid-April I was interviewed about the Lenore Skenazy story. Lenore is a journalist who gave her nine year old son a metro card and twenty dollars to travel home in Manhattan. Lenore has created a website and a movement called "Free Range Kids." Lenore says, "Children, like chickens, deserve a life outside the cage. The overprotected life is stunting and stifling, not to mention boring for all concerned." I found this concept thought-provoking, and it has led me to do some serious thinking and research about how we decide when our children are ready to travel or stay home on their own, and what steps we need to take to help them manage these opportunities for independence successfully.

I hope that you all enjoyed a wonderful Mother's Day. Personally, I am humbled on this holiday by the incredible women who have made it possible for me to be a mother. I hold them all deep in my heart and think of them with love and gratitude today and every day.

I'd like to take this opportunity to wish all fathers a special Father's Day. May your day be filled with love, happiness, and appreciation for everything you do for your family, all year long.

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Wishing you and your family all the very best of everything,

Elizabeth Pflaum

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### **Freedom: How Much Is Your Child Ready To Handle?**

A difficult decision every parent faces is when and how to allow a child to exercise his/her independence. Giving a child some freedom is truly a gift with many benefits. A child who possesses the ability to safely and confidently stay home alone or walk to school independently can feel empowered and more competent. Kids who are given independence are more self-confident to take new risks, attempt challenging activities and participate more actively in school. They feel comfortable separating from parents because they know how to feel safe by themselves in different situations.

It is our job as caregivers to carefully plan, prepare and train our children to function successfully on their own without unnecessary anxiety. Parents must be cautious, however, that if a child is unprepared for independence, he/she may encounter stress, danger and fear of separation.

#### **Home Alone**

What is an appropriate age for a child to stay home alone? Typically, the belief is that children 12 years of age or older can be left home unsupervised for a period of time. Many states have "Home Alone Laws." If you wish to find out the law in your state, call the Department of Social Services.

Parents must teach their children these critical safety precautions before they leave them home alone:

- Do not open the door to strangers -- Would a child know not to answer the door for a pizza delivery that was never ordered;
- If he/she answers the phone, never mention one is home alone;
- Do not use the stove;
- Call 911 in an emergency;

- Call an adult nearby if one needs help

Parents should also make certain their children know basic first aid, where to locate a flashlight in the event of a power outage and how to operate the house alarm.

If you believe your child possesses these skills, you are probably ready to leave him/her home independently. Important guidelines to follow are:

- Start out gradually. Leave the house for 30 minute intervals. Once you and your child are more comfortable, increase your time away in 30 minute time periods;
- Bring your cell phone and set a designated time for him to call you;
- Set ground rules in advance: Determine where in the house your child can and cannot stay; choose which appliances she can and cannot use;
- Be certain that lighters, matches, tobacco, alcohol and prescription medications are put away out of reach of all children;
- Leave a list in a predetermined area of family and friends to call for help;
- Decide how siblings will interact. Is your oldest child in charge, or are you relying on all of the children to behave well and take responsibility for themselves;
- If pet care is involved, be sure that your child has performed the task before and understands your expectations

### Freedom Outside the Home

Would a child know what to do if she is in a situation without a parent and a stranger approaches her? For example, you feel your 13 year old daughter is ready to grocery shop on her own. This activity provides an excellent opportunity to develop important life skills. She has shopped with you at this particular market several times and is familiar with its layout. You equip her with a grocery list, money and a plan to pick her up at a designated time. Imagine she is looking for cake mix and is stopped by a distraught-looking woman who asks for help locating her two year old child. Many children may be tempted to go with the woman in order to help her. Parents must educate their children to turn or walk away, or to go to an adult or store manager for assistance. It is imperative that kids understand that if something does not seem right, they should never obey strangers.

Perhaps your child is walking a short distance

home from school and a stranger approaches him and says "Don't Scream." He should immediately shout, "This is not my mother/father. I don't know this stranger," and run away.

The benefits of walking to and from school far outweigh the minor risks that it may pose. Walking promotes a healthy lifestyle and can be a rewarding experience for your child if safety guidelines are followed. Indeed, research supports that children actually concentrate better in class when they walk to school. Children must be taught how to cross the street carefully and safely and know which side of the street to walk on. The route should be practiced several times with an adult. Parents should also be certain that their child keep a house key in a safe place and know how to open the door by him/herself. For more information on walking home alone, access the Center for Disease Control's pamphlet at [www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/kidswalk/](http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/kidswalk/).

### **Independence for Children with Special Needs**

It is just as necessary for children with disabilities to have some degree of freedom as it is for children who do not have special needs. I feel that it is crucial to a child's maturity, especially for children with learning, behavioral or emotional challenges. Parents who have children with ADHD or LD should generally abide by the same rules as they would with children who do not have special needs, making safety and communication priorities. My son with autism has been food shopping on his own since he was 12 (okay, so I was sometimes hiding in the store), cooks independently (no stove when a parent is not home) and attends movies and sporting events with friends unaided by parents. He has developed tremendous self-confidence as a result of his success in handling his freedom responsibly.

One way to test if your child is prepared for independence is to take frequent and short trips out of the home to help him/her develop confidence and comfort. Over time, parents can test their child in a variety of ways to make sure he/she can handle minor unexpected events. The goal is to make independent activities successful.

and to go at a child's own pace.

Some children take longer to be ready. If your child is highly impulsive, prone to high anxiety or stuck in the "Ready! Fire! Aim!" loop developmentally, it may be best to wait until he is older or more mature.

As a parent, only you can decide when your child is ready. Trust your instincts!

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## Celebrating the Importance of Fathers


Both mothers and fathers play pivotal roles in the development of their children. Each role is unique, yet intrinsic to a child's well-being. This year we honor all fathers on June 15, Father's Day, to recognize the unique characteristics that make dads special.

It is heart-warming to see a father teach his daughter how to pitch a fast ball or watch a father read a book to his son. Dads bring fulfillment, adventure and spontaneity to a child's life. They are talented educators -- giving a child a look at the world through a man's perspective -- teaching one about politics, sports, business and other interests. Fathers are sympathetic listeners, lending an ear and a shoulder to cry on in times of need. Fathers are "rough and tumble," enjoying wrestling and physical play.

### A Child's Perspective of Her Father

Several years ago, my friend's 7 year old daughter created the list below of "Top 7 Reasons My Dad is the Best" as a gift for her father on Father's Day. It sums up the extraordinary impact a father has in a child's life.

1. My Dad plays with me.
2. My Dad helps me with my hard homework.
3. My Dad helps me learn sports.
4. My Dad listens when I am sad.
5. My Dad builds with me.
6. My Dad taught me to ride a two-wheeler.
7. My Dad loves me.

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### How a Child Can Honor Dad on Father's Day

Oftentimes the least expensive gifts are the ones that will be cherished and remembered the most.

- Cook Dad's favorite dinner. Bring your child shopping with you to help pick out the ingredients.
- Create a list of what makes Dad special; illustrate it with markers or paint.
- Decorate a beautiful handmade card.
- Take a special photograph and place it in a beautiful frame for Dad's desk.
- If your child plays an instrument, perform a special concert in recognition of Dad.

"Any man can be a Father but it takes someone special to be a dad."

-- Anne Geddes

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### Practice What You Preach

Parents are their children's role models. What they say and do, and how they act, are echoed in their children. Yell at a child for misbehaving and, in turn, that child will yell at a sibling or, in the case of a young child, scream at a doll. As a parent, it is painful to witness our children mimicking our bad behavior. Obviously, no parent is perfect - we all lose our cool sometimes. However, parents must do their best to set standards and rules both inside and outside the home.

### Be Respectful

I have learned time and time again that if I treat my children with respect, they will treat others with respect. One way to instill respect is to eliminate yelling and name calling. These devices are unacceptable ways to communicate with family, as well as all others outside the home. Yelling and name calling make a child angry and

upset. Calling a child a derogatory name is belittling and squashes self-esteem, possibly creating a lifetime of emotional scarring. Parents can show respect to their children by taking the time to pay attention when they are speaking. Eye contact is crucial and shows that you are with them 100 percent. When you treat people with respect, you value their feelings and pride. You behave toward others as you would like to be treated.

Even while you are disciplining your child, it can be done in a respectful way. Think of a scenario where your child is angry and confronts you in an accusatory way. A parent's first inclination would probably be to get defensive and angry in return. A better response would be to take a deep breath, think before acting out and explain to your child that you understand he is upset, but when he talks to you this way it makes you angry and hurts your feelings. You can then explain in a respectful way that when he talks to you or anyone else in a non-accusatory way, the other person is happy to help. In this instance, you respected that your son was upset about something that was important to him, but also taught him the appropriate way to get his point across.

#### **Be Kind**

Generally, kindness begets kindness. What a positive way to reduce stress and live one's life. Acting out of kindness, not anger, feels good. When a parent says kind words and performs kind tasks, it inspires their children to do the same. Acting kindly is a simple way to promote a positive atmosphere in your home. Make the effort by taking time to listen to others, by being thoughtful and benevolent. Sometimes the act of kindness requires us to go out of our way and exert ourselves more, but the results are well worth it.

#### **Be Tolerant**

When parents show tolerance, they teach their children to be open-minded and non-judgmental. Oftentimes, we too quickly form an opinion on people based on outside appearances or compare them with our own opinions and situations. Hand in hand with this idea is that parents should teach their children not to gossip or talk behind peoples' backs. Parents must model this behavior at all times. Children have "big ears," and even when you think they are not listening, they are. If you are gossiping on the telephone, there is a good chance that they are in the next room hearing every word you say.

It is important to teach tolerance of people's differences and abilities. Perhaps your child is helping a younger sibling with homework and the younger child just does not get it. The older child

should be patient and empathetic of her sibling's frustration and take extra care to help.

Respect, kindness and tolerance are gifts we can give our children. By practicing what we preach, the old adage "The apple doesn't fall from the tree," will make both parent and child proud!

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### **My All-Time Favorite Father's Day Poem**

I find this poem so powerful that I still cannot even read it out loud without my eyes filling with tears. The words ring true and the sentiment is beautiful. I hope that you enjoy it as much as I do.

**Walk a little slower, Daddy,  
Said a little child so small.  
I´m following in your footsteps,  
And I don´t want to fall.**

**Sometimes your steps are very fast,  
Sometimes they´re hard to see;  
So walk a little slower, Daddy,  
For you are leading me.**

**Someday when I´m all grown up,  
You´re what I want to be;  
Then I will have a little child  
Who´ll want to follow me.**

**And I would want to lead just right,  
And know that I was true;  
So, walk a little slower, Daddy,  
For I must follow you.**

As we were reminded by the movie Gameplan, "Never Underestimate The Power Of The Father." Fathers teach us some of life's most important lessons. Fathers can give us the confidence to accomplish our goals and to love ourselves, which ultimately helps us to expect more joy, health, and happiness in life.

In my own life, I have always believed



that my father has seen me not as I am at a given moment in time, but as my very best self. By keeping the bar high, he taught me to believe in myself and provided me with opportunities to confirm his belief in me with actual success. While my mother has given me wisdom and an unwavering belief in my own power as a woman, it is my father who has been my coach and cheerleader all my life. Having been born with some birth defects, my father began teaching me about every athlete who overcome unbelievable odds to accomplish their dreams from the minute I could speak. I read about Jim Abbott, who is an awesome pitcher with only one arm, Jackie Robinson and the fact that there was a clause in his contract that he could not respond when he was spit upon on the field! I learned about numerous athletes, musicians, writers, and brilliant contributors to the world around us who faced adversity with grace and courage. Armed with his teaching and unconditional love, I was well prepared to teach my children that challenges such as racism or physical differences are simply opportunities for extraordinary personal growth in disguise.

No matter how difficult the circumstances might be, he has always helped me to believe that I can overcome anything, and then has given me the support and encouragement to do it.

This morning I watched my husband encourage our older son who happens to have Autism take his younger brother to his Little League Game. My son asked him, "what if I can't do it, Dad?" and my husband immediately reminded him that of course he is capable of walking his brother to the field, helping him with his batting stance, cheering him on, and making sure that he has

enough water to drink. "Do you really think I can do it, Dad?" my son asked. "Of course, now get going, he replied without a hint of hesitation. His words, tone, and body language all communicated one single message: "I know you can do this. I believe in you and I know that I can count on you." With that, the two boys walked down the road to the field, laughing and talking about fielding strategies, my younger son could not have been happier to have his big brother at his side. When the boys returned, I I overheard older son tell my husband, "You were right, Dad, of course I can do it."

I believe it is that quiet, unhesitating confidence in our children that may be one of our greatest gifts of all.

**How will your child describe your impact on his or her life thirty odd years from now?**

#### Refer a Friend

As my summer gift to you, clients will receive a free telephone or in-person session for each new referral.

Please check my website for parenting teleclasses that I will be offering later this summer.

#### Follow up Links

[www.aaarentcoach.com](http://www.aaarentcoach.com)

[www.freerangekids.com](http://www.freerangekids.com)

***"All children behave as well as they are treated." Anonymous***

Please give me a call if here is anything

[www.empoweredadoption.com](http://www.empoweredadoption.com)  
[www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/kidswlk](http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/kidswlk)  
[www.adoptionconsultant.com](http://www.adoptionconsultant.com)

that I can do to help you and your family.

With Warm Regards,

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