

# The Violence Trap

*By Barrington H. Brennen, November 28, 2006*

Most moms and dads today cannot effectively parent and train their children. This is one of the profound reasons we are having so much emotional and physical violence, disrespect, dishonor, vulgarity, and drug addiction in our society. Why are parents unable to parent their children effectively? The answer is deeply philosophical and at the same time fundamentally simple. Most parents of today might have been parented well but were not taught how to parent their own children. Parents of the so-called "good old days" had control over their children, not with reason and intellectual skill, but with fear and coercion. However, those same children who were raised under the authoritarian rulership of believed-to-be-reasonable parents, were obviously not taught in a way so they would be able to transmit to their own children the same values and principles under which they were taught.

## **SOCIAL ILLITERACY**

The authoritarian parenting style of yesteryear was devoid of training skills that have not equipped today's moms and dads to face the challenges of parenting in a post-modern society. It has created what I call years of "social illiteracy" in our society. This "social illiteracy," has actually caused today's post modern youth to fall into a violence trap. Parents are guilty of creating a trap from which it seems almost impossible to be freed unless radical intervention occurs. (See next week's article entitled "Releasing the Violence Trap.")

## **THE SKILLS**

What are these fundamental skills? Before listing these important skills, let me provide the foundation on which they will be cultivated. Ellen G. White, a great author of family life, writes in her book *Child Guidance*: "The family is a church over which parents preside. The first consideration of parents should be to work for the salvation of their children." Directing children to Jesus is the foundation on which all other training can happen. This spiritual nurture makes attaining the primary goal of parenting easier.

The primary goal of parenting is to train a child who is able to govern his or her life positively under any circumstance without external coaxing and prompting. This is called self-government. How is this done? This is achieved by teaching these three basic skills to the child:

**1) Independent thinking.** It is imperative that parents encourage children to think for themselves. First, independent thinking is realized by creating an interest in reading (not television viewing) through parental modeling and by reading to and then with the child. Second, it is achieved by allowing the child to fail. Teach that successful failure is growing through painful circumstances. It is making room for wrong choices and learning from them. Third, it is achieved by encouraging the child to speak his mind and valuing her opinion even when it does not make sense. This approach was a

taboo yesteryears. A child was not allowed to think for himself.

**2) Critical thinking.** This is a most crucial skill that if present, will reduce the risk of children growing up to a life of violence. Critical thinking is the ability to reason, evaluate objectively, ask appropriate questions, and attain rational conclusions. It is obvious that most of our youth lack this ability. If it feels good, looks good, tastes good, sounds cool is the limit of their reasoning for selection of appropriate behavior. This is fundamentally flawed. Parents can teach children how to develop critical thinking by asking them questions. Parents should discuss with their children the principles and concepts of whatever they are requesting them to do. It is only through this kind of training that the children will have ownership of these values and principles. This is how the values taught are transmitted down through the generations.

**3) Original thought.** Original thought, although closely connected to critical and independent thinking, is the ability to create, in one's own imagination, or through higher critical thinking methods, original ideas that are unique to that individual. This is most important because it allows the child to become creative, spontaneous, and more fun to be around. People who can develop original thought are less likely to become chronically bored. Thus, they may not resort to a lifestyle leading to violence.

## **DESTRUCTIVE TOOL**

What makes it very difficult for children to develop independent or critical thinking and most of all, original thought, is the television. The television robs growing children's ability to think for themselves. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics "too much television too early in life actually prevents the full development of the brain. The first two years of life are especially important in the growth and development of your child's brain . . . Until more research is done about the effects of TV on very young children, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) does not recommend television for children age two or younger. For older children, the Academy recommends no more than one to two hours per day of educational, nonviolent programs."

Parents, to avoid the violence trap, start training your children to think independently.

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