

by Melinda Blau

Role Model Moms & Dads

8 Enlightened Ways to Prepare Your Child for the 21st Century

THESE DAYS, parents often worry about “doing the right thing” to prepare their children for the quick-change world they face:

- A New York father wonders how he’s going to help his 5-year-old son set up his new computer.
- A Korean mother in Boston worries because her 7-year-old daughter feels as if she doesn’t measure up to the “blond-haired, blue-eyed ideal.”
- A father in Indiana, whose own father was remote and out of touch with his feelings, hopes that his sons will come to

him “to talk about their feelings and anything they’d ever dream about.”

- A stay-at-home mother in California goes back to work hoping that she will then give her daughters—7, 5, and 3—a “different kind of role model.”

Parents everywhere are caught up in a whirlwind of societal change—coping with technology; teaching children to value their own and others’ uniqueness; combating a culture of violence and intolerance; juggling feelings and goals, home and work. The world is shrinking, the old definitions don’t seem to fit, men’s and women’s roles are changing, and it’s tough to figure out what skills our kids

will need to live in the 21st century.

According to trend-watchers, the tempo of the times isn’t likely to slow down. In large part, we can attribute these sweeping changes to technology, which has altered the way we communicate and work. Faith Popcorn, New York City-based author of *The Popcorn Report: Faith Popcorn on the Future of Your Company, Your World, Your Life*, notes that by February 1991, 18.3 million people were making money in home-based businesses, 65 percent of them women. The irony is that while we are instantly linked to one another by fax, interactive TV, cellular phone, and computer, we are feeling more isolated, Popcorn says.

“By the time a child is 6, he’s been exposed to a quarter of a million commercial messages, a half a million by the time he’s 18,” says Watts Wacker, M.B.A., resident futurist and managing partner at Yankelovich Partners Inc. in Norwalk, Connecticut. He says that MTV, CNN, and the sound byte have had a major impact on family life, second only to the changes brought by the increasing number of working women. This means that parents must compete with many distractions in getting their points across to their kids and that they probably have less time to do it if they work.

In fact, the entire structure of society is in flux. “We can no longer count on the biggies—government, schools, corpora-

50s

DWIGHT AND MAMIE EISENHOWER

PRINCESS GRACE

60s

PRISCILLA AND ELVIS PRESLEY

PA IN BONANZA

GREGORY PECK AS ATTICUS FINCH IN TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD

YUL BRYNNER AS THE KING IN THE KING AND I

MOMS & DADS: THE WAY THEY WERE

From left to right: BEN ROSS/Photo Trends; SMP/Globe Photos; NBC/Globe Photos; Columbia Pictures Corporation; Globe Photos; Morgan Studios/Globe Photos; AP Worldwide Photos; Globe Photos; RUSSELL C. TURIAK/Outline; Frank Bez Photography/Globe Photos; Globe Photos.

tions, religious organizations”—for stability or reinforcement of values, observes T George Harris of La Jolla, California, founder of *Psychology Today* and former editor of *The Harvard Business Review*. “There’s a freedom and loneliness of a sort that’s never been felt before.

“We have more need than any generation in history to be our own centered selves *and*, at the same time, to be able to connect to a larger group,” Harris says. Our kids will need to be responsible citizens of the global village and flexible, creative, and independent thinkers, Harris explains. At the same time, they will need to be effective communicators.

All this places more stress on parents to create a safe haven at home. “The larger the system, the smaller and more powerful and important the parts,” says John Naisbitt, Washington, DC-based author of *Global Paradox*. In other words, a rapidly changing world leads kids to crave an anchor that will keep them from going adrift. “No one’s trying to go back to Mayberry or Ozzie and Harriet,” Wacker says, “but just in the last five years, we see a trend toward the importance and power and majesty of the family.”

As a longtime president of Oberlin College in Oberlin, Ohio, Frederick Starr, Ph.D., was in a unique position to see the results of 18 years of parenting and warns against a “do as I say” philosophy. “Parents who try to program children are doomed to failure,” says Dr. Starr, who’s

now president of The Aspen Institute, an executive education think tank in Washington, DC. “The way parents really live their lives—that’s the important thing.”

Which trends are here to stay, and which are tomorrow’s Hula Hoops? Which values and attitudes should be emphasized, and which should be ignored? The following guide can help you cut through the confusion and rise to the challenge of being a good role model for the 21st century. It charts major trends, lays out the challenges, and offers tips for giving kids what they’ll need to survive in the future.

1. SO MANY CHOICES

It’s clear that your child will have a mind-boggling array of choices in all areas of life—jobs, travel, relationships, pleasurable pastimes. Successful adults will be those who were taught to slow down and think about what matters to them.

THE CHALLENGE: to inspire kids’ confidence so they are not afraid of taking risks and are willing to be flexible. “Kids need to learn how to be independent, to make decisions—not simply to drift with the stream,” Dr. Starr maintains.

WHAT PARENTS CAN DO: Help kids identify their own strengths and learn to believe in themselves so they can develop confidence and independence, says Pamela Green, vice president of New York City’s Community Education Service, a division of Children’s Television Workshop, creators of *Sesame Street*.

Have your child look in the mirror, Green suggests, and tell you what she sees. “It’s a good way to learn what your child feels about herself.”

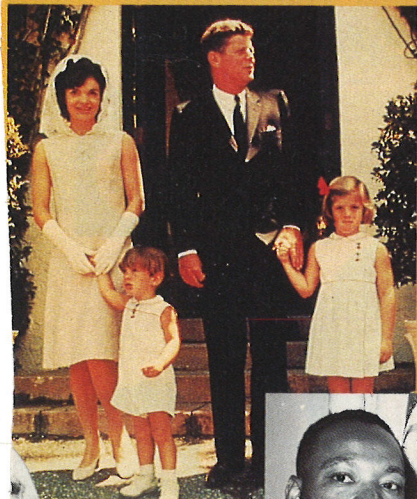
Give children opportunities to make choices. To a 2-year-old: “Would you like oatmeal or corn flakes?” or “Which of these two shirts would you like to wear?” Encourage kids to try new activities. Don’t rush in to solve problems for kids, but acknowledge their disappointments when they fall short of a goal. When her daughter didn’t make the volleyball team, Michele Weiner-Davis, M.S.W., a marriage and family therapist in Woodstock, Illinois, and author of *Divorce Busting*, admits she was also devastated. “But I shared some of the disappointments I had lived through,” she recalls.

2. THE INFORMATION AUTOBAHN

No one wants her kids to be left out of the technological revolution. It’s growing so rapidly that the term “information highway” doesn’t accurately reflect its global quality, Wacker says. Judith Waldrop, M.P.A., research editor for *American Demographics Magazine* in Ithaca, New York, points out that computers were once considered luxuries. “Now they’re viewed as necessities, especially in households with children,” she says.

THE CHALLENGE: to help your child use technology while keeping it in perspective. “Computer literacy has to be sup- ▶

JACQUELINE AND JOHN F. KENNEDY



BETTY FRIEDAN

CARLY SIMON



YOKO ONO AND JOHN LENNON



CAROL AND MIKE BRADY



CORETTA AND MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

70s

ported by the three Rs and proper socialization—a more humanized approach,” Popcorn says. “Good communication skills will be of the utmost importance.”

WHAT PARENTS CAN DO: Don't panic if you know nothing about the technology. “Computer literacy is only a problem for parents,” Dr. Starr points out. “For children, it comes with the air they breathe!”

“Join them, instead of lecturing them,” advises Marie C. Wilson, M.A., co-author with Elizabeth Debold and Idelisse Malavé of *The Mother/Daughter Revolution*. Allow the child to be your teacher. Ask what she knows about computers, have her explain what “cyberspace” is, and learn to play her electronic games.

Ron Taffel, Ph.D., New York City-based author of *Parenting by Heart* and *Why Parents Disagree*, suggests that a good way to “connect” with a child is by switching roles. Ask for your child's help when it's truly something you can't do—like setting the timer on the VCR. “Kids love putting Mom or Dad in the helpless seat,” Dr. Taffel says. “It makes them feel important and useful.”

3. THE VALUE OF WORK

People won't be “married” to one job or even one career; and they'll have to manage themselves. Twelve years ago, 30 percent of the work force was employed

by Fortune 500 companies, Harris notes. Two years ago, only 13 percent was.

“You don't know whether you'll work in a private office or one big amphitheater or even out of your home,” says Peter Drucker, Ph.D., a management expert in Claremont, California. “You have to know yourself, so you can find the right job as you develop and as your family becomes a factor in your choices.”

THE CHALLENGE: to help children roll with the punches and avoid turning everything into a “crisis.” Our kids will need to be resourceful and flexible problem-solvers, Dr. Starr says. “They must continue learning all their lives.”

WHAT PARENTS CAN DO: Relish learning; it will rub off on your kids. “If you want your child to develop athletic or musical talents, pushing her to play Little League or take viola lessons won't work,” Dr. Starr says. “It's far better for a parent to play baseball himself and to love music.”

Remember that it doesn't matter if you're a nine-to-fiver or a stay-at-home parent, a CEO or a carpenter, the key is to let your kids see and understand what you do and that you *value* what you do. If you respect your own work, hobbies, causes, and cultural interests, it will inspire them to pursue their own dreams.

Let kids know that nonpaid work also counts. Talk about the value of caring;

explain that *ability* often transcends the job—an efficient homemaker is a good manager, creativity can translate into becoming a musician or turning a hobby into a business. Help children understand how your own interests developed. This will help stabilize kids later when the chips are down and give them the incentive to shift gears when necessary.

When advertising executive Kathryn Leary gave up the security of a weekly paycheck to start her own international marketing business in New York City, she didn't try to hide her cash-flow problems from her 9-year-old daughter.

“We had to cut back; I explained that it was a temporary condition, but this is what it takes to start a business,” Leary recalls. By being honest, she showed her daughter that it's okay to take chances, to make mistakes, to venture out on your own, and to continue learning.

4. GENDER BLENDERS

Traditional men's and women's roles are becoming obsolete—at home and at work. “They aren't 50-50 or totally gender-free,” grants Judith Langer, a market research consultant in New York City. “But the new American dream requires two wage earners *and* two homemakers.”

THE CHALLENGE: to be evenhanded in your relation- (Continued on page 104)

Left to right: STEVE GRANITZ/Retna. Ltd.; PATRICK LICHFELD/Globe Photos; Globe Photos; ANDREW ECCLES/Outline; Twentieth Century Fox; Globe Photos; CHRISTOPHER LITTLE/Outline; UP/Bettman News Photos; STEVE GOLDSTEIN/Outline.

80s

STEVEN SPIELBERG



BILL COSBY

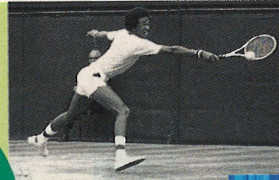


PRINCE CHARLES AND PRINCESS DIANA



KATIE COURIC

ARTHUR ASHE



ROSEANNE CONNER



90s

BILL AND HILLARY CLINTON



HOMER AND MARGE SIMPSON



Disney

**Introduces
Pooh Learning Videos**

**Gentle Lessons About
Friendship, Caring, Sharing—
And Important Discoveries
With Pooh And His Pals!**

**Winnie the Pooh
MAKING FRIENDS
LEARNING**

**Also available:
"Helping Others"
"Sharing And Caring"**

© Walt Disney Home Video distributed by Buena Vista Home Video, Burbank, CA 91521. Printed in U.S.A. © The Walt Disney Company.

ommends. "Preventing children from internalizing sexism is one of the most powerful things parents can do."

5. MULTICULTURALISM

Immigration and other factors are rapidly changing the landscape of America. For example, census figures show that the Asian and Pacific Islander population, the fastest-growing group in this country, will have expanded to five times its current size by the middle of the next century. This means that your child will increasingly interact with people from different backgrounds at school and later at work.

THE CHALLENGE: to help children appreciate their own culture and others'. But don't go overboard emphasizing difference, warns Sara Bullard, education director of the Southern Poverty Law Center in Montgomery, Alabama, and editor of *Teaching Tolerance*, a magazine for teachers. "Inside, human beings share 99.9 percent of their genes; their outsides represent only .1 percent. So we have to talk about differences *and* sameness."

WHAT PARENTS CAN DO: The seeds of prejudice are planted early. The first step for parents is "serious reflection about their own attitudes," Bullard suggests. "Everyone has a tendency toward intolerance; in every playgroup of 4-year-olds, someone is excluded," she notes. "The key is to find the feelings that precipitated the intolerance—it's usually your own insecurity, not the other person's."

"As you discover and change your own biases, you won't feel like a hypocrite when you discourage such behavior in your kids," Bullard says. Gain an understanding of other cultures by learning about them *with* your kids—especially if your neighborhood is inhabited mainly by one ethnic group, she suggests. Go to museums, cultural festivals, or different churches. "If you have an attitude of openness, that there's a lot of interesting stuff going on in the world, your kids will want to learn about it, too," she says.

Multicultural materials are abundant. Look for books about other cultures, children with physical disabilities, or other lifestyles. Buy dolls with realistic features of different nationalities. "The more familiar children feel with other colors and races and types of people," Bullard maintains, "the more comfortable they're going to be with difference."

THE NEW FAMILY

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 102

ships with your daughter and your son and to help them develop qualities that transcend traditional role expectations: compassion, competence, creativity, ingenuity, honesty, openness, flexibility, warmth, assertiveness.

WHAT PARENTS CAN DO: "It's not about treating kids the same, but giving them the same chances and choices," says New York City-based Letty Cottin Pogrebin, whose compendium of nonsexist child-rearing techniques is just as relevant today as it was when her book *Growing Up Free* was published 14 years ago.

To combat the culture, Mary Colwell, R.N., a psychiatric nurse in Northampton, Massachusetts, consciously nurtures different strengths in her daughter and two sons. "I want the boys to be sensitive and to acknowledge that side of themselves, and I want my daughter to stand up for herself," she says. And Leary, who has taken her daughter on business trips all over the globe, is literally showing her that the world is at her fingertips.

Research shows that we often handle baby boys more roughly and that we're more nurturing toward girls, says Olga Silverstein, M.S.W., and New York City-based author of *The Courage to Raise Good Men*. These patterns show up in the ways we handle feedings, parent-child conversations, and toilet learning.

So raise your consciousness: Read books about gender-free childrearing, and take stock of your attitudes and activities. Children learn about gender blending when they see Mom raking leaves *and* reading bedtime stories, Dad toting a briefcase *and* kissing a skinned knee. Also notice what you *ask* of your children: Do your sons cook and do housework? Do your daughters help with repairs?

Of course, parents aren't the only teachers: some movies, cartoons, toys, and books still convey sexist themes. Watch television and listen to music *with* your children. "Ask questions of your daughters, like 'Why do you think all the lead characters are guys?'" Wilson rec-

6. CREATING COMMUNITY

Civic responsibility is replacing a rugged individualism. A related trend, which Popcorn calls "clanning," indicates that people are grouping together "on the basis of some commonality: blood relationships, special interests, political causes, shared tastes." Says Popcorn: "Alone is a solitary struggle; together is positivism. As a group you can offer community service instead of lip service."

THE CHALLENGE: to help children value being part of a community.

WHAT PARENTS CAN DO: Remember that the notion of being "part of" something begins at home. "When you're in a family, you're in a community," stresses Sandra Rodman Mann, Ed.D., a family therapist in New York City. Lay the groundwork by encouraging openness—talk about your own experience and feelings. Take your child to the voting booth, join the school board or PTA, surround yourself with loving friends, participate in a support group, or connect with other parents.

Dr. Taffel advocates "peer groups" for parents of kids in the same grade. By getting together to talk about rules, what's happening in school, and the latest movies, fads, and music videos, you are modeling community and, just as importantly, expanding your sphere of influence in your kids' lives.

7. BALANCING POWER

New models of equality and cooperation are emerging: On a global level, we've seen the end of the Cold War and a shift toward collaboration among nations. Forward-thinking corporations are reviewing hierarchies and experimenting with workers participating in management decisions. And more school systems are involving parents and teachers in decision-making. In families, men and women are struggling to treat each other—and their children—with new respect and revised expectations.

THE CHALLENGE: to give children the confidence and courage to share power in their relationships with others.

WHAT PARENTS CAN DO: Wilson is hopeful about school programs that teach children problem-solving skills. "The idea is to help kids learn to deal with one another. But parents also need to model that," she stresses. "Young children watch care-

fully for who has the power and the responsibility in the family." Children will value fairness, equality, and collaboration when they see Dad valuing Mom's work in the home as much as she values his work outside the home, and when they see the garbage collector treated with the same courtesy as the doctor.

Dan Bennett, a wood craftsman in Oakland, California, has a studio in his basement, and his wife, Denise Witzig, a teacher, works at home part-time. Both parents are intimately involved in the care of Nolan and Gracie, 8 and 4, as well as of their home. Like most couples, they have had their share of who-does-what disputes. "But the kids also see us working it out respectfully," Bennett says. And the couple also gives their children age-appropriate responsibilities and respect; their feelings are heard.

8. INNER PEACE

"We're in a time of change and transition, and people tend to turn to religion and spirituality," Langer notes.

THE CHALLENGE: to give kids a spiritual and moral foundation. This responsibility falls squarely on parents' shoulders, Dr.

Starr says. "No force outside the home will develop in the child the ability to be a whole person, morally and spiritually."

WHAT PARENTS CAN DO: Share your own spiritual quest with your kids however it manifests in your life. "Let them see what kind of inner life you're living," Dr. Starr says. "Pay attention to how you treat others, how you get along with your neighbors and with people who are different."

When we help a blind person cross the street, we teach caring. When we honor our own parents, we teach respect. When we stop what we're doing to hear how a child's day is, we teach concern. When we participate in local government, we teach social responsibility.

"Children are always watching," Pogrebin stresses. "But it's the nondidactic moments that count most—when you're just being yourself."

With a little help from you, your child just might be part of the generation that cleans up the environment, heals the world, houses the homeless, and harnesses technology for the common good. ■

Child contributor Melinda Blau has won several awards for this column. She is the author of Families Apart: 10 Keys to Successful Co-Parenting.

The advertisement features a red border with yellow sun icons. At the top, the Disney logo is on a yellow banner. Below it, the text reads "Introduces Pooh Playtime Videos". To the left, a VHS box for "Winnie the Pooh: Cowboy Pooh" is shown, with the text "Play And Pretend With Pooh And His Pals On An Imaginative Journey To Almost Anywhere!". To the right, a cartoon bear (Pooh) is dressed as a cowboy, wearing a white hat, a blue scarf, and red boots. Below the bear, it says "Also available: 'Detective Tigger' 'Pooh Party'". At the bottom, a small copyright notice reads: "© Walt Disney Home Video distributed by Buena Vista Home Video, Burbank, CA 91521. Printed in U.S.A. © The Walt Disney Company."