

The Myth of Child-Centeredness



By Joseph Tan
Good Monday Consulting

Executive Summary

When pressed by a reporter for a quick tip on effective parenting, well-known family psychologist and parenting author, John Rosemond replied with wit – “I have only four words – *Put your marriage first.*”

We now live in a society where fathers have forgotten how to be *husbands* and mothers who have forgotten how to be *wives*. In this special *Character-Wise Report*, you will rediscover the foundational wisdom of creating *parent-centered* homes versus the postmodern psychological phenomena of developing *child-centered* families.

Beyond this article, the topic of exercising right leadership at home is covered extensively in a one-day workshop for parents with children 12 years old and below. Check it out at: <http://www.goodmonday.com/parenting.html> .

So, are you running a *parent-centered* family? Check out the following indicators – the results may surprise you!

Checklist #1: DO I HAVE AN EXCLUSIVE SLEEPING ARRANGEMENT?

It seems innocent enough – what’s wrong with letting the child snuggle in with the parents so that he feels the warmth and security of a loving family?

Here’s the myth: The concept of *attachment parenting* states that sharing the family bed will draw the child closer to you and create a sense of bonding.

Here’s the truth: There are higher principles at stake here – *boundaries and authority*. A child’s behavior and attitude is governed by his general respect for the boundaries set for him at home. Central to his understanding of boundaries is the parent’s duty to train him in respecting the *exclusiveness* of the marriage relationship (he is not a member of the wedding!). In training your child to sleep on his own, you are inadvertently sending a message that there is an *authoritative difference* between your status and his status at home. Obedience breeds within the context of a respectful relationship.

Checklist #2: DO I SCHEDULE IN REGULAR MARRIAGE TIME?

Society today is in dire need of couples who demonstrate what a strong marriage looks like. Nobody needs to see this model more than your very own child – why? – her attitude towards marriage in the future is governed by what she observes at home!

Here’s the myth: The more attention I pay to my child, the more attention she will pay to me. My performance as a parent depends on how much I do for my child.

Here’s the truth: Your relationship with your spouse must be *stronger* than that with your child. Think about it – what gives the child security? A rock-solid marriage becomes the child’s anchor and security that he can also one day be fully released from the home to society (successful emancipation). A couple who constantly revolves around the child will only create continuous dependence giving rise to the now growing social phenomena called the “boomerang kids”.

Of course, I am not advocating that you abandon your child. On the contrary, when you regularly spend time alone with your spouse (engaging the services of relatives or babysitters), you become re-energized (from your love relationship) to be a better parent! You have heard it said before – *the best gift a parent can give to his child is to love the spouse.*

When you get back home today, make sure the first person you greet (and kiss) is your spouse and not your child.

Checklist #3: IN A SOCIAL GATHERING, WHO GREETES WHO FIRST?

When royalty walks into the ballroom, everyone stops what he is doing and greets the very important guest and acknowledges the arrival of a person of greater importance and status. Now, let's turn the ballroom into the home of your relative or friend – when your child enters in, does he immediately greet the host (with enthusiasm and eye contact)? Or does everyone stop what they are doing and “high-five” the arrival of the little royalty (who is too busy playing his video game to notice all the adults anyway).

Here's the myth: The child's self-esteem is at stake. Whatever can be done to notice them will boost their confidence and self-image.

Here's the truth: The child already has too much “self”! In fact, child-rearing is about getting the “self” out of him so that he can notice more about the people (especially other adults) around him. The “terrible twos” syndrome is symptomatic of a child who rebels against the notion that he is no longer the center of the universe! Your duty as a parent is to train your child to notice *and acknowledge* the presence of others *first* by simple, clear and respectful greetings. Isn't this a practical antidote for selfishness and self-entitlement? Think about it.

Another similar context is in the serving of dishes during meal time. Let's say, the family is having dinner with grandma and grandpa – who is served first? Often in such a situation, the first five minutes of meal time is devoted to the child and then the adults get their turn. This is not right. The child receives respect by first learning how to *give respect*. Let your child see that grandma and grandpa is served *first* – it would be beautiful if the child is trained to serve them! What a wonderful world this would be ...

Checklist #4: DO I SPEND A LOT OF TIME AS A CHAUFFEUR?

Co-curricular and enrichment activities are growing – there is a class for almost every imaginable talent and skill from financial literacy to football leagues! The child now spends more time “behind” us (at the car backseat) rather than “in front” of us (face to face conversations or family games and activities).

Here's the myth: The child ought to be sent for as many enrichment activities as possible and as young as possible – just in case, he might be deprived of a “hidden and undiscovered” talent.

Here's the truth: A lot of the parental stress experienced today comes from a packed schedule of after-school activities which fail the long-term test – “*Will this activity actually matter in 10 years time?*” So much of what we do as parents is motivated more by fear – the anxiety of losing out to the boy next door. The truth is this – when a child is young (especially up to the age of 12 years old), the development of *character* is far more important than competency. The building of your child's character cannot take place in an environment where you are constantly “on the move” – the most often repeated instruction at home is – “*Hurry up and get into the car! We're going to be late for _____.*”

When was the last time your family had free time at home? Do you remember fun, casual moments where you can “let your hair down” and just relax? Do you have regular family meals (with conversations, not eating and watching TV at the same time)?

A more relaxed home (less after-school activities) contributes to less stressed parents leading to better behaved children! Furthermore, when the child is grown up and decides to learn a new skill, it is still not too late because his character is already in place and his attitude will give him that extra edge.

For more character lessons, check out : <http://www.goodmonday.com/parenting.html>