

## Parenting the Soul of the Child and Teenager

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Ohr HaTorah Synagogue

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The greatest gift you can give your child is the gift of insight, reasoning and wisdom.

1. Childhood and teenage years as opportunities to “Discover the Self, Discover the Other, through the Discovery of Wisdom.”
2. Cultivate Insight, Virtue, Reasoning and Rationality, Wisdom and Depth
3. The idea of the child depends on a variety of factors, including age, gender (with all its complications) personality, and developmental stage.
4. Long Note on Adolescence (here defined as extending from 12-20, even to 25 years old in modern society), is usually seen as a time when parents, schools and other institutions prepare the adolescent for their adult lives. This approach is valid, but only to a limited degree. Adolescence is a fully separate developmental stage. This stage requires imagination and play, though different from that childhood. Teenagers are developing a sense of self and identity, what they are good at, where they are in the various hierarchies, and why. Teenagers are developing into private human beings, sometimes sexually active. Teenagers are coming into their souls, as it were. This seminar includes a focus on moving away from raising teenagers and managing adolescents solely as “adults to be,” but rather guiding consciously the developing soul of the teenager.
5. Introductory Cases
  - a. Thriving Child or Teen – until they crash.
  - b. Quitting Child or Teen – because they were forced into it.
  - c. Picky Eater Teen – because they don’t like the food, need to be defiant or need break away from family.
  - d. Defiant child or teen – seeking independence, reducing control of others
  - e. Teasing / Squabbling / Argumentative Child or Teen with siblings
  - f. Squabbling / Argumentive with Parents – lack of respect and boundaries.
  - g. Dilatory Child or Teen – because they are concerned with their life, not our regimen.

- h. Lying Child Teen – because they fear, live in an imaginary world or want privacy and independence.
- i. “Lazy” Child or Teen (including screens, social media) – seen as such because their will to action does not coincide with what adults want.
- j. Messy Child or Teen – because they need to mark out their private space.
- k. People in Rehab, former children and teenagers – often whose souls were crushed.

## 6. Making Room for Parenting the Soul

- a. Briefly: what do we mean by soul?
  - i. Meaning, Purpose, Identity and Destiny discovered through
  - ii. Soul – Inner life - Unconscious realm where life experiences are worked out and meaning is created. The authentic Self is shaped. Briefly, at its core, meaning has to do with (for example), love and devotion, care, concern, virtue, justice, fairness, truth, beauty, wisdom, honor, courage, desire, play, happiness and joy, humor, duty and responsibility, gratitude, awe and wonder, a sense of the divine and ultimate purpose and meaning, as well as humility, sadness, tragedy, grief, reversal, hope, and resilience and acceptance.
  - iii. Conscience and Virtue
  - iv. James Hillman, “The soul is where events become experiences.” Soul as the experience of the self in the world.
  - v. Deep, reflective experiential connection to the world - e.g., Love, Justice, Truth and Beauty. Taught as transcendent ideals, not human conventions
  - vi. Self-awareness and insight, their journey, their narrative, life story. “What’s it like being in there”
  - vii. Sense of the transcendent
  - viii. Higher consciousness
- b. Problem of managing the child as a project – the focus on extrinsic goals and markers. “Checklist” parenting. Children can become an extension of parents and other adults, and this puts stress, conscious and unconscious, on the child and teenager – they respond by seeking approval, defiance, unconscious resistance and destructive behavior, to others to themselves.

- c. Our “should’s” must be within reason and within the child’s nature, development, interests and capacity. Guiding vs. pushing. Re-reasoning decisions.
    - i. Behavior at home
      - 1. Parents
      - 2. Siblings
      - 3. Care of self and space
      - 4. “chores” and work
    - ii. School
      - 1. Grades, homework, college, majors, the future.
      - 2. Problem of being on the parent’s timeline, as opposed to developing their own.
    - iii. Music and Art, Interests, Hobbies, Sports
    - iv. Self-image, including body image.
    - v. Friends, romantic others, social media
    - vi. Achievements
    - vii. Focusing less on our opinion of their happiness and success and more on helping them discover theirs.
    - viii. Focusing less on our opinion of their living their lives to full potential and instead helping them understand their potential.
    - ix. “Sex, Drugs, Rock n’ Roll”
  - d. Managing toward extrinsic goals often results in a home of disapproval, anger, criticism and stress: The deadly Four C’s
    - i. Criticizing (including advising, commanding, demanding)
    - ii. Complaining
    - iii. Condemning (insult, label, compare, accuse, blame, shame, hurtful gestures of face and hands)
    - iv. Conflict / Arguing
7. If we are not parenting mostly for check marks, where do we start? What are our goals?
- a. First, we figure out who they are. Suggestive List:

- i. Observation – non-judgmental.
    1. Their personality.
    2. Where they are in their development as a child/teenager.
    3. The way they experience and interpret the world, “prism and prison” (understand them first, don’t correct them)
    4. Their moral character – don’t try to fix them at the observation state.
  - ii. Insight into your filter (your agenda, what you want) and disabling it to the extent possible: yourself, your inner makeup, your agenda, and your childhood.
  - iii. From a non-judgmental observation, and once we can suspend our own needs, one can start to have insight into who your child is:
  - iv. Some mix of
    1. Genes
    2. Early Childhood (object relations)
    3. Interaction with world ever since childhood.
    4. History of conscious and unconscious choices
  - v. “The fact that they can do something does not mean that they should.”
8. If not toward our agenda, to what are we parenting them? Constant guiding, reinforcing, teaching (didactic and experiential), focusing on connection, not correction. 90% connection; 10% correction. All based on good grounding in both developmental psychology and your child’s own particular nature.
- a. Safe – no reckless endangerment of life and limb.
  - b. Healthy –
    - i. Physically: grounded in their bodies, eat well and exercise. Issues with screens, body image, food, cigarettes, pot, alcohol, sex and drugs.
      1. Finley – the importance of self-defense.
    - ii. Emotionally: inner regulation – overcoming rigidity and chaos
    - iii. Mentally: Rationality, Facts, “Police Report” style sharing, problem solving
    - iv. Morally – see next
    - v. Spiritually: Meaning, Purpose, Transcendence, God
  - c. Moral – not to cause unnecessary, intentional harm to others, especially emotional. To have a conscience, including empathy. No endangerment of others. Benefiting others when possible.

- d. Respectful of the property and persons of others – including siblings
- e. Rational and reasoning – can determine facts, reason well, including moral issues – problem solving.
- f. Can process well with others.
- g. Insightful/Reflective/Wise – into the self (especially motivations), others, the situation, processes of people and groups of people, factual knowledge.
- h. To love and be loved well
- i. Ability to thrive in community – social interaction
- j. A sense of power, freedom and competence in their lives
- k. Creativity
- l. Grieving well
- m. Industrious / Work ethic
- n. Learning
- o. Pleasure/fun
- p. Cultivating Virtues
- q. Meaning in life
- r. If interests, knowledge of the Divine

## 9. How

- a. Listen to their feelings and emotions – don't correct.
- b. Try to move them from “Feelings (right brain) to reason (left brain)” and then to reasoning well with an eye toward virtue.
- c. Reflection on experiences - the gift of insight.
- d. Dreams, fantasies, wondering – don't correct them. Teach them how to interpret them.
- e. Take an interest in their interests.

## 10. What we need to know:

- a. Some theory of the personality (e.g. Erik Erickson, Jung, Enneagram)
- b. Some theory of the inner life
  - i. (Assagioli) –
    - 1. Ego-Self,
    - 2. Ego-Mind,
    - 3. Higher-Self,

4. Archetypal Self,
5. The Will
  - a. Strong Will, Skillful Will, Good Will, Transcendent Will
  - ii. William Glasser – Choice Theory
    1. Aside from personality, our ego-self thoughts, feelings and emotions are “choices.” - An inner calculus – payoff.
  - iii. Albert Ellis – Rational Emotive Behavioral Therapy.
    1. A – B – C. Activating Events do not cause our emotional Consequences – our Beliefs do. Problem of irrational beliefs – “should’s”
- c. Knowledge of Transactional Psychology – Eric Berne (*Games People Play*) and Thomas Harris (*I’m Okay, You’re Okay*). Types of Conversations:
  - i. Banter – no goal, just pleasantly passing time. “How about them Cubs!” “Ain’t it Awful.”
  - ii. Work – something to get done, focused toward an end
  - iii. Processing – Rationally thinking through a problem, hearing all sides, respectful and affirming. The conversation can cycle through many time periods. Processing with parents and siblings is the training ground for life-long processing well with others.
  - iv. Solving – giving and getting advice, getting to a course of action quickly
  - v. Venting – letting emotions out – within boundaries (get to processing if possible)
  - vi. “Games” Something underhanded afoot, some surreptitious agenda, conscious or unconscious roles – domination, victim, savior, helpful, hysterical, etc. Try to get to “I’m okay, you’re okay.”
- d. How to respond to hard questions: Right and wrong (moral realism – e.g. human rights), purpose, meaning. God, religion, the Bible, etc.

11. All struggles are opportunities to teach insight

- a. Coach vs. authority/enforcer. Children and Teens need both, but mostly the former.

12. The demons of the unconscious ego self (negative ego-states). We try to help them work through. All have natural, adaptive dimensions, but each can become problematic. (this is an incomplete list)

- a. Anger at others
- b. Anger at self
- c. Control, dominance, gratification
- d. Resentment
- e. Despair/Grief
- f. Guilt
- g. Shame
- h. Victimhood
- i. Fear
- j. Anxiety
- k. Envy
- l. Confusion
- m. Procrastination
- n. Stubbornness
- o. In general - Wants, needs, desires.

### 13. Guidelines

- a. Understand yourself, as the parents, in terms of object relations – how you shape your children’s attachments, their developing mind. How their experience of you, the parent, siblings and the home shape how they experience the world.
- b. Therapy –
  - i. Finley recommends cognitive psychology, managing consciousness, educational assessment – how their minds function.
  - ii. Finley: avoid too much psychodynamic (“parents are the causes”) and psychiatry if possible.
  - iii. Do not do therapy on your teenager – move from feelings to teaching skills. Feelings are important but not decisive.
- c. Keep serious interactions brief, unless they want more.
- d. Few rules – make sure they are rational. Enforced – no threats, just reasonable consequences.
- e. How to express disapproval. Brief and square. Let them know what you want them to do, when and why, but don’t argue or try to persuade – they typically already know why. Tell them what you are going to do if they don’t comply. Make sure you will follow up. Typical problems:

1. Disrespect and defiance
2. Disobedience
3. Lying (usually issues of fear, privacy, independence, transitioning to adults)
4. Squabbling with siblings
5. Odious friends and romantic interests.
6. Procrastination and non-performance
7. Other issues, raised by participants.

f. Never argue with a child (reason instead)

- i. Dispense with “why” discussions
- ii. Let them make a case
- iii. Give your pre-decision
- iv. Allow them to respond
- v. Decide

g. Other issues:

- Kind, clear, firm (no shouting, etc.) setting of boundaries
- Do not pathologize or label your children.
- No advice or persuasion unless they want it. (They usually don’t)
- Ask: Would you want to grow up in your home?
- Ask the right questions (not ‘how was your day,’ ‘do you have homework,’ instead: e.g. “Tell me about your friends.”)
- Don’t make them talk – act in way that they want to share information with you. Parents have to be cagey, sometimes.
- Don’t make them say please and thank you. Don’t guilt them into being grateful. Teach insight instead – let them arrive at gratitude.
- Patience. Accept imperfection
- No chores “so they learn” – make sure work around the house is meaningful and helps “the team.”
- Reasonable order and grooming.
- Manners

14. Family culture –

- a. The family as team
- b. The values of the family, for example: Humor, fun, safe, respectful, industrious, supportive.

c. Code of conduct; coat of armor.

15. Have a theory, e.g.: Social and emotional learning (SEL) is the process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions.

16. For reference - Wisdom Work:

- a. Vision, Will, Skill, Reflection
- b. Virtue, Rationality, Wisdom and Depth
- c. Duty, Bliss, Resilience, Everything Matters.



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