

Expert: parenting calls for great personal sacrifice

By LUCINDA LANDAU
Special to The Independent/Free Press

How do you raise an obedient, happy child who is full of self-esteem?

Traditionally, many have believed that the combination of forceful language and a switch in hand achieved results. Others adopted a laissez-faire, do-your-own thing approach.

"So," asked child and family educator Gord Naylor, "what went wrong? Why have both approaches failed?"

Naylor presented some practical guidance for raising self-esteem in children and adolescents Sept. 27 when he addressed 50 adults in the Gallery of the Halton Hills Cultural

Centre. Naylor is the founder and principal of the Nancy Campbell Collegiate Institute, a private school in Stratford. He is also the director of a social service agency — a group of treatment homes for disturbed and abused children and adolescents run by a staff of 70.

"Parenting really calls for great personal sacrifice," Naylor said. "As parents, we are called to raise our children in a spirit of servitude and humility, in order to promote their growth and well being."

He asserts that this is no easy task in a world which focuses on outrageous behavior.

Naylor outlined three models which govern human interaction. The

'power', model, he explained, divides people into those who have power and those who do not. In this model, everyone is held in check by a system of often arbitrary and rigid laws which results in oppression.

The 'pleasure' model, he reflected, was popular in the 60's wherein we were all treated as perfect equals. 'If it feels good, do it' replaces the rigid laws, but this model, Naylor said, ultimately results in chaos.



GORD NAYLOR

Parents need to set limits Naylor described the circumstances of a 12-year-old boy who as brought to one of Naylor's treatment home by an exasperated parent. The child climbed up on the furniture and swung from the rafters, while the father just threw his hands up and said he didn't know what to do with the child.

Naylor said that the problem with this child was that no clear expectations had been set for his behavior. "This 'vacuum' leads to tremendous anxiety in a child," Naylor said. To alleviate that anxiety, children will either become aggressive or apathetic.

"But, Naylor pointed out "we are not all created equal; we want our inherent uniqueness to be recognized and valued in the world. As children or adults, we can blossom when boundaries for our behavior are negotiated and clearly respected."

Reach agreement through consultation

Having demonstrated the weaknesses in traditional child-rearing approaches, Naylor then outlined a model based upon the belief that each human is essentially noble. The 'growth' model values each individual's unique nature and personality. The method relies upon a constant parent-child consultative process to establish acceptable behavior.

The first step is to negotiate a

creative list of parent and child needs and wants, which is balanced by family principles and governed by parental restraint.

"Parents need to let children take responsibility for their choices and feel the consequences of those choices," he added.

In Naylor's treatment homes; when an adolescent stays out for an hour past curfew, up to triple that amount of free time will be lost from the next evening.

When children see the consequences of their behavior — both good and bad — a feeling of trust and security is created. The feedback cycle is positive, children express enthusiasm, they are productive and they reach their creative potential.

"Even five-year-old children can participate successfully in a family consultation," he stressed.

"Physical and corporal punishment are ineffective means of teaching responsibility. The more you strike a child, the more often you'll have to keep on doing it," said Naylor. The long-term effect is a powerless adult with no means of shaping the behavior of the adolescent.

While the consultative method may not produce the immediate 'apparent' results of physical punishment, it allows the parent and child to build bridges of understanding that will eliminate need for a physical threat.

The seminar was sponsored by the Baha'i community of Halton Hills.

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