

# ISSUE 22

## Kids

**W**hen I got married, I thought my life had changed forever. I was right, of course, but those changes did not compare to the ones that happened as a result of having children. When my wife and I were first married, we had lots of opportunities to enjoy ourselves, but those times diminished fast after we had kids. Even a simple thing like going to the movies became a major task; we not only had to pack food, diapers, spare clothes, teething rings, bottles, and a baby buggy, but we also had to be prepared to leave the theater before the end of the movie to keep from bothering other members of the audience due to crying babies. As the children grew, the problems became more serious: teaching them everything they need to know in life such as how to behave and even how to dress, worrying about their safety and social status, advising them on schoolwork, dates, and their future. By the time they were truly independent, my wife and I were too old to want to go out and enjoy ourselves any more.

### How have your kids changed your life?

- (1) They have made me more mature.
- (2) They have made me more understanding.
- (3) I found out that children are expensive.
- (4) I learned that children are incomparable treasures.
- (5) Now I'm always tired.
- (6) They taught me how to laugh.
- (7) Because of them, I learned how to keep from losing my temper.
- (8) I now know how difficult it is to be a good parent.
- (9) I'm sure being childless is better.



-diminish : reduce or decrease

-baby buggy : baby carriage; stroller

-lose one's temper : become very angry

-teething ring : object for an infant to bite on while teething

-incomparable : such that nothing else can compare

# Sample Answers

(A) Nobody ever told me how much kids cost. The initial doctor and hospital bills were *staggering* amounts *in their own right*, but the health care expenses never seemed to go away: vaccinations, colds, flu, chickenpox, dental work, and so on, until graduation; fortunately, we never had to face any serious medical problems. Then, there were school costs and fees for private lessons; athletic and musical equipment; clothes; insurance; allowances; and savings for future expenses to come, like college *tuition* and *dowries*. But, now that most of it is over, I have to say that the investment was worth every bit.

(B) I want to enjoy my life. My husband and I don't need kids for self-fulfillment. Instead, we can eat out as often as we please, go anywhere we like *on the spur of the moment*, stay out late, and travel the world. Meanwhile, even though we aren't very careful about money, we are avoiding the enormous costs of child-rearing, so we're actually able to buy whatever we want and still have money left for our eventual retirement.

## Speak Your Mind

1. How many children would you like to have?
2. Is having boys any different than having girls?
3. In what ways can our children make us sad?
4. Why is it difficult to be a good parent?
5. Why is it difficult to be a good child?
6. What have you learned from your parents?
7. What is the most important thing you should teach your child?
8. What do you think is the ideal relationship between parents and children?

# Speak Your Mind

## Speak Your Mind Helpers

### 1. How many children would you like to have?

(A)

I would like to have one boy and one girl, just to balance things out and to experience all the problems and joys of parenthood.

(B)

I am *nostalgic* for big families. Both of my parents had lots of brothers and sisters, but none of my cousins are interested in *following suit*. When my aunts and uncles get together to *reminisce*, I learn how exciting and unpredictable life can be growing up with such a *motley* of siblings. I think today's young people are too spoiled and too *conformist* in their behavior, largely because they don't have to compete for attention from their parents.

### 2. Is having boys any different than having girls?

(A)

People may think I'm old-fashioned, but I can't help believing that our society absolutely depends on having a male *heir* to carry on the family *lineage*. I have nothing against women, and treasure my own daughters *immensely*, but I think they should be *subordinate* to men. It is easy to find foreign women to marry and have our children, and many of them are much better suited for these roles than our own, native females, who have gotten spoiled by feminism.

(B)

From experience, I know that raising boys is not the same as raising girls. It isn't so much that one gender is harder than the other to raise, but the process is different because we expect the *outcomes* not to be the same. At first, little boys are harder to take care of. I think they are more *frail* than their sisters. But by the time they start going to school, they are more independent and don't require as much *supervision*. Girls, on the other hand, are largely trouble-free until they reach *adolescence*; then they need lots of personal attention and psychological counseling. Then, an amazing thing happens: the boys suddenly become *rebellious*, and parents have to start devoting a lot more time to controlling their behavior, while the girls become mature, responsible adults all at once. Raising kids is like being on a roller coaster that runs on two opposing cycles.

### 3. In what ways can our children make us sad?

(A)

We all want our own children to be better than we are. They should be smarter, healthier, better looking, happier, and more successful than we; and then, when we find that that is probably not going to happen, we feel like we have somehow failed to do our parental job correctly.

(B)

Because of our experience, we know how to approach life's problems. And we think we can guide our children in ways to avoid our mistakes. Sometimes they listen to us, but many times they have to test our judgment and find out for themselves. When the *inevitable* happens, we can't help but feel sad that they didn't take our advice and avoid some unnecessary unpleasantness in their lives.

### 4. Why is it difficult to be a good parent?

(A)

Parenting doesn't come with a user's manual. Every mother and every father has to rely on *on-the-job* training rather than *prior* experience. It is all a process of trial-by-error, and we all make lots of mistakes along the way.

(B)

The main reason that parenting is so hard is because we care so much about the *end product*. If we were only talking about some *commodity* like a radio or *abstraction* such as money, we could afford to be more *lackadaisical* about an *occasional lapse* in performance. But we always realize that we are dealing with our own children, whom we love and cherish and want even more than the best for, so we are always hyper-critical of our own job performance. Every error is a *glaring* failure, from our exaggerated *perspective*.

### 5. Why is it difficult to be a good child?

(A)

It is always hard to *live up to* our parents' expectations. They always want us to be better than we really are and to do better than we actually can. They *mean well*, but they just aren't content to let us be ordinary people.

(B)

There is much that kids don't know about life, love, work, and society, so they make a lot of mistakes as they grow up. It's not because kids don't try to be good, and they certainly *crave* their parents' respect, but they don't know all the right answers yet.

# Speak Your Mind

## Speak Your Mind Helpers

And even when they have the correct answer, they don't always know how to achieve it. It's like doing really hard calculus problems at home, before the class reviews them.

### 6. What have you learned from your parents?

(A)

A few years ago, I would have said, "Absolutely nothing." I thought my folks were *clueless* about all the important things in life and knew that my own view of things was far superior to theirs. That was when I was nineteen. Now that I'm twenty-six, I'm amazed at how much they have learned in the last seven years.

(B)

It's hard to put into words, but actually what I have learned from my parents is "everything." They taught me to be the person I am today, with my ideas of what is right and what is wrong. They taught me how to succeed in society and how to get along with people. They taught me how to balance my selfish desires with my generous *impulses* so that I am useful both to myself and to the world I live in. No matter what I achieve, it will all be because of my parents.

### 7. What is the most important thing you should teach your child?

(A)

If we can teach our children to be *resilient* in tough times, we will have done our job well. One kid will be serious about everything, and another will find joy in anything, but both need to know that life can be full of big obstacles to overcome. There will be good days and bad days, but they must learn from experience and go forward. Their parents won't always be there to pick them up and dust them off if they fall down, so they have to be able to perform that function on their own.

(B)

Every child must know what it means to be a member of our culture. Our values, our aspirations, our various roles, correct social *intercourse* — all of these aspects define who we are, and if we don't learn them properly we cannot be real people in our society.

-**clueless** : stupid, knowing nothing

-**impulse** : sudden strong feeling that one must do (sth)

-**resilient** : having the ability to recover quickly, as from misfortune

-**intercourse** : communication between people or activities that people do together

## 8. What do you think is the ideal relationship between parents and children?

- F : I'm always amazed when I see you with your kids.
- M : Why? Don't you think I'm capable of having kids?
- F : No, silly. But you never seem like a Parent! All I ever see is a bunch of friends of different ages, rather than a father with his children.
- M : Why, thank you. I find that to be a real *compliment*.
- F : Well, you're welcome. But I'm not sure you should be so happy about it. I don't think it is wise to be a *buddy* to your kids. They need adult guidance from their parents, not mere friendship.
- M : I'm not at all *convinced* that I know enough to be their guide; you know as well as anyone how imperfect I am. I've got too many bad habits of my own to want to be any kind of role model for my children, but since we're all friends together they can *overlook* my faults and love me for who I am. For that I am very grateful.
- F : No one expects you to be perfect; no one is. But you are expected to teach your children *filial* respect. There's a huge difference in your ages and experience, and there should be a similar difference in how you relate to each other. Being a father is a serious job, and a father should behave just that way.
- M : It's not that my kids and I all like the same things; we don't. I *detest* hip-hop music, and they don't much like fishing. But it isn't what we do that matters; it's how comfortable we feel in each other's presence. I don't want my kids to be afraid of me or to show false respect for me. I just want them to enjoy my presence as much as I do theirs.
- F : But what about when they need to be disciplined? A father can punish his children without *jeopardizing* his status, but a person never could punish his friends without destroying their relationship.
- M : Hmmmmmm. You might be right about that. But so far the issue has never come up. We've always been able to solve any problems they have come up against by *talking* them *out* and sharing our views. I guess we've been lucky.
- F : You certainly have! In my family it's been a constant struggle to maintain the proper tone. My husband and I insist that our kids must know how they're supposed to behave at home and in school. We want to make sure that they grow up the right way, so they can get ahead in society and also take care of us when we're old. If we *let up* in our training, we're afraid that they'll make too many wrong choices and won't be happy or satisfied. When they grow up and have families of their own, maybe then we can become "friends," since we will all be adults together, but meanwhile we insist on the proper inequality.
- M : I'd rather be the friend of my children now while I can. "Someday" may be too late.

