

Guidance Guide

Hold on to Your Kids

By Allison Parr-Plasha, M.S.S.A., L.S.W., C.P.C.C., Guidance Counselor

“We cannot truly know independence until we know dependence.” These were the resounding words of a mentor of mine while in graduate school. After many years in practice and becoming a parent, that statement has proved itself to be true repeatedly. However, this statement does not resonate with everyone. Nor does it seem to be a cultural norm. There are many parents and educational programs that push for independence as early as possible. There is no doubt young children can do amazing things physically and intellectually. However, are they ready emotionally?

As parents, my husband and I encouraged dependence early on which have led to having two very independent children (outside our home). However, as our son grew older (now eleven), I started to succumb to the cultural expectation to nudge him towards a level of independence he wasn't ready for.

Last month, I came across Gordon Neufeld and Gabor Mate's book, “Hold on to Your Kids: Why Parents Need to Matter More Than Peers.” I feel grateful I found this book as a parent and guidance counselor. I have been normalizing, like many of us, that it is natural for adolescents to be rude and aloof and distant from parents and adults. When I would see this personally or professionally, I would lament with the other parents/adults that this stage is difficult but to be expected. According to the authors of this book, this is not a normal nor a healthy part of development. This is a consequence of our cultural climate. As I have embraced the strategies outlined in their book in our own household, I feel that I now have an opportunity to prevent losing my child (children) to peers. I highly recommend this book to

every parent, teacher and adult. The following are excerpts from the book.

Does your child or a child that you know....

- Have difficulty playing alone unless attached to a computer/technology?
- Become easily bored when away from friends or when not engaged in technology?
- Appear to be inappropriately sophisticated, jaded in some way, pseudo mature before their time?
- Seem to be less innocent and naïve?
- Have less excitement for the world, less desire to be in nature or engage in creativity?
- Resist taking cues from adults?
- Seem focused exclusively on contact with his/her friends?
- Feel difficult to control or advise?
- Have little to no fear of getting in to trouble with adults?

As a parent or teacher, do you...

- Feel less confident in your role?
- Have just as much to teach kids, but your capacity to get your knowledge across has somehow diminished?
- Feel less empowered?

What's changed?

- Many of our children have become peer oriented rather than adult oriented.
- Children's attachments to parents are no longer getting the support required from culture and society.

- Children are increasingly forming attachments with their peers that compete with their parents.
- Young people are turning for instruction, modeling, and guidance from their own age group.
- Peer bonds have come to replace relationships with adults as children's primary sources of orientation.

What is attachment?

At the beginning of life this drive to attach is quite physical. If everything unfolds according to design, the attachment will evolve into an emotional closeness and finally a sense of psychological intimacy. Attachment theory is a concept in developmental psychology that concerns the importance of "attachment" in regard to personal development. Specifically, it makes the claim that the ability for an individual to form an emotional and physical "attachment" to another person gives a sense of stability and security necessary to take risks, branch out, and grow and develop as a personality. Children who lack this kind of connection with those responsible for them are very difficult to parent or, often, even to teach. Only the attachment relationship can provide context for child-rearing.

Why is adult oriented parenting important?

- The secret of parenting is not what a parent does but rather who the parent is to the child. When a child seeks contact and closeness with us, we become empowered as a nurturer, a comforter, a guide, a model, a teacher or coach.
- For a child well attached to us, we are her home base from which to venture into the world, her retreat to fall back to, her fountainhead of inspiration.
- All the love in the world cannot get through without the psychological umbilical cord created by the child's attachment.
- In an adult oriented culture, where the guiding principles and values are those of more mature generations, kids attach to each other without losing their bearings or rejecting the guidance of their parents.
- **Why isn't peer orientation working?**
- Children may know what they want, but they do not know what they need. Children are unable to see this for themselves or their peers.
- The child is unable to rest from the relentless for-

aging for approval, love and significance.

- Peer oriented kids cannot feel fulfilled. For fulfillment to sink in, the child must be able to feel deeply and be vulnerable. Only mature adults can offer this.
- It is not natural nor is it healthy. A child is simply not mature enough to support their peers in navigating emotional development.

What's the Solution?

- Claim your children. If you have already lost them to peers, you need to woo them back. Is it time to take them on a trip? Weekend away? Get creative, have fun and brainstorm with them.
- Connect. Spend time in their rooms at night. Read to your kids even though they know how to read. Play a game. Hang out (I just saw a great movie, *The Chef*, that highlights this).
- It's okay and important to say "no." i.e. this is a family weekend.
- Playdates and creating connections with peers are great. Too many playdates and friend time is unnecessary. It's all about balance.
- You don't have to engage with your children 24/7, nor do you have to always be "doing" something. Create a space for "being."
- Create family traditions
- Technology fast. Outside of homework, have your children unplug during the week or on the weekend. And you do the same.

When to Let Go?

- The attachment relationship of child to parent needs to last at least as long as a child needs to be parented.
- This can last throughout college or beyond.

This past summer I had two great visits with my college roommates. Their children, despite being teens, were incredibly friendly, kind and respectful to not only us, but their parents. My friend claims they are lucky. My claim is that they have always been "present" parents (even when they were temporarily separated). These kids have many wonderful friends and are highly accomplished, but the parents choose to drive to Colorado and Florida once a year as a family (despite the fact they can

afford to fly). They have family meals and family outings in Northern Michigan regularly. They are busy and yet very connected to one another. I think the authors had it right....parenting is so much easier when we remain attached to our children. Just like a garden needs ongoing attention through weeding, tending to, and watering, our children/young adults need us to provide nourishment on every level. By doing this they will be able to firmly root themselves and blossom fully.

Erie Day School Motto

May I live each day being mindful of the goodness that surrounds me.

May I always stretch my mind and heart so that I live my life in wisdom and love.

May I be a loyal friend to others and willingly help those in need, and may I always honor and respect the earth of which I am a part.



Erie Day School

Learning today, leading tomorrow.

Erie Day School
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If you have any questions, comments or additions to the *Guidance Guide*, or know someone that should be included on the email distribution list, please contact Allison Parr-Plasha at 814-452-4273 or via email at aplasha@eriedayschool.com

Erie Day School
1372 West Sixth Street
Erie, PA 16505
814-452-4273
www.eriedayschool.com