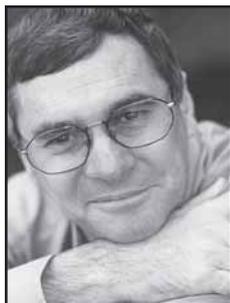


Teachers as parents and parents as teachers of young children

Ian Lillico



Ian Lillico (father of three sons) is the former principal of City Beach High School in WA (recently retired) and consultant in boys' education. He has done action research in gender throughout Australia and New Zealand from 1992 and in the Northern Hemisphere during his Churchill Fellowship in 2000. He has been with the education department of WA for 31 years and has held the positions of teacher, Head of department, Deputy Principal and Principal. Ian is widely known for his expertise in the area of boys' education and is a publicist, recognised speaker and advocate in the area of boys' education throughout Australia. He was awarded a Churchill Fellowship for the year 2000 to further boys' education in Europe, The United Kingdom and North America. He is recognised as a leader in the field of boys' education worldwide and provides seminars and professional

development to teachers, parents, parenting and sporting groups and all kinds of organisations around Australia and overseas.

In 2004, Ian was made a National Fellow of The Australian Council for Educational Leaders (ACEL). In 2005 Ian was appointed as The ACEL National Travelling Scholar for 2005. He is an advisor to the NSW Department of Education and Training in the areas of Gender Equity, Middle Schooling and Boys' Education. Ian is a keynote presenter for the Australasian Boys' Education Network (ABEN) and a consultant for the "Success for Boys" program.

In this article I want to examine the needs and behaviour of young children in the Post-Birth, Toddler and Early Childhood stages. The information is relevant to teachers of young children, parents, guardians and all involved in their lives at these ages. Teachers are welcome to share this information with parents and make this article available to parents and guardians. I have been involved with educating children for 31 years and spend a lot of time in preschool centres, kindergartens and primary schools as well as communicating with parents every day in my parenting seminars and through my website - www.boysforward.com.

The period from birth to age eight is arguably the most important time to bond with children. Babies need cuddles, love and the sound of our voices – from Mum, Dad and everyone involved in their lives. There is a need to engage in activities that are relaxing including an emphasis on going to parks, lakes, the seaside and places where we can commune with nature. Latest brain imaging has found a link between calm children and very early calm and

serenity in parent's lives and in their early experiences at kindy and preschool. Music is particularly important pre birth and right through early life experiences for the infant.

Babies crave human touch and very young children who are denied this human need may become delinquent as the human need for touch is paramount. No amount of appropriate touch and nurturing can have any harmful effects on young children and early ideas of toughening up young boys have been totally disproved and not linked to any type of dependency behaviour or perceived weakness in boys. Babies without appropriate human touch will often suffer life-long repercussions, including a propensity for violence, if this is also absent in their later development.

Behaviours at this age are focused on meeting baby's primitive needs for food, shelter, touch and toileting and should not be misunderstood as the baby being naughty, trying to manipulate us or deliberately trying to make our lives difficult. We can expect a gradual reduction in baby's need for continual



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reassurance and a gradual increase in independence in some basic tasks.

The ensuing “toddler” stage is not an easy one as we try to establish routines and independence, while also trying to keep them close to us. Toddlers will fall and hurt themselves and no amount of caution on our part will ensure complete safety from the occasional fall or minor accident. Human children are fairly resilient and we have to gradually let them establish some independence in daily chores like eating, washing and toileting. Again, behaviours centre around their basic needs rather than any intent on making our lives difficult.

Many of the tantrums that we see from toddlers are a result of their frustrations in not getting their little bodies to do what they want them to do - be it opening a door, climbing over a wall or being able to reach a favourite toy. Some boys, in particular, develop an amazing love and connection with their toys and limited possessions. When another toddler or older sibling mistreats their teddy or breaks their favourite pencil they become very upset as they don't have many possessions (mortgages etc.) and what they do have they become very attached to.

This is the time at home that early routine and predictability need to be established and times set aside - particularly just before bed or bath time to talk about events of the day, read to them and spend time with them. We should expect that behaviours and gains in all areas will not be linear but will comprise of ups and downs. Make time to listen and encourage them to speak for themselves whenever possible. Shy children often develop their shyness as their parents, guardians and teachers speak for them too often. Keep your explanations to their many questions short and simple and help them explore and identify with their new found world. Telling preschoolers stories from our own childhood helps them identify their place in the world and also assists their bonding with parents and other adults in their lives.

Offer preschoolers choices in their clothing, foods and activities and expect them to take care of some of their possessions. Early time and resource management are essential if we are to instill these ideas in adolescence. Reading to young children – particularly fantasy – helps them deal with the harsh realities of life later and aids in their emotional intelligence. When difficulties arise in later life, youngsters can often retreat into fantasy to get over things. Children not raised with fairy stories and fantasy often have trouble surviving major traumas.

Early Primary School is often termed the golden era of childhood. It is a time when boys and girls are beginning to spread their wings, test their independence and start to assert themselves in the home and at school. Making time to listen to them with full attention is vital and they should see us talking, negotiating, laughing, crying and discussing world events using our emotions and feelings.

We need to try very hard to catch them doing something good and praise them for it while ignoring the little things they do wrongly. Don't be too quick to help them with daily tasks and, instead of jumping in and solving their problems for them, continue to listen to them and help them to problem solve. At this stage of their lives we need to let them know that the negative things they see on the media are perpetrated by a minority of people and that most people in the world are kind, loving, moral people. If children are not optimistic about the future at this age, they want to stay children forever and not grow into adults and take responsibility. They need to see adults having fun and enjoying life so they don't associate adulthood with seriousness.

Behaviour at this age needs to be modified through praise not punishment. Punishment will contain behaviour, but not change it. Rules should emphasize positive behaviour. We need to praise kids for keeping the rules rather than punishing them for breaking the rules. Let's all work together to raise children in our society – “It takes a village to raise a child”