

*Names are changed to honor client confidentiality*

## **Who'll Pick Up The Pieces?**

A recurring theme has been cropping up among my clients with children. They worry about how their children will turn out as they launch into the world.

I've touched on this kind of worry before, but one of my clients, Mary, has some real insight into what it takes to prepare a small person to flourish once he or she leaves the nest. She's raised her own children in a way that was deliberately designed to give them the tools and confidence to strike out on their own when the time comes.

I was impressed by the simple, common-sense nature of her methods, so I asked her to write down a road-map of her reasons and methodology for the rest of us. The following is her letter.

"When my firstborn was just months old, I was invited to attend a new mother's luncheon. The chance to attend an event outside of the house with a prepared meal, adult conversation and childcare provided seemed to be a day that was heaven-sent.

"As I eagerly settled in to listen to the keynote speaker, little did I know that what was about to transpire would change my parental outlook and the direction of my children's lives. The speaker shared many inspirational words, but the only words I internalized were these: 'Your main purpose from the day your child is born is to wean them into the world.' What could that mean? How could that relate to my son? Were we to push them out of the nest like our feathered friends? After all, I was still my baby's source of nutritional livelihood. This man wasn't a new mother; he surely didn't understand.

"As the days passed, those words often surfaced and penetrated my consciousness. I reflected on that premise for the next couple of decades, only to realize the validity of his challenge to us on that day.

"It first became a factor for me when the floor of our home was cluttered with youthful objects needing to be redirected into a storage container. My first memory was of the Duplo blocks made by Lego for little people.

"They were a favorite playtime activity, and when their day was done, it seemed to me that I was best equipped to handle the task of picking up and placing them neatly into a basket for future enjoyment. Then those words would enter my thought process, and I would painfully watch my son put them into the basket at a rate I felt was too slow and with no organizational skills by color or size. These many laborious pick-up sessions over the years were painful for me to observe. But knowing that I was building character in my child and preparing him for the

world kept this routine intact.

“As events presented themselves over the years, the wisdom spoken at that luncheon became clearer. I realized that by instilling responsibility and accountability, I had given my child the self-confidence and independence needed to enter the world as a productive citizen. This gave him the confidence and strength to face challenges outside the safe haven we called home. He had developed positive traits over the years due to conscious actions on my part. He was proud of his achievements, and success built success. Yeah for both of us!

“My experiment complete, I encourage parents to grant their children the opportunity to take the journey from birth to adulthood with gentle nudges, genuine learning experiences, the right to fail, the privilege to recoup after a fall, and the love and praise that will empower them to be the best that they can be. They will thank you for your wisdom, patience, and unconditional love when they have left the nest and are able to fly in the formation we call society.

“Enjoy every minute of their childhood, and reap the rewards from your knowledge and love during their developmental ‘weaning.’ If we don’t pick up the pieces when they are children, we won’t have to pick up the pieces when they are adults.”

Mary’s glad she restrained herself. “It wasn’t easy,” she said. “I’m a perfectionist so it took everything I had.”

It paid off. “Today, my children both have successful careers.”

Yes, the seemingly simple act of picking up our children’s toys can have far-reaching effects. The don’t-sweat-it-I’ll-do-it-for-you message they hear can influence their future, their relationships, their work ethic, and how they expect to be taken care of by others.

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