

Safety Training

Some training has nothing to do with character building. It just keeps your child alive and healthy. These illustrations may sound harsh to some, but I have proven, along with many others, that this approach is both effective and safe.

GUN SAFETY

Being a hunting family, we have always had guns around the house. With little ones, we made sure to keep the guns out of reach. But, with the possibility of their sooner or later coming in contact with a loaded gun, we trained them for safety.

With our first toddler, I placed an old, unused and empty, single-shot shot-gun in the living room corner. After taking the toddler through the “No” saying, hand-switching sessions, they knew guns were always off limits. Every day they played around the gun without touching it. I never had to be concerned with their going into someone else’s house and touching a gun. I didn’t gun-proof my house, I gun-proofed my children.

HOT STOVE

We have always had a wood-burning stove for cooking and heating. Toddlers can be seriously burned by a red-hot stove. I have seen some awful scars. But, we had no fear, knowing the effectiveness of training. When the first fires of fall were lit, I would coax the toddler over to see the fascinating flames. Of course, they always wanted to touch, so I held them off until the stove got hot enough to inflict pain without deep burning—testing it with my own hand. When the heat was just right, I would open the door long enough for them to be attracted by the flames. I then move away. The child would inevitably run to the stove and touch it. Just as his hand touched the stove, I would say, “Hot!” It usually took twice, sometimes three times, but they all learned their lesson. Other than the training session, where we never even raised a blister, we never had a child get burned. It was so effective that, thereafter, if I wanted to see them do a back flip, all I had to do was say, “Hot!” They would turn loose of a glass of iced tea.

SINKING FEELING

When our children were coming along, we lived in a house with a pond in the immediate yard. As they grew to be toddlers wandering around outside, we always watched them closely. Yet, knowing the possibility of one getting out of sight, we cranked up the training. On a warm spring day I followed the first set of wobbly legs to the inviting water. She played around the edge until she found a way to get down the bank to the water. I stood close by as she bent over reaching into the mirror of shining color. Splash! In she went.

Girl, it was cold. I restrained my anxiety long enough for her to right herself in the water and show some recognition of her inability to breathe. When panic set in (mine as well as hers—not to mention her mother’s), I pulled her out and scolded her for getting close to the pond. She didn’t swallow any water, and there was no need for resuscitation—except on my wife who took several hours to begin breathing normally. We repeated the same process with all the children. It took only one time for each of them to learn respect for the water. And it got easier on us.

We did have trouble with one of them. She is the one who became mobile early, crawling at four months and walking at seven. She always had marvelous coordination. She just wouldn’t fall in. I got weary taking walks to the pond. So, to bring the class to graduation, I pushed. Oh, she didn’t know it. As she was balanced over the water, I just nudged her with my foot. To this day, I still believe that if I had left her alone she would have swum out. But, it distressed her enough to make her not want to play around the pond.

No, they didn’t stay distressed of the water. My children were all swimming by the time they were four. We still closely watched them, and we never had a close call. The training worked. Do not try this unless you are sure that you can maintain full control of all the circumstances.

GET OUT FAST

Last winter, my two girls, nine and eleven, were riding with me in the old 4x4 Army truck. The gravel road was bumpy and rough. When I made a stop at an intersection, I heard the two, twelve-volt batteries, which are located right behind the seats, short out and begin to arc. An explosion of spraying battery acid was potentially imminent. The girls understood none of this. However, when I said (this time in a raised voice), “Get out *fast!*” they didn’t ask, “Why?” I immediately got out on my side to run around and open their usually jammed door. As soon as I cleared the door on my side, I looked over my shoulder to see how they were doing. They were gone. The door was still closed, and the window, which also sticks, was only open about half way. But, they were nowhere in sight. When I got around to the other side, there they were piled up in the gravel road rubbing sore hands and knees. “How did you get out?” I asked. “Through the

window,” they choked out. “Head *first?*” I asked. “You said get out fast,” was their accusing reply.

My son, who was driving another truck behind me, said, “I didn’t know what was happening. Suddenly they both came flying out the window head first and landed in the road.” I had trained them to jump upon command. They did. There may come a time when their safety or survival will depend on instant obedience. “Duck!” or “Hit the deck!” has saved more than one life.

TRAIN FOR REALITY

The world is sometimes a hostile place. A child must learn early to take precautions. Don’t give your child a modified sense of reality. Teach them about heights and falling, about guns, the danger of knives and scissors, the caution of sharp sticks and coat-hanger wires, the terror of fire, and the danger of poisons and electricity. School them. Drill them. Show them examples. Expose them to death—the death of a pet, or an accident victim. This must be done with calm, confident reverence, not with fear. Don’t be excessive. One or two examples to a three-year-old is enough. Control their environment, but don’t shut out reality. Expose them to it at a level they can comprehend and at a rate suitable to their maturity. The goal is to keep the training ahead of the external assaults and to have them worldly wise by the time they must face it on their own.

SNAP TO IT!

I am the General. My wife is my aid and adviser—the first in command when I am absent. I rule benevolently. Love and respect are my primary tools of persuasion. I lead, not command from a distant bunker. Mine know that I will lay down my life for them; consequently, they will lay down theirs for me. They find joy and pride in being part of the team. To instantly obey a command is their part of the team work. In doing so, the home team runs smoothly and our common objectives are met.

I have taught the children to obey first and ask questions later. When they were small and I put them through paces, they learned to immediately do what I said. If they ever failed to instantly obey a command, I would “drill” them. “Sit down. Don’t speak until I tell you to.” Understand, I was not taking out frustrations. It was all done in the utmost pleasantness and usually even fun. “Stand up,” I would say. “Now come here. Go touch the door.” And, before they could get there, “Sit.” Plop, down they would go. “Now, go to your rooms and clean them up.” Just like little, proud soldiers, off they would go to the task.

If one of them should fail in his attitude, he would be spanked—without haste or hostility, mind you. Negligence or clumsiness was a time for patience and grace, but lazy rebellion was punished with the rod.

This may sound all cold and harsh. I hope it doesn’t; for it was warm, friendly, loving, and produced confident, calm, hard working, loyal children and adults. In actuality, because of our consistency the children were seldom spanked. They soon learned that every transgression received a *‘Jus recompense of reward’* They knew, without a doubt, that to even delay obedience meant a meeting with the rod. Delayed obedience was dealt with as disobedience. Such firmness with consistency makes for a sense of security.

Even today, without looking at the children, I can snap my finger, pointing to the floor, and they all (including the ones over six-feet) immediately sit. I can point to the door, and they all take it. When a visit develops into a counseling session, I have given the gesture for the children to vacate the room and the company never knew what prompted everyone to leave. Teach your children to snap to it.” They will be better for it, and it will make them more lovable—which makes for more loving.