



## PARENT LEADERSHIP:

# Revisiting the Authority Stage of Parenting

### TAKING STOCK:

“Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.” Proverbs 22:6

Over the centuries, wise parents have adhered to the 3 Bedrock Parenting Principles in raising their children. They are:

→ LOVE

→ TEACHING PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY

→ TEACHING NOBLE VALUES & VIRTUES

In Month 10, you were introduced to Ellen Galinsky’s Six Stages of Parenthood. The following two Stages of Parenthood have been discussed frequently in KinderKronicle. Here is a summary:

The **Nurturing Stage**—begins at birth and lasts until your child begins to say “NO.” During the nurturing stage, LOVE is the paramount parenting principle.

The **Authority Stage**—begins with your child saying “NO”—usually around age 18 to 24 months. That’s when parents must decide “what kind of authority to be.” During this stage, parents build on the foundational principle of LOVE as they turn their focus to the next parenting principle of TEACHING PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY. Parents have about three years to teach their child the basic building blocks of personal responsibility in their life before the next stage of parenting begins.

Your child is 49 months old now. This means you only have about a year left of the **Authority Stage** of parenting before you graduate to the **Interpretive Stage** of parenting. Here is a brief description of the next stage:

- The Interpretive Stage is where parents “*figure out how they want to interpret reality for their children and more firmly decide on the values they want to promote.*” The Interpretive Stage starts as outside influences like extended family, friends, preschool, and similar daily intrusions begin to filter into the family circle. However, the Interpretive Stage will be in full swing when your child starts school and lasts as the dominant parenting stage until adolescence.

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## Preparing for the Interpretive Stage

In another year, you will have your hands full with the Interpretive Stage. The best way to prepare for the Interpretive Stage is to revisit and review how the Nurturing and Authority Stages of parenthood have gone for you. Ask yourself, “Is there action I can take within the next few months to improve my effectiveness with the core principles taught during these stages?” Here are some ideas for your consideration:

**First**, review the parenting style or discipline you have chosen. Think you haven’t selected one yet? Like it or not, by default, you have. In KinderKronicle Month 1, page 2, we introduced you to the four major parenting styles or disciplines, and in Month 22 we discussed them in greater detail. As a reminder, the four basic parenting disciplines are:

1. **UNINVOLVED PARENTING,**
2. **AUTHORITARIAN PARENTING,**
3. **PERMISSIVE PARENTING, OR**
4. **AUTHORITATIVE PARENTING.**

Study after study recommends the **Authoritative** style of parenting. KinderKronicle Month 22 reviewed the basic principles of Authoritative parenting. Authoritative parents build on the principle of Love as they transition to teaching “Personal Responsibility.” Teaching Personal Responsibility in an “authoritative way” is key to practicing the Authoritative Style of parenting.



**Second**, there are three important elements in teaching Personal Responsibility:

- **Family Rules**—the child who has learned to respect and obey family rules will become a law-abiding member of society. Think of family rules as the walls of a safe house. As long as a child stays within the walls of his or her safe house—in other words, keeps the family rules—all is OK. However, when they venture outside the walls of their safe house—then there are adverse consequences.
- **Teaching Choices**—children must learn that every choice has a good or bad consequence that they cannot control. Parents who let their child experience the consequences of the bad choices they make teach them that they are responsible for their choices.
- **Work Ethic**—while children are young and anxious to help, take advantage of their natural eagerness to learn new things working with Mom and Dad.

**Third**, here is a checklist to use to gauge whether you are on the right track during your Authority Stage of parenting, or whether you need to make some adjustments to your parenting ways:

- You have established reasonable, age-specific family rules for your child.  yes  no
- You have clearly communicated those rules and your expectations to your child.  yes  no
- The rules are consistently enforced.  yes  no
- You teach these rules and expectations to your child with love and kindness.  yes  no
- You do not take away the negative consequences of your child’s bad choices, but you support your child as she experiences them.  yes  no
- You point out and acknowledge good choices that your child makes.  yes  no

You can also ask yourself questions about your daily parenting behaviors to see how well they are matching up with your parenting plan. For example, you might ask yourself the following:

### Love

- Do I show my child love every day?
- Do I communicate my love with words, touch, and actions?
- Does my child know he is an important member of our family?

A child is more likely to listen to your counsel if he feels loved and valued.

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### Personal Responsibility


- Am I willing to revisit our family rules as my child grows and matures?
- Do I give my child opportunities to succeed, and teach her that mistakes are okay?
- Do I encourage her to try again?
- Have I accepted that it is my responsibility to be the authority in the home, to help my child grow within reasonable boundaries?
- Am I willing to lead by example?

### Teaching Noble Values and Virtues

- Are we holding a weekly Family Hour?
- Does everyone in the family participate?
- Do we teach our children through our actions as well as through our words?
- Do we take advantage of teaching opportunities as they arise?

Authoritative parents understand that love and personal responsibility are both important, and they strive to teach their children noble values and virtues so that their children will want to make choices with good, positive outcomes, even when the parents aren't nearby.

Asking yourself these types of questions is like taking a look at a map to make sure you are on course for the destination you have chosen. If you are unhappy with any of the answers you give yourself, remember that it is always possible to make course corrections by making a goal, breaking it down into smaller steps, and getting started.

The endgame in parenting is to be able to send off healthy, well adjusted, productive adults into the world. Giving your child a firm, lasting foundation of love, boundaries, and a strong moral code is a great way to help your child on the path to success. 

## FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS:

# A Sense of Shared Meaning

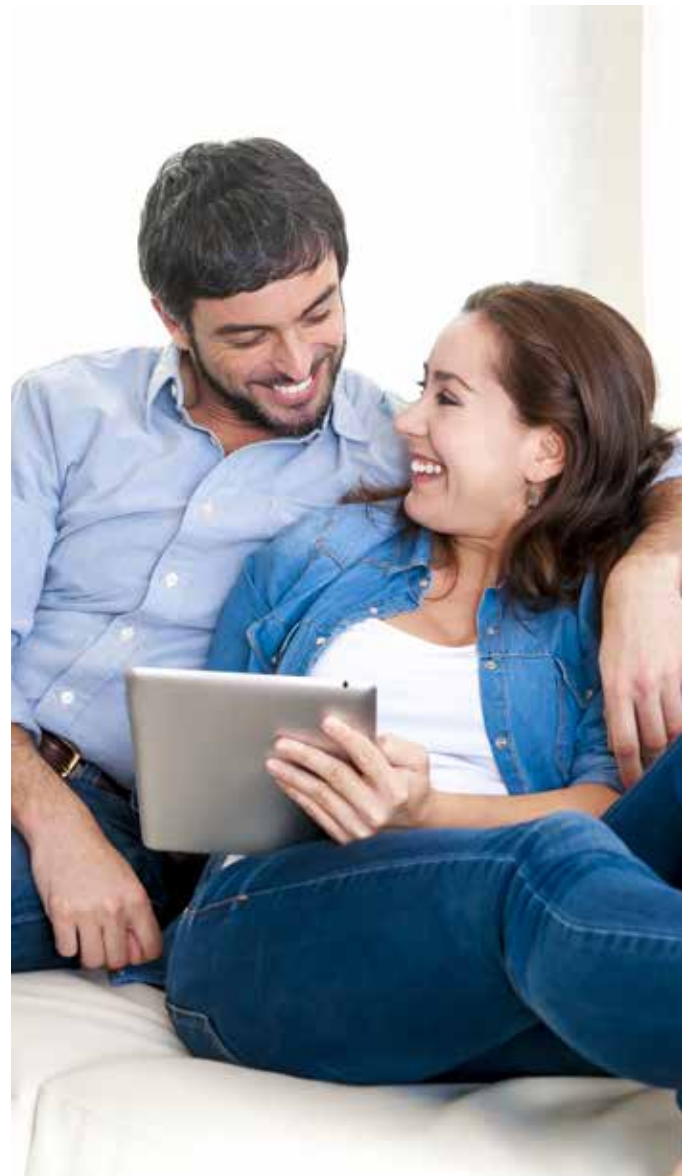
*Marriage isn't just about raising kids, splitting chores, and making love. It...has to do with creating an inner life together—a culture rich with symbols and rituals, and an appreciation for your roles and goals that link you, that lead you to understand what it means to be a part of the family you have become.*

— John Gottman

Because Mom-Dad unity is so important, KinderKronicle will be discussing ways to strengthen the spousal relationship a lot over this next year. When Mom and Dad feel connected and are working as a team, the entire family benefits.

One way to strengthen your relationship with your spouse is to cultivate a sense of shared meaning. As *Just in Time Parenting* explains, “every couple has their own special way of doing things with their own customs, rituals, and traditions. This creates a feeling of closeness, belonging, and knowing.”<sup>1</sup> And when you are willing to share your “innermost thoughts, feelings, dreams, goals, and plans for the future with each other,”<sup>2</sup> you create a strong sense of shared meaning with each other.

Does this mean that you must always agree with your spouse, and that every goal must be shared by both of you? No, of course not. But it does mean that couples with a sense of shared meaning “develop a culture that incorporates both of their dreams and goals and that helps them grow together. They talk openly about their convictions and search for common ground on fundamental values.”<sup>3</sup>





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Family researcher John Gottman suggests that the following can help couples create shared meaning<sup>4</sup>:

- **Create family rituals, or traditions**

You might always give each other a kiss before the workday begins, or you might always snuggle in bed together for a few minutes before going to sleep. Or perhaps you meet up for lunch every Monday, or take a hike together every Saturday, or participate in church services together every week. Even family dinners and a weekly Family Hour, held regularly and consistently, could be considered a family ritual—These little repeatable, easy to accomplish routines become part of the fabric of daily life, strengthening your connection to one another.

- **Discuss your roles together**

Dr. Gottman states, “our perspective on our own roles and our mate’s can either add to the meaningfulness and harmony between us or create tension.”<sup>5</sup> For example, you might discuss with your spouse what your expectations are for yourself as a husband or wife, or what values you consider to be most important to share with each other and your children. Dr. Gottman believes that “the more you can talk to each other frankly about your deeply held views about your roles in life, the more likely you are to reach a consensus that makes sense and comes naturally to your family.”<sup>6</sup>

- **Create goals—both personal and couple goals**


Sharing goals with your spouse can give you shared meaning as you work together to accomplish something that is important to both of you—it gives you

an opportunity to work together as a team. Sharing your deepest goals with each other also is a very intimate act, because you are willing to be vulnerable and share your deepest selves with each other.

- **Create symbols together**

Dr. Gottman explains that symbols can be both concrete and more abstract. For example, a couple’s home might hold strong symbolic meaning of the family they are building together. Or, the family stories they share over and over again might represent the values they hold most dear.<sup>7</sup>

If you will recall, in KinderKronicle Month 16 we discussed religious faith as part of safety nets for families. Numerous studies show that a shared religious faith strongly contributes to the success of participating families

As you spend time building your relationship together, you create shared meaning. You create “tethers” of connection between you which can strengthen you and bind you closer together, helping to keep your relationship strong as you grow together and move forward together. 

1. <http://articles.extension.org/mediawiki/files/9/98/JITP49-50mo.pdf>
2. Ibid.
3. <https://foreverfamilies.byu.edu/Pages/marriage/Nurturing.Connecting.AndSharing/Creating-Shared-Meaning.aspx>
4. <https://www.gottman.com/blog/shared-meaning-is-key-to-a-successful-relationship/>
5. Gottman, John M., and Nan Silver. (1999). “Principle 7: Create shared meaning” in *The seven principles for making marriages work* (Chapter Eleven, 243-258). New York: Three Rivers Press (Random House, Inc.).
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.

## NEXT ISSUE- MONTH 50 LOOK FOR THESE EXCITING FEATURES AND ARTICLES

FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS:  
**Traditions are Family  
Glue**

CHILD CHATTER:  
**Hands-on Learning**

THE DAD DIFFERENCE:  
**Serve**

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