



PARENT LEADERSHIP:

Interpreting the World to the Children

Once parents have taken the time to “interpret [themselves] as parent[s],” the most important task of the Interpretive Stage becomes how to **interpret the world to the children**, meaning that parents need to decide “how they are going to interpret their children’s existence to them; what facts they want to share, what behavior, . . . manners, [and personal character traits] they want to teach, and what [family] values they want to impart.”¹

Here is a discussion by Ellen Galinsky, author of *The Six Stages of Parenthood*, of the types of things parents may need to explain, or interpret, to their children:

“In almost every encounter with a child, parents are asked, verbally or nonverbally, to explain. Parents may choose not to or feel unable to answer. But if they do respond, they find themselves explaining facts: where the water in the sink comes from and where the water in the toilet goes, . . . how bridges are built over rivers, [and] why there are more right-handed people in the world than left-handed. Parents also pass on skills: How to solve the problem if there is one stick of gum and three kids, or how much change the child should get from the market.

Parents [also] interpret the social world: Why the man next door is always yelling, why a teenage baby-sitter said, ‘shut up,’ why a neighbor is moving, and why people get divorced. They warn their children of possible dangers—of not putting their hands into electric sockets or leaning out of windows or crossing the street without looking...

Parents deal with fears, from the fantasies of monsters in the dark corners of the room that younger children have to the fears of older children—of crazies on the street, of spiders scurrying across the floor, of pesticides, of prisons, war, nuclear radiation leaks, and eventual death. **Essentially, parents find themselves being asked to describe their version of the world.**²

KINDERKRONICLE-CHANGING LIVES ONE FAMILY AT A TIME

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Remember, you, the parent, are the leader in your home. Along with interpreting the reality of the world that surrounds them, parents in the Interpretive Stage continue to set behavior standards and think about their expectations for their children. If you are unhappy with the authority relationship you have established, you can make changes. After all, you and your child are always growing and changing and so are your needs. The idea is to take a look at where you want to go, and where you are, then take steps to reconcile the two.

Galinsky states that parents who see family life as having ups and downs, rather than the way television sit-coms picture it, fare better, because they recognize that mistakes and changes are to be expected as their family works together to find a good balance.

Finally, interwoven throughout these tasks is the need and desire to transmit your family values to the children. In fact, as Galinsky points out, values are communicated in most dealings between parent and child. Every time a parent mediates a conflict or offers an opinion, that parent is transmitting values and morals to their child.



Your example also transmits values and morals to your child—what you do, what you say, and how you spend your time and energy all show what is important to you. **Family Hour**[®] is also a great way to consciously share your morals, values, and beliefs with your child. As you talk about the things that are important to you, engage in activities that highlight your values and morals, and work together as a family, your child gets a concentrated lesson on what values you as a family hold dear. And those values and morals are cemented in him as he is exposed to them daily in your home.

Now is a great time to talk with your spouse and children about what morals, values, and beliefs you value and want to focus on in your home. As their children start to approach the teenage years, many parents intensify their emphasis on values,³ but they are most effective when they consciously share their values and morals from the time their children are young. This is why KinderKronicle talks about the importance of Family Hour so often—because building a strong foundation of love, values, and togetherness right from the start helps your children stay strong when they need the most support.

Here are some value/moral-related questions to think about as your child enters school:

1. How do you explain what truth is?

2. How do you want to emphasize and model honesty to your child?

3. How do you want to explain differences in others to your child? Do you acknowledge differences and then look for similarities?

4. How do you want to teach respect for others to your child?

5. How do you want your child to treat others?

6. Are you modeling the values you want your child to exhibit?

7. Are you actively sharing and practicing your values and moral behaviors with your child?

8. What are your priorities? Are your actions in line with your priorities?

The following statement, first seen in Month 59 of KinderKronicle, also bears repeating:

As you move through this stage, keep the things that are working, modify the things that need to change to meet your child's changing needs, and make new decisions to help you move forward to your end goal—sending a happy, healthy, functional adult out into the world. 

1. Galinsky, Ellen. *The Six Stages of Parenthood*. Da Capo Press, 1987.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

CHILD CHATTER What to Expect From Me Developmentally During My 5th Year

Child: Hi, Mom and Dad! Can you believe I'm already five?

Parent: I know, it's crazy! You are looking more and more like a big kid every day!

Child: Yup! And even though I've done a lot of growing already, I'll do even more this year!

Parent: So, what should I be looking for in your development this year?

Child: I'm glad you asked! So, physically, I'm getting more and more capable. I should be getting pretty good at gross motor control, meaning that I can jump, I can balance pretty well, and I can start learning to swing and climb things pretty well on my own. I can also use the toilet with little to no help.

Parent: That's great! How I can I help you with these gross motor control skills?

Child: That's an easy one—play with me! Hopscotch, skipping, balancing games, and swings are all great ways to build my gross motor skills. I need the chance to run around, play on playground equipment, and practice moving my body's bigger muscles. Free play on a playground is a great way to get the practice I need! I could even join my first sports team to get in some running and moving time.

Parent: Great, that sounds like fun! And what about fine motor control?

Child: During this year, I should get pretty good at dressing myself—including those tricky buttons! I can also use zippers. And I am getting better and better at using a fork and spoon correctly. If you give me a table knife, I can probably start learning how to use that safely, too. Oh! And I'm going to need to know how to hold a pencil correctly, how to hold crayons, and how to use safety scissors in kindergarten, so we can start practicing at home together!

Parent: We can definitely do that. Maybe I'll let you practice your scissor skills on the papers I need to shred.

Child: Sounds good to me!

Parent: So, how about your emotional development? What should I expect there?

Child: Well, I have some good news, and some bad news. The good news is that I often will have more self-control now. The bad news is that I probably won't be consistent. Regulating my emotions is hard, and it takes a lot of work! And when I start school it can be even harder, because if I'm trying to sit still and listen to rules and instructions all day at school, I can sometimes just be **done** when I get home, and I might melt down at home.

Parent: I understand. If it makes you feel any better, grownups sometimes have a hard time managing our big emotions, too.



Child: Really? Wow, that does make me feel better. Thanks. With that thought in mind, I want you to remember that five can be hard sometimes—I am becoming more of a big kid, but I'm still little in a lot of ways. So please be patient with me! On the good news side, if you have been teaching me self-regulation skills, I might start trying to use some of them—like trying to work out problems with my friends without asking for help right away, or I might try to calm down with big breaths if we practice that. Oh! And I do like to please you, so I will probably try to be cooperative more often, even if I'm still demanding a lot.

Parent: I will do my best to remember to be patient, thanks! How about social skills? Any new developments there?

Child: Oh, definitely! I should be easily understood by most people now, because my language skills should be pretty good at this point. I'm getting better at sharing, and better at higher-level thinking and problem-solving, too. I want to make friends, and I'm starting to feel and understand the idea of empathy for others—meaning I am starting to understand that other people may have a different point of view, and I'm more likely to care about my friends' feelings, along with my own. In fact, besides working on self-regulation this year, learning empathy is really important. If you help me learn about feelings and how to care about what others are feeling now, I have a much better chance of success as I grow older. In fact, KinderKronicle is going to tell you all about empathy and how to help me learn these skills this year.

Parent: I'm glad to hear that. Well, it sounds like this is going to be a busy year in your development!

Child: For sure! Thanks for helping me to learn all these skills. It's good to have a Mom and Dad who love me and help me. Thanks for all you do! 

Sources:

<http://www.pbs.org/parents/childdevelopmenttracker/five/index.html>

<https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/actearly/milestones/milestones-5yr.html>

<https://www.verywellfamily.com/5-year-old-developmental-milestones-620713>



FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS: The 5:1 Ratio

In the 1970s, family and relationship researcher Dr. John Gottman helped lead several longitudinal studies about relationships. His team found that “The difference between happy and unhappy couples is the balance between positive and negative interactions,”¹ and that there is a “magic ratio” of 5:1, meaning that successful relationships have five or more positive interactions for every one negative interaction.²

While the research was focused on couples, the benefits can be used to maintain a close relationship with your child, too. As your child starts school, he begins to branch out and form attachments to others beyond the family circle—he will likely bond with teachers, make friends among his classmates, etc. But his bond with you remains his most important attachment. Remembering the 5:1 ratio can help keep your bond strong and happy.

For example, if you need to correct your child about something, follow up the correction with a hug and a reminder of your love for her. Spend time together doing something your child enjoys and give her your full attention on a regular basis. If you seem to be getting into a cycle of frustration with your child, take a step back, really look at her, and tell her some things that you appreciate about her.

There are going to be times of conflict in any relationship, whether it is a romantic couple relationship or a parent-child relationship. But the key to a happy, lasting relationship, according to Dr. Gottman and his team, is to make sure you maintain that magic ratio. KinderKronicle encourages parents to take a magic ratio inventory with their child frequently. 

1. <https://www.gottman.com/blog/the-magic-relationship-ratio-according-science/>

2. Ibid.

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