

Published August 17th, 2011

Family Focus What Parents of Grown Children Would Do Differently

By Margie Ryerson, MFT



Margie Ryerson, MFT, is a marriage and family therapist in Orinda and Walnut Creek. Contact her at 925-376-9323 or margierye@yahoo.com. Her new book, *Treat Your Partner Like a Dog: How to Breed a Better Relationship* is available on www.amazon.com and at Orinda Books.

Just for fun I decided to conduct my own informal, nonscientific poll of Lamorinda friends, neighbors, and colleagues with grown children to find out what they would do differently as parents if they had a "do-over." My hope is that these insights will help those who are currently engaged in the "front lines" of parenting. Parenting humbles us. It's impossible to feel that we always know what we're doing or are doing it well enough.

Here is a list, in no particular order, of these longtime parents' wishes and regrets:

- We should have tried to instill more religious training. I always feel guilty that we didn't bring them up with more tradition.

- I'm sorry we were so lenient with our son when he was in high school. We didn't check enough on his plans or know all of his friends and what they were up to. He developed a drug habit that we knew nothing about until there was a near tragedy. Now he's independent, hard-working, and stable, but we had many difficult years that perhaps could have been avoided.

- I wish that we had required them to regularly do some defined community service or other volunteerism.

- I wish we had done more exploring on Saturdays and Sundays of the Bay area.

- I wish we had each had more individual dates with our boys.

- I wish that I had insisted on more dinner mealtimes at home with the kids with foods they had to eat. So important and they both were such picky eaters. A little more bonding and less finicky eating would have been a good idea!

- I wish I hadn't tried so hard to control my daughter's weight when she was in her early teens. I nagged her too much and it took her a long time to trust that I think she's beautiful.

- One thing I do regret is not insisting on using sun block regularly and realizing the importance of keeping young skin covered in the sunshine. I would be more vigilant at the pool and outside events to protect their skin.

- I wish I hadn't worried so much about where they would go to college. Now I realize that getting into a certain college isn't an automatic recipe for success at all. Many of my friends' kids have been highly successful despite starting in community college or going to colleges that weren't prestige schools.

- I regret not making my children follow through with piano. We let them off too easy, one after just one year of lessons, instead of insisting they stick with it.

- We wish we had given them a regular allowance instead of money when they wanted it so that they would have gleaned an inkling into the value of money and how hard it is to earn.

- I regret doing too much of their school work for them, such as contributing too much to their papers and doing too much work on their projects. I tried to make everything perfect for them instead of letting them make their own mistakes.

- One thing I wish I had done differently would be insisting that my children write thank you notes to their grandmothers.

- I wish we had demanded that our children consistently do chores around the house, such as cleaning their rooms, doing dishes, and helping with laundry and the yard.

- I regret not making more effort to go to their games.

- I wish I had taught my kids the difference between praise and achievement. I see our children as struggling with the real world because I think we have erred in teaching them that it's ok to come in last. When we praise them too easily they don't always learn the most important lesson that the real world insists on teaching all of us... It's tough out there and we don't get jobs, and life isn't handed to us without trying really hard!

- I would be sure to have tighter curfews and more consistent punishment -- especially grounding -- when they screwed up.

- We wish we had been less busy and had spent more time just relaxing with our children. (Several people expressed this wish. Some wish they had done more simple activities together, such as camping, playing games,

cooking, or leisurely bike rides. They would have liked a slower-paced life with their children).

So there we have it, some wisdom from experienced parents who know well the challenging, often emotionally and physically exhausting, yet life-enhancing task of raising children.

Reach the reporter at: margieryr@yahoo.com

[back](#)

Copyright © Lamorinda Weekly, Moraga CA