

Thomas Gordon's Parent Effectiveness Training

Saturday June 16, 2007

Dear Dr. Miller,

In 1971 I found Thomas Gordon's "Parent Effectiveness Training." Because my own childhood had been miserable, I knew I needed guidance to mother my baby son. Gordon's book saved me--and him. The book presented techniques for listening and speaking to my child so that I could hear him and he could hear me. It presented mutual problem-solving through negotiation with my child (and later, children). It told me what NOT to do or say, thereby avoiding damage to my children's self-respect. As a result, my son is a singer-songwriter in Europe, and my daughter is a budding artist who put herself through college and has friends all over the U.S.

I'm amazed that you haven't seen this book because Gordon's PET seems like the ideal follow-up to your work, instructing, as it does, in how parents can communicate with their children (and even toddlers) without disciplining, punishing, shaming, inducing guilt in, or manipulating them.

Of course, while saving the next generation, PET did nothing to free me from my own repressed childhood trauma. That was accomplished years later through my reading and rereading of your books, individual therapy, and the Codependents Anonymous twelve-step program (which works quite well whether one believes in God or not).

Or have you examined Gordon's work and found it wanting? If you doubt that emotionally damaged adults can use his methods without their neuroses creeping in, I assure you that I've done it--alone, as I was divorced when they were still babes. I categorized and summarized Gordon's recommendations on index cards with headings relating to particular situations that would arise, such as, "When the kids fight," or "When I need their help," or "When they complain," or "When they've done something I resent," etc. There were classes offered in PET as well, but I couldn't afford the fees.

Could I have your reaction to Gordon's work? I admire yours so much, I'd like to think you value his as I do.

Sincerely yours, S. G.

AM: Thomas Gordon's advices concerning a "family conference" are excellent and could save our society if they were used everywhere over the world. Also the ideas of Marshal Rosenberg about non-violent communication are very helpful. But both were already published more then 30 years ago and are not used by the majority of parents. Why? Because parents who were severely mistreated in their childhood and deny these facts are unconsciously compelled to repeat the once endured damage on their children. Thus many of them are not motivated to have children who are free and healthy, this would bring them to the pain of their own upbringing that they try not to feel. Instead they make their children feel it. The idea of a free child already scares them. I thus think that to be able and wanting to help our child we must come in touch with our repressed feelings concerning our own history of mistreatment. Parents who have done this can enormously benefit from Gordon and Rosenberg, also all parents who were brought up without violence. They get here much important and supporting information and are free to use them. People who deny the pain of their childhood are rarely free to understand anything but violence. However, I have always supported Gordon and am glad that you wrote here about him and described your experience. Thank you.