

# The Heiskell School

## The Two “R’s” of Parenting

September really seems only a few short months ago, doesn't it? The month of May has arrived, and your little ones are almost a year older and undoubtedly a few inches taller. The summer stretches before us, and most of you are probably wondering how you will fill all those hours between now and next September when you drop off your child at school again. Older students can hardly wait for lazy summer days to begin, but we know that preschool parents greet the summer months with mixed feelings. A more relaxed schedule has definite benefits, but preschoolers rarely “sleep in,” and long, hot days spent with the five and under crowd can be trying to even the most patient parents.

If you have already glanced through your child's progress report, maybe you have spied a few areas you would like to work on over the summer, whether it is brushing up on the alphabet or trying to increase your child's attention span. But before you pull out the flashcards or map out an ambitious plan of academic review, may we offer a few suggestions? We know that most parents earnestly desire for their children to be successful in school, and beyond that, to be successful in life. We want that for your children, too. While we try to highlight in the progress reports various areas in which your child may be struggling, we want to emphasize that there are really just two things that you need to be doing with your preschooler. We call them the “two R's.” If you will really focus on the two “R's” this summer and beyond, we can almost guarantee that your child will be more than ready for the next year of school and more than ready for learning the three “R's,” reading, writing, and arithmetic. When the two “R's” are in place, your child will have the foundation for being a successful student, and one day, for being a successful adult. Best of all, if you work on the two “R's” this summer, those long, hot days can actually be very happy ones for you and your preschooler. That sounds like a pretty good deal, don't you think?

So what are the two “R's”? They are really quite simple. The first “R” is to *require obedience*. The second “R” is to *refuse to entertain*. Now if you are thinking that the two “R's” sound a little grim, bear with us until we can explain. We are not suggesting that you never have any fun with your child or that you rule your household like a humorless, unforgiving despot. We are only advising that you function as the authority. You need not be, indeed *should not be*, your child's buddy or entertainment director. The preschool years are the years in which your child should learn to do as you say, and they are also the years in which your child should learn to entertain himself. When those lessons are firmly in place, when your child quickly obeys your directions and when your child easily occupies himself with his own amusements for long periods of time, then your child will be more than ready to achieve success at school.

We do not live in a submissive age. Our culture encourages and celebrates the flouting of authority. Requiring cheerful obedience the first time you give instructions may well be distasteful and difficult for you. But it is truly a blessing to your children when you require them to obey. “Oh, how I love your law,” said the psalmist (Psalm 119), and “Children, obey your parents in the Lord...which is the first commandment with a promise: ‘that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth’ (Ephesians 6:1-3).” The Bible reveals time and again that God wants us to submit to authorities. If you struggle with this, two books may be helpful. The first is one we often recommend to parents, Ted Tripp’s *Shepherding a Child’s Heart*. Pastor Tripp has experience as a minister, a counselor, a school principal, and a parent, and he offers wonderful help to parents who are wondering not only about the “how-to’s” of parenting but also what their goals should be.

The second book is perhaps not as familiar, though many will recognize the author’s name. Elisabeth Elliot is well-known to many evangelical Christians as the widow of Jim Elliot, who was killed along with four fellow missionaries by the Auca Indians of Ecuador in 1955. She has written numerous books and one of them is a marvelous description of her own family, that is, her parents and five siblings. Called *The Shaping of a Christian Family*, it is not a step-by-step guide to parenting but rather a rich picture of how one very ordinary couple applied Biblical truths to the raising of their own children. It is a book well worth reading.

If requiring obedience seems a little daunting, though we hope it will seem less so when you have read the suggested books, refusing to entertain your children may appear well nigh impossible. We all hate to be bored, don’t we? And children who complain that they have nothing to do are excruciating to listen to. No wonder many parents go into overdrive planning fun activities for their children each day. Who wants to endure the whining of a child who is bored?

But guess what? You will never be able to entertain enough! No matter how hard you try, and we know lots of parents who try very, very hard, your child will never be satisfied. The child who gets to watch one hour of TV a day will plead for two hours. The child who gets to go to ESPN Zone once a month will ask for more frequent visits. The child who takes at least one “field trip” a week will still want to know “when are you going to play with me?” Generally, the more a child is entertained, the more they will want bigger, better, and more frequent entertainment.

So what is a parent to do? Quite simply, stop trying. Let your child find his own ways to play. Make clear that, in general, it is his responsibility to come up with something to do each day. When you refuse to entertain your child, you encourage resourcefulness, creativity, and imagination, all wonderful traits that will serve him well at school and later in life. You also remove yourself from the exhausting effort to provide fun for children who will never be completely satisfied. When you have time and it works into your plans for the day, by all means take your child to the pool. When you think that the whole family might enjoy and benefit from an outing to a museum, schedule one. Certainly snuggle together at bedtime while you read a story. But most of children's free time should be spent pursuing their own amusements, and in summer there should be lots of unscheduled free time.

As you relinquish the role of entertainment coordinator, we highly recommend that you go ahead and banish TV (and electronic "toys") from your family's daily life. Many psychologists and child experts have written about the ill effects of television (including videos) on developing minds, and you may want to read some of John Rosemond's books, for example, if you have lingering questions about why television is so harmful to children, especially very young children. We don't have room to delve into the subject here, but suffice it to say that when you turn off the TV, except for perhaps an occasional special show or movie, you will be giving your child a marvelous gift, the gift of the opportunity to be **creative** and **imaginative** and **resourceful**. If your child struggles with paying attention or has a short attention span, banning TV, as well as computer games and other electronic media, should be even more of a priority. If the thought of giving up TV or videos as an electronic babysitter makes you want to weep – perhaps it's the only time your child is still and quiet each day, and any parent knows how precious that kind of time is – try taking it one day at a time. Each day that you succeed in living creatively without resorting to television can be a small victory and will give you encouragement to make it through the next day. Eventually your children will lose interest in TV because they will be so busy doing other, better activities.

We know that it will not always be easy, and in fact, will require a lot of determination and prayer. The rewards are great, however, and more than worth all the effort. Obedient, resourceful, creative children will almost invariably be successful in school, whether they have reviewed the alphabet and numbers all summer or not. Better yet, obedient, resourceful, creative children are usually very happy ones as well. The reverse is equally true. *Children who have rarely been required to obey and who are constantly entertained will struggle in school and in life, even if they learned the alphabet perfectly at age two and are now working on mastering material far above the norm for their age.* We will keep you in our prayers as you persevere.

Blessings on you this summer and always.

The Faculty and Staff of The Heiskell School