

Effective Parenting and Parenting Education: Priorities That Are Needed

by Kerby T. Alvy, Ph.D.

Candidates for the presidency are now staking out positions and policies to make the United States a safer, healthier and more productive nation.

They would be doing all of us a great service by expanding the scope of the issues they will address to include two that have never been debated in a presidential campaign.

Firstly, the effective parenting of America's children needs to be made a priority. Because effective parenting is a learned set of interpersonal skills and values, parenting education also needs to become a priority as the most direct means for helping more parents to be effective.

Here we will look more closely at what constitutes effective parenting, bring attention to the consequences of both effective and ineffective parenting, recall prior but mostly unknown proposals for actualizing both priorities, and add new proposals.

Defining Effective Parenting

Based on findings from social and behavioral science studies, effective parenting is defined as the use of a five part child

rearing approach. Parents who consistently employ this approach are the most likely to have children who are independent, self-confident, academically successful, socially popular, and capable of controlling aggressive impulses and actions.

The five parts, each of which includes the use of specific parenting skills, are:

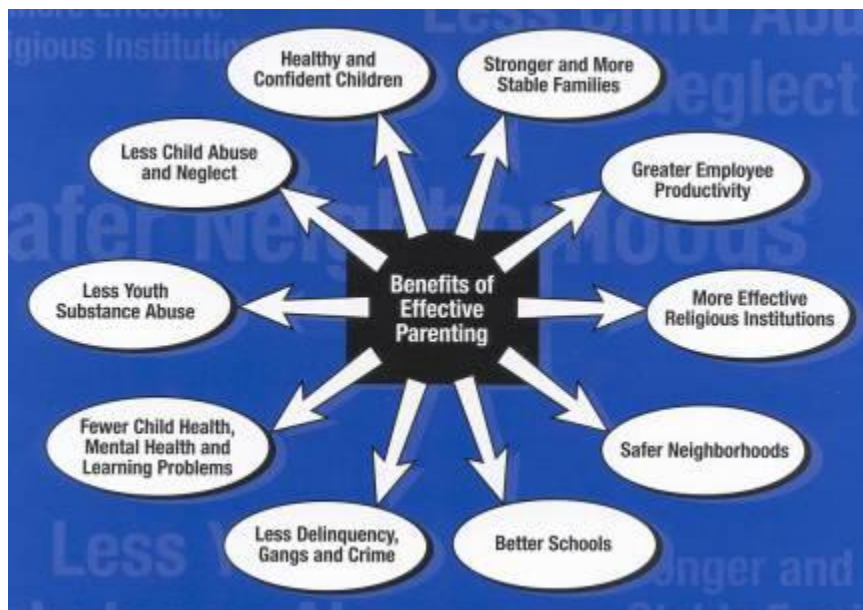
- 1. Conveying an abundance of warmth and acceptance regarding their children and their abilities.**
- 2. Being consistently fair and firm in disciplining children, using reasons to indicate why certain actions are unacceptable and responding with consequences that do not insult the dignity of the child.**
- 3. Setting expectations on children for mature behaviors that are within their capabilities at different ages.**
- 4. Being responsive to their children's cues and behaviors throughout their childhood and adolescence.**
- 5. Making the daily care and concern of their children a priority in their own lives.**

There now exists a variety of parenting education programs, including those designed for different cultural groups, that teach the skills that are involved in each part of this overall

approach, such as effective communication and problem solving skills. The United States is a world leader in creating such important programs, but has yet to make them available to all parents. That is one of the reasons for the needed prioritization.

Justifying Priorities

The candidates can justify these priorities by drawing attention to the many societal benefits of having more children effectively raised. As the drawing below reflects, those benefits include having more healthy and confident children, and more families that are strong and stable. They can also bring attention to the consequences of ineffective parenting that is currently so much a part of life in America.



Child abuse and neglect are the most obvious examples of ineffective parenting. Other social and health problems that

are caused by or maintained by ineffective parenting are juvenile delinquency, gang involvement, learning disorders, school dropout, youth substance abuse, bullying and child mental health problems.

Regarding child abuse and neglect in all its various forms, 3 million parents a year for the last three decades have been reported. In addition to the tragic human suffering involved, there are tremendous monetary costs. The CDC conducted a study that focused on over 500,000 cases and estimated the lifelong costs to manage and treat each victim, plus the estimated loss of productivity of each child. The resulting costs were \$124 billion!

Prior and Additional Vehicles for Prioritizing

While these ideas and facts were never before made part of presidential campaigning, they have been brought to prior administrations. I know of this first hand as I was involved.

The Clinton administration considered yet did not have time to implement a Presidential Commission on Effective Parenting. The succeeding Bush administration held a White House Briefing on a well developed National Effective Parenting Initiative. This included the creation of a cabinet level Department of Effective Parenting (DEP) with a research institute to further define effective parenting and to further evaluate parenting programs, a training institute to make sure all communities have well prepared and supported parenting

instructors, and a clearinghouse to raise awareness about effective parenting and to bring attention to local resources. Early in the Obama administration the same ideas were introduced.

As such, these government-centered and funded models are available for further consideration and implementation.

Another model would be a privately financed Effective Parenting Television Network (EPTN). Using television, Internet and a variety of social media, EPTN would make parenting skill building ideas, strategies, and the latest information on child growth and development, vividly and dramatically available at a click of a remote or stroke of a keyboard. This network would produce and disseminate apps for managing pressing child rearing challenges ranging from colic to defusing aggressive behavior.

The embracing of either government and/or privately supported venues for making effective parenting education a societal priority would certainly be a giant step forward for the United States.

Those who seek to lead our nation can and should become the champions of such progress. Now, each candidate has within their grasp some vital ideas and models to demonstrate their leadership in forging a better future for us all.

About Dr. Alvy

Kerby T. Alvy, a psychologist, is the founder and executive director of the 41 year old non-profit Center for the Improvement of Child Caring. He has been instrumental in creating some of the nation's most widely used parenting skill-building programs, including programs for parents of color. The books he has authored include *Parent Training Today: A Social Necessity*, *The Positive Parent*, and *The Soulful Parent*.

What You Can Do Now

Dr Alvy encourages you to share this article as widely as possible and especially with the presidential candidates as they visit your community. Ask them what they are proposing to do to help parents be more effective.