

**PERENNIAL PROBLEM:**

What to do about Nurturing Human Development

**CONTINUING PARENTING CONCERN:**

Exploring the Realities of Being a Parent

**RELATED CONCERN:**

Multiple Realities of Parenting

**DESIRED RESULTS FOR STUDENTS:**

Students will examine the multiple realities of parenting.

**LEARNER OUTCOMES:** Students will:

1. Reflect on the examples of parenting they have seen in their lives and analyze the various meanings related to parenthood.
2. Examine various motivations for becoming a parent.
3. Begin to identify the rewards vs. the challenges of parenting.
4. Analyze the factors that should be considered in evaluating readiness for parenthood.
5. Begin to recognize the commitment necessary to be a parent.
6. Examine alternative approaches to achieving their desired results.
7. Analyze the consequences of actions for the various alternative approaches.
8. Consider the desired results in making a decision to parent.
9. Evaluate how present decisions about parenting may affect future goals.

**SUPPORTING CONCEPTS:**

- A. Parenting Roles/Family Function
- B. Motivation for Choosing Parenting
- C. Rewards vs. Challenges of Parenting
- D. Responsibilities of Parents
- E. Readiness for Parenting

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION:**

According to Hildebrand (2007) in *Parenting: Rewards and Responsibilities*, "Parenting: providing care, support and guidance that can lead to a child's healthy development" (p. 26)

**Parenting Roles:** Many people perform parenting roles. Anyone who interacts with children parents them to some degree. A caregiver is a term sometimes used to refer to anyone who cares for a child, whether on a long-term or short-term basis. All biological parents, foster parents, stepparents, adoptive parents, family members, babysitters, and professional child care providers are considered caregivers and all need similar skills in caring for children. In society we

are all responsible for children. Learning about children is important; some say it is the most important topic to be learned. By studying children, we show that we care for ourselves, other people, the world, and the future we have together. Because the perfect parent does not exist and we cannot teach persons to be perfect parents, it is more realistic to teach them to be competent parents.

Many people are not prepared to assume the role of parent. Understanding the complexity of human development does not come naturally. If parenting were instinctive, the transition to parenthood would be simple and smooth.

Parenthood can be viewed as a career, perhaps the most common career in the world. Viewing parenthood as a career is realistic. Careers demand commitment and parenting is an irreversible commitment. Both careers and parenting involve responsibilities, offer rewards, and present challenges.

Laws require parents to feed, house, educate, and provide health care for their children. In addition, a parent has a moral obligation to accept the responsibilities of meeting the many needs of children which could include love and belonging, safety, growth and development, spiritual and moral guidance, safety, and directing them to be useful members of society.

**Family Functions:** It is a well known fact that the family is a primary influence on the development of children. Over the past few decades the definition of "family" has changed to accommodate the various types of family structures. According to the U.S. Bureau of the Census, family is defined as "two or more persons related by birth, marriage, or adoption who reside together." Thus, a family can consist of a single adult with biological or adopted children, a married couple with or without children, or two or more adult siblings living together. The way families are organized depends upon the culture and society in which they live. In some cultures, extended family members play important roles in the structure of the family, including socialization of the children. Extended families often provide a support system, lending help to families when needed. The nuclear family, which includes parents and their children, may find support from co-workers, friends, professionals, or government agencies.

The family is an important structure that performs many functions which allow society to survive from generation to generation. According to Roberta Berns in *Child, Family, School and Community, Socialization and Support*, the functions of the family are:

- *Reproduction. The family ensures that society's populations will be maintained—that is, that a sufficient number of children will be born and cared for to replace the members who die.*
- *Socialization/education. The family ensures that the society's values, beliefs, attitudes, knowledge, skills, and techniques will be transmitted to the young.*
- *Assignment of social roles. The family provides an identity for its offspring (racial, ethnic, religious, socioeconomic, and gender roles). An identity involves behavior and obligations. For example, children receive constant messages about table manners, about gender and household chores, about contributing to charities and a myriad of other "rules" that are taught either consciously or unconsciously.*
- *Economic support. The family provides shelter, nourishment, and protection. In some families, all members except very young children contribute to the economic well-being by producing goods. In other families, one or both parents earn the money that pays for goods the entire family consumes.*
- *Nurturance/emotional support. The family provides children's first experience in social interaction. This interaction is intimate, nurturing, and enduring, thus providing emotional security for children. The family also cares for its members when they are ill, hurting or aging. (page 82)*

As society changes, the way families carry out their various functions also change. For example, traditionally the man was responsible for providing economic support to the family and was the primary breadwinner while the woman typically cared for the children and maintained the household. Children were socialized to perform these roles. Today the trend is for more dual-earner families which have changed the way that families meet the needs of its members. Who cares for the children? Who does the household chores? How are work and family coordinated?

There are four key roots of socialization (how children learn socially acceptable behavior).

1. The first root of socialization is the establishment of a trusting relationship between the child and adult.
2. The second root of socialization is the prevention of discipline problems in advance.
3. The third root of socialization is allowing infants and toddlers time to incorporate the information you are sharing.
4. The fourth root of socialization is using strategies appropriate to the child's developmental stage.

**Reasons for Parenting:** In the past, parenthood was seldom viewed as a choice and most were expected to marry and have children. Today many people recognize that the decision to become a parent is one of the most important decisions people will ever make.

People decide to have children for many reasons. For many people, parenthood brings great joy and happiness. Often, people desire to share their lives with one another and raise a child in a loving, caring environment. They receive satisfaction from watching a human being develop through the stages of life. Children may make life fuller and more meaningful. Parents share a sense of achievement and love for their child. Smith and Apicelli (1982) state in *Family Matters: Concepts in Marriage and Personal Relationships* that children challenge us to be the best we can be. They allow us to get in touch with the child inside of us. They enable us to use the knowledge, experience, and interpersonal skills we spend a lifetime acquiring. Children provide a sense of meaning, a kind of continuity to our lives. They enable us to give expression to our need to love, nurture, and cherish.

People often choose parenthood for reasons considered to be inappropriate because they do not focus on the child. These may include saving a relationship, proving masculinity or femininity, getting away from an unpleasant job, wanting someone to love, wanting to be loved or be depended upon, continuing the family line, or ensuring that someone can take care of you when you are old.

In some countries, parents have children in order to contribute to the work force in the family. This was also true in the United States several generations ago (Hildebrand, 1990).

While many people in our society become parents, an increasing number of people do not. Others are physically unable to have children. Some people choose to delay parenting and some choose not to have children. Some reasons for delaying parenting or deciding against parenting are pursuit of career goals, limiting economic conditions, emphasis on individual and couple growth, age and desire for freedom. Adults who do not have children may find that society puts subtle pressures on them to become parents.

**Rewards vs. the Challenges of Parenting:** While parenting sometimes brings joy, for some it can include sorrow, despair, and regret. When children grow up, parents often feel rewarded and a great deal of pride if their children become productive, happy adults. But when children do not meet the expectations of their parents, it can cause a great deal of shame and remorse. Many

parents do not find their role to be as they anticipated. One of the realities of parenting is that it is an irreversible decision which makes it a commitment for life. When a person is taking care of a baby or small child, it is hard to realize that “Once a parent, always a parent” may become very real in years to come.

In general, society promotes parenthood by placing certain values on having children. The subtle message is that being a parent is more desirable than not having children (similar to the message that being married is more desirable than being single). Sometimes, however, the responsibilities and “hard work” which parenting requires prove demanding and disappointing, and parents may resent their children because of the inadequacy and frustration they feel. This may result in shame, child abuse, suicide, mental illness, or other problems for the people involved.

One of the realities of parenting is that a parent does not know if that experience will be a positive one or a negative one. For most people, parenting is full of both positive and negative experiences and the results cannot be predicted.

So what are the realities of parenting? It is a commitment for life. Rearing children is hard work. Children are demanding and expensive and cause permanent changes in the relationship and lifestyle of the parents. The rewards include the challenge to be our best, the chance to use our knowledge and skill, the additional sense of meaning that children add to our lives, and the opportunity to express our love.

*(Note to the teacher:* It is important that the teacher be completely honest with students regarding these issues. Many textbooks, magazine articles and “experts” in the field write very confidently regarding the positive aspects of parenting. This is true for many people, but students need to look at the underlying issues as they relate to the topic.)

**Readiness for Parenting:** Some of the major difficulties and frustrations of parenting can be prevented by preparing for parenthood. Readiness for parenting is critical to gaining positive outcomes. Many people do not find parenting to be as rewarding as they expected because they became parents before they were ready for the experience. Henderson (1988) in *Dimensions of Family Life* cites six readiness factors which she sees as guidelines related to the responsibility of parenthood. Some people may review these guidelines and conclude that they will not be ready to be a parent for several years. Some will need more time. Others may feel they can never meet these guidelines and feel they will never choose to become parents. (Note to the teacher: These factors are the ideas of one person. They are not necessarily inclusive, just as they are not necessarily indicative of personal readiness for all people. Unfortunately, there is no “magic” list which will give a true prediction of success as a parent. There is also no “perfect” parent, so the list is not meant to imply perfectionism. Help students to examine this list carefully and weigh it with other information they read or hear.) These readiness factors, as given by Henderson, are:

1. **Knowledge of child development and child care procedures.** A person should be aware of normal development patterns in children to allow them to judge if they are ready to deal with the children at the stage in which they are. A parent needs accurate and realistic expectations of what children are like and what can be expected of them.
2. **Patience with young children.** Babies involve diapers, bottles, and continuous routines of eating and sleeping. Children, no matter how old, present similar challenges. This part of parenting can become emotionally draining and generate frustrations which can lead to child neglect and child abuse.

3. **High levels of energy at all times of the day and night.** Parenting responsibilities are often overwhelming, especially the first few years. Taking care of the physical and emotional demands of a child are often not what was expected.
4. **Ability to put personal priorities aside in favor of the needs of the child.** Infants are totally helpless and a parent must attend to the needs of the child, causing personal goals and needs to be postponed. When parents are employed, work and child care consume most of a couple's time. Little time is left for personal hobbies or activities.
5. **Equality of the burdens as well as the rewards of parenting between mother and father.** If equality is not perceived by each parent conflicts may occur. When the parent is single no one is available to share the responsibility of the burdens or the rewards.
6. **Material means for parenting.** The actual cost of raising a child is usually beyond most estimates. Immediate costs include medical bills, the possible need to relocate or remodel, clothing and childcare equipment, and a possible cut in the family income. The additional costs of raising a child add up to tens of thousands of dollars. Having money does not ensure a healthy, happy child. Yet, when there is not enough money, this can make successful child rearing difficult. The precise cost of a child depends on the family's lifestyle, income, values, goals, and the child's special needs. (For most recent data use the U. S. Department of Agriculture estimates.)
7. **Loving relationships between parents.** A baby will not save a troubled relationship because children add additional areas of potential disagreement. Parents need patience and understanding and a strong relationship which is built on love.
8. **Emotional maturity.** This includes the ability to put someone else's needs before your own. It means being secure enough to devote your full attention to an infant without expecting to receive attention in return. It involves the ability to hold your temper when you find that a toddler has dumped all the dirt out of the houseplants. Age is not a guarantee of emotional maturity. However, most people are better able to handle situations like these as they grow older. Maturity is also needed to make sound judgments for the well-being of a child.
9. **Desire for parenthood.** Prospective parents should ask themselves the question, "Do I really want to be a parent?" Only in this way can they be sure of their decision rather than realize too late that their reasons for having children were not realistic.
10. **Health considerations.** A woman under the age of 17 and over the age of 35 takes a chance of a riskier pregnancy for both the baby and herself. Other health considerations for parents can include some genetic disorders and environmental factors.
11. **Support system.** Because no two children or circumstances are ever alike, every parent needs someone with whom they can ask questions and discuss their parenting experiences.

The addition of a child is a major change that people experience because it affects every aspect of their lives. New parents must view themselves as a mother or father as well as a partner with a career. Parenting is demanding and having children changes a person's life forever. Some changes that people can expect with the addition of a child include: a) restriction of freedom, b) change of social life, c) emotional adjustments, d) loss of privacy, e) increased financial responsibilities, f) career changes, g) relationship between parents, and h) noisy activity-filled household.

Everyone has ideas about parenting. Some are realistic and some may not be. Much of what we learn about parenting can be so deeply ingrained that we don't remember learning it. It almost feels instinctual. However, parenting is a learned behavior. First and foremost, we learn how to parent by the way we were parented.

Untrue or false beliefs about parenting exist. These are called myths. Myths foster unrealistic expectations about parenting which can lead to disappointment and can affect the parent-child relationship. It is important to know the difference between parenting myths and realities before becoming a parent in order to make responsible decisions about this important life role.

Parenthood is not a decision to be taken lightly. Those who choose it should be prepared to meet the demands that will be placed on their time, energy, finances, and skills. But when approached with good judgment, the experience can be a rewarding and fulfilling one. Opportunities should be taken to learn about children and about parenting skills in order to make it the best possible experience for the child and the parents.

#### **TEACHER PREPARATION:**

1. Think back to your own role models for parenting. Where did you learn how to parent? How has that affected your parenting?
2. Reflect on your own decision to parent (if you are one). Was it a conscious decision? How was it made? How can that experience help you stimulate your students to begin to think about their own role as a parent? Which activities will most help them get at the real decision?

Note: TM in the activities refers to transparency master and SM refers to student master.

#### **DIRECTED ACTIVITIES:**

##### **Supporting Concept A: Parenting Roles**

1. **"Meaning of Parenting":** Help students begin to think about parenting by choosing one of the following activities:
  - a. Direct them to a bulletin board entitled "What is Parenting?" The bulletin board could have several pictures of children of different ages on it. Have students write short sentences on 3 x 5 cards defining or describing parenthood and place them on the bulletin board. Have students share what they wrote.
  - b. An alternate activity would be to have students make a collage of pictures and words which answer the question, "What is Parenting"?
  - c. On the board write, "Wanted: A Job as a Parent." Ask the group to take five minutes to brainstorm the qualifications for being the ideal parent of an infant or young child. Be sure they consider both mothers and fathers when they brainstorm. When the brainstorming is completed, use "Want Ad," (SM-1) and have students write a "want ad" for the job of a parent. They should pretend they are an employer who wants to hire someone for the job and proceed to write an advertisement for the position. (This activity could be expanded by having students write a response to the ad, applying for the position. These responses could be analyzed by the group as to whether the applicant was qualified for the position. If not, what does the applicant need to learn or do before he or she should become a parent?)

**Journal Assignment:** Upon completion of the activity ask students to write about the role of a parent in their journal. The following questions may be useful guidelines:

- How can you learn more about the job of being a parent?
- With whom can you talk?
- Based on this activity, how many people who are parents are really qualified for the job?
- Can you get fired as a parent? How? For what reasons?
- What are some of the “bonuses” a parent can expect?  
(*Desired Results, Awareness of Context*)

2. **“Family Functions”:** Begin by leading a discussion of what a family is. Discuss possible groups that fit the definition of family. These are family structures. Then discuss the five family functions. All of the information for this is in the background information.

Assign students to complete, “TV Family Life Styles” (SM-2). This would be best if assigned over several days or record a show to view in class. Before the assignment is turned in discuss:

- What family structures are most prevalently portrayed on the show?
- Are they realistic situations? Why or why not?
- What family functions did you see illustrated?
- If challenges were presented, did you agree with the ways they were handled?
- How might challenges have been handled differently?  
(*Alternative Approaches, Desired Results*)

3. **“Cartoon”:** (If Option C was used in Directed Activity #1, go on to Directed Activity #3). Introduce the topic of “Realities of Parenting” by using the Sally Forth cartoon, SM-3 or TM-1. Working with a partner, students will read and discuss the cartoon and identify the “realities” they see here --- what it’s really like to be a parent (no training, big responsibility, on duty 24 hours a day, no pay, no vacations, etc.) Ask a student from each pair to share their comments. (*Awareness of Context*)

4. **“Class Discussion”:** Continue helping students to consider the meaning of parenting by leading a class discussion or have students write in a journal. Use the following questions as guidelines:

- What are some examples of parenting you have experienced?
- Who has performed parenting roles for you in your life? (Parents, grandparents, teachers, community workers, neighbors, coaches, music teachers, friends’ parents, police officers, store clerks, friends, etc.)
- Who taught you to do your favorite hobby?
- Where did you first learn to read? From whom?
- Where did you learn to play your favorite game? From whom?
- Who helped you understand your religious beliefs?
- From whom did you first learn about sex?
- How have these people influenced your perception of what a parent is?

Have students also make a list of all the people for whom they have performed a parenting role. Discuss the kinds of long-lasting influences they have on these people.  
(*Awareness of Context*)

5. **“Media Messages”:** Have students choose to do one of the following:

- a. Find examples from magazine or newspaper articles, jokes, greeting cards, children's books, cartoons, etc. that give messages about parenting.
- b. View a current family-type TV show and examine the message given about parenting. (Record a show to view in class.) Have students complete the worksheet on "Media Messages" (SM-4), to focus their observations and/or use as a basis for class discussion.

Have students write a short paper comparing media/societal messages with their own experience of observing their parents and other parents who "parented" them. Include a paragraph on how that might affect their own style of parenting some day.  
(*Awareness of Context, Consequences of Action*)

6. **"Myths"**: Review, "Common Parenting Myths" (SM-5). Ask the following questions:

- How might myths about parenting affect people who are deciding whether to become parents?
- How might they affect people after they become parents?
- How can people tell the difference between myths and reality?
- What ideas about parenting do you have?
- Do you think they reflect reality?  
(Hildebrand, "Parenting: Rewards and Responsibilities," Glencoe, 2007)

### Supporting Concept B: Motivation for Choosing Parenting

7. **"Parent Panel #1"**: Invite a couple who have chosen not to have children and a couple who have children to serve on a panel for the class. To get the discussion started, have some questions prepared on what the considerations were in making their decision whether or not to parent. (If unable to get persons to come during school hours, appropriate persons could be recorded for use in class.) (*Alternative Approaches, Awareness of Context*)

8. **"Reasons for Parenting"**: Ask students to identify reasons people give for having children. List ideas on board. Think about conversations you have heard where statements have been made about parenthood such as the following:

- a. Sue would make a good parent because she is so understanding of people.
- b. Mary should never have become a parent because she is too immature.
- c. John wouldn't make a good parent because his job keeps him away from home too much.

Add other statements you have heard to this list.

- What is the underlying assumption being made in these statements?  
(There are differences in parents' aptitudes.)
- Do you agree with these assumptions? Why or why not?  
(*Awareness of Context*)

Have students work in groups to make a list of "good" or "poor" reasons for having a baby. As a whole group, share lists. Did everyone agree on which list to place the reasons?  
(*Awareness of Context, Desired Results*)

Examine transparency master "Why Should I Be a Parent" (SM-6 or TM-2) on "good" or "poor" reasons for choosing parenthood.



- Do you agree or disagree?
- Are these true for everyone?
- Can a wrong reason for one couple be a right reason for someone else? Who or how?
- What causes someone to have reasons in some areas and not others?
- What are likely consequences for parents, children, family, or society if some reasons were more strongly believed than others? (*Awareness of Context, Consequence of Action*)

9. **“Pressures”**: Some people say that there are many “poor or wrong” reasons to have a child but the only “good or right” reason is because you really want one.

- Do you agree?
- What does “want” mean? (*Alternative Approaches, Desired Results*)

Explore students’ understanding of pressures that might come as a result of expectations from society.

- From where might these pressures come?
- Are these pressures positive or negative? Why or why not?
- What might be some results (for children, for parents, for society) of persons choosing to have children because of pressures put on them by others? (*Awareness of Context, Consequences of Actions*)
- How might persons of different ages experience these “pressures” differently?
- What are some unique pressures teens may face? Newly-married couples? A couple in their late 30’s? A discussion might follow on why teens get pregnant (self-concept, desire to be loved, etc.). (*Awareness of Context*)
- Do you agree or disagree with this statement: “A couple is not a family until they have had a child”? Why or why not? (*Alternative Approaches, Awareness of Context*)
- What is the desired result regarding motivation for persons making a decision regarding parenting? (*Desired Results*)

10. **“Alternate Parenting Choices”**: Have students each take a clean sheet of paper and fold it into fourths (in half both crosswise and lengthwise). In each quarter of the papers, have them write alternate options for parenting, other than in the traditional way (examples are babysitting, employment working with children, care for nieces/nephews for a weekend, volunteer as a teacher’s aide, “Big Brother/Big Sister” program, or teach Sunday School). For each situation, have them write how being a “parent” in this way might help them make a wiser choice when the time comes to do so. Or in what way might it satisfy a common human desire to be a parent? (*Alternate Approaches, Desired Results, Consequences of Action*)

### Supporting Concepts C: Rewards vs. Challenges of Parenting

11. **“Parent Panel #2 or Interviews”**: In order to help students become aware of the rewards as well as the challenges of parenting; choose one of the following activities:

- a. Invite a panel of parents to discuss the rewards and challenges and also the problems of parenting. Include in the panel a teen parent, a stepparent, a foster parent and a parent of an adopted child, in addition to a biological parent. (*Awareness of Context*)

- b. Have students interview at least two parents, other than their own, and ask the questions listed on “Parent Interview Questions” (SM-7).

**12. “Discussion”:** Follow the panel and/or interviews with a discussion. First, summarize findings by listing rewards and challenges of parenthood on the board.

- Which of these seemed to be most often mentioned by the parents?
- How have the experiences of the parents influenced their rewards and challenges?
- How might those rewards and challenges affect their parents?  
(*Awareness of Context, Consequences of Actions*)

**13. “Mixed Feelings”:** Have students read SM-8, “Mixed Feelings About Parenting.” Follow with discussion.

- What insight did you gain about parenting from this article?
- What did you learn from this article about your parent’s role?
- Based on your own experience and what you have seen of other parents, what is your interpretation of this article? (*Awareness of Context*)
- What is most desirable for parents and children in considering the rewards and challenges faced by parents? (*Desired Results*)

#### **Supporting Concept D: Responsibilities of Parents**

**14. “Responsibilities”:** As a group, consider the meaning of the term “responsibility.” Have students individually make a list of some of the responsibilities they have at the present time. Have them make another list of parental responsibilities and then compare the two lists.

- What are the responsibilities of parents to their children? To their other children? To themselves? To society?
- What are the consequences to children of parental responsibilities not being met? To the parents themselves? To society?
- Are there any alternatives if parents do not accept these responsibilities?
- What actions are most desirable for parents when it comes to their parental responsibilities? (*Desired Results, Alternative Approaches, Consequences of Action, Awareness of Context*)

**15. “Male/Female Groups”:** Divide males and females into separate, small groups. Give them ten minutes to list: 1) their expectations of a male with regard to parenting responsibilities and 2) their expectations of a female with regard to parenting responsibilities. Ask them to include the specific tasks they would expect these persons to accomplish. As a whole class, have the groups share their completed lists.

- What kinds of things have affected what you think?
- What happens if parents do not agree on whose responsibility a parenting task is?
- What is most desirable as far as division of parenting responsibilities? (*Awareness of Context, Consequences of Action, Desired Results*)

**16. “Cinquain”:** Have students write a cinquain poem reflecting their feelings on parental responsibilities. Cinquains are described on “Cinquain” (SM-9).

## Supporting Concept E: Readiness for Parenting

17. **“Case Studies”**: Make a copy of “Case Studies” (SM-10), and cut the case studies apart. Divide the class into small groups and give each group a case study to discuss. Make copies of the case study questions (SM-11, TM-3) for the small groups to use, or make a transparency of the questions and put them up on the overhead. Set a time limit for the small group discussion. After the small groups have completed their discussion return to the large group and have each group share their situation and conclusions.

- What are some characteristics of persons who are ready for parenting? Together, list as many as possible on the board. (*Awareness of Context*)

18. **“Readiness Factors”**: To consider the factors that some writers consider important, use the “Readiness Factors for Parenting” (SM-11 or TM-4) as a guide for discussion. This list is not inclusive and not true for all persons. Discuss each area.

- Do students agree with the list? Disagree?
- Are there other areas which should be included?
- Does the list imply that parents must be perfect?
- Can you be a good parent and not be perfect?
- What happens in families when parents think they have to be perfect?  
(*Awareness of Context, Consequences of Actions*)

In relation to the readiness for parenting, what is most desirable for parents? For children? For society? (*Desired Results*)

What are the consequences if people become parents:

- Before they can afford children?
- Before they are ready for the challenges parenthood brings?
- If they want to continue their hobbies and activities?
- Before they can recognize who is most affected?
- Before they understand how parenting decisions affect future goals?  
(*Consequences of Action, Awareness of Context*)

19. **“Commitment”**: What kind of commitment is necessary to have and rear a child? Ask students to name individuals to whom they have made commitments.

- What are they committed to give?
- What do they expect to receive?
- What kind of commitment would a student have to make in order to have and rear a child?
- How is this commitment similar or different from the commitments to the other individuals the student named?
- What, if anything would the student expect in return for his/her commitment?
- Is it possible to really know what a commitment means when the future is entirely unknown? (*Desired Results, Awareness of Context*)

20. **“Costs”**: How does understanding the cost of raising a child show a mature and responsible concern for a child’s future?

- If you were going to make an investment what would you want to know about the investment? (Usually the first question is how much it will cost.)

- If you were buying a car or a home, both big investments in your future, what would be one of the first things you would need to consider about the purchase?

Children are one of a person's biggest investments for the future. It is not selfish to consider the rights of a child and what it will cost to provide the child with shelter, clothing, food, health care, recreation, education, and so on. (*Awareness of Context*)

- What do you think it costs to have and raise a child to age 18?
- After the teacher gives the 18-year-figure (USDA estimates) calculate the price per year and per month.
- What happens if people do not have this much money?
- What are some alternatives? Evaluate these approaches, according to their consequences. (*Awareness of Context, Alternative Approaches, Consequences of Action*)

**21. "Lifestyle Changes":** In what ways would becoming a parent change your lifestyle? Choose among the following activities:

- Invite a parent to be a guest speaker and discuss how one's lifestyle is affected when one becomes a parent.
- Then role-play responses that a couple would have for the following situations:
  - Friends call with an invitation to go out for pizza.
  - Your boss calls asking for help on a weekend project.
  - Friends call with an invitation to go to a movie.
  - You have a last minute chance to go to the coast for a weekend.
- Role play the situations several times, adjusting the response for a single parents, having a new baby, and having an active two-year-old.

Discuss the question, "If a family's lifestyle is incompatible with the needs of their infants or children, what would be the effect upon the children?"  
(*Awareness of Context, Consequences of Action*)

**22. "Cartoon":** View the Hagar cartoon, (SM-12 or TM-5).

- What point is Hagar trying to make?
- Do you agree or disagree with him? Why or why not?

Ask for comments on how the cartoon relates to the discussion.

**22. "Desired Results":** Ask student what we really want for possible future parents when we consider the meaning and realities of parenting. (This could be assigned as a journal entry.)  
(*Desired Results*)

**23. Wrap-up Assignment:** Assign students to choose between one of the following activities to culminate the unit:

- Explain the statement, "Deciding whether or not to become a parent is the biggest decision a person will make."
- Write a personal reaction paper regarding your capabilities of being a parent and acceptance of the responsibilities of parenthood.

- c. Write a short paper entitled, "What it means to be a parent."
- d. Create an imaginary couple who are considering parenthood. List some guiding questions that will assist them in making this decision.
- e. Complete "Think Sheet #3" (SM-13) on "How to introduce Practical Reasoning to Students." Have students state a problem which deals with the decision to parent. (*Awareness of Context, Alternative Approaches, Desired Results, Consequences of Action*)
- f. Write a persuasive paper describing why or why not to become a parent.

#### **RESOURCES:**

Berns, Roberta. (2004) *Child, Family, School and Community: Socialization and Support. (6<sup>th</sup> Edition) California: Wadsworth/Thompson Learning.*

Hildebrand, V. (2007) *Parenting: Rewards and Responsibilities.* Peoria, Ill., McGraw Hill Company.

Jorgensen, S. and Henderson, G. (1988) *Dimensions of Family Life.* Cincinnati, OH: South-Western Publishing Co.

Mawhinney, T.V., & Peterson, C.J. (1986) *Child Development: Parenting and Teaching.* Cincinnati, OH: South-Western.

Smith, R. & Apicelli, M.L. (1982). *Family Matters: Concepts in Marriage and Personal Relationships.* Encino, CA: Glencoe.

## WANT AD

**JOB TITLE: Parent**

**QUALIFICATIONS:**

**RESPONSIBILITIES:**

**LENGTH OF CONTRACT:**

**HOURS:**

**VACATIONS, SICK LEAVE, HOLIDAYS:**

**FRINGE BENEFITS:**

## TV FAMILY LIFESTYLES

Television offers different versions of the American Family. Choose one program about a family to watch and answer the following questions:

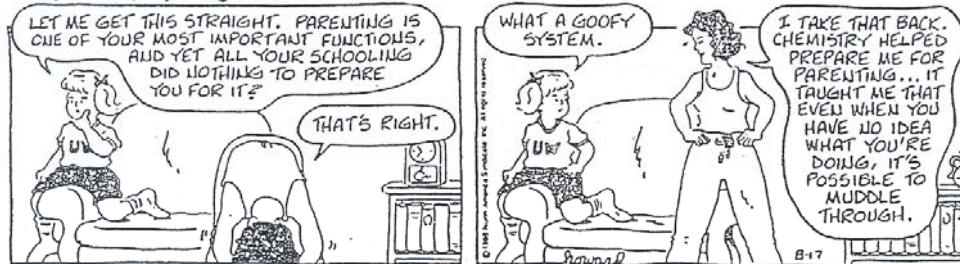
Name of show: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Describe the family in the program you watched.
2. Summarize the program.
3. How were the decisions made in the family? Who made them?
4. What challenges/conflicts arose during the program?
5. How were they handled?
6. Was the dramatization of the family and their problems presented realistically? Explain why or why not.

Sally Forth / By Greg Howard



Sally Forth / By Greg Howard



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Sally Forth / By Greg Howard



Sally Forth / By Greg Howard





## MEDIA MESSAGES

Directions:

- A. Choose between one of the following activities:
1. Find four examples from magazine or newspaper articles, jokes, greeting cards, children's books, billboards, cartoons, etc., that give messages about parenting.
  2. View a family-type TV show and examine the messages given about parenting.
- B. Based on your observations, answer the questions below.

1. Who was responsible for the children?
2. What kind of work did the parents do?
3. Whom did the children talk to when they had a problem?
4. Was there a major caregiver?
5. How are parents viewed in a positive way by society?

By your peers?

6. In what ways are parents viewed in a negative way by society?

By your peers?

7. Are mothers and fathers valued equally well? (Consider things such as maternity/paternity leave, childcare benefits, etc.)

How might that affect the way they parent?

How might this affect the children?

8. What does the white middle class say about who should be a parent?

How does that compare with some other cultural or ethnic groups in the United States? In other countries?

What are the reasons for the differences?

9. Do parents feel competent to do the task?

Why or why not?

10. What needs do parents have in their parenting role?

Are they given the message from society that it is acceptable to have their own needs? To need help?

Who can help them?

11. What are some ways the following situations might affect the meaning or the reality of parenting?

a. A parent who is chemically dependent:

b. A parent who struggles with depression:

c. A family in poverty:

d. A family who experiences domestic violence:

e. A parent who experienced child abuse or trauma as a child:

12. What are the overall messages you have received about being a parent?

13. How are these messages alike or different from the ones you have received from persons who have parented you?

## COMMON PARENTING MYTHS

- Myth #1: Good parenting comes naturally.**  
Although it is true that no special degree or experience is required to become a parent, education, training, and experience are valuable to even the most intuitive parents. To be a responsible parent, a person must be mature, willing to learn, and able to make sacrifices.  
**What training is available for parents?**
- Myth #2: Having a baby doesn't have to change a person's life.**  
Babies must be fed, burped, changed, held, cuddled and loved day in and day out. Crying babies demand attention even in the middle of the night. Mothers and fathers both must make economic, social, and physical adjustments.  
**Make a list of some of the economic, social, and physical adjustments.**
- Myth #3: Having children doesn't cost much.**  
Having a baby is expensive. Money is needed to feed, clothe, and care for children. Medical expenses are increasingly becoming overwhelming for many American families. As children get older there are additional expenses.  
**What are some of the additional expenses parents have as children get older?**
- Myth #4: Children can make up for whatever is missing from a person's life.**  
Some people believe that having a baby will fill an empty place in their lives and will provide unconditional love. These people have unrealistic expectations that the child will fill their needs, not the other way around. Babies bring their own bundle of needs.  
**What are some of the needs of a baby?**
- Myth #5: Children affect their parents' lives for a short time.**  
Being a parent is a lifetime commitment. Most American children remain with their parents for 18 years or longer. That means parents must consider their children's needs, and perhaps put their own personal dreams on hold for a very long time. The great reality is that parenting never really ends.  
**Why is this true?**

Adapted from Parenting – Rewards and Responsibilities, Hildebrand, Glencoe, 2007.

## Why Should I Be a Parent?

Parenting readiness means that adults have thoughtfully and purposefully chosen to become parents. It is sometimes possible for mature adults to have an unplanned pregnancy and still raise a happy, healthy and much-loved child. Most of the time, however, it is best when parenting is a choice, not an accident.

### Why do some people want to have a child?

#### Good Reasons:

- Some people may say they want to be parents because they love children.
- Some may say they want to devote their lives to raising productive members of society.
- Some may wish to pass on some part of themselves and their family traditions to a new generation.
- Some couples may feel that having children is a way to make their relationship even more fulfilling.
- Some may feel they want to share their life with a child.

#### Poor Reasons:

- To prove adulthood
- To please someone else
- For emotional benefits
- For respect and status
- To escape a situation
- Because society expects it
- To improve a bad relationship

#### Questions for discussion:

1. What distinguishes good reasons for becoming a parent from bad ones?
2. If a couple decides to have a child to improve their life, what are some possible consequences?
3. What do you consider the most valid reason for having a child?

Adapted from: Parenting – Rewards and Responsibilities, Hildebrand, Glencoe, 2007.

## PARENT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

**Directions:** Use this form as a guide for your interview. Feel free to gather additional information. If a question makes you or the person you are interviewing uncomfortable, eliminate the question. On this side interview one of your parents or guardians.

1. What aspect of parenting has been most difficult?
2. What part of parenting has been most surprising?
3. What part has been most rewarding?
4. How has being a parent affected your relationship?
5. What changes were made in your life when you had children?
6. What do you wish you had known before having children?
7. What financial changes did having a child make in your life?

Physical changes?

8. Do you feel you were ready for children?

**Directions: Interview a parent with children much younger or much older than you.**

1. What aspect of parenting has been most difficult?
2. What part of parenting has been most surprising?
3. What part has been most rewarding?
4. How has being a parent affected your relationship?
5. What changes were made in your life when you had children?
6. What do you wish you had known before having children?
7. What financial changes did having a child make in your life?  
  
Physical changes?
8. Do you feel you were ready for children?

## “Mixed Feelings About Parenting”

When you consider the rewards and challenges of parenting, you will find about an equal number of each. Many times we are drawn both toward and away from something. This may be true of parenting. It also explains why a mother or father has mixed feelings about children. Because parenthood is a long-term commitment, parents' emotions about their children are not constant. They may adore their baby daughter when she giggles happily in the tub. But they may dislike it intensely when she talks back at age 13. A parent may glow when their son gets an A in history and be horrified when he impulsively breaks streetlights with friends.

Parents may love their children while hating the demands they make. One father enjoyed buying his 9 year-old son a bright yellow bicycle for his birthday. The boy was happy and proud of his “wheels.” During the first week he had the bike, he left it overnight in the schoolyard. It was promptly stolen. His father was furious.

Another set of parents willingly gave up a house they had wanted to buy for many years and used the money to send their child to college. They were hurt and angry when that child dropped out of school, saying flippantly, “I never wanted to go anyway.” Parents may make elaborate plans for a family trip, planning it around experiences their children will enjoy. They resent it when their children sulk because they would rather be home with friends. Parents learn to live with these mixed feelings. Discipline probably causes more mixed feelings than anything else. For example, if parents do not set guidelines and stick to them, their children could walk all over them. If parents do set up rules to which their children object, they will worry about keeping the children's love. This happens because most people confuse love with liking and respect. If parents are mature, they probably always love their children, but there will be times when they do not like their behavior. Their children certainly will not always like what their parents do. But if parents are consistent and fair, they will probably always have their children's love and respect.

Because of this, it is important for people who become parents to know how they feel about many issues. For example, parents must decide how they will deal with bedtime, pajama parties, chores, friends, homework, television, drugs and alcohol, sex, driving, movies, community services, books and travel. These are just some of the things you will have to make decisions about if you have children.

When you are ready to be a parent, you will weigh the rewards of parenting and balance them with the challenges parenting brings.

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Adapted from *Parenting and Teaching Young Children* by Verna Hildebrand. (1990) McGraw-Hill School Division.

## CINQUAIN

Cinquain – a poem with 5 lines which uses the following form:

- Line 1: Title, one word only
- Line 2: Description of title, two words
- Line 3: Express action, three words
- Line 4: Feelings, four words
- Line 5: Another word for the title, one word

An example:

Parent  
"Working Mother"  
Teaches, Cooks, Nurtures  
Fulfilled, Frustrated, Overworked, Overjoyed  
Person

In the space below, write a Cinquain which reflects your feelings on parental responsibilities.



## CASE STUDIES

**Tina and Jose** have been married for four years. Jose has been laid off from his job several times during their marriage and Tina's wages are low. They have always been able to pay their rent on time, but never have any extra money to save for a second car or to buy a house or go on vacation. Tina wishes she could get training as a dental assistant but her family and friends have started to "hint" that it's time she get pregnant. Tina worries how they could ever afford a child.

**Mike and Brenda** have been married for seven years. They have traveled a lot and are very content and secure in their marriage and jobs. It is obvious to people that they love each other very much. They both want children and have been talking about trying to get pregnant for some time but wonder about the adjustment it will be.

**Antonio and Cherie** are both professionals and have good-paying jobs, a nice house and two cars. Recently, their relationship has drifted apart and they do not seem as close as they once were. They don't ever seem to have anything to talk about. Antonio wonders if having a baby might give them something in common and that maybe it would help their marriage.

**Susie** graduated high school two years ago and received her Associate's degree at a local community college. She has been with her boyfriend **Jack** since their junior year of high school. Jack is attending Oregon State University working towards a degree in Civil Engineering. Susie just began a job as an assistant teacher at a Head Start program in a location closer to Jack and lives on her own in a studio apartment. Jack works part time. He makes enough money to pay for his car insurance, books, and some spending money. His parents help support him while he is going to school. Both Susie and Jack love each other and don't want to wait any longer to start their lives together. Susie and Jack plan on getting married in a couple months and then beginning a family. They have always wanted children and feel "why wait"?

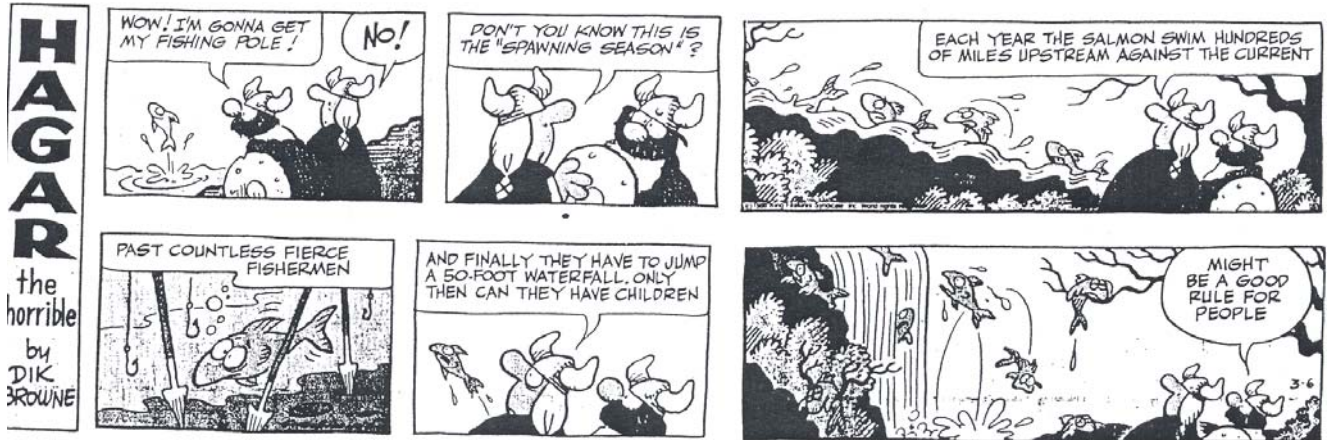
**Nancy and Paul** live together in an apartment they rent. They have one car and no major bills besides Paul's tuition. They have been married for three years and are thinking about having a baby. They didn't have a blood test before they were married because it wasn't required by the state. With Nancy's job they could have enough money for Paul to stay home with the baby and still pay bills, which is Nancy's desire. Paul was raised believing that the man should work and the woman should stay home and take care of the baby. Paul wants children now but really wants to support the family on his own. Paul and Nancy have been arguing about this topic for a few months now.

## **READINESS SCENARIO ASSIGNMENT**

1. Read your scenario card as a group.
2. List the factors the people in your scenario exhibit that show they are ready to be parents.
3. Decide and explain whether the people in your scenario are ready to become parents or not.
4. How could becoming a parent change their lives now and in the future?
5. How could becoming a parent now change your life now and in the future?

## **“READINESS FACTORS FOR PARENTING”**

1. Knowledge of child development and child care procedures.
2. Patience with young children.
3. High levels of energy at all times of the day and night.
4. Ability to postpone personal priorities in favor of the needs of the child.
5. Equality of the burdens as well as the rewards of parenting between mother and father.
6. Financial resources
7. Emotional maturity
8. Desire for parenthood
9. Health considerations
10. Support system



## PRACTICAL REASONING THINK SHEET

Identify a *PROBLEM*:

Suggest *ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES* and *CONSEQUENCES*:

Alternative Approaches	Consequences
a.	1. 2.
b.	1. 2.
c.	1. 2.
d.	1. 2.
e.	1. 2.

Identify some *DESIRED RESULTS*:

- a.
- b.
- c.

Gather information to become aware of the *CONTEXT*. Identify some influences on the situation.

- a.
- b.
- c.
- d.

**TAKE ACTION!**