

# Teach Your Children Well

## 8 things your child should know to succeed at life

By Sheila Fields

It's that time again. Days grow shorter. Apples are ripe for picking. The evening air is crisp. Soon there will be frost on the pumpkins. The September back-to-school rush is over and hopefully everyone involved has adjusted to the new academic year.

As a single mom to three boys, I often wonder and worry about training my sons to be men of integrity. Lacking the support of a loving spouse and male role model in the home, I find myself trying harder. At times I have to wear

two hats, but because I'm a much better mom than a dad, I just do the best I can.

With my firstborn's foray into the "real world" – he's a college freshman this fall – I've been making a list of life issues that I've tried to instill in him and his brothers. Along with reading, writing and arithmetic, there are a few other subjects you might consider teaching your children before they enter life's big classroom where, unfortunately, there are no make-up exams or summer school.

Here are eight life skills your child needs to learn:

- 1. Integrity.** Live a life of integrity. Be all that you can be just by being you. I'm teaching my sons that integrity encompasses honesty and transparency. It means being the same person all the time even when no one is looking.
- 2. Humility.** Humility goes before honor. When it comes down to it, no one of us is any better than the next person. We all eat and sleep and poop. I've tried to model for my sons putting others before self and treating people the way you want to be treated.
- 3. Love.** Love one another. Love deeply. Love is the one element that makes life worth living. It is the one thing we all desperately seek and need, even though we sometimes deny it. The wrong motivation in the pursuit of love, however, can make us act incredibly stupid and do things we later regret. (Yes, I'm speaking from experience.)

**4. Purpose.** It took me a long time and two failed marriages to understand that I need to be purposeful and intentional in how I live each day. Each 24 hours is a gift. Staying in the moment and savoring every second brings me freedom and great joy. Formerly, I was frivolous in regard to how I lived my life and I squandered many years. I hope that by my new example of making each day count, my sons will understand the value of our time on earth, that we are here for a specific reason to make a unique contribution.

**5. Marriage.** As a child of divorce, I grew up with an unhealthy view of marriage. I've taught my sons that marriage is a lifelong bond that should be entered into with wisdom and as much maturity as a person in the throes of emotional love can muster. How I wish when I was 18, that someone had told me to not only prepare well for my career, but also to study the subject of marriage, learning that it takes sacrifice, hard

work, and lots of love and respect to make it successful.

**6. Forgiveness.** Since my sons were little, I've tried to model that forgiveness is a key to freedom. My life has brought hurts and disappointments that I never expected. People I loved made bad choices that broke my heart. There was a time, after a major blow, that I wanted to get even. But I've learned that unless and until I choose to forgive, I can never be free to truly embrace and enjoy my life.

**7. Work Ethic.** I'm instructing my sons to look at who they are – their personalities, interests, and talents – as they choose their life's work. I hope they will spend their careers doing what they were passionately made to do, with heartfelt excellence. But, there is also a need for balance in work, being careful not to put projects and programs before people. Our relationships are our most treasured assets.

**8. Money.** Money mishandled can lead to money misspent and great hard-

ship. I want my sons to be the masters of their money, not the other way around. Plastic can be a curse. The time-worn adage of living within your means and delaying gratification can result in great peace of mind and strength of character.

As a single mom who has chosen poorly in the past, I am having to play catch-up as I turn myself around and transform my consequences into life changing lessons to pass on to the next generation.

We single parents may not be able to alter where we have been or what we have done, but we can choose to make tomorrow better.

By investing ourselves in our kids and teaching them from our own experiences, we can hopefully help them begin a future filled with more good than bad.

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