

PROFILE OF A GOOD PARENT

BY JENNIFER ROGERS

Jennifer Rogers has taught Montessori at the primary level for 16 years, seven of them at Countryside Montessori School in Northbrook, IL. Jennifer graduated from Albion College with degrees in Religious Studies and English, after which she went on to earn a Master in Theological Studies from Emory University. In 1995 Jennifer attended the Montessori Institute of Atlanta and earned an AMI Primary Diploma. She went on to teach at the primary level for five years. Following this she attended the Montessori Teachers Institute of Denver earning an AMI Assistants to Infancy Diploma in 2000. In 2003 Jennifer joined the staff of Countryside Montessori in Northbrook where she continues to teach a primary class.

Good parents bring notepads to teacher conferences. They come prepared and ask intelligent, insightful questions. They jot down notes about play dates, private lessons, IQ tests, educational evaluations, semesters with tutors. Sometimes the notepad alleviates boredom. Sometimes it buffers frustration, anger or guilt.

Good parents soon discover that while they know how to organize and compete, there are no winners or losers in the parenting game, no awards, incentive programs or recognition. No rock stars at this gig. Well-educated people build profitable careers writing books to guide parents, but the only real experts on a particular child at a specific moment in time are his flummoxed parents.

Thankfully, children offer their parents a lifetime supply of second chances. Kids never get tired of forgiving. Every child offers his parents endless opportunity to help build his unique human life. When the job is well done, parents and child form an enduring relationship. A well-parented child grows up too fast, leaves home to work and love, returns for celebrations or when he needs comfort, support or understanding.

“I turned out fine. Nothing to worry about, right?” Nope. No guarantees. There are big risks and gambles at every fork in the road. Some children do not stay connected to their families; some resent or regret their parents’ involvement in their lives, leaving home never to return. Many adults never achieve their human potential, never access their intelligence, never find productive work, never learn to love.

Interview parents whose kids are achievers. Survey the best literature on parenting. Listen to experts—it’s time well spent. Revelations and insights are refreshing. Each revelation will be followed by the necessary change and adaptation. Every insight will require more change and another essential adjustment.

Good parenting isn’t a strategy. It’s an education, an attitude, a ramshackle construction built with memories and hope. It requires

humility, a rare ability to act with confidence despite uncertainty, a foolhardy willingness to walk casually away from a bad decision with faith things will get better.

A good dad commands respect. He has reasonable, clear expectations, understands the importance of consistency, assigns chores and implements consequences. He turns the television off, leaves his cell-phone on his desk and eats supper with his family. A good dad reads to his children, sometimes falling asleep with storybooks open in his lap.

A good mom is steadfast—as kind as she is strong. She waits while her children dress themselves, watches while they set the table for meals, teaches them how to pack their own lunches. Her children know she possesses an arsenal of management techniques, a vast repertoire of appropriate, uncomfortable responses to their indiscretions and rebellions.

In a child’s mind, good parents offer moments in time that pass quickly but are never forgotten. Children remember the time mom cancelled the play date because chores were not finished, the week dad confiscated the Legos left on the kitchen floor. They remember Goodnight Moon and Little Red Riding Hood, vacations, garage sales, camping trips and bike rides.

Energetic and happy, good parents are a little disheveled. Are they doing all the right things? No. They have made peace with uncertainty and regret. They have learned to smile when their child is failing, to cry when he reaches his goal, to laugh even when the outcome isn’t clear.

After a few years, good parents realize the notepad was a prop. They come to conferences as they are: empty-handed, open and honest. Good parents know they will be back for another conference. New questions will emerge. The child will remain at the center of the conversation.