

## A CHILD'S GUIDING LIGHT

By: Beth Vishnevsky  
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Every child deserves a guiding light, and by that, I mean a strong force that leads by example and whose love and support never diminishes, unconditionally and unfailing.

To an adult, having a child signifies new beginnings filled with joy and amazement. But a child is more than a cute object to gaze at in awe, or an accomplishment. A baby, from birth, needs love and attention and he is not concerned with how he is dressed or what his parents want for his future. He wants to explore and be his own person *and* be encouraged for this independent act.

What bothers me about society "rules" is while it seemingly encourages standing up for what you believe in, it turns around and chastises those who actually do. Talk about confusing messages. What society dictates is going along with what the majority is doing because if a lot of people are doing the same thing, it must be a good thing, and therefore, ends up being encouraged. If you are the slightest bit different in any way, and that does **not** imply weird or freakish, society will not accept you as a whole. The real deal is, when people don't understand what causes another individual to act the way they do, ignorance rears its ugly head. Instead of asking questions or trying to understand, it's easier to tear down, poke fun at, or otherwise snub a nose at.

Go back to that child now. He understands on some level what his parents expect from him and what road they'd like him to follow. His natural inner reaction is to think, "Why aren't I good enough the way I am? What about my dreams? What about what I want? Isn't that important?" Well, kid, I'm going to tell you the truth. Couples have babies for their own selfish reasons. They want to pass on the family name; they want a girl to pamper and look pretty and a boy to proudly display as the "little man" – a real bonus if he turns out to be a big sports star. If you're lucky, your career aspirations won't be limited to a doctor or lawyer [can't you get more original than that, Mom and Dad?] Your parents want to have you live through their dreams to become something that perhaps they were unsuccessful at or wished they had done. Not that parents have totally ill intentions, but when first contemplating having a miniature of them, the pictures they visualize, including having the most perfect child of them all, are none too pretty and certainly not realistic to what **you** need.

Children are not dumb or blind. They know when parents and grownups are disappointed in them. They feel pain in believing they don't measure up. They sense when they are not wanted or appreciated for their uniqueness. The sad thing is, children **ache** to become what is expected of them, but they simply can't pretend on any long-time scale. Eventually, the child who strives to be his best solely for his parents' sake will rebel and resent the very idea that he must be perfect or excel in every area of his life. Children want approval and acceptance, but not on anyone else's terms. A healthy child must be able to think on his own and make appropriate decisions if he is to grow strong and independent. Soon enough, he will feel the wrath of society and learn that compliance to what the 'whole' is doing is more acceptable than being true to himself. However, if he is brought up to show compassion for those who are different and understand that our differences are a good thing, he will thrive regardless. Merely telling

a child to be caring and sensitive to others will accomplish nothing if it is not followed up with examples from the grownups he depends on.

Children do not get a whole lot of respect either. Mostly, they get dragged around town, going places even their own parents dread taking them. When they misbehave, some get slapped around; others, a loud acknowledgment of not conforming to the norm. The ironic thing about it all is, children do act their age and are punished for it. Maybe their parents are tired, overworked and overstressed, but do you think that means anything to a little child? No. All it sends is the message that he's not good enough and needs to change so that his parents will love him more. That is what runs through his mind. Your embarrassment is equal to his realizing that conformity is rewarded and being himself is not. This is not to say that children should go around misbehaving or being rowdy. They need discipline and direction, but not at the expense of losing their specialness.

If your child grows up and wants to do something that you would never do yourself, don't tear down his dreams. Sure, he's going to experience many ups and downs in life; that is normal. You cannot protect him from life and living. He's going to make mistakes and some may come with a big price to pay. Don't blame yourself or think you have failed. Life is only a failure if you stop trying and give up. Life is not about acquiring the most possessions or being one up on your neighbors. Life presents the very lessons that we need to grow and learn from. Teach your children, but don't hold them back. As painful as it may be for you, let them learn their lessons. If they are exhibiting destructive or disturbing behavior, you step up to the plate and see what you can do to help. You don't ignore it or pass it off as just a phase. You don't dabble with the illusion that **your** child would never do this or that. Learn a lesson from past events. Adults are hurting, but children are hurting, too. There is nobody human out there who doesn't experience sadness, pain, anger, and/or feelings of hopelessness at times. If grownups are capable of acting without thinking things through clearly, then, duh, so are the younger folks out there. If you are a parent, denial is one thing that should never cross your mind. It's the old 'better safe than sorry' deal. If you suspect something isn't quite right, it probably isn't. The most loving thing you can do is combine compassion and support and always an open arm to hug and lean on.

You hesitate because the world is unsafe for children, but it has always been that way. The internet has brought people together, and at the same time, put fear into people's souls. It's natural to want to protect your children and you should do everything in your power to do that. But the message here is more personal than that. This is about what children **need**: a guiding light of glory that will see them through anything.

Stop seeing your children through your own eyes and start seeing them as the amazing individuals they are. Let them be goofy sometimes and laugh up a storm. It's normal and healthy. Show an interest in their lives and they will draw you in. Cut down on the sermons and acknowledge all the good inside them. They need encouragement and praise. Rise them up. They are as glorious as the sunshine and as limitless as the great world we live in. There are no mountains that can't be crossed and explored. Set limits, but be willing to ease up here and there. Encourage independence because there are many followers, but not enough leaders.

Be that guiding light for your child. It's not what you say, but what you do that makes all the difference in the world to a child who loves you. Your child loves you and although he will resort every now and then to wishing you would vaporize, your love means

everything to him. You brought him into this world; now step back and proudly watch him become all that he is meant to be.

All children need love, support, encouragement, and acceptance. They are the present and the future. Guide them accordingly and the rest will all fall into place.

I need to go hug my kids now. I am so proud of them and feel blessed beyond compare. To give life is one thing, but to see it unfold is truly surreal and magical.

May all children not only be blessed, but *feel* blessed, now and forever, and always, always, have a guiding light they can count on.