

We're all either children or children and parents. You can't escape this one. This is a subject in which we're all embedded. Nobody got here without parents, so you're at least embedded to the degree that you're somebody's child and you may also have children of your own. And I notice, I was once asked to speak to my daughter's, the parents of my daughter's school. And I kind of looked at, what would you say to the parents of your daughter's friends in a junior high school?

You know, teenagers got a lot of stuff going on, a lot of issues. Like, people think that with teenagers it's very, very, very important, this whole issue about discipline and freedom. And sex is a very important subject for teenagers, and dope is a very important subject for teenagers, and grades are a very important subject for teenagers, and how late they should be allowed to stay out, how much freedom they should have, and all those really, really, really important things. And it occurred to me that in the raising of a teenager, really what's fundamental, what's really important is lost in all of those issues, because the issues become what's important.

And what gets lost when the issues become what's important is, I love you. I mean, that just kind of disappears someplace. There's no space for that, no room for that. And I can't, I mean, it's the most, it's the simplest thing. Parents do love their children. And children do love their parents.

That's the simplest thing you could say. And it's also the most profound thing you can say. Because all of those issues are, as far as I can see, secondary to, I love you. So that's what I decided to talk to the parents of my daughter's friends. That I didn't think all the issues that were really so kind of like, concernful for everybody, were as important as, I love you. And, you know, there's nothing very startling about that. And yet it's very profound. And it's something that most of us forget. And we just really do forget that.

We maybe take it for granted. Or, well, "you know, I love you". That may be so, but it's very easy to forget that that's the primary issue, not the other things.

So what I noticed in working with people is that all of the problems they had in their relationship with their parents would probably go away if we realized that our parents owe us nothing. I mean, if it were true that your parents owed you nothing, that it was not rightful to have some certain expectation about what your parents should have or ought to have, if it was really true that your parents owed you nothing, and that if anything, the obligation was the other way around. If there was any owing, you owed your parents.

If that were really true, it seemed to me that most of the problems people have with their parents would disappear. And that's clear to me that that's true. I mean, I had such a terrible relationship with my parents, you know, having deserted them, really, that I had a lot to experiment with. And it finally got clear to me that my parents didn't owe anything to me. I mean, they really did not owe me anything. As a matter of fact, I actually owed them something. Whether it was a hell of a lot or not, it was just I owed them, they didn't owe me anything. And it made it very easy to go back home. I mean, there was really nothing much for, it was all stuff I could handle now.

I mean, if I owed them something, it was all stuff I could handle. When they owed me something, it was hard to handle, because then I had to convince them that they ought to X, Y, and Z. The other thing is that you find out with a lot of people, if you work with people, that their parents are not all right with them. This is a variation on the same thing.

It's like, your parents should have been like this or like that. Most kids think that their parents should have been like the parents next door, or that they should have been like the other guy's parents. And if you could really get that your parents ought to be exactly like they are, a whole lot of the problems you got

with your parents would disappear. They should be that way. Now, my parents are a particular way, and I assume your parents are as well. And given the way they are, there are certain things I wouldn't do with my parents.

I would not ask them to join me in jumping out of an airplane with a parachute on. I wouldn't ask them to join me jumping out of an airplane without a parachute. But I mean, I wouldn't ask them to do that.

I don't think I would enjoy doing that with them. Not to mention that they might not enjoy doing that with me, but I don't think I would enjoy doing that with them. But I don't see anything wrong with that.

I mean, there are lots of people whom I like a lot that I wouldn't invite to do certain things. One of the things that I found interesting was that when it was all right with me for my parents to be like they were, there was a lot more that I found that I enjoyed doing with them. And interestingly, there was a lot more that I found that they enjoyed doing with me.

I mean, things that they had never done that I was interested in, I suddenly realized that I could invite them to do that with me and they would in fact often do it and often we would enjoy ourselves together. So one of the things that I find very counterproductive for parents is that they feel like they are to blame for the way their children turn out. And that's clearly not true as far as I'm concerned.

I mean, having had the opportunity to work with thousands of young people and hundreds of thousands of young people who got older, it's really clear to me that at a very early stage in a person's life, they take over and it goes just the way they want it to go. And when they're small, young, what we call children, they have the justification for the way it goes called their parents.

You know, like I think kids do well in school because they want to do well in school. Now, some of them don't want to, some of them don't want to be responsible for that. So they say, my parents forced me, but I'll be damned. I mean, I can remember being a kid vividly.

I have some very vivid memories of being a kid and it's very clear to me that I never did anything I didn't want to do, including all this stuff I said I didn't want to do. And the way I know that is a lot of the stuff I didn't want to do and I really didn't want to do that my parents wanted me to do, I didn't do anyhow. And I always found a way not to do the things I really didn't want to do.

I mean, I ran away a couple of times so as not to do what I didn't want to do. It was real clear to me. I always had the option of running away.

I ran away a lot of times when it was something I didn't want to do. It was real clear to me that now in retrospect, it's real clear to me that I had an option. And I think that most of us as parents don't recognize that our children are really determining their own lives and we can participate with them like partners, but not like gods.

And some parents foolishly think that they are God for their children. I suggest that that's a mistake. Now, then there's the other side of it.

Well, since it's all up to them, I'll just let them alone. That costs you your own integrity. It's like I don't say of my partners in an enterprise, well, they do anything they want to do.

No, I have a way of communicating what I want, what will work for me, what I require. And I always noticed that the degree to which I am being who I am, my partners are empowered. And I have the same sense that that's true about children, that the ultimate gift you can give to your children is the quality of your own life.

And that doesn't guarantee anything. Children are a risk. People who don't like risks should not have children.

They're a big risk. So it's not like you can determine the outcome of a child's life. And it is like you can play for all your worth with your children and that you can make a hell of a contribution.

And even when you've made a hell of a contribution, that doesn't guarantee that your children are going to turn out because they're going to turn out the way they want to turn out, not the way you want them to turn out. And what you do doesn't determine the way they turn out. What they do determines the way they turn out.

And what you contribute may open up possibilities for your children. So I'm not trying to give people an excuse. I mean, I am responsible for my children.

That's clear to me. It's also clear to me that the idea of being to blame or guilty is nonsense. Nonsense like counterproductive.

Nonsense like not empowering to oneself as a parent or one's children like children. And as far as I can tell, that happens very, very, very young. I mean, very young. It's also clear to me that there's something very fundamental about family. I hate to make pronouncements, you know, like this is so. But I have the sense that there is something very fundamental to family.

I don't think it needs to be this way, that way or the other way, because for some people, a being complete as family might look this way for other people being complete as family might look like that. I mean, I know people who are very complete with their family and their family is perhaps either not available to them, either they've passed away or whatever the case may be. They're really very complete with their family and they are. I mean, that's that's there for them. It's a part of who they are. Their family is there for them.

It's a part of who they are. I just have a sense that it's fundamental for us. I don't want to preach about it.

So I'm just kind of sharing my sense about it, that when one is complete, it includes being family.