

# PARENTS WITH PREPAREDNESS

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INHERITED LESSONS ON LEADERSHIP

PARENTS WITH PREPAREDNESS MAGAZINE

EDITION 16



# PARENTS WITH PREPAREDNESS

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# Welcome to *Parents with Preparedness Magazine*



Hello Fall 2025. With summer now distant in the rearview mirror, and the sound of school bells beckoning return long silenced, both familiar and new routines are underway. September is National Preparedness Month in which there is a renewed focus on preparedness and resiliency on a national level, and true to our mission, PWP examines preparedness and resiliency on a family level.

We focus on key discussions around the supper table which instill lifelong lessons about the value of communication—even sometimes to explain what at first seems unexplainable with the violence we see at a national and international level, and closer to home in our communities and schools. We do this through the art of storytelling.

Storytelling is something we have all grown up with. It is how we first learned, how we recorded voices before we even understood the content of those stories as infants. As we grew, we learned to identify with the stories and the storytellers and formed not only memories but began to build

our own life stories.

The PWP story began as most do, with an idea spoken aloud. The idea was to create a way to provide knowledge to kids and families about preparedness and resilience at no cost by busy, experienced educators and practitioners who would not be compensated, have their work peer-reviewed, and distributed to individuals they may never meet. What could possibly go wrong? In short, not a single thing!

We have and continue to tackle the most complex of issues involving active shooter violence, human trafficking, loss, relocation, bullying, and learning through the global pandemic. We are nearly seven years into this story, are now publishing Edition 16, and have produced countless videos and resources relied upon by educators, parents, families, and caregivers.

Our PWP story continues to evolve and we have enlisted educators, poets, artists and practitioners of all sorts: law enforcement, firefighters, diplomats, victims, medical personnel, psychologists, parents, and grandparents. See Issue 15 for a compelling article by author Laila Moore, only 16 years old with the confidence to tell her story to the world. Not to be outdone, her mom, Teresa Moore, a Special Education teacher, shares her story here of passion becoming purpose and selflessly changing a lot of lives in the process.

The articles each encapsulate the essence of storytelling and highlight the spirit of connectedness of life through the building and sharing of stories. As we have all learned, the

best stories are driven by life experience—all of it—and best told by those who have lived it. My thanks to Dr. Linehan for making the Japanese concept of *jinmyaku*, a now familiar way for me to think about networks of nurtured relationships inextricably intertwined which carry trust and respect, an invisible but undeniable life-force. To Lauren Anderson, the unflappable Head of a Middle School; to Ben Patton, a born storyteller; to Adam King, our brilliant Content Manager who has written his very personal story which will inspire new ways to think about preparedness. To each and all of our authors and our amazing team of volunteers, you have my everlasting gratitude.

The universal thread that always transcends each story is the deep commitment to make the world a better and safer place for this generation and the next—not only in September, known as National Preparedness Month, but always. That is our story.

**Kathleen Kiernan, EdD**

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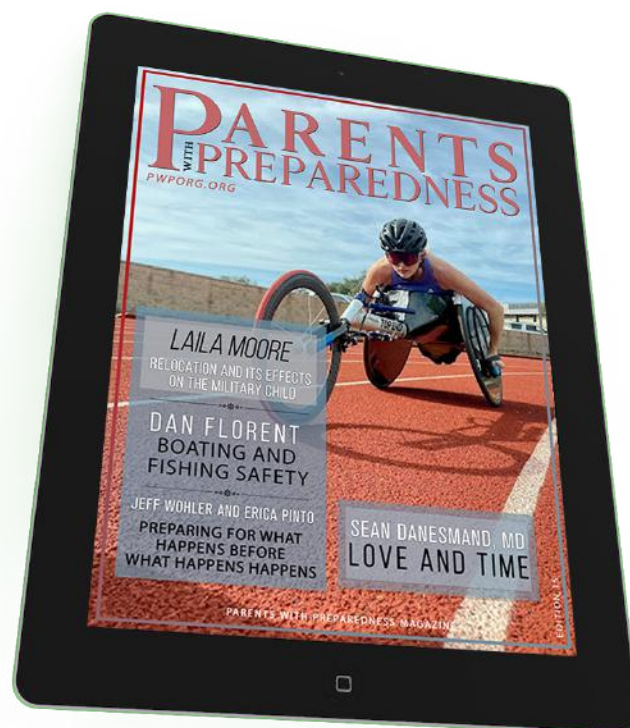
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# MIDDLE SCHOOL MISSTEPS

## WHY PARTNERSHIP MATTERS MORE THAN PERFECTION

*By Lauren Anderson*

**W**hen I tell people that I'm the head of a middle school for girls, I almost always get the same reaction: "Wow, I hated middle school!" or "Seriously? Middle school girls are so mean." While the comments are often made with a laugh, they reflect something deeper; people are not actually reacting to the idea of middle school girls, but rather to their own adolescent experiences.

Middle school is undeniably a time of complexity and change. Students are navigating a unique stage of development—no longer young children, not yet adults. They oscillate between independence and vulnerability, confidence and insecurity. They are figuring out who they are while simultaneously juggling social pressures, academic demands, and a whirlwind of emotions, all with a brain still under construction.

At lunch, a student may be wondering where to sit. In science, she might worry about who will be her partner. She may be trying to focus on a math test while reliving the group chat from the night before or stressing about how to finish an English paper between lacrosse practice and piano lessons. It's a lot. And in the midst of all this, they will make mistakes, sometimes big ones.

As educators and caregivers, we should expect missteps. When a school reaches out to share that a student has made a mistake, cheated on a test, hurt a peer's feelings, or acted out, it is a moment that can define not just the outcome of the incident, but also a child's growth and resilience. And in that moment, how a parent responds becomes the first domino in a long chain reaction.

The common scenarios go something like this: A seventh grader cheats on a Spanish test. The school calls home. The parent is understandably upset, but often, that frustration is directed somewhere: at the child, the teacher, or the school itself. There is confusion, defensiveness, blame, and ultimately, the child is left behind in the fallout.

Or another version: the parent initially seems receptive, but 24

hours later decides the school is actually at fault. They make a call, frustration builds on both sides, and again, the child is left behind.

In the early years of my career, these conversations often left me feeling unsettled. But then two things changed: I became a parent myself, and I began analyzing what differentiated the conversations that resulted in growth from those that kept everyone stuck. The answer was clear—partnership.

As a mother of two young boys, I've received my fair share of phone calls about behavior concerns. Like many parents, my instinctive reaction was often to defend: "Did the other child hit him first?" or "Where was the teacher when this happened?" While these are natural and often valid questions, I quickly realized they rarely led to meaningful solutions—especially if I remained stuck in a defensive posture. These questions didn't get to the heart of the issue: Why did the behavior occur, and what could be done to support my child moving forward?

It was during one of these moments that I experienced what Oprah would call an "ah-ha" moment. As a school administrator, I began to understand that the first step in building authentic partnerships with parents is to allow space for their initial emotions, fear, frustration, confusion, and concern. These feelings are deeply human and deserve to be acknowledged. But my role couldn't stop there.

I realized that my job was not only to deliver facts or outline what had happened, but to lead conversations with empathy, openness, and curiosity. It meant creating a space where vulnerability was welcomed, and where we could explore not just what happened, but why, and how we could move forward together. True collaboration begins when both school and home commit to understanding, growth, and out-of-the-box thinking in the best interest of the child.

When parents and educators approach one another with mutual respect, a shared goal, and a focus on the student, the results are powerful. So what does this look like in practice?



*Continued on next page.*





### Start by listening.

When the school calls about a misstep, resist the urge to jump to conclusions or assign blame. Avoid running your own parallel investigation with other parents. Take a breath and listen. You don't have all the facts, yet.

Then, when your child comes home, listen again. Let her tell you her version. Ask open-ended questions, not to interrogate, but to understand. What are the contributing factors? You know your child the best; you are her expert. Her account may not match the school's exactly, and that's okay and expected. There is often truth in both stories. Accept that the truth is somewhere in between.

### Next, initiate partnership.

Set up a meeting with someone who knows your child well: an advisor, teacher, division head. Come with questions, not accusations. Share what you're seeing at home. Does it align with what the school is seeing? Ask about patterns, behaviors across different classes, and what kinds of support might help. Keep your focus on the future, not on re-litigating the past.

If she was dishonest academically, maybe she's overwhelmed and needs a lighter schedule at home (a parent solution), and also needs one on one help from her teacher (a school solution). If she was unkind to a peer, perhaps she's dealing with something deeper (a parent solution), and may also benefit from social distance or guidance at school (a school solution). These are the productive, student-centered outcomes that only arise through true collaboration.

What often derails this process is a fixation on the details, who said what, when, and how the incident came to light. While those details can feel important, they rarely change what a student needs next. Getting stuck in them often prevents the most crucial work from happening: providing support, creating boundaries, and learning from mistakes.

When conversations between parents and schools are rooted in partnership, a foundation of mutual respect and trust begins to form. This trust be-

comes essential when future challenges inevitably arise. Even if a parent does not initially feel a strong sense of confidence in the school or its educators, engaging in open, collaborative dialogue fosters understanding over time. These relationship-building conversations not only strengthen the connection between home and school, but also create a more supportive environment for the student, one where adults are aligned in their commitment to the child's growth and well-being.

In some discussions, one party, whether the parents or the school, may establish a firm position or set a clear boundary. This could take the form of the school declining to place a student in an advanced class, or the parents deciding not to pursue outside support. When this occurs, the question becomes: what is the next step?

I often share with families, "I will not intrude into your home if you trust the decisions I make in my professional space." It is both acceptable and sometimes necessary for each side to maintain its position. Factors such as values, morals, finances, personal beliefs, and past experiences all influence these difficult conversations. What is not productive is to assume malicious intent. There may be many valid reasons why the school has chosen not to place a student in an advanced group, just as there may be sound, and sometimes private reasons for a family's decision not to seek external support.

The most constructive approach is to assume positive intent, return to the foundation of a trusting relationship, and keep the student's best interests at the center while respecting established boundaries. While you may not always achieve the outcome you hoped for, it is important to preserve the relationship. Other challenges will inevitably arise, and when the bridge between home and school is damaged, the person most negatively affected is the child.

In the best-case scenarios, everyone in the room is focused on the same thing: the child. Not just what she did, but who she is becoming. When we treat missteps as opportunities for growth, when we model accountability and empathy, and when we choose partnership over perfection, we give students the best possible chance to move forward, not just unscathed, but stronger. 🌱



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lauren Anderson is proud to serve as Head of Middle School at Garrison Forest School, a role she stepped into in 2024 after nearly a decade of dedicated service to the Middle School community. Her leadership journey at Garrison Forest started in 2009 has included roles as Assistant Head of Middle School, Middle School Dean of Students for Grades 6–8, and Associate Director of Admission.

She holds a Graduate Certificate in Independent School Leadership from Johns Hopkins University, along with both a Master of Arts in Health Education and Promotion and a Bachelor of Science in Health Education from East Carolina University. Throughout her career, she has been deeply committed to creating an inclusive, supportive, and empowering environment where students are known, challenged, and inspired to grow.

# EMBRACING BUDO PHILOSOPHY: RESILIENCE THROUGH JAPANESE KARATE AND EDUCATION

By Dr. Paul Linehan

I have been a lifelong student of Japanese martial arts (budo), from studying Okinawan karate as a child to Judo with the Tokyo Police, and as a practitioner of traditional Japanese karate through the Japan Karate Association (JKA). My 20-year affiliation with the George Washington University (GWU), began when I first studied under Sensei Kenichi Haramoto, 7th Dan, Japan JKA, and now serve as a faculty member and karate instructor. I have drawn many life lessons from Sensei Haramoto, particularly from his inspiring karate journey, which included founding university clubs in the San Francisco Bay Area at Stanford University, the University of California – San Francisco, and the University of San Francisco. All of these clubs continue to flourish because of Sensei Haramoto's comprehensive approach to teaching traditional Japanese martial arts, which encompasses more than just the physical aspect of studying moves and techniques. His promotion of JKA Karate teaches his students the importance of harmonizing body, mind, and spirit.

I grew up in the inner city, in the predominantly Irish, street-tough neighborhood of South Boston, and our house was the quintessential "Melting Pot." My father was a first-generation

Boston Irish, my mother was Japanese, and our "Nonna," Angelina, a Sicilian widow, lived on the first floor. We shared an immigrant connection, embraced our ethnic diversity, but first and foremost, we were proud to all be united as Americans with a common life goal of a strong community and country.

Growing up in this inner-city environment was tough. I experienced discrimination, racism, and was bullied at times, and this motivated me to learn Japanese karate as a means of self-defense, and developing confidence and resilience. It was at this time that I discovered many of the values and principles of the Boston Irish Street were similar to those of Japanese "budo" – discipline, respect, perseverance, loyalty, courage, benevolence, honesty, honor, and self-control.

At the heart of "budo" is resilience, perseverance, and remaining calm in the face of adversity. Everyone experiences adversity in various forms, whether it is bullying, discrimination, hatred, racism, abuse, or violence. What one chooses to do in response makes all the difference in one's attitude, emotional health, and approach to life. In my case, I turned to sports, physical activities, and martial arts, and the rigorous training that karate demands. This instilled in me a sense of

commitment, focus, and discipline that resonates in every aspect of my life today.

The calmness and mental clarity I have learned in Japanese martial arts have also saved my life. On June 14, 2017, in Alexandria, Virginia, I survived a mass shooting that occurred during a practice session for members of Congress for the annual Congressional Baseball Game. During my morning walk around the park, I suddenly found myself caught in the middle of the mass shooting, but by maintaining sharp 360-degree mental awareness and remaining calm, I was able to evade danger and escape unharmed.

Japanese karate has taught me that physical mastery is enhanced by mental clarity and self-discipline, which in turn shape academic pursuits, enabling me to approach challenges with patience and resilience. As I teach GWU students, I emphasize the importance of discipline in both their studies and life. I encourage them to set goals and remain committed to their pursuits, mirroring the commitment one learns in the dojo.

Thus, the importance of life balance extends beyond physical discipline by fostering character, discipline, and academic excellence, as taught in the Japanese philosophy of "bunbu-ryodo"





(excellence in academics and martial arts, as exemplified by the student-scholar athlete). Bunbu-ryudo is a unique blend of physical education and character development that instills values such as perseverance, resilience, respect, and self-control —essential elements of character formation. This philosophy aligns with my conviction in fostering well-rounded individuals who are not only scholars but also confident, compassionate, and responsible global citizens.

In karate, a culture of mutual respect fosters a supportive community. When students feel respected and valued, they are engaged and embrace their struggles as opportunities for growth rather than insurmountable barriers. This philosophy has helped many of them develop a healthier relationship with “success and failure,” to become resilient in understanding that setbacks are simply stepping stones towards success.

Through my journey in JKA, I have also come to appreciate the importance of lifelong learning and mentorship, crucial aspects of the budo philosophy. Having had the privilege of learning from Sensei Haramoto, I feel compelled to give back. I strive to be a mentor to my students, fostering a space where they can seek guidance and support. Whether it involves them in club activities or encourages their participation in community outreach, I seek to create pathways for growth that extend beyond the classroom.

The tenets of Japanese budo have profoundly influenced my life and teaching at GWU, instilling in me a sense of discipline, respect, perseverance, and harmony, which shape not only my approach to karate but also my role as an educator and mentor. As I continue to share these values with my students through the practice of traditional Japanese karate, I aim to empower them to lead lives rooted in these principles, nurturing the next generation that embodies the spirit of budo both inside and outside the dojo. In a world that often feels fragmented, the lessons learned from my Japanese karate journey serve as a powerful reminder of the importance of balance, respect, perseverance, and resilience in our collective pursuit of excellence and personal growth. 🌱



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Linehan is a geo-strategic security consultant specializing in global security and government affairs, and international security programs associated with defense and military capability, innovation and technology advantage, emerging threats, strategic competition, trade and economic statecraft, and strategic risk analysis and mitigation. He is also an adjunct lecturer at the U.S. Department of State, Foreign Service Institute; Boston College; and Keio University; faculty member at George Washington University; senior advisor to the Japan Society; executive management consultant, and a senior fellow at a Pentagon think-tank - the Center for Naval Analyses.

Dr. Linehan's decades of professional experience and federal government service have been devoted to managing a range of Indo-Pacific business, defense, intelligence, and national security affairs. In his final assignment in the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, he served as the Director, Indo-Pacific for the National Disclosure Policy Committee and U.S. Designated Security Authority as U.S. Government lead expert for international security agreements, security certification of defense programs, industrial security, and national disclosure policy for the Indo-Pacific region.

Prior to government service, Dr. Linehan had private sector experience in Tokyo, Japan at a multinational corporation and as adjunct faculty at Oberlin University, Tokyo. He has lived abroad for 13 years in Asia and Europe.





# A CHAMORRO DAUGHTER'S JOURNEY BACK TO GUAM

By Dr. Mary Kate Soliva



Life's journey often begins in the place we call "home." Yet for many of us who have served in the military, it can take years before we return there for any meaningful length of time. Guam has always been a core part of my identity, as my family's bloodline stretches back for generations, but for much of my life, I called Maryland home, with military service frequently changing my address. My grandmother likes to say she keeps my mailing address written in pencil, ready to erase and update it with each new move.

Through all those transitions, I carried with me a longing to know my heritage more deeply. Still, I often felt a sense of distance from the traditions and daily customs shaping life on the island. When I boarded the plane from Maryland to Guam just a month ago, I knew I was heading toward something both deeply familiar and completely new. I still consider myself a student of culture and family history. I recall a wholesome memory of helping set up the fiesta table and making the dreaded mistake of setting the rice at the very end. My great-aunt could be heard across the lawn, "Who put the rice at the end of the table?!" and my cousins quickly pointed at me. I was quickly referred to as a "coconut", white on the inside, though brown on the outside. A simple example of the duality I feel as someone with indigenous Chamorro blood but raised in the U.S mainland.

It's often said you can see the history of Guam through the food on the fiesta table, with Chamorro food at the start of the table and American, Japanese, and other cuisines following. There is a complex and rich history here, and I have a deep respect for the community and people who call Guam "home". Identity is not inherited, and in my opinion, must be lived and felt. To my surprise, many people thank me for returning to Guam, especially since so many from my generation have left for the U.S. mainland in search of better opportunities and an easier life. It is what we call being "priced out of paradise".

### The Value of Inafa'maolek

One of the most important values I have encountered in Guam is inafa'maolek, which has one possible translation: to "make things good for each other." It is the idea of selflessly promoting harmony, reciprocity, and care for the community. I've witnessed this practice every day with moments of people sharing food, helping the elderly, volunteering at village events, and welcoming someone new, like me, with generosity.

For me, inafa'maolek has become both a guide and a reminder. It guides me in how I

approach community life: not with a checklist of what I know or don't know, but with a spirit of giving and learning. It's a powerful reminder of how preparedness, whether for daily life or for emergencies, is not an individual act but a collective one. As the saying goes, "it takes a village".

### Lessons for Families

For parents and families, my journey holds lessons extending beyond Guam. Many of us move across oceans or neighborhoods and navigate environments where we feel both like insiders and outsiders. For children especially, these transitions ignite questions about identity and belonging.

Here are a few lessons I've learned to help families embrace such transitions:

#### 1. Cherish what you bring.

Even if you feel like a newcomer, you carry values, traditions, and meaningful experiences. For me, the discipline and resilience I gained from years of work in the mainland enrich the way I contribute to life in Guam. Families can help children see their own experiences as strengths rather than shortcomings.

#### 2. Practice humility as a strength.

It is okay not to know everything. Had I dared to ask where the rice went, I would've avoided my great-aunt's wrath and such a humbling moment. When families model curiosity and the willingness to ask questions, they show children how learning is a lifelong process, not a weakness.

### 3. Stay grounded in the community.

Belonging is built through relationships. It is easy to take for granted the people who make up a community. However, real change and community come from taking part in local events, volunteering, or simply sharing meals, which help weave connections. Families can use community ties as a source of stability and strength during times of change.

### 4. Teach resilience through culture.

Culture is more than history; it is a living resource for resilience, ever evolving and still woven into the fabric of our being. For Chamorros, values like inafa'maolek remind us how collective care makes us stronger. For other families, reconnecting with cultural traditions can provide children with a sense of belonging and rootedness, regardless of where they live.

### 5. Embrace growth together.

Transitions are not just for children; they are also opportunities for adults to grow and develop. Sharing stories of your own challenges and learning moments can help children see how everyone, regardless of age, is still on a journey of becoming. My grandfather often said, "No one



can take your education away from you, so never stop learning."

### Lifelong Learning

My return to Guam has shown me how homecoming is not a destination but a process I'm excited to share with my family. It is about honoring where we come from while acknowledging how identity is continuously shaped by how we live, learn, and give back. For parents, this is an empowering message: our children do not need to "arrive" at a fixed sense of iden-

tity. Instead, they can embrace the richness of becoming, balancing pride in who they are with humility, which drives them to continue learning. As I continue to settle into life on Guam, I carry with me both the bloodline connecting me to this land and the humility of a lifelong student. I have found a deeper kind of preparedness for life itself. In Guam, these values are clear: care for one another and embrace your heritage, regardless of your address. As I continue my journey in Guam, I hope to live with the values of inafa'maolek more fully each day. 🌺



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Mary Kate Soliva is a Special Operations Army Veteran and co-founder of the Guam Human Rights Initiative (GHRI), where she leads efforts to advance human rights in Guam and the Pacific through research and advocacy. Under her leadership, GHRI presented at the United Nations Minority Assembly in Geneva, Switzerland. Soliva is a Hoover Institution Veteran Fellow in the inaugural fellowship program under the direction of former U.S. Secretary of State Dr. Condoleezza Rice.

She is an Assistant Professor of Public Administration and Criminal Justice at the University of Guam. A TEDx Hagåtña speaker, Soliva continues to demonstrate how homeland security and human rights are deeply interconnected, inspiring the next generation of changemakers. Most importantly, she loves to travel and live life with her husband, Nelson.



# Framing a Life of Music, Photography and Preparedness

By Adam King



**STORM OVER THE CABIN**



**BEACH SHOT OCTOBER**



**BEACH SHOT JANUARY**

I started playing piano at two and a half years old. My parents had an old Everett upright that became the catalyst for my musical and emotional growth. The piano sat beside a southwest-facing glass door, where sunlight streamed in from mid-afternoon to early evening. I remember playing with intensity, louder and more urgent, believing the sun would break from the clouds to embrace my hands as they danced across the keyboard with each crescendo.

*To this day, I swear I could control the clouds with my music.*

When my grandmother and then grandfather passed before my ninth birthday, I coped by matching my music to the sun. I raised the piano's vibrations as high as I could, hoping they might hear the notes, an ethereal beacon guiding them toward heaven. Since then, I've continued this ritual for many loved ones and friends, even arranging for my music to be played at several of their funerals.

In my teens, after signing my first record deal at nineteen, I began to notice hidden stories within the structures of my songs. These stories arrived as emotional visions so vivid I believed I was tapping into something far greater than myself. In time, the visions took on shapes as I began to see notes, not just hear them, alive in ways more profound than simple definition.

When the first digital cameras appeared, everything changed. I could now give sound to vision and vision to sound, even though painting was never my strength. Photography gave me another language to express what music had already revealed. Later, when I learned Photoshop in my mid-twenties, I became a force to be reckoned with.

In 1991, I released my first album, *Without the Water*. The CD's back cover showed what looked like a glowing red-and-gold sunrise. Listeners

called it beautiful, mysterious, and profound. What no one knew was that it was just a manipulated photo of a candle resting on the back of a toilet. To this day, my wife and I laugh at how deeply it resonated. The next step came naturally: weaving stories through both images and music. What most people don't realize is that when you're on a creative mission, the true reward isn't the final product, it's the journey and all of the emotions that develop into positive memories throughout the process. Each experience, from idea to fieldwork to the studio, builds perspective, discipline, and yes, even preparedness.



**ALEC AND LIV NORTHERN LIGHTS**



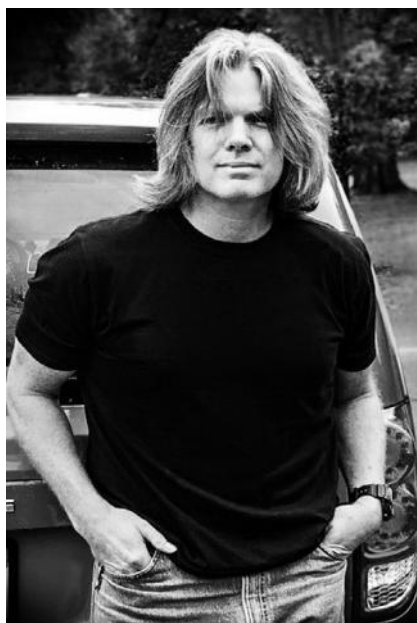
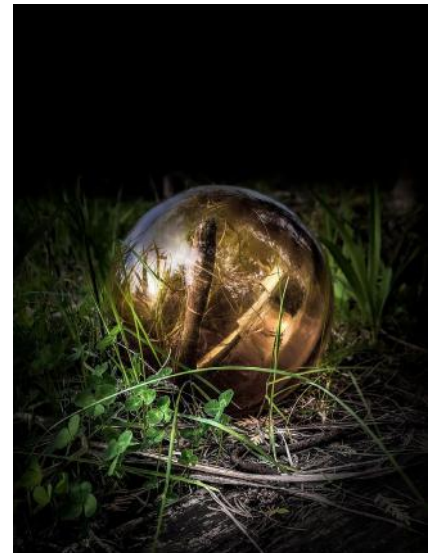


At first glance, it may seem unusual to connect music and photography with preparedness. But both have shaped the way I live and the way I raise my family. They sharpen observation, foster patience and nurture resilience. I've even learned practical lessons, like exactly how long it takes for my fingers to go numb and no longer register on an iPhone screen in negative twenty-degree weather. (Three and a half minutes, in case you're curious.) These gifts remind me that beauty and peace can be found even in uncertainty. They've helped me create a positive space not just for myself, but for my wife and children, who each share in this creative journey in their own ways.

For children, the lesson is even more critical. A child who learns to see beauty through a lens or shape music from emotion isn't just learning art, they're learning self-reliance, confidence and resilience. These are qualities that will carry them through life's challenges, both big and small, just as they have carried me.

To the readers of Parents with Preparedness Magazine, my hope is simple: encourage your children to pick up a camera, pluck at a keyboard, hum a tune, or strum a guitar. Photography and music are not merely pastimes. They are practices that build awareness, resilience, and hope. They give kids a way to make their world more beautiful and, in the process, prepare themselves for the future with strength and creativity.

The beauty of where I live reminds me daily: the waves of Lake Michigan will always rise and fall, but what matters most is how you frame the moment, and what song you choose to carry it forward. 🍷



## About The Author

Adam is a composer, writer, and photographer whose work reflects a lifelong connection to creativity, resilience and the outdoors.

He shares these passions through his work with [PWPORG.ORG](https://www.pwporg.org), helping families explore music, photography and preparedness as tools for strength and self-reliance.

He is currently working on his next album, *Place of Echoes*, a project blending his photography and music, set for release in summer 2026.

To listen to his music, view his photography, or connect with Adam, please visit [PlaceofEchoes.com](https://PlaceofEchoes.com)



# Family Communication in a Complex World

By Dr. Stacy Phillips, DSW, LMSW



In a world where alerts buzz constantly on our phones, news cycles never end, and stressors from school, work, and society feel ever-present, family communication has never been more critical—or more challenging.

As a single mother of three boys, I’ve learned firsthand that communication is both the glue that holds us together and the bridge that gets us through turbulent times. My sons are all at different stages of life: Jordan, my youngest, just began his first year of college; Christian is in Texas, completing his second year of school on his own; and Brady is at home pursuing his apprenticeship in HVAC. Their paths may look different, but one truth ties us all together: honest, consistent communication sustains us as a family.

**Listening Before Speaking**

I’ll be the first to admit—listening and not trying to control didn’t come naturally to me. As a single mother, I often felt the weight of keeping everything together, which sometimes made me want to manage every detail of my boys’ lives. But with time (and a few humbling lessons), I realized that communication isn’t about control—it’s about connection.

Some of the most meaningful conversations we’ve had as a family happened not in the big sit-downs, but in the in-between moments: late-night phone calls from Christian, car rides with Brady, or fixing something around the house with Jordan. I learned to ask questions that left space for more than a “yes” or “no.” Instead of “Did you have a good day?” I’d try: “What was the highlight of your day?” or “What was hardest today?” These questions opened doors for deeper conversations.

**Honesty, Even When It’s Hard**

My boys have experienced challenges many young people never should, including living through the impact of their father’s substance dependence. Early on, I had a choice: shield them from the truth or be honest in an age-

appropriate way. I chose honesty. Children sense when something is wrong, and silence often causes more confusion than comfort.

By naming what was happening and giving them space to share their feelings, we were able to process the hard moments together. That choice to be transparent built trust—it showed them that no topic was off-limits and that home was a safe place to express both fear and hope.

**Balancing Individuality and Unity**

Jordan, my youngest, has always been driven. Now in college, he’s channeling that determination into academics, athletics, and leadership. Christian, on the other hand, is navigating independence far from home in Texas, building resilience while living alone. Brady is charting a different course altogether, pursuing skilled trades through his HVAC apprenticeship.

Each of them communicates in their own way—one through openness, another through humor, and one mostly after reflection. My role as their mom is to adapt, to meet each of them where they are, and to make sure they know their voices matter. At the same time, we maintain family rituals—weekly calls, holiday traditions, and shared stories—that keep us tethered no matter how far apart we are.

**Modeling What We Teach**

Over the years, I’ve been reminded again and again: my boys are watching not just what I say, but how I say it. If I urge them to listen but interrupt them, they notice. If I preach about honesty but hide my own struggles, they feel the disconnect.

One of the most powerful lessons I’ve learned is modeling vulnerability. When I admit that I don’t always have the answers, it gives them permission to be open about their own challenges. When I apologize for losing my patience, it shows them that respect runs both ways.

## Practical Strategies for Parents

A few strategies that have helped us:

- **Tech-free time:** Phones go down during meals. It's a small rule, but it protects our time together.
- **Check-ins:** Even a quick five-minute "how are you?" at the end of the day or week can spark connection.
- **Shared tasks:** Doing things side by side—whether cooking, repairing something, or running errands—creates natural space for conversation.
- **Hope and forward focus:** We don't just talk about what's hard; we talk about dreams, goals, and what we're building for the future.

## Why It Matters

Communication is more than just words—it's one of the most important protective factors a family can cultivate. Research shows that young people who feel heard and connected at home are better equipped to handle stress, make healthier decisions, and build resilience.

For us, communication has been the difference between feeling fractured by life's challenges and growing stronger through them. It hasn't always been easy, and I'll be the first to say I'm still a work in progress. But every time one of my boys' calls to share good news, opens up about a struggle, or simply laughs with me at the dinner table, I'm reminded why it matters.

In today's complex world, we can't control every challenge our kids will face. But we can give them the assurance that at home—or wherever we are—they are heard, understood, and loved. And sometimes, that is the greatest gift we can give them. 🍷

### 1. Listen Before You Speak

Ask open-ended questions like, "What was the highlight of your day?" instead of yes/no questions.

### 2. Be Honest, Even When It's Hard

Children sense when something is wrong. Being transparent—while tailoring details to their age—builds trust and shows them that home is a safe place to talk about anything.

### 3. Respect Each Child's Style

Every child has their own way of expressing themselves. Meet them where they are, rather than expecting them to fit the same mold.

### 4. Protect Tech-Free Time

Phones go down during meals. It's a small rule, but it protects the sacred space of conversation and connection.

### 5. Create Rituals of Connection

Weekly calls, shared dinners, or even inside jokes can keep a family tethered—no matter how far apart you live.

### 6. Model Vulnerability

Admit when you're overwhelmed, say sorry when you lose patience, and show your kids that growth is a lifelong process. They'll follow your lead.

## About The Author



Stacy Phillips develops and deploys effective solutions to challenging and systemic crime victimization issues as a Victim Justice Program Specialist with the Office for Victims of Crime (OVC) at the U.S. Department of Justice. Levering her more than 20 years of experience in the victim services field, she works collaboratively across OVC's Discretionary and Human Trafficking Teams to create, implement, and monitor a broad range of programs. Dr. Phillips has spearheaded demonstration initiatives on polyvictimization, reducing child fatalities and recurring serious child injuries, and currently leads OVC's opioid/drug addiction crisis initiatives. She also oversees Project Hope, a community of practice focused on law enforcement and communities. She also manages projects on crime victims' rights enforcement and legal wraparound networks, law enforcement-based direct services, post-conviction initiatives, and human trafficking. As a children and youth expert with a focus on trauma, polyvictimization, and brain science, Dr. Phillips represents OVC on the DOJ Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA) Working Group, Federal Inter-Agency Work Group on Child Abuse and Neglect, the Federal Interagency Task Force on Trauma-Informed Care. She is a sought-out speaker at national conferences and has advised research teams in their development of nationwide toolkits.

Before joining OVC, Dr. Phillips spent 15 years responding to the needs of children and families through the child welfare system. At the DC Child and Family Services Agency, she worked on child and family protective services issues, including grants, program design and management, needs assessment, resource development, and policy development. During this time, she started the DC Parent Advisory Council, served on the Districtwide Children's Justice Act Task Force, and helped develop the

District's Human Trafficking Task Force. Beforehand, Dr. Phillips served as a Child Protective Services Investigations Supervisor, conducting adoption, foster care, and kinship licensing studies in Texas. She began her career as a Child Protective Services Investigator in Bridgeport, Connecticut.

Dr. Phillips holds a Doctorate of Social Work (DSW) from the University of Southern California with a focus on smart decarceration of youth; a certificate in Public Policy from Harvard University Kennedy School of Government; an M.A. in Clinical Psychology from Southern Connecticut State University; and an M.S.W. from the Catholic University of America.



# When Passion Becomes Purpose

By Teresa Moore



I've always known I wanted to be a teacher. For as long as I can remember, school felt like a magical place, a world where anything was possible. Growing up, school was more than just a building with desks and chalkboards; to me, it was an escape. It was a space where curiosity was encouraged, where I could discover something new each day, and where I felt surrounded by friends who shared in the joy of learning. I loved the structure of the day, moving from one subject to the next, each one bringing a different challenge. I loved the excitement of physical education, the freedom of recess, and the calm joy of library time. All of those moments were stitched together into something that felt safe and fulfilling. Most of all, school was a place where I could simply be a kid.

It was this sense of wonder and belonging that planted the seed for my future career. I knew early on that I wanted to recreate that experience for other children. My dream was to create a classroom environment where students could feel the same joy I felt—a place where they could love learning, where they felt free to be themselves, and where they could simply enjoy the experience of being children. To me, teaching has never been just about academics. It has always been about fostering a safe, nurturing, and inspiring space that allows children to grow in every sense of the word.

When I entered graduate school to pursue my Master's in Education, I was faced with an important decision: what grade level would I teach? At first, I struggled with the choice. Each level—elementary, middle, and high school—offered its own unique challenges and rewards. Elementary school appealed to me because of the foundational skills students develop at that age, skills that shape their future success. Middle school called to me because of the energy, growth, and curiosity that come with adolescence. High school intrigued me because of the independence of older students and the opportunities to help them prepare for the real world. Choosing just one felt impossible.

I wrestled with the decision until my student advisor made a suggestion that changed everything: Special Education. She explained that this path would allow me to teach across all grade levels and, even more importantly, to work with students who often struggled in general education classrooms. These were students who needed extra support, individualized instruction, and someone to advocate for them. The moment I heard this, it clicked. Special Education was not just a compromise between grade levels; it was a calling. It would give me the chance to meet students where they were, to celebrate their unique strengths, and to help them overcome obstacles that others might not even notice. It was, for me, a no-brainer.

Since then, I have come to deeply appreciate the many hats teachers wear every single day. We are not only instructors but also planners, assessors, mentors, coaches, cheerleaders, counselors, mediators, advocates, role models, and so much more. As a collaborative special education teacher and case manager, I wear all of these hats and then some. My work requires me to constantly shift roles depending on the needs of my students, their families, and my colleagues.

In my role as a collaborative teacher, I work side by side with general education teachers. Together, we co-teach lessons, ensuring that students with special needs can access the curriculum meaningfully. I monitor individual goals, check that accommodations are being followed, and make modifications when necessary. I also assist in managing classroom behavior, creating an environment where every student can thrive. Collaboration is at the heart of this work—it requires flexibility, communication, and a shared commitment to student success.

As a case manager, my responsibilities expand even further. I collect data and input from a team that includes parents, general education teachers, specialists, and administrators. I use this information to write Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), which outline the goals,

services, and supports each student needs to succeed. I lead annual meetings to review student progress, adjust goals, and ensure that we are providing the right services at the right time. Beyond the paperwork and meetings, I check in regularly with my students, maintain open lines of communication with parents, and partner with teachers to support classroom learning.

At the heart of all of this is my passion for connecting with students. I genuinely enjoy being in the classroom, finding ways to engage students in learning, and making it fun and meaningful for them. I strive to create a classroom environment where students feel safe to take risks, ask for help, and be themselves. I often tell people that I see myself as an educator not just for academics, but for the whole well-being of my students. Academic success is important, but so is building confidence, resilience, and self-advocacy.

My classroom reflects this philosophy. It is decorated to be warm and inviting, a space that feels less like a sterile institution and more like a community where students belong. I believe that environment matters—students should walk into the room and feel safe, comfortable, and ready to learn. Just as important as the physical environment is the relational one. I make it a priority to build strong, healthy relationships with each of my students. I learn about their interests, celebrate their achievements, and support them through their struggles.

I believe that relationships are the key to academic success. When students know that I care about them as individuals, they are more willing to ask for help, to admit when they don't understand something, and to embrace mistakes as opportunities to learn. They develop a sense of trust and belonging that motivates them to work harder and push themselves further.

Teaching, to me, is both a privilege and a responsibility. It is the privilege of walking alongside students as they grow, guiding them as they



discover who they are and what they are capable of. It is the responsibility of creating a space where every student feels seen, valued, and supported. Every day, I am reminded of why I chose this path: because school once gave me a place to belong, and now it is my mission to give that gift back to others. 💖

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Teresa Moore is a Special Education teacher in Northern Virginia with almost two decades of working with and nurturing young children.

A devoted educator, she thrives on creating a welcoming environment for her students and providing opportunities for them to succeed.

As a military spouse and mother, she enjoys spending time with her family, exploring nature, walking her dog, and cheering on her favorite NFL team.



# AWKWARD CONVERSATIONS WITH YOUR KIDS

By Brenda Minge, RN



I speak with a lot of young people and families struggling with many issues, and one issue stands out: communication. Kids are reluctant or afraid to come to their parents with personal problems for fear of being laughed at, ridiculed, dismissed, or reprimanded. Many parents, in turn, don't want to discuss life's issues with their kids because of past traumas and core wounds they suffered, including physical danger, embarrassment, or things they would rather forget.

Our kids are worthy of feeling validated, acknowledged, and understood. You may not agree with what they are thinking and saying, but you can let them feel safe enough to come to you and talk. Whether the conversation is about "taboo topics" such as dating, sex, and drugs, or something more benign such as college plans and their future, having that dialogue can be life-changing. Regardless of age or gender, everyone has a voice, an opinion, passions about certain topics, and the right to feel what they feel.

You have the right to use your voice and share your thoughts and feelings with others—not only with those who agree with you but also with those who may disagree. And that's wonderful. An exchange of ideas and beliefs through open, honest, non-judgmental communication is how we learn and grow. Just because someone believes differently than you does not make them your enemy. Learn to agree to disagree. Be courageous enough to keep an open mind, open eyes, and a closed mouth long enough to listen—you just might learn something.

Providing a safe space for your child so they know they can come to you without fear of yelling, rage, humiliation, or "I told you so" lectures helps them grow. Thanking them for trusting you enough to come with uncomfortable discussions builds a deeper and more trustworthy relationship. Telling them you love them—no matter what they do—is equally important. This is unconditional love. You may not agree with their choices, but you will continue to love and stand by them.

Think back to your own childhood. Were you able to have open, honest, non-judgmental conversations with your parents? Or was it "do as I say, not as I do"? How would it have felt if you had been able to sit down and discuss the hard topics that kept you up at night? I

was very blessed to have a close relationship with my mother, and I could talk to her about anything—often when I got home from a date and she was waiting up for me. Those late-night talks over popcorn and old mystery movies are some of my best memories. When my son was growing up, he knew he could come to me with anything, and we would work it out together—the good, the bad, and the HOLY CATS! Today, he and my daughter-in-law have that same kind of relationship with my granddaughter.

Everyone deserves a safe space—someone they can turn to with their deepest worries, fears, hopes, and dreams. We all need people who believe in us, whether that's a parent, grandparent, aunt, or uncle. Someone who won't laugh or make us feel small, but instead makes us feel capable and supported every step of the way.

Allow your children the gift of awkward conversations. Share your own stories. Let them see you not just as Mom or Dad, but as people who were once goofy kids who made mistakes but never gave up. Let them learn from your life lessons and use your stories to light their path.

Most importantly, allow your child to feel safe enough to be their authentic self, knowing you will always love them for who they are—not who you wish they were. Let them know their voice matters. Their opinions matter. THEY MATTER. 🍷

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Brenda Minge is a retired RN, now Life Coach specializing in Trauma Therapy. I am certified in Family Development, Stored Memory Access Retrieval Trauma Techniques, NLP, EFT/TFT, EMDR, PTSD / PTSD Case Management, Guided Imagery and Relaxation Hypnotherapy.

Having been raised in the Midwest, I take great pride in my Midwest values and down-to-earth approach dealing with clients and families. Clients say talking to me is like sitting down for coffee with your best friend.

I am committed to helping individuals struggling with PTSD, C-PTSD, Moral Injury, Depression, Anxiety, Core Wounds, Generational Trauma, Grief and Loss. My clientele include veterans, active-duty military, law enforcement, first responders, victims of family and domestic violence, victims of sexual assault and human trafficking. Through therapy my clients transition from Victim to Survivor to Thriver / Warrior.

# PREPARING TEENS FOR THE ROAD AHEAD: A PARENT'S GUIDE TO HEALTHY DATING

By Norma Peterson, Executive Director, Document the Abuse

**W**hen a teenager reaches the age where dating becomes part of their world, parents often find themselves torn between excitement and anxiety. Although dating is a natural milestone, a step toward independence and adulthood, parents worry about how to keep their teens safe; emotionally, physically, and especially preserve their digitally.

Like teaching a young driver to navigate the road, preparing teens for dating is less about control and more about equipping them with the skills to recognize signs, make informed decisions, and reach out for help if needed.

A simple and effective way to frame these lessons is by using the “traffic light” analogy: green, yellow, and red. This approach empowers teens to recognize healthy behaviors, navigate uncertain situations, and steer clear of danger while keeping the message positive and proactive.

**Green Light:** Encouraging Healthy Relationships

Just as a green light signal “go,” there are aspects of dating that parents can encourage and celebrate. These are the markers of healthy, respectful, and mutually supportive connections.

Healthy dating starts with communication. A teen should feel comfortable expressing their interests and establish boundaries without fear of judgment. Encourage your child to notice when a dating partner listens respectfully, values their perspective, and gives space for individuality. A healthy relationship allows both people to continue growing as individuals while sharing experiences together.

Trust is another “green light.” If your teens feel confident that their partner will be honest, supportive, and respectful, they are experiencing the foundations of a safe connection. Remind your teens that respect also means valuing each other’s time, friendships, and family connections, no one should be pressured to cut ties with the people who matter to them.

Parents can reinforce values by modeling healthy relationships in their own lives. Teens learn as much by observation as by

instruction. Talking openly about what mutual respect looks like at home can help normalize it in romantic contexts, too.

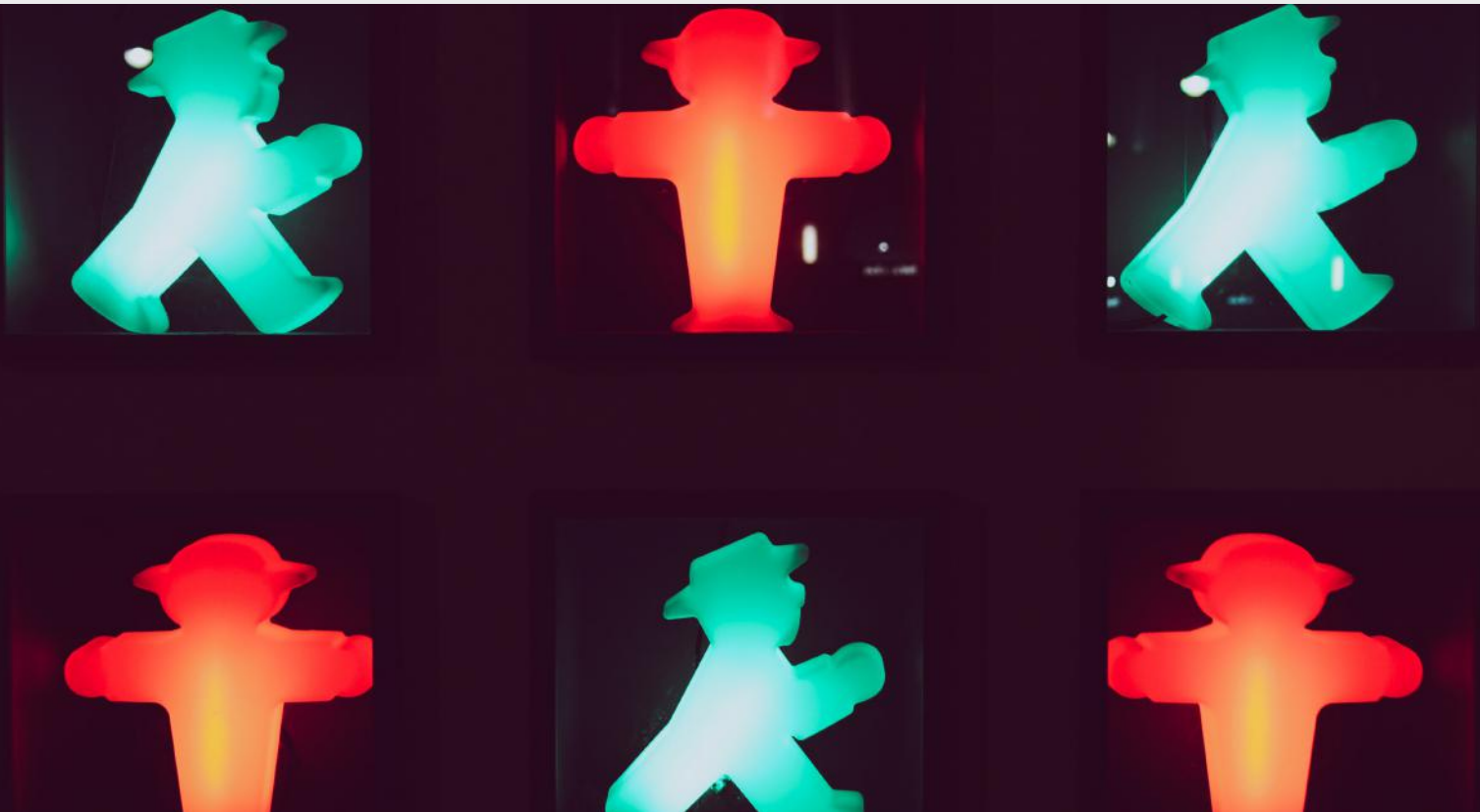
**Yellow Light:** Proceed with Caution

Yellow lights don’t always mean danger, they mean it’s time to slow down, pay attention, and evaluate the situation. In the context of teen dating, “yellow light” behaviors are not necessarily harmful, but they can be signals to pause and reflect.

For example, does your teen notice if their partner becomes moody when plans don’t go their way? Do they seem overly dependent on your teens for happiness or approval? Does texting and social media communication feel overwhelming or one-sided?

These yellow-light behaviors often show up subtly. They aren’t always immediate red flags, but they warrant conversation. Parents can help teens by framing these as opportunities to develop critical thinking skills. Ask open-ended questions:

- “How did you feel when that happened?”
- “What do you think is a fair balance in a relationship?”
- “If the roles were reversed, would that





feel comfortable for you?”

Encouraging teens to articulate their feelings creates self-awareness and builds the confidence they need to set boundaries. Yellow-light moments are a chance to practice asserting themselves and deciding what feels right.

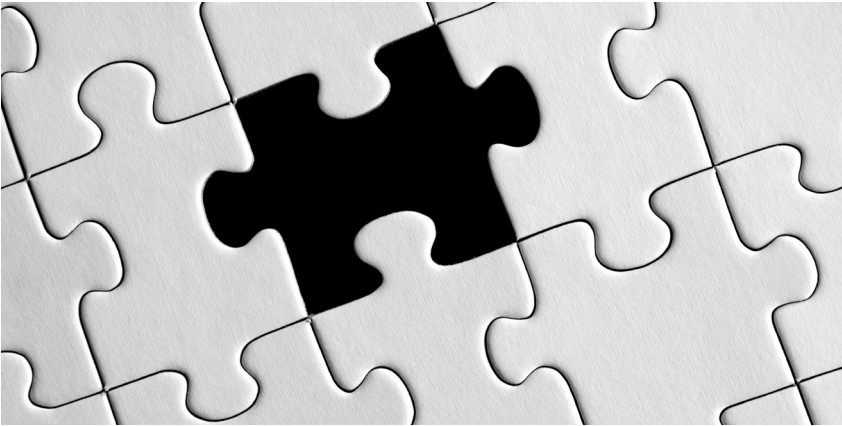
**Red Light:** Stop and Reroute

Red lights are clear signals of danger, behaviors that no one should ignore. Parents need to prepare their teens to recognize and respond to these situations.

Red-light behaviors include:

- Controlling actions, such as dictating what your teen wears, who they spend time with, or how they use their phone.
- Intense jealousy, accusations, or constant “checking in.”
- Threats of harm, either to your teens, their family, or themselves.
- Any form of physical violence, sexual pressure, or emotional manipulation

These warning signs must be taken seriously. Teach your teens that love should never feel like fear, and that no one has the right to control or harm them. Just like you would insist they stop at a red light to stay safe, insist that they recognize these behaviors as reasons to end the relationship.



It’s also important for parents to prepare in advance for what to do if their teens feel unsafe. Make sure your child knows they can always come to you without fear of punishment or blame. Establish a code word they can text or call with if they need to be picked up discreetly. Talk about safe places and trusted adults they can reach out to.

**Preparing for Detours:** Talking About Missing Teens

Conversations about safety naturally bring up a parent’s worst fear: a missing child. While rare, these situations can happen, especially when teens are navigating relationships. However, rather than dwelling on fear, parents can approach this topic as part of an overall plan for independence.

Teach your teens the importance of checking in. This isn’t about micromanaging, it’s about accountability. Agree on a system where they share where they’re going, who they’ll be with, and when they’ll be back. Encourage them to keep their phone charged and discuss what to do if they feel lost or unsafe.

It’s also a good idea to role-play scenarios. Ask: “If you couldn’t reach me, who else could you call?” “What would you do if you needed help in a public place?” Framing these discussions as tools for empowerment helps teens feel prepared rather than restricted.

**Parents as Co-Pilots:**

Ultimately, preparing teens for dating is not about scaring them away from relationships but helping them enjoy the ride





safely. Think of yourself as the co-pilot in their car: you won't always be behind the wheel, but you can help them steer on unfamiliar roads.

Stay approachable. Teens are far more likely to open up about their dating experiences if they feel their parents will listen without immediately judging or lecturing. Express curiosity rather than criticism. Share your own stories of learning from relationships, the good, the bad, and the in-between.

At the same time, stay informed. Learn about the pressures teens face today, from social media dynamics to issues of consent. Knowledge helps parents guide conversations with empathy and relevance.

*“Teach your teens  
that love should  
never feel like fear,  
and that no one has  
the right to control  
or harm them.”*

#### A Journey Worth Preparing For:

Dating is a natural, exciting milestone for teens, full of opportunities to grow, connect, and discover more about themselves. Parents who approach it as a life skill, like learning to drive, can help their teens navigate with confidence.

By teaching them to recognize green lights of healthy connection, yellow lights of caution, and red lights of danger, you're not just preparing them for dating, you're preparing them for all the relationships that lie ahead. And just like learning the rules of the road, these skills can last a lifetime. ♡



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Norma Peterson is the Executive Director of Document the Abuse, an organization which houses the Evidentiary Abuse Affidavit (EAA) inspired by her missing sister-in-law, Stacy Peterson. She is a nationally recognized victim advocate, speaker, and trainer with over a decade of leadership in the movement to prevent domestic violence and support survivors.

Norma serves as the Illinois State Coordinator for CUE Center for Missing Persons and is a member of the Illinois Domestic Violence Fatality Review Board and the DuPage County Family Violence Coordinating Council. She has appeared on local and major media programs such as Dateline NBC, Crime Watch Daily and Snapped to bring awareness to domestic violence prevention and awareness.



# Parenting as Leadership

## Cycles of Learning, Unlearning and Relearning

By Samson Stevens



While statistics vary, it's said that approximately 80% of the time you spend with your children is over by the time they're 18. As we sent our twins off to their first year in college, I've been thinking about the changing approaches to parenting during our children's time in our homes and then into adulthood. I've also been contemplating the cycles of learning, unlearning, and relearning that we must undertake through life, leadership, and parenting.

The past two months have been a whirlwind—concluding my service with the Coast Guard, celebrating our twins' graduation from high school, coaching and parenting through their preparations for move-in and convocation at their Virginia colleges, and adapting from a household of five to three with our high school senior. Looking back, if my present-day self could time-travel to meet my new-dad self 18 years ago, I'd offer this advice: be more intentional about the year-to-year changes in parenting, and seek more feedback as a two-way exchange between us (my wife and me) and them (our children).

This clarity came into focus just a couple weeks ago when my wife and I took our three children to dinner to commemorate the last time we'd technically be the "under-the-same-roof" family that began 18 years ago. Attempting to extend this special dinner as long as possible, I proposed a round of reflective questions:

- How would you characterize your relationship with your parents? Would you like it to be different?
- What would your present-day self tell your younger self? Would your younger self recognize your older self?
- What is your relationship with your siblings? Our children reciprocated the reflection and directed the following to us:

How would you describe your relationship with your children?  
Do you think your 18-year self would relate to, or be friends with us (your three kids)?

Talk about a vulnerable conversation and real heart-to-heart shar-

ing—it struck me that this was the kind of meaningful discussion we should have had at multiple stages throughout their lives. This would have allowed us to learn as a family, using the conversations as feedback to reinforce positive trends or perhaps alter course on elements that could be improved.

For me, the answers were revealing, sometimes a bit raw, and emotionally challenging as I accepted feedback about who I was and the kind of father I was...and had been. It made me realize that the journey of parenting is probably one of the most complex and dynamic relationships with other humans you could have, yet we often go about our routines, allowing the tyranny of urgent and mundane to drown out the significant growth curves that both parties experience. I've often thought of life's degrees this way: moving out of one's parents' house to become independent earns you a Bachelor's, sustaining a relationship with a partner earns you a Master's, raising children is a lifelong Doctorate. These "PhDs" are complex, humbling, lifelong, and require a constant cycle of learning, unlearning, and relearning.

As new parents, we learned to rely on our knowledge and understanding of "the right answer" to guide us as parents:

- Don't cross the street without looking, or you could get hurt.
- Eat nutritious foods to help your body grow!
- Treat your brother and sister kindly and say sorry because these are the values we espouse as courteous and respectful human beings.
- Keep an open mind and stay curious about new ideas, people of different backgrounds, and even thoughts that are opposite of yours—it is a recipe for being a better person.
- Work hard at school to do your best because each subject provides a basis for knowledge you'll rely upon in the future.

But somewhere along the early high school years, we suddenly realized that "what got us here, wouldn't get us there." The all-knowing parent faced the all-knowing teenager, and it was a real exercise in patience and discipline to learn how to listen to the viewpoints and opinions of our teenagers, especially when they would deliberately

test our positions and values. No longer could we say our choice of politics was the right one, our positions on social issues challenging our society today were the correct ones, or that the path to adult success was fixed along well-worn paths.

We were surprised at how quickly the “all-knowing parent” paradigm stopped working—often leading to heated arguments or to teenagers tuning us out entirely. As our kids grew into the independent thinkers we wanted them to be, we realized that we needed to unlearn and relearn what argument sounded and looked like. As opposed to the earlier years where we argued to “win” using our knowledge, experience, and evidence, we recognized staying on this same path would only teach our kids that argument was only about victory, not growth.

This new kind of argument required us to open our minds, no matter how controversial or provocative the subject, and “stay curious” by inquiring, positing, questioning, conceding, disagreeing agreeably, and leaving what felt like a problem to be solved... unsolved and open. In other words, we had to unlearn how to parent with knowledge and information, and relearn how to parent with curiosity and coaching, setting them up for the independent lives they were destined to have. This required years of work and especially devoted work with my spouse, as we coached each other how to unlearn parenting children and relearn how to parent young men and women.

Of course, it's easy to write and talk about this, but applying it remains a challenge every day. Most recently, on the day of our twins' high school graduation, our son told us he no longer believed college would help him achieve his goals in music production, nor was it the guaranteed path to adult success. (He's intelligent, and he is not wrong as we've seen the trends in employment and success over the years).

It took all the strength I had not to revert to the “knowing parent” paradigm by confronting his decision with evidence, data, and parental knowledge. (I have my spouse to thank for this, who has been an indispensable ally in all our parenting challenges). With my wife's strong recommendation, we purposely disengaged from our son and told him that we'd talk in a week once we had discussed it together. We scheduled a “business meeting” with him a week later designed to ask him questions to better understand his position and goals. My wife and I sat down with a notepad and inquired about his plan: where he'd live, how he'd earn money, how he defined his future success, what his back-up plans were, etc. We intentionally took notes but resisted engaging, debating, or arguing. We thanked him for his time and told him we'd have a decision for him in a week.

We recognized simply giving up on parenting was not an option, and we clearly saw the stark contrast between parenting a young

adult versus a 5-year-old. However, my wife and I created the framework for a plan, and a week later, we delivered it to him: We'd like you to attend college for a semester.

- We are open to modifying your degree and coursework.
- We believe the experience with other students in a new area will broaden your perspective.
- We trust you to apply effort to your coursework.
- At Thanksgiving, we will revisit this discussion and hear your feedback about the experience and which direction you'd like to go.

He listened intently as we spoke, and when I concluded and asked him what questions he had, he thought for several moments. My wife and I were both expecting further pushback, but to our surprise, he said he understood, found everything reasonable, and was ready to proceed.

I believe that while we delivered a firm decision, the entire process was based on the coaching form of parenting we continue to strive toward. By allowing him to state his position and intent, followed up with our detailed questions and inquiries about his plan, and concluding with measured flexibility and agency, I'd like to think we engendered continued communication and trust. And at the end of the day, communication and trust are the foundation we want to preserve.

This experience epitomized the gradual shift in parenting we'd needed to implement as our teenagers navigated high school—gently tightening and relaxing consequences as we worked to uphold trust and communication at all costs. The stakes starkly change from the dangers of sharp knives, hot stoves, and busy intersections to substance abuse, reckless driving, unprotected sex, respectful relationships, money management...and so much more.

As we age and become more crystallized in our knowledge patterns, our children accelerate in mental development and capability, testing independence of thought, idea, and worldview. At that point, conversations can no longer be about one side being right and the other wrong. Teaching children that the outcome of a conversation should not be about who wins an argument, but how both can give and take on different viewpoints and perspectives, hopefully leaves them with the communications and relationship skills for adult success. And perhaps repeated over time and across families, this approach may even contribute to broader civil discourse and a tolerant society.

As we return to school this year, what parenting stage are you in? What legacy skills and techniques do you need to retire in order to foster your children's growth and independence—helping them leave home and thrive by being resourceful, asking questions, and learning in new environments? What styles and approaches do you need to unlearn and what do you need to relearn about parenting as you step into a new school year? 🍷

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Samson recently transitioned to his current role as the Director of Federal Government Affairs for The Port of Virginia, where he will be leading the port's federal engagement strategy and representing its national-level policy positions. He previously served a 30-year career in the U.S. Coast Guard, culminating as Senior Intelligence Officer for U.S. Coast Guard Atlantic Area and as Captain of the Port of Virginia. His leadership experience spans organizational transformation, maritime operations, crisis response, and interagency strategy at the highest levels of government.

A graduate of the U.S. Coast Guard Academy, Samson holds advanced degrees from the University of Michigan and the U.S. Naval War College, has completed intelligence studies at the National Intelligence University, is a graduate of the Naval Postgraduate School Center for Homeland Defense and Security Executive Leaders Program, and is a published author in U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings.



# THE POWER OF PRESENCE

## *MORE INHERITED WISDOM ON LEADERSHIP*

By Ben Patton



**G**eneral George S. Patton (US Army) “Know your men” and “top-down loyalty” were my late father Major General George S. Patton’s most heralded traits. But before I move on to some others I grew up learning, I’d like to lend embellishment to my previous thoughts.

While my father never wanted to rank them, I do tend to place top-down loyalty on a different level from the others, perhaps because it is so rare these days—certainly in the civilian world in which I live and work. With that in mind, I want to share a few more examples of leadership that I observed my dad practicing.

### THE CHOW LINE

When I was about 10, and my dad commanded the 2nd Armored Division (Hell on Wheels) in Texas—which his father had commanded just prior to WWII—several

times a week he would show up unannounced at one of the division’s many mess halls (now DFACs) to have breakfast with the soldiers. From time to time he would roust me, pre-dawn, to tag along. After he took me a few times, I began to understand why he did this.

First, when the division CO showed up in the chow line wearing his fatigues—in my dad’s case, emblazoned with his trademark white stars, which are normally black, but he insisted that he wanted to be seen both by his troops and the enemy, to show the enemy that he had “a certain disdain for their accuracy of fire”—the cooks and staff perked up quickly. And because he showed up unannounced at a different mess hall almost every day, the food was better prepared, the kitchens and dining areas were much neater. The tables were cleared, and garbage cans had been emptied. His aide would typically join to make notes when things were not up to snuff.

More importantly, though, my dad made

it a point to always sit with the enlisted men—not the officers. It was herein that one could witness my father’s top-down loyalty so beautifully demonstrated. He wanted his men to know that he was one of them, and that he cared about the common soldier, not just his commanders.

### HOUSE CALLS

My latent understanding of loyalty, “know your men,” and a sense of duty stemmed from another incredible thing he used to do in all of his commands. At Fort Hood, Texas, every couple of weeks my dad would visit apartments off base in nearby Killeen, where many enlisted families lived. He would always take my mom and his Chief of Staff with him. While my mom chatted with the spouses and their kids, my dad would query the soldier on how things were going, if the apartment was in good shape, and whether the building superintendent was doing a good job.

I remember his division Chief of Staff, Colonel Maupin, telling me about one of these unannounced excursions. He recalled visiting the apartment of a young private with a wife and two small children. The soldier told him that one of the burners on his stove had not been working for several months and that the building super had never gotten around to fixing it. Well, that changed the next day.

After these trips, Maupin would give my dad a list of the names and numbers of the building supers, and the General would call them up and threaten to move the soldiers out of the building if he didn't fix it that day. The sheer surprise of the unannounced call resulted in these things being repaired in a big hurry. My dad made it a point to always sit with the enlisted men—not the officers. It was herein that one could witness his top-down loyalty so beautifully demonstrated. He wanted his men to know that he was one of them, and that he cared about the common soldier, not just his commanders.

### HOT MEALS DELIVERED

When my father was tank company commander near the end of the 1953 Korean War (aka “The Forgotten War”), he took command of four squadrons with a total of 20 main battle tanks. This was monsoon season and everything was soaking wet, covered in mud. And this sorry status—despite minimal combat—was reflected in the poor attitudes of the soldiers under his command.

He recalled that when many of the common soldiers passed my father, they would look the other



way, as if they didn't see him, and then fail to return his salute—something he immediately saw as subversive. Nonetheless, rather than taking corrective action, he thought it best not to react at all, and instead to heed a brilliant maxim the extraordinary British Naval Officer, Horatio Nelson (circa 1800), had taught his officers: “The watch captain should not change the sails until at least 30 minutes into his watch.”

My father heeded this advice and mostly observed his troops for the first couple of weeks without giving any new orders. When he inquired about the last time the company had eaten a hot

meal, the mess sergeant responded that it had been more than six months. My dad immediately told him, “We are going to serve a hot breakfast and coffee to each tank crew tomorrow. It's going to be piping hot, and you and I are going to serve it.” They started at 6 a.m. and finished at 3 p.m.—in the driving rain.

Seeing the commander do this personally had an immediate impact. My father told me, “I just lucked into that but, afterward, I had them eating out of my hand, and there was very little I had to do to improve their attitude and sense of duty from that point on.” 🍀

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Back in 2005, I was running summer film camps, two weeks at a time, first at my parent's estate and later with a fellow filmmaker in Denver. Eleven to 18 year-olds making films about the things that mattered most at that age: Their first kiss, puberty, getting picked on, figuring out who they were.

I quickly realized that the films were really about identity, about making sense of themselves in that awkward space between childhood and adulthood. I'd always been good with kids (I even spent a stretch substitute teaching), and when I began working with them, I went back to graduate school and earned a master's degree in developmental psychology, to better understand how young people grow, and how storytelling could play a role in that process.

Then one summer, my father's former Vietnam chopper pilot, Charlie Watkins, came to one of the screenings. Afterward he pulled me aside and said:

*“You know, this might help veterans in transition. They're struggling with identity too, figuring out who they are after the military.”*

That was the spark because he was right.

Soldiers come home, often transitioning to civilian life, and are told to find their “new norm.” But what does that mean? Who are you when the uniform comes off? When the mission ends? When the structure and camaraderie often forged in battle that defined you disappears?

The way those kids had used film to work through adolescence got me thinking, why couldn't veterans use film to work through transition?

So in 2011, I pivoted. I took what I'd learned from years of camps and stepped into a new arena. We started running workshops on bases like Forts Carson, Hood, Drum, and Bragg...working with soldiers preparing to deploy again, or trying to reintegrate after combat. Some carried visible wounds, many carried invisible ones, all were searching for identity.

That's how Patton Veterans Project began.

And at its heart, it's still about the same things those kids were grappling with: Identity, direction, purpose. Film just gives people the space to say, this is my story, this is who I am, this is who I'm becoming.



# NERVOUS SYSTEM REGULATION

by Rosie Cataldo

These patterns are the body’s natural survival strategies. They can show up as racing thoughts, emotional flooding, forgetfulness, or a sense of detachment. Importantly, these responses are protective, not permanent. With time, support, and regulation, the nervous system can find its way back to balance. To prevent illness or disease, it’s imperative to be able to move fluidly from a stressed state (which is supposed to be temporary) to a relaxed state. Being stuck in a stressed state can wreak havoc on the body.

### Nervous System Regulation Tool

There is a wonderful modality that is simple to share to help a loved one or trusted friend when they are experiencing overwhelm. This is an evidence-based, trauma informed, nervous system regulation tool.

- To start, have the individual in a seated position with legs supported or lying down.
- Place one hand on the kidney area (just below the rib cage, lower back).
- Place the other hand on the underside of the ankle.
- Have the recipient focus on their breath. A suggestion is to ask them to give themselves a breath in, from the abdomen, for a count of 4, hold at the top for a second, and exhale for a count of 6 seconds. This can be done a few times to help calm the body.
- Wait quietly until you feel pulsations at each spot with your hands. You will feel a tick-tock. It may be fast or faint depending on the state of their nervous system. If the person is in a dysregulated state, you will feel the pulsations sooner. If they are in a relatively calm state, it may take about 2 minutes, or longer, to feel the pulsations.
- Wait until the pulsations dissipate. Repeat on the other side.
- Feel free to include an intention or prayer for the recipient.

It is important to wait until the pulsations dissipate before removing your hands. In addition, if you are the giver of this modality, be sure you are in a regulated state. You do not want to pass your anxiety or unease to the recipient.

The reason this works so well is that the kidneys are the body’s filtration system. The kidneys lie near the psoas muscle (sometimes called the “fight-or-flight” muscle). By holding this region, bodywork can help the body soften tension in the psoas, which promotes parasympathetic (rest-and-digest) regulation. Holding the kidneys offers both a physiological benefit (soothing stress hor-



mone response) and an energetic one (safety, support, vitality), making it a powerful point of regulation in bodywork. The practitioner is using their nervous system to dial down the recipient’s stress, creating a sense of calm and ease.

Some recipients may feel tired right away, or the following day, others may feel energized. The majority of clients I share this with feel tired and need a nap, or have a really wonderful night’s rest as a result of this. Each result is individual. However, be aware of the possible need to take a rest the following day.

This modality is wonderful for significant others to share with one another, for a parent to use with a child to aid in their sleep, or soothe their anxiety. The most important factor in sharing this modality is the giver’s intention. As long as there is a pure intention to soothe, comfort, show compassion or assist with a restful night’s sleep, the results will be beautiful. It’s simply holding space for a person whom you care about and allowing tension in the nervous system to melt into the practitioner’s hands. Give it a try. 🐾

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Rosie Cataldo is a trauma informed healing practitioner, counter human trafficking consultant and trainer, who works alongside Midwest Center for Trauma Healing in Minneapolis, MN.

She is an experienced researcher, multi-faceted writer, and an innate connector who enjoys educating and training others on how to recognize and report exploitative activity. Offering people tools to create life-long barriers to traumas and embark on their path toward healing is her mission.

# OBTAINING THE POLE POSITION

By Peter Hill



In every auto race from the Indy 500 to the local dirt track races the coveted position to start is in the pole position, or simply put, the front. While the driver often gets most, if not all the accolades, it never happens without a well-prepared team. Preparation does not guarantee success, but it does help put you in the right place. Typically, it does not happen overnight. It is often the result of months if not years of hard work and trusting, the proper circumstances will come together in an extraordinary fashion.

I have had the privilege of leading multiple teams on mission trips to Poland. Each team of believers prayed, prepared and bonded together to assist local churches in Poland with various forms of outreach and community engagement.

Just a few months ago I was able to lead a mission team from First Baptist Canyon Lake to Stezyca, Poland, where we joined the Baptist church from Malbork, Poland. We assisted them in conducting a weeklong English Camp for children. The churches in Poland use these children and youth camps to build relationships with the parents and their kids. The Polish churches ask native speaking English speakers to come alongside them in conducting the camp, as English is a gateway language for Polish boys and girls. They learn grammar and vocabulary in school but struggle with the spoken word, which is where we are able to help by teaching them how to speak. The Polish churches use us as the draw for community engagement with families in their area.

Preparation for this trip and others before it actually began about 10 years ago and truly long before. I was part of a team that was

slated to do a mission trip to Russia. However, several months before the trip Putin and his leadership team stopped issuing visas to any church groups. With a team ready to serve and nowhere to go we began seeking directions from our savior, asking him to open a place for us. The leader of the trip reached out to an old college friend that was working in Poland as a full-time missionary. The missionary and his wife had been serving there for several years and laid the groundwork in Poland, and as such were now ready for teams from the USA to come across the pond and help them reach the people there. Relationships built on our first trip paved the way for our trip last summer.

The preparation for this mission trip began last fall as I began the process of putting a team together. Through prayer and faith in divine intervention, individuals responded to this calling willing to sacrifice large chunks of their time and money to a service greater than themselves. Together, the team and our church prayed our journey's path would be paved to deliver a message of love and hope.

After the team was assembled we had much to do to be ready for our adventure. The first task was to prepare a group of people who did not speak Polish how to teach English to a group of children who spoke little to no English. I was blessed to have a relationship with a young lady from outside our church who had a master's degree in linguistics. She developed and wrote the curriculum for the English lessons and Bible Studies, teaching us wonderful new techniques that were easy for us to learn and repeat. Under this expert guidance, the team kept the children engaged in the lessons and stories.

In addition, the team was responsible for leading American games and teaching workshops, which would give the students





an opportunity to learn a new skill or create something to take home. Each team member planned games for one day, and many prepared workshops. They gathered ideas and supplies, many ordered and sent ahead, trusting Polish Amazon and Google translate were accurate. And the rest we packed in 13 suitcases.

Fortunately, there was a large and willing group at our church to help prepare raw materials for crafts and workshops ahead of time. Folks packaged hundreds of bags of beads the kids used to make key chains and bracelets. Some prepared the supplies for each child to make sheep to enhance the lesson of the lost sheep. Others cut out crosses, made tissue paper squares, and packaged supplies so the teachers were able to spend time with the children instead of using scissors and counting beads.

We also had to trust that our Polish counterparts were doing what they needed to do in order to prepare for a week of camp. The Polish team took care of logistics like a place to stay, food to eat, and registration. They prepared Polish lessons and games. They provided volunteers, and most of all, prayed. After all, it would be very disappointing to travel to Poland, spend lots of time and money, and not have any kids come to camp or if they were not ready for their part of the camp.

Success depends on more than each person doing their part to be prepared. We prepare our lessons, we prepare our games, we prepare our hearts and lives. We trust each other to be prepared. Most importantly we place our trust in our faith which guides us to serve others. Ultimately our success comes not just from relationships with the people we meet or in our preparation, but also in our faithful devotion. When we are prepared to serve through our faith we are placed in the pole position. 🍷



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Peter Hill serves as Senior Adult/Missions Pastor at First Baptist Church of Canyon Lake, Texas. He has been in the ministry for almost 40 years in various churches and positions across Texas. He has led dozens of mission trips for youth and adults both locally and internationally.

He is married to his beautiful wife Cheryl. Together, they have five awesome children and three wonderful grandchildren. He loves the hill country, the Texas Longhorns and enjoys playing golf. Even if a great round means he has the same golf ball in his pocket at the end of the round as he did when he started the round

# PREPARING FOR LIFE IN VERSE AND PROSE

By Lawrence George Jaffe



**T**here are more to words than meets the eye. Words have hidden meanings and sometimes dubious definitions. Words can be contagious, with generic sayings twisting in the wind. Words help you prepare for life and give definition to everything you do. Some words are more qualified than others. Some words distract, and some words are home runs that help you enumerate your life.

The following sets of words are designed to illuminate life and possibly set you free from life's entanglements—especially words of wisdom and damnation. Words that are meant to haunt you and keep you on your path. And words that set the world on fire because of their incendiary devices.

I have chosen the following words to help others prepare for life. The initial words set the mood, then traverse to frankness and understanding. These are my words after all—use them if you dare. Plunder them if you feel it is called for, but by no means should you ignore them.

## Intricacies of Reading a Compass

You wear it on your wrist  
like a watch.  
Instead of telling time it  
tells direction—  
something needed in this  
foregone world.

You gaze longingly in the  
route you are headed.  
Will it be home or some  
newly recognized land  
mass?  
You pray for the homey-  
ness and yearn for  
memories  
once forgotten and lying  
dormant in your path.

Loneliness can be quite an

obstacle  
that your compass fails to  
read.

Suddenly the little arrow  
that determines your path  
starts spinning wildly  
and you lose all sense of  
direction.

You are on a path of no  
return and you hope  
for some revelation to  
prepare you for your  
outcome.  
You look up in desperation  
and find to your pleasure  
that you are home.

The compass never fails to  
give you direction—  
and you wish for one that  
reads people.

## My Father's Clothes

Sometimes I feel like  
I am wearing my  
father's clothes.

They are uncomfortable  
and too big for me.

The sleeves grab at my  
hands,  
encasing them in wool  
or gabardine.

They make me sad,  
as though he is living  
his life through me—  
though he passed oh so  
many  
years ago.

I feel like he never

passed the mantle  
of his love on to me.

And I must wear his  
shroud  
like some ancient Egyptian  
cloak,  
suffocating my life  
through his life.

As his life continuum  
continues  
beneath my consciousness,  
willing me away from my  
own destiny,

It makes me sad that he  
could  
not just walk that solitary  
path  
without taking me with  
him.



# A Short Piece on Neglecting the Spirit

I woke up the last couple of mornings with something niggling at me that just would not let go. I could not totally put my finger on it and frankly the thought, though persistent, just kept jamming my brain like nobody's business. We get so caught up in everyday business that life is just going bonkers. It is like being in a civil war with ourselves and our friends.

I have people who I haven't talked to in years because our politics don't mix. I hate politics (about as much as I hate preaching), nevertheless I feel caught up in it whether I like it or not. Bottom line, we are responsible for where we are at—either diligently creating it or ignoring and neglecting our current situation. So, like I said, I hate the idea of preaching, yet here I am doing just that.

Here's the point of all this: we take so much for granted. When we turn the tap and expect water to pour out hot or cold. When we turn on the toaster and hope it doesn't burn our bagel. That the guy cruising along at 75 mph on the highway doesn't just ram into you. We just take so much for granted that we seem to forget that we created this. We are part of this majestic creation and contribute to it. We create every danged moment of it.

When you put everything to the side and really look at our lives, we just might be thankful for it. How much would it take to thank the clerk for helping you out, or simply acknowledge the driver in the next lane over with a smile? I don't want to ever take anyone or anything for granted. And no, this is not the result of a near-death experience. It is more the result of a near-life experience.

Personally, I like that small-town viewpoint of saying hi and hello to folks as you walk by. You would be surprised at how much good you will do. There is nothing better than acknowledging the existence of another being.

## A Lesson in Acknowledging Another

Look them in the eyes.  
Don't flinch.

Look away the injustice.  
Look away the temptation.  
Look away the pretense.  
Look away...

Brother to brother.  
Sister to sister.  
Brother to sister.  
Sister to brother.

Acknowledge their existence.  
Smile.



**EROS**  
the passion ever  
embers  
bright always  
dawning sun  
escaping  
mist of salvation

**PHILIA**  
the bond ever  
strengthens  
affinity always  
magnetic reply  
escaping  
mist of touch

**AGAPE**  
the distance ever  
dissolves  
contact always  
immediate universe  
escaping  
mist of time

**INFINITY**  
the love  
we have without  
looking  
where the mist  
clears  
beyond friendship  
into totality

## Four Balances of Love

The ancient Greeks speak of three different categories of love: Eros, Philia, and Agape. Eros is the feeling of love that exists between two people. It is the type of love that burns with intensity. After Eros has burned itself out, Philia must be present for the relationship to endure. Philia is the kind of love felt between friends, the kind that commands mutual respect. Agape is one step beyond. It is one of complete and total love, and manifestations of such unconditional love, enlightenment, are rare. To this balance I add the final measure of Infinity, slightly different from the others as it should be.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



For his entire professional career, Larry Jaffe has been using his art to promote human rights. He was Poet-In-Residence at the Autry Museum, a featured poet in Chrysler's Spirit in the Words poetry program, co-founder of Poets for Peace, helped spearhead the United Nations Dialogue among Civilizations through Poetry project, former Poet Laureate Youth for Human Rights, Florida Beat Poet Laureate, Pushcart Nominee, and the recipient of the Saint Hill Art Festival's Lifetime of Creativity Award, along with other awards.

He was recently awarded the Lifetime New Generation Beat Poet Laureate. Poet in Residence Jack Kerouac House in St. Pete. Jaffe recently started handing out poems to strangers as part of his The World Needs More Poetry Project. He is the Editor-In-Chief of BeatLife Magazine and Poetix Poetry News, Editor Florida Bards anthology. He has six books of poetry: Unprotected Poetry, Anguish of the Blacksmith's Forge, One Child Sold, In Plain View, 30 Aught 4, Sirens Man without Borders and the Abolitionist Poetry Handbook. Only Shadows Breathe a book of poetry noir and mystery is his latest book.

# Afterward

## PREPARING HEARTS AND MINDS

**A**s we close this special Parents with Preparedness edition, we're reminded that true preparedness for our families extends far beyond stockpiled supplies and emergency kits. The voices in these pages—from educators like Lauren Anderson exploring middle school partnerships to Dr. Paul Linahan's insights on inner resilience through Japanese Budo—illuminate a fundamental truth: our greatest preparation lies in nurturing strong, connected families.

Whether it's Dr. Mary Kate Soliva's powerful journey home to Guam, Adam King's unique blend of music, photography, and readiness, or Dr. Stacey Phillips' guidance on family communication, each contributor offers a piece of the preparedness puzzle that centers on relationships and personal growth. Teresa Moore and Sampson Stevens, Sr. remind us that and our families cycle through phases and parents, we need to lead through those phases. Brenda Minge and Norma Peterson tackle the challenging conversations that strengthen our children's foundations.

From Benjamin Patton's inherited leadership lessons to Rosie Cataldo's nervous system insights and Peter Hill's strategic thinking, this collection demonstrates that preparedness is as much about emotional and psychological readiness as it is about

physical supplies. Spencer Cour-san's resource guide and Lawrence George Jaffe's contributions round out a comprehensive approach to family resilience.

These stories and strategies don't just prepare us for uncertainties—they equip us to raise children who are confident, connected, and capable of facing whatever comes their way. In the end, our most important legacy isn't what we leave behind, but the resilient human beings we raise and release into the world.

Thank you to all our contributors for sharing their wisdom and to our readers for prioritizing both preparedness and parenting. ♡



**Heather Hollingsworth**  
Chair, PWPORG.ORG



THE  
GOLD  
STANDARD



PARENTS  
WITH PREPAREDNESS

*Helpful*

RESOURCES

ON AWARENESS  
AND PREPAREDNESS

SPECIALLY  
CURATED

For Parents

BY PARENTS



# OFF TO COLLEGE

## 10 SAFETY TRUTHS EVERY YOUNG WOMAN SHOULD

By Spencer Coursen

### Introduction

College is a time of growth, freedom, and self-discovery—but it can also come with hidden risks. The shift from home to campus often creates a false sense of security. New surroundings, new faces, and reduced parental supervision can form a perfect storm for people who prey on distraction, inexperience, and social pressure.

This article isn't about living in fear. It's about being prepared. Combine confidence with clarity, instincts with strategy, and freedom with planning—and you're not just surviving college... you're owning it.



## THE 10 TRUTHS TO CARRY WITH YOU ON CAMPUS

### 1. Boys Lie.

Boys may say anything to get you into bed. Don't fall for their lines—if it sounds too good to be true, it probably is.

### 2. Trust Your Gut.

If something feels off, it probably is. Your intuition is a survival tool—know it, trust it, and use it.

### 3. Alcohol Is the #1 Date-Rape Drug.

It's also the most common excuse for bad behavior. Know your limits, designate a sober friend, and never leave your drink unattended.

### 4. Self-Defense Starts with Self-Worth.

Know that YOU are worth defending. You are stronger and smarter than you think—and you're never overreacting for prioritizing your protection.

### 5. Boundaries Are Beautiful.

Enforce them. Say no. Make eye contact. Disengage. Walk away. Your "no" isn't a negotiation—it's the end of the conversation.

### 6. Violence Doesn't Only Happen in "Bad Areas."

Danger can strike anywhere, anytime. Don't let familiarity or perceived safety dull your awareness.

### 7. The Red Zone Is Real.

Most sexual assaults occur in the first four months of college. This is when predators exploit naivety, distraction, and isolation. Be especially vigilant early on.

### 8. The Biggest Threats May Not Be Strangers.

It's often people you know. Learn to recognize grooming, coercion, and manipulation to protect yourself.

### 9. Bystander Power Is Legit.

If you see something, say something. Silence protects predators. Be as loud as you'd want someone to be for you. Your willingness to speak up for others often starts with speaking up for yourself.

### 10. Don't Be Afraid to Be Blunt.

Don't let politeness compromise your safety. Your reluctance to offend shouldn't outweigh your need to defend yourself. Courtesy is a courtesy—but your safety comes first.

## 3 PROTECTIVE STRATEGIES YOU CAN EMPLOY TODAY

### 1. Build Boundary-Setting Confidence Early

**What to do now:** Practice saying "no" assertively in low-stakes situations—whether it's declining a favor, changing plans, or standing your ground.

**Why it matters:** You'll likely face new dynamics in college. Having already practiced assertiveness will help you speak up when it counts.

### 2. Audit and Lock Down Your Digital Footprint

**What to do now:** Review your social media privacy settings, delete overly revealing posts (like those that show your high school, location, or dorm), and use strong, unique passwords for each account.

**Why it matters:** Predators can use social media to gather information. A low-profile digital presence makes you less of a target—and helps you protect your identity and reputation.

### 3. Develop a Personal Safety Baseline

**What to do now:** Familiarize yourself with your own instincts—try walking different routes alone (safely), notice how your body reacts to discomfort, and journal moments when something felt "off."

**Why it matters:** Understanding your intuitive responses now makes it easier to detect danger later. Trusting your instincts is a superpower—practicing it helps make it second nature.

### Bonus Insight:

Self-defense tools can help, but a self-defense mindset is far more powerful. Most of us won't need weapons—but awareness, skepticism, and vigilance are always accessible. Master those, and you'll carry protection without worrying about what you left in your bag.



# WHAT AN UMBRELLA CAN TEACH US ABOUT SAFETY

By Spencer Coursen

## WHY FEELING SAFE ISN'T THE SAME AS BEING SECURE — AND HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF AGAINST FALSE CONFIDENCE.

### Why This Matters

Most people interchange the terms “safety” and “security” as if they mean the same thing. They don't. And understanding the distinction could mean the difference between being protected and being exposed.

- Safety is a feeling — the comfort, trust, and peace of mind we carry when we believe we are being protected.
- Security is a state of being — the systems, strategies, and structures that actually shield us from harm.

### Think of it like an Umbrella

- Security is the canopy itself — strong, durable, built to withstand the storm.
- Safety is how we feel underneath — warm, dry, and confident in its ability to protect us.

Here's the truth: one without the other isn't enough.

- If you feel safe but aren't secure, that's false confidence.
- If you're secure but don't feel safe, that's anxiety.

Read more on fear vs anxiety <[HERE](#)>

### Bottom Line

Feeling safe is not the same as being secure. And being secure doesn't always mean you'll feel safe. Only when safety and security are in alignment can we ever be truly protected. One without the other would be like carrying an umbrella when the forecast calls for rain, only to realize that it's full of holes when you need it most.



## FIVE PROTECTIVE STRATEGIES YOU CAN EMPLOY TODAY

### 1. Inspect Your “Umbrella” Regularly

Just like you'd check an umbrella for rips before a storm, inspect the systems you rely on — door locks, digital passwords, alarm systems, even your daily routines. Don't wait until it's too late to find out something is broken.

### 2. Differentiate Feeling Safe From Being Safe

Ask yourself: Am I comfortable because I want to be, or because I actually am? Don't confuse peace of mind with real protection.

### 3. Control Your Environment Where Possible

Choose seating with sightlines, park under lights, and position yourself near exits. These are small choices that layer security into ordinary environments.

### 4. Have a Backup Plan

Carrying only one umbrella is risky. Likewise, don't rely on a single layer of protection. Have redundancies — a phone charger, a trusted contact, a safe route home.

### 5. Train Your Awareness, Not Just Your Tools

Tools provide security, but awareness ensures you know how and when to use them. Notice who's around you, what feels off, and what's changing in your environment.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Spencer Coursen is a nationally recognized threat management expert, best-selling author, and combat-tested security strategist. A former Army Airborne Ranger and Special Deputy U.S. Marshal, he has led protective operations in 163 countries and overseen more than 300 successful security missions. With over 20 years of global leadership experience, Spencer blends battlefield lessons with boardroom strategy to help people and organizations navigate today's complex threat landscape. Founder & CEO, Coursen Security Group (CSG) | Based in Austin, TX | Serving America.



## SchoolSafety.gov Back-to-School Campaign

Prevention is the foundation of a safer school. Build it at SchoolSafety.gov.

The SchoolSafety.gov Back-to-School Campaign provides information and guidance that K-12 schools and school districts can use to prepare for a safe return to school. The campaign aims to empower K-12 communities to learn about and engage with resources, trainings, and tools available through SchoolSafety.gov before, during, and after the back-to-school season.

The 2025 SchoolSafety.gov Back-to-School Campaign focuses on prevention, highlighting resources and actions to prevent or deter school safety threats or incidents and create safer learning environments for students and educators. As part of the campaign, SchoolSafety.gov provides a back-to-school reading list, prevention tip sheet, communications toolkit, and ready-to-use social media posts and graphics. Feel free to copy, download, and share the materials found below to learn more about the campaign, access helpful resources and guidance, and spread the word to others in your school and community.



## Back-to-School Campaign Reading List and Tip Sheet

Explore and share the SchoolSafety.gov Back-to-School Campaign Reading List and Tip Sheet to help inform your school's prevention efforts and create a safe learning environment this school year. These resources are specifically designed to support K-12 schools and districts in preventing school safety threats and incidents, enhancing student well-being, and fostering safer campuses and classrooms.

Back-to-School Reading List [CLICK HERE](#)

Back-to-School Tip Sheet [CLICK HERE](#)

## Back-to-School Campaign Communications Toolkit

Download and use the SchoolSafety.gov Back-to-School Campaign Communications Toolkit to share information about the campaign and its resources with others in your school and community. The toolkit includes sample social media posts and communications to promote SchoolSafety.gov and the Back-to-School Campaign in a variety of ways.

Back-to-School Communications Toolkit [CLICK HERE](#)





A photograph of three diverse professionals (two women and one man) sitting around a table, looking at a laptop screen. The woman on the left is Black, the woman in the middle is white, and the man on the right is white with a beard. They are all dressed in business casual attire. The background shows a modern office environment with bookshelves.

**Join Us**  
And Make  
*a Difference*

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# PARENTS WITH PREPAREDNESS

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