

Common Ground is a coalition of Bay Area schools created to enhance parent education. The goal of the coalition is to provide opportunities for parents and educators to learn from experts in a variety of fields, to share ideas with others, and to support each other's efforts to enrich our local communities.

The Common Ground Speaker Series features dynamic speakers who are nationally recognized for their expertise in specific areas of parenting, education and/or health. Each year, we strive to present a balanced series that addresses a wide array of issues confronting parents and educators.

Common Ground Member Schools

The Carey School  
Castilleja School  
Charles Armstrong School  
Crystal Springs Uplands School  
Gideon Hausner Jewish Day School  
The Harker School  
Hillbrook School  
Keys School  
Menlo School  
Mulberry School  
The Nueva School  
Phillips Brooks School  
Pinewood School  
Ronald C. Wornick Jewish Day School  
Sacred Heart Preparatory School (Atherton)  
Saint Andrew's School  
St. Joseph's School of the Sacred Heart  
St. Matthew's Episcopal Day School  
Stanbridge Academy  
Trinity School  
Woodside Elementary School  
Woodside Priory School  
Yavneh Jewish Day School

## Raising Self-Disciplined and Confident Kids with Robert Brooks, Ph.D.

Can your disciplinary style have a direct and lasting impact on your relationship with your child? Dr. Robert Brooks, an eminent psychiatrist with over forty years of experience, explored the topic of disciplining children in his Common Ground talks. Through the use of anecdotes, Dr. Brooks outlined various discipline styles and their effectiveness in dealing with differing temperaments in children. First and foremost, Dr. Brooks is a father, and as such he admitted that he was fallible. He recounted a story in which his oldest son at age ten, on live television, commented that the way Dr. Brooks behaved in public and at home were two very different things. Dr. Brooks emphasized that as parents, we must bear responsibility for the discipline choices we make, and attempt to do what is best for our child. The ultimate goal of a parent should be to use techniques which result in a self-disciplined and confident child.

Disciplinary styles can be broadly categorized into three approaches, although in reality we may revert to different approaches at various points in time.

- The first is an "Authoritarian" style in which a child is often told "you have to do this because Mommy or Daddy told you to do it". These parents are more likely to yell and scream, or use corporal punishment. They provide less positive feedback to their child and are more often critical.
- The second style is the "Permissive" one in which the adult is in effect seeking the child's approval. Permissive parents often give in because they are afraid that their children will not love them unless they do their bidding. They do not realize that children intuitively understand that their parents are setting rules and boundaries out of their concern for them. Dr. Brooks recounted the story of a fourteen-year-old girl whose mother never imposed a curfew – the girl got pregnant and had an abortion at thirteen. He asked the girl what she would have done had her mother imposed a curfew, and the girl replied that she would have fought her kicking and screaming. After some time, the tear-struck girl admitted that at least she would have known that her mother cared.
- The third parenting style is the "Authoritative" one, in which parents set firm limits and give a lot of positive feedback. The authoritative parent's primary goal is to promote self-discipline in the child. Dr. Brooks strongly advocated an authoritative parenting style because it fosters confidence and problem solving abilities in a child. He emphasized that parenting styles are often inherited – whatever approach the parents were subjected to, they often impose on their own children. Furthermore, research shows that children of authoritarian parents many times grow up to have poor marriages, and do not know how to problem solve. Children and teens of a permissive parents often have a sense of entitlement and are selfish. Children of authoritative parents, on the other hand have healthier relationships and marriages and are better able to problem solve.

Disciplinary styles can be broadly categorized into three approaches, *authoritarian, permissive and authoritative.*

Dr. Brooks described some basic characteristics of authoritative parents. Authoritative parents are capable of "changing negative scripts". They alter their discipline technique when it is not working. One mother who had self-diagnosed her child as having "oppositional defiance disorder" told of how she and her daughter constantly argued and she invariably sent her daughter to her room at the end of the disagreement. She changed the script after her discussions with Dr. Brooks, and instead told her daughter that she felt that their argument was not productive, and she gave herself a "time out". To the mother's astonishment, her daughter followed her to her bedroom and they began talking after some quiet time!

One of the hallmarks of an authoritative parent is their ability to be empathetic.

Authoritative parents always ask themselves how they come across to their children. As an exercise to find out the answer to this question, Dr. Brooks suggests the following: in separate columns write down all the words you hope your child will use to describe you, and all the words you think they

# Mark Your Calendars

*RIGHT ON THE MONEY:  
TEACHING KIDS  
FINANCIAL  
RESPONSIBILITY*  
Nathan Dungan

Do your kids understand financial boundaries or do they think of you as their personal ATM? Is your teen developing the healthy financial habits he or she will need for college and beyond?

It's an alarming fact that children today spend five times more money on average than their parents did, *even adjusting for inflation*. Experts worry that we are creating a generation of young adults with unsustainable spending habits and unprecedented levels of credit card debt. Now is the time to teach our children how to manage money and develop healthy spending habits....*before they leave home*.

Tuesday, March 3, 7:00pm  
St. Matthew's Episcopal Day School  
16 Baldwin Avenue  
San Mateo  
(650) 342-5436

Wednesday, March 4, 7:00pm  
Castilleja School  
1310 Bryant Street  
Palo Alto  
(650) 328-3160

Thursday, March 5, 7:00pm  
Saint Andrew's School  
13601 Saratoga Avenue  
Saratoga  
(408) 867-3785

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WILL use to describe you. Then go ahead and ask your child to describe you in their words. The results might surprise you! One four-year-old girl described her mother as "rushing", an adjective which might apply to all of us.

Dr. Brooks described his own experiences with his eldest child Rich, whom for four years he asked as the first question when he saw him, "Did you do your homework?" He showed a lack of empathy because he did not try to understand how Rich felt when this was the first question which awaited him day after day. Another exercise that Dr. Brooks suggested is to write down two or three of the most wonderful experiences you had as a parent, and what made them that way, and two or three of your worst moments as a parent, and what made them that way. A lack of empathy is probably a factor in the worst moments. Authoritative parents know the nature of their child and are in tune with it. Authoritative parents are empathetic, even when they are upset, angry or disappointed with their child. They figure out ways to discipline their children such that the child hears them.

Children are born with temperaments and traits, and authoritative parents understand how to tailor their discipline style to meet the needs of the child.

Dr. Brooks cited seminal research by Thomas and Chess, who studied the basic temperament of children and characterized their temperaments on a nine-point scale. Most children can be classified as having one of three temperaments: "Easy", "Slow to warm, cautious" or "Difficult" child.

- An "easy" child is happy most of the time, and has an easier time with self-discipline and school.
- A "cautious" child does not like change or new situations, and is shy towards unfamiliar people. He gave an example of a mother whose first question to her daughter when she came home from school was "Who did you speak to today?" The daughter felt that the mother was punishing her for being shy, and asked "Doesn't she know that if I could, I would?" Research in neuroscience reveals that cautious children are "wired" to view every unfamiliar situation with a "fight or flight" response which others reserve for more dangerous or serious circumstances. An authoritative parent would not discipline a child simply for behaving in a manner consistent with her temperament.
- A "difficult" child is insatiable, thinks every rule is unfair, and is not self-disciplined. They feel that the parent is always on their back. Disciplining this type of child involves choosing your battles carefully and building in choices in your approach. Authoritative parents use their discipline technique to turn problems into problem solving opportunities. A difficult child often feels that he or she is unloved, and benefits most from time alone with one parent. As an example, Dr. Brooks cited a father who had a very rebellious daughter, and in trying to improve their relationship, he arranged a weekly time alone with her. In her attempts to be difficult, the girl made him take her to the town dump for eight weeks, and then finally succumbed and asked him to take her out for breakfast. Their relationship subsequently improved.

Authoritative parents offer realistic hope. It is well established that positive feedback and encouragement work better with children than punishment. An authoritative parent will find realistic ways to offer positive feedback. Many adults suffer from a "praise deficit" which is very harmful in all their relationships, and especially so in those with their children. Every child has "islands of competence" and it is important to make them aware of their own strengths. Children are attuned to our perceptions and if they feel that they may not meet our expectations, the relationship deteriorates and discipline becomes increasingly difficult.

Discipline is most effective in the context of a good relationship.

Authoritative parents realize that children inherently benefit from helping others. Many adults say that their most memorable moments in school were when they were asked to help in the classroom. By saying to your child "I need your help", and utilizing their services, you fulfill the need of the child to make a positive contribution. Participating in charitable events as a family is a great way to enhance parent child relationships.

Dr. Brooks had a very special relationship with his father, and one of his fondest memories is that his father kept a "file" of all his children's accomplishments. Make your child aware that they are special and have their own unique "islands of competence". Finally, as Dr. Brooks father advised him, "If you have something nice to say to someone, don't hold back and say it to them". This is even more crucial if that someone is your child!