



BEYOND SQUABBLING

By Susan Vogt

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I realized a long time ago that I learn a lot more from others' mistakes and foibles than from hearing how wonderful they are doing. I once sat in on a workshop led by another family life director. His kids were present also. I really respected this colleague and was surprised to watch two of his children poking each other and heading for trouble. I don't remember exactly how the parents dealt with the situation, but I do remember very well the feeling of relief and comfort I got from realizing that even good families don't have perfect kids. I felt much better after this than I do when I sit behind one of those perfectly behaved and groomed families in church in which the toddler sits quietly through the whole service. (I almost wonder if the parent drugged the child before leaving home.) It is in this spirit, that I share the following experiences.

One of the most irritating things I have experienced as a parent is watching perfectly good kids tease and squabble with each other. I fight within myself about whether this is a necessary part of growing up and I should accept it, or whether I am failing woefully as a parent. Of course, as with most things, the truth is usually somewhere in the middle. For years the solution has eluded me, as my husband and I would try one thing or another to try to make our home more peaceful. I'd like to share a strategy, however, that has directed our latest effort. But first a very important disclaimer – we have not gotten this perfected yet. If you call our home on a bad day, you might still hear yelling and complaining or a door slamming. The point is we've got a goal we agree on and we're moving toward it.

The goal? – The Family Pledge of Nonviolence (see below) When we first proposed this pledge to our family it took two or three months of debating and procrastinating before we actually agreed to take it. Although we still go back periodically and check ourselves on it, the most significant part of taking the pledge was the discussion that was necessary leading up to it. Our then 17 year old confronted me on what he felt was undue criticism of him – *To Respect Self and Others*. We all realized how stubborn we were as we collectively cringed over the admonition against insisting “on having my own way”. This was a hard one for independent folk like us with a strong German and Dutch heritage.

But by far the “biggie” was *To Play Creatively*. In fact, this was the stumbling block for much of the time we were considering taking the pledge. It sounds innocent enough at first until you get to the part about “avoiding entertainment that makes violence look exciting, funny, or acceptable.” Maybe it's because we had two sons still at home rather than daughters. Maybe it's a pre-teen/teen phenomenon. But there are very few video games without violence?

Eventually we negotiated a plan in which violence that was historical, fantasy, or symbolic would be allowed in TV, movies, or games. It wasn't a perfect solution, but it moved us in a healthier direction.

Some would say (among them our own children) that kids distinguish between make-believe and the real world. “Just because we see something on TV doesn't mean we're going to do it” our kids would chant. Who knows for sure, but reducing exposure to gratuitous violence seemed like a reasonable step to tone down the squabbling in our home.

Try the Pledge! It's better than just wishing or complaining. It's a concrete start.

Family Pledge of Nonviolence

Making peace must start within ourselves and in our families. Each of us, members of the _____ family, commit ourselves as best we can to become nonviolent and peaceable people:

1. To Respect Self and Others

To respect myself; to affirm others and the dignity of all human life.
To avoid uncaring criticism, hateful words, physical attacks, and self destructive behavior.

2. To Communicate Better

To share my feelings honestly, to look for safe ways to express my anger,
and to work at solving problems peacefully.

3. To Listen

To listen carefully to others, especially those who disagree with me,
and to consider others' feelings and needs rather than insist on having my own way.

4. To Forgive

To apologize and make amends when I have hurt another.
To forgive others, and to keep from holding grudges.

5. To Respect Nature

To treat the environment and all living things, including our pets, with respect and care.

6. To Play Creatively

To select entertainment and toys that support our family's values
and to avoid entertainment that makes violence look exciting, funny, or acceptable.

7. To Be Courageous

To challenge violence in all its forms whenever I encounter it, whether at home, school, work,
or in the community, and to stand with others who are treated unfairly.

*This is our pledge. These are our goals. We will check ourselves once a month on _____
for the next 12 months so we can help each other become more peaceable people.*

Pledging family members sign below:

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