

ON RAISING THEM TO CHOOSE WELL

What is kept from a child, what is given to a young adult, and what is never shown to either

A companion to The House With Children — written for parents

TWO DIFFERENT SILENCES

There is a silence that protects a child and a silence that abandons an adolescent, and they are not the same silence. A young child needs to be kept entirely clear of all of this; The House With Children sets out how, and none of it softens with time. But a boy of sixteen whose body has changed and who has been carrying questions for two years is not being protected by silence. He is being left to be taught by other people, and those people are worse teachers than you.

So the rule shifts once, and only once: what is kept from a child is given to a young adult — not the practices of this house, which stay private permanently, but the understanding of what marriage requires and what they should be building toward.

WHY SIXTEEN

Sixteen is chosen because it is the age at which the law in this country recognises them as capable of consent, and because by then the questions are no longer theoretical. It is a threshold for teaching, not for permission. Nothing about this age marks anything as advisable — this house holds that intimacy belongs inside marriage, and that is taught plainly and without apology.

But teach it as a conviction to be argued for, not as a rule issued from height. An adolescent given reasons can carry them into rooms where you are not present. An adolescent given only prohibitions discards them the moment the prohibition is out of earshot, and learns to conceal rather than to choose.

WHAT STAYS PRIVATE FOREVER

Nothing in this library is ever shown to a child of any age, including an adult one. The specifics of a marriage belong to the two people inside it, permanently. A grown son or daughter learning the particulars of their parents' private life gains nothing and loses something they cannot get back.

If a teenager asks a direct question — and an observant one may — the answer is short and closes the subject: what happens between your mother and me is private, nobody is harmed, and it is not something we discuss. Delivered calmly, that satisfies. An elaborate denial does not, because it invites the search for what is being denied.

Public one side. Children one side. And the marriage, behind a closed door, on its own.

WHAT THEY ARE ALREADY BEING TAUGHT

Be clear-eyed about the competition. By sixteen, most young people have absorbed a great deal from pornography, from peers, and from a culture that treats intimacy as recreation and commitment as a limitation on the self. None of that is neutral. Pornography in particular teaches a boy that women are for consumption and teaches a girl what she must perform to be wanted, and it teaches both that intensity is the measure of a relationship.

You cannot prevent the exposure. You can be the counter-argument, and the counter-argument only works if it is specific. Vague disapproval loses to vivid material every time. Name what is wrong with it: that it shows use without knowledge, bodies without persons, and appetite without any of the things that make appetite worth having.

TO A SON

Teach him that a man's worth is measured by what he does when it is difficult and no one is watching. That his word is the whole of his credit. That strength exists to be useful rather than displayed, and that a man who frightens people is weak rather than strong. That he will spend his life either building something or drifting, and the difference is almost entirely habits formed before twenty-five.

On women: that no is complete, immediate, and final, in every setting and at every stage; that a woman's consent is not something to be negotiated toward; and that pursuing someone who has not chosen you freely is the mark of a small man. That the girls worth having are the ones who are hard to impress. And that whatever he thinks he wants at sixteen is not what he will want at thirty — which is precisely why he should not bind himself, or bind someone else, before he knows.

And teach him what he will owe a wife: provision, fidelity without exception, attention as a daily practice, and a standard he holds himself to whether or not anyone enforces it.

TO A DAUGHTER

Teach her that being wanted is not the same as being valued, and that a great many young men will manage the first without ever attempting the second. That attention is cheap and constancy is rare. That a man who pressures her — for anything, in any way, however gently framed — has told her everything she needs to know and should be believed the first time.

Teach her that her judgement is the thing to develop, because she will one day choose someone and that single decision will shape her life more than any other she makes. Teach her to watch how a man treats waiters, his mother, and people who can do nothing for him. To notice whether his words and his actions match over months rather than evenings. And to understand that the ability to walk away early is the most valuable thing she will ever possess.

And teach her what she may rightly expect from a husband: faithfulness, honesty, effort, and a man who becomes more rather than less over the years. Not perfection — but movement in the right direction, which is the only reliable sign.

COURTSHIP, AND WHY IT IS WORTH KEEPING

The old forms had a purpose that the modern absence of them does not replace: they slowed everything down long enough for judgement to work. Give them the principles rather than the etiquette. Time before intimacy, because attraction lies and character takes months to show. Introductions to family and friends early, because a person who resists being known in company is hiding something. Public places before private ones. And a clear head — most regretted decisions at that age were made drunk.

Teach them, too, that the point of courtship is assessment, not acquisition. They are not trying to win someone. They are finding out, slowly and honestly, whether this is a person they could keep a vow with for fifty years — and the right answer, most of the time, is no. That is not failure. That is the process working.

SELF-DISCIPLINE, WHICH UNDERLIES ALL OF IT

This is the inheritance that matters most, and it has nothing to do with anything physical. Teach them to do the difficult thing first. To keep a commitment made to themselves as seriously as one made to another person. To finish. To be on time. To take correction without collapsing and without arguing. To be honest when a lie would cost less.

A young person with those habits will build a good marriage whatever framework they eventually choose, and one without them will struggle inside any framework at all. Everything else in this library is downstream of this, which is why it can be taught openly, at any age, to anyone.

IF THEY CHOOSE OTHERWISE

Teach your convictions fully and without dilution — and then be honest with yourself about the fact that some will choose differently anyway, because young people always have. A child who makes that choice while ignorant of how to protect themselves pays a price out of all proportion to the decision, and that price falls on them rather than on the principle.

So ensure they have the facts as well as the values. Knowing how a body works, how pregnancy and infection occur, and what protection does is not permission — it is not an argument for anything, and it undermines nothing you have taught. It simply means that if they depart from your counsel, they do so informed. And make sure they know that whatever happens, they can come to you: a child who fears you more than the consequence will conceal, and concealment is how a manageable problem becomes a catastrophe.

WHAT THEY LEARN WITHOUT BEING TOLD

None of this teaching will matter as much as what they observe. They will absorb, long before they can name it, whether their parents are devoted, whether their father keeps his word, whether their mother is respected, whether promises are kept in this house and whether anyone raises their voice.

That is the real curriculum, and it has been running since they were born. A child raised in a house with a clear centre, visible devotion, and two parents plainly committed to making each other more will recognise the real thing when it stands in front of them at twenty-five — and will refuse the counterfeit without needing to be told why.

Teach them to choose well. Show them, every day, what choosing well produced.

Nothing in the Covenant Set is ever shown to a child of any age. This document concerns values, not practices.