

# IMPRIMIS

Because Ideas Have Consequences

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## Why There Is No Substitute for Parents

**Wade F. Horn**  
**Director**  
**National Fatherhood Initiative**

**W**ade F. Horn is the president of the National Fatherhood Initiative, an adjunct faculty member at Georgetown University's Public Policy Institute, and an affiliate scholar with the Institute for American Values and the Hudson Institute.

From 1989 to 1993, he was the commissioner for children, youth and families and chief of the children's bureau within the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services. He also served as a presidential appointee to the National Commission on Children from 1990 until 1993. Prior to these appointments, he was the director of outpatient psychological services at Children's Hospital National Medical Center in Washington, D.C., and an associate professor of psychiatry and behavioral sciences at George Washington University.

Dr. Horn received his Ph.D. in clinical psychology from Southern Illinois University in 1981. ▲



*Don't worry about what may be lurking under the bed or hiding in the closet. The really scary monsters are the ones who tuck you in at night. Clinical psychologist Wade F. Horn describes how the state has tried to convince children to fear their parents. He also demonstrates how the notion that single-parent households are just as effective and desirable as traditional families has caused an epidemic of violence, pregnancy, drug abuse, and suicide among today's teens.*

*Dr. Horn's remarks were delivered during Hillsdale College's Shavano Institute for National Leadership seminar, "Educating for Virtue: The New Values Revolution," on January 17, 1997, in Coronado, California.*

**I**n 1960, the total number of children living in fatherless families was fewer than eight million. Today, that total has risen to nearly twenty-four million. Nearly four out of ten children in America are being raised in homes without their fathers and soon it may be six out of ten. How did this happen? Why are so many of our nation's children growing up without a full-time father? It is because our culture has accepted the idea that fathers are superfluous—in other words, they are not necessary in the "modern" family. Supposedly, their contributions to the well-being of children can easily be performed by the state, which disburses welfare checks, subsidizes midnight basketball leagues, and establishes child-care facilities.



Ideas, of course, have consequences. And the consequences of this idea have been as profound as they have been disastrous. Almost 75 percent of American children living in fatherless households will experience poverty before the age of eleven, compared to only 20 percent of those raised by two parents. Children living in homes where fathers are absent are far more likely to be expelled from or drop out of school, develop emotional or behavioral problems, commit suicide, and fall victim to child abuse or neglect. The males are also far more likely to become violent criminals. As a matter of fact, men who grew up without dads currently represent 70 percent of the prison population serving long-term sentences.

Undeniably, fathers *are* important for the well-being of children. So, too, are traditional families. They ensure the continuity of civilization by propagating the species and socializing children. Everyone seems to understand the obvious benefits of propagation, but the important role that parents play in socializing children is widely misunderstood and undervalued.

## The Process of Socialization

**S**ocialization can be defined as the process whereby individuals acquire the behavior, attitudes, and values that are not only regarded as desirable and appropriate by society but that have also stood the test of time and proved to be the most humane. Proper socialization requires delaying or inhibiting “impulse gratification” in order to abide by the rule of law and the rule of custom. Well-socialized children have learned, for example, not to strike out at others to get what they want; poorly socialized children have not. Well-socialized children have learned to obey the directions of legitimate authority figures like parents and teachers; poorly socialized children have not. Well-socialized children have learned to cooperate and share with others; poorly socialized children have not.

Much of what is described as “good character” or “virtue” reflects the ability to delay or inhibit

impulse gratification. When a child tells the truth, even though he knows that it will result in negative consequences, he is inhibiting the impulse to lie to avoid unpleasantness. When he shows

charity to others, he is inhibiting the impulse to behave selfishly. A civil society is dependent upon virtuous citizens who have developed this capacity to delay or inhibit impulse gratification; that is, persons who can control their behavior voluntarily. Without a majority of such citizens, storekeepers would have to post armed guards in front

of every display counter, women would live in constant fear of being raped by roaming bands of marauding men, and children would be left to the mercy of those who would exploit them. Fortunately, well-socialized children generally become well-socialized adults. Unfortunately, poorly socialized children generally do not. There are few statements one can make with complete certitude, but here is one: When families fail in their task to socialize children, a civil society is not possible. Herein lies the awesome responsibility of parenting.

Parents socialize children through two mechanisms. The first is teaching through direct instruction reinforced by a combination of rewards and punishments for acceptable and unacceptable behavior. The second is teaching by example. Of the two, the latter is the more important mechanism since most complex human behavior is acquired through observational learning. Children are much more likely to do as a parent *does* than as a parent *says*. This is why parents who lie and cheat tend to raise children who lie and cheat, despite any direct instruction to the contrary. As Benjamin Franklin once observed, the best sermon is indeed a good example.

Please note that I have not asserted that the state—or as it is euphemistically referred to these days, the “village”—is necessary for the proper socialization of children. Rather, it is parents who are necessary, and this means a mother *and* a father. There are, of course, thousands of single mothers who are doing a heroic job of parenting and beating the odds. I do not mean to denigrate their efforts. Yet there is a great deal of hard evidence to suggest that when fathers are absent, boys

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tend to develop poor conduct. They “act out” their aggressive impulses, sometimes quite violently, toward others. Girls also tend to act out when fathers are absent, but in a different way; they become rebellious and promiscuous.

## The Importance of Mothers and Fathers

No matter what the advocates of “gender-free parenting” may say, mothers and fathers *do* parent differently. Mothers tend to be more verbal, whereas fathers are more physical. Mothers also tend to encourage personal safety and caution, whereas fathers are more challenging when it comes to achievement, independence, and risk-taking. And mothers tend to be stronger comforting figures than fathers who are more intent upon establishing and enforcing rules governing the behavior of their children.

The fact that mothers and fathers parent differently is not to say that one group does it “right” or “better” than the other. What children need to develop good character is the combination of what mothers and fathers bring to the parenting equation. Take the fact that mothers

tend to be nurturers and fathers tend to be disciplinarians. Parenting experts used to believe that families socialize children best when both parents adopt a nurturing but permissive role, demonstrating high levels of love and low levels of control. Decades of research have shown, however, that when children are reared this way they act out through chronic bad behavior. Permissiveness as a “parenting style” simply doesn’t work. Boys and girls need a high level of nurturing balanced by a high level of control. Those who are reared in families that exhibit this combination are friendlier, more energetic, and better behaved. Those who are reared by single mothers, therefore, are warm and affectionate but have difficulty learning self-discipline. Conversely, those who are reared by single fathers are obedient but often plagued by anxiety and insecurity.

It has also been fashionable for those pushing for gender-free parenting to assert that the physical play of fathers has no beneficial impact on child-rearing. Many self-proclaimed child experts

exhort fathers to stop playing with the kids and do more housework. Some even claim that the rough-and-tumble play of fathers teaches aggression and should be avoided. But new clinical studies reveal that the physical play of fathers actually gives children much-needed practice in regulating their emotions and behavior and helps them develop the capacity to recognize the emotional cues of others.

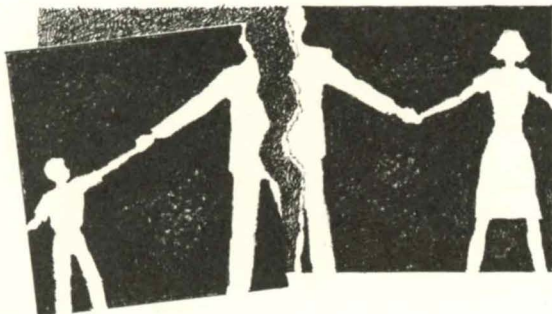
The point is not to force a choice between the parenting role of mothers or fathers but to suggest that they work best when they work together. This view contrasts sharply with the “two pair of hands” argument, which holds that when it comes to parenting, two people are better than one and it makes no difference whether they are mothers or fathers. In reality it matters greatly to whom the “two pairs of hands” are attached. Kids don’t need impersonal “caregivers”; they need loving moms and dads.

Fathers are also critical to the proper socialization of children because they teach by

example how to keep negative impulses in check. It is through boys’ observation of the way their fathers deal with frustration, anger, and sadness that they learn how men should cope with such emotions. It is also through the

observation of how fathers treat mothers that boys learn how men should treat women. If fathers treat mothers with dignity and respect, then it is likely that their sons will grow up to treat women with dignity and respect. If fathers treat mothers with contempt and cruelty, then it is likely that their sons will, too. Fathers are also critical for the healthy emotional development of girls. If girls experience the love, attention, and protection of fathers, then they are likely to resist the temptations of seeking such things elsewhere—often through casual sexual relations at a very young age. Finally, fathers are important in helping children make the difficult transition to the adult world. Boys require an affirmation that they are “man enough.” Girls require an affirmation that they are “worthy enough.”

Given this understanding, what should we expect when fatherlessness becomes the norm? We don’t need a crystal ball to find the answer. As I





indicated earlier, nearly four out of every ten children are being raised absent their fathers right now. The result is that juveniles are the fastest growing segment of the criminal population in the United States. Between 1982 and 1991, the rate at which children were arrested for murder increased 93 percent; for aggravated assault, 72 percent; for rape, 24 percent; and for automobile theft, 97 percent. Although homicide rates have increased for all ages, those for teenagers have increased more rapidly than for adults.

The teen population is expected to grow by 20 percent over the next decade, and this is precisely the generation most likely to be reared without fathers. The prospect has led many sociologists, criminologists, and law enforcement agencies to conclude that shortly after the turn of the century we will see an adolescent crime wave the likes of which has never been seen before in this country. If that were not enough, we know that each and every day:

- 7,700 children become sexually active;
- 1,100 children have abortions;
- 2,500 children are born out of wedlock;
- 600 children contract syphilis or gonorrhea; and
- six children commit suicide.

Fatherlessness is not solely responsible for these tragedies, but it certainly is a major cause. Indeed, all the available evidence suggests that improving the well-being of our children—and ultimately our nation—depends upon finding ways to bring fathers back into the home. The question is: How?

## The Fatherhood Solution

First, our culture needs to replace the idea of the superfluous father with a more compelling understanding of the critical role fathers play in the lives of their children, not just as “paychecks,” but as disciplinarians, teachers, and moral guides. And fathers must be physically present in the home. They can’t simply show up on the weekends or for pre-arranged “quality time.” Children need to know that their fathers are literally there for them.

Second, we need to convey the importance and sanctity of marriage. While most boys and girls expect that they will eventually get married and

have children, they no longer believe that there needs to be a chronology to these two events. They should be taught that marriage comes first and that it is not a trial arrangement that can be abandoned whenever conflicts arise. Here’s where religious and moral instruction can make a huge difference, because children need to know that marriage is far more than a state-approved contract between two parties or a box to check on an income tax return.

Third, we must make restoring the rights and responsibilities of parents a national priority. Over the past century, child rearing has increasingly come to be viewed as a public rather than a private matter. As early as 1901, the Supreme Court of Indiana upheld a compulsory education law by arrogantly declaring, “The natural rights of a parent to the custody and control of his children are subordinate to the power of the state.” The assault on parental authority gradually extended to all other areas of life. By 1960, one social worker writing in the prestigious professional journal, *Child Welfare*, felt free to note that “day care can offer something valuable to children *because* they are separated from their parents.” [Emphasis added.] School-based condom distribution, “witch hunts” against parents suspected of abuse without sufficient cause, abortion on demand without parental consent—these are all contemporary examples of how the state has chosen to wage war against parents and convince children that the very people they count on most in this world are out to hurt them. In essence, the state is saying to today’s children, “Do not trust your parents—we don’t.”

The tide is turning, however. Even many die-hard critics of the traditional family have finally been forced to admit that their ivory tower theories are wrong; in the real world, children need to be raised by two parents. And parents need the freedom to decide what is in the best interest of their own children. Another positive development is the “pro-family movement” that has grown tremendously in the last few years. There are now dozens of national and regional organizations dedicated to championing parental initiatives. And pro-family rallies have attracted stadium-size crowds around the country.

What can you do right now in your own home and your own community? You can start by pledging, “I will be a good wife and mother,” or, “I will be a good husband and father.” It is a simple promise, to be sure. But it is a promise upon which a good, just, and civil society depends. ♣

## Children are much more likely to do as a parent does than as a parent says.

# The Hillsdale Academy: A Model for America

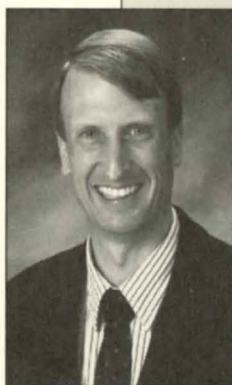
**Robert C. Hanna**  
**Assistant Professor of Education**  
**Hillsdale College**

*The Hillsdale Academy is a private, coeducational K-8 school founded by Hillsdale College in 1990. Since then, it has become a model for Americans seeking true educational reform. On May 16, 1997, a ground-breaking ceremony for a new facility was held. When the Academy opens its doors in the fall of 1998, it will include a high school. Here, Hillsdale College Assistant Professor of Education Robert C. Hanna explains why this small school has a national impact.*

**R**obert C. Hanna has been an assistant professor of education at Hillsdale College since 1995. He is president of the

Midwest History of Education Society and editor-elect of the Society's journal. He is also the author of *The Charles Dickens Family Gospel* and has published papers in the *Dickensian*, the *English Journal*, the *Illinois Schools Journal*, the *Kappa Delta Pi Record*, *Safety & Health*, and the *Virginia English Bulletin*.

Dr. Hanna received his Ph.D. from the University of North Carolina-Greensboro and has taught at a number of high schools and colleges, including the Gaston Day School, Belmont Abbey College, and the University of North Carolina-Greensboro. ▲



**T**here was a time when you could walk into almost any American school and find a mission statement prominently displayed. Based on timeless ideas and values concerning the proper upbringing of children, each statement was carefully and lovingly crafted with the care of an artisan and was meant to last for generations. Each was meant to speak to all of us, regardless of our individual differences. But somewhere along the way, we stopped listening. Meanwhile, self-proclaimed experts in the new philosophy of progressive education defined progress more and more as rejection of the Western tradition. The conscience-troubling mission statements were finally removed from virtually all public and most private schools around the country.

But when you enter the Hillsdale Academy office, a mission statement is prominently and proudly displayed. It proclaims that the Academy "educates children to become successful, productive, and independent members of a free society." Enter any Academy classroom and it is evident that the teachers are still as dedicated to this mission as were our forefathers. Observe Academy students at work and you will witness the results of "solid preparation in the fundamental academic skills of reading and phonics, writing, and computation." Examine the classroom holdings and you will find "the best of the Western tradition." Speak to Academy parents and you will learn of their children's moral growth from the "values-centered approach" of "personalized instruction from teachers dedicated to the well-rounded development of the young."

## From a Vision to a Model

**I**n just seven years, the Hillsdale Academy has grown from a vision derived from Hillsdale College's affirmation of the Judeo-Christian faith and Greco-Roman culture to a nationally acclaimed model for American education. Visitors are administrators and teachers from



public schools, including charter schools; clergy and lay ministers from church schools; trustees and administrators from established and planned independent schools; and parents who teach their children at home.

They find, to use Hillsdale College President George Roche's words, "a safe, orderly, encouraging school atmosphere" and students who are acquiring "a sense of personal dignity and responsibility." And they learn firsthand that the Academy demonstrates the often forgotten truth that one curriculum *can* meet the educational needs which all children, by nature of their humanity, hold in common.

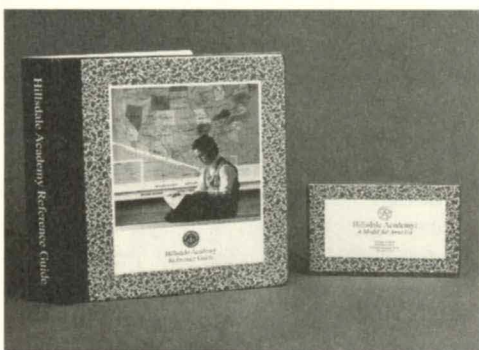


## Parents as Partners

**T**he Academy's extraordinary success is also due to the fact that parents are regarded as vital partners in the educational process. Far too often in today's schools, parents are belittled or ignored or treated as "the enemy" when they speak up for traditional education and question

## The Hillsdale Academy Reference Guide

*The Hillsdale Academy students' routine includes flag-raising ceremonies, reciting the Pledge of Allegiance, Bible reading, learning phonics, and studying the great books of Western culture.*



*For more information on the Hillsdale Academy Reference Guide, please call 800/989-READ.*

**F**or those who cannot visit the campus, who plan to open a school of their own, or who intend to reform an existing school, there is the *Hillsdale Academy Reference Guide*, a unique curriculum outline for kindergarten through the eighth grade. (A high school version is currently in preparation.) One thousand copies

*On national standardized tests, Hillsdale Academy students score among the top 3 percent of all students in the nation.*





## Personal Testimonials

**P**ersonal testimonials regarding the Academy's effectiveness abound. Not too long ago, a new student was admitted to the eighth grade.

Headmaster Todd Avis did not give her tests to determine her "type of intelligence," "learning style," or "special needs." Instead, he interviewed her to ascertain the seriousness of her academic purpose. He also discussed with her and her parents the Academy's mission statement. When this eighth grader, who had never before studied French, found herself on the first day of school in a French class, surrounded by students already able to speak

French, she doubted her ability to succeed. So her teacher asked her to stay after school three days a week for additional instruction. Her parents helped her with her homework. Within a few months, she no longer needed extra instruction.

Soon after that, she recited "The Night Before Christmas" in French during the Academy's holiday program. Before the school year was over, a teacher overheard her speaking French and explaining its meaning to younger Academy students during the lunch hour. The following year, when she entered high school, she qualified to enroll in French II. The Hillsdale Academy makes this kind of difference in the lives of its students every day. ▲

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