

Introduction

The Key Question: What Makes Great Kids Great?

Very early in my teaching career I met two brothers, Myles and Blair. They were strong academic students, good athletes, positively engaged with their peers and very comfortable in adult company.

However, there was something else about these boys that attracted my attention. I really appreciated the positive ways they interacted with students less capable or less fortunate than themselves. They were caring and compassionate in a quiet, very mature way. At the same time both were well liked and respected by their peers and both had a clearly defined sense of self that made them stand out. They were not the best in any one area, but they were great citizens and well rounded students. I hoped that my own kids would be like them as they grew up. This was the first time that, as a teacher, I had identified Great Kids. I soon became very interested in trying to figure out what made these brothers such Great Kids.

Over the next 34 years I got to know and work with countless Great Kids who were almost always self-confident, outgoing and successful. Invariably, they were positively

motivated and above all, good citizens. Not surprisingly, many became leaders of "generation next", a generation that I truly believe is changing our world into a better place.

In trying to understand these Great Kids I came to realize they usually had adult support: somebody in their lives who made a very positive difference in developing personality, successes and, ultimately, life chances. As time passed I observed that the often-intuitive choices such adults made were very much aligned with current psychological research around good parenting. Great Kids, I discovered, had Great Parents—or, in many instances (like Blair and Myles), a Great Single Parent—doing it right.

As I delved into the research on youth behavior I found that many of the psychologists and youth experts I was studying, people like Barbara Colloroso, Dr. Gordon Neufeld and Dr. Martin Brokenleg, validated the intuitive parenting practices I was observing and which my wife and I were beginning to practice.

It is fascinating to look back at all the Great Kids I have known over the last 34 years. There has never been a time when kids, and the conditions affecting them, have changed so much. This is especially true of the last decade. Despite this onset of change, however, the factors that made kids great in the 1970s are virtually the same today. The specific challenges facing both parents and kids have changed but good parenting skills have really remained constant.

Great Kids started out as a series of parenting conversations directed towards my own children. As the conversations progressed and evolved, I received considerable encouragement and support in developing the questions about why Great Kids are great, for a much larger audience. The conversations evolved into this book, which I hope will be a valuable resource for any person interacting with children,

from toddlers to teens. *Great Kids*, by design, is not as prescriptive as the many parenting books that promote a particular “parenting style.” Instead, I have chosen to closely examine some of the common characteristics of really successful children, so that readers can recognize and enhance their own styles and interactive practices.

While *Great Kids* has an undeniable parent focus, today more than ever, successful parenting, requires the positive involvement of a community of adult supporters. Great Kids invariably have a variety of adults who influence their lives in a positive way. It may be the auntie who is always around, it may be a caring grandparent, a youth leader or a teacher. We are all familiar with the stories about the struggling youth whose life is turned around by the one caring adult, the one role model who nurtures or encourages some greatness to develop in their lives. This book will be very helpful to anyone in such a mentorship role!

No parent is perfect and certainly my own kids will attest that I wasn't. As you read through the chapters you will likely smile at many of the examples I share and wince at others as you recognize your own parenting style under examination. At the end of the day, however, in *Great Kids* you will have a resource that will provide you a few more tools, a few new options to consider, and a few new resources to try as you embark upon this incredible journey.

It is truly my hope that by looking at the common characteristics exemplified in *Great Kids*, you will be better equipped and better able to enjoy parenting and mentoring your own Great Kids.

Enjoy the journey!

Mike McIndoe, BA, MEd, Dad