

# **Rutland Herald (VT)**

**Rutland Herald (VT)**

August 19, 2012

## **Duct tape parenting?**

### **Vt. author offers family fix for sticky situations**

Author: By Kevin O'Connor

STAFF WRITER

Section: NEWS

Index Terms: topstory

#### Article Text:

Can't tame your wild child with stares, scolding or strict discipline? East Middlebury educator Vicki Hoefle has written a new parenting book with a more bracing suggestion: Duct tape. Yes, you read right. A sticky strap across the mouth, hands, arms, feet - whatever the problem area.

"What you need to know is that the duct tape will be for you, mom and dad," Hoefle's book clarifies. "You can actually tape yourself, but a mental visual is just as effective." So begins "Duct Tape Parenting: A Less Is More Approach to Raising Respectful, Responsible and Resilient Kids." Hoefle's new paperback - set for national release Tuesday - encapsulates her two decades of advice to more than 60,000 parents who've taken her child-rearing classes in at least 60 Vermont communities including Barre, Burlington, Montpelier and Rutland. Are you a parent who constantly nags and needles yet still has a problem? The problem may be you.

"Your kids are merely doing what they have always done, and for them, it is working perfectly," Hoefle writes. "They have you trained, and in certain situations, they are in control of the way the family functions. You can be relied upon to do the same thing over and over again even though you experience little or no long-term change."

Ever order a fidgety friend, nettlesome neighbor or uncooperative coworker into a "naughty chair"? For parents who answer no, Hoefle suggests extending the same courtesy to their children and instead educating them on the benefits of dropping their own melodrama and more clearly acting on life's challenges.

"As a parent, you're the blueprint for your child," the 54-year-old mother of five says in an interview. "Everything that happens between the two of you informs them about how to be in relationship with others. When kids feel good about themselves - and that's a result of the relationship they're in with you - they keep showing up as their best, so the pesky behaviors tend to dissipate or dissolve altogether."

Hoefle knows what some of you are thinking: She hasn't met my child. But the teacher says her

technique has worked not only with her own teenagers and twenty-somethings but also for thousands of families who've turned her business, Parenting On Track™, into a profitable provider of classes, CDs and DVDs.

Hoefle was content to focus on such audiovisuals when she received a call from the Boston-based Bibliomotion print and e-book publishing house. A brother of one of the principals had taken her course and raved about the results. Would she consider sharing her concepts in a 250-page paperback?

Parents who point at a difficult youngster don't necessarily like to be reminded the rest of their fingers are curled back at them. That's why Hoefle approaches her subject with equal parts honesty and humor.

"If you're saying to your child, 'I can't talk to you while you're whining,' guess what?" she writes. "You're still talking! If the goal for the child is to draw mom and dad closer, then whatever it takes to accomplish that goal is logical to the child. The bigger the reaction kids receive from their parents, the more likely they are to continue using the behavior."

Hoefle tags some parents as authoritarian, others permissive. She advocates being neither a dictator nor a doormat but instead a disciple of the middle way. Her publisher, however, wanted to start at the beginning - specifically, with a title.

"We sent 25 very sophisticated, intellectual, aesthetically pleasing titles - and every one was a snooze-fest," she says. "Then I put down 'Duct Tape Parenting' because that's my call to action." Most parents tell Hoefle they want children who are capable, cooperative, responsible and respectful. Then they turn around and save their youngsters from making the slightest mistake. Such parents, the teacher says, are making a big one themselves.

"Mistakes are opportunities to learn," she writes. "We have to allow for mountains of mistakes and pause before we intervene, not to solve, but to find out what the child is learning from the experience. Once we know where the child is, we can put in place a plan to build on the experience."

Her motto: Unless a choice is physically or morally dangerous, let a child make it and learn what happens.

Hoefle began her own study of parenting just before the birth of her oldest child 23 years ago when she discovered the theories of the late Alfred Adler, an Austrian-born physician and psychiatrist who espoused treating everyone with equal dignity and respect.

That doesn't mean parents acquiesce to their children. Instead, Hoefle believes all members of a family should have both rights and responsibilities.

"If they can walk, they can work," she says. "The mother who does everything for the child turns her child into a young adult who can't do anything for himself."

Hoefle taught her children to carry their cups and plates by age 2, set the kitchen table for everyone by 4 and load and unload the dishwasher by 6 - all while helping them master how to clean themselves, their clothes and the rest of the house.

As Hoefle sees it, children preparing for college or a career should be ready to live on their own by 18, so they'll want to know at least a quarter of the skills they'll need by 4½, half by 9 and three-quarters by 13½.

Many parents, however, believe their children can't even make their own breakfast. Hoefle's book excerpts one class exchange:

Hoefle: "You really don't believe they will do anything without your assistance?"

Parent: "Well, they might try to do a few things, but they will either leave a mess or they will fight with each other, or they will just give up, or they will eat a candy bar."

Hoefle: "And you know all of this will happen - how? Have you ever left them alone in the morning?"

Parent: "No. Never. I can't."

Hoefle: "So you think you know what your kids will do if you aren't nagging, reminding, lecturing and so on, but you don't really know for a fact what will happen because you've never stepped back and watched. And is there an age at which your children will suddenly be able to do all these things on their own, perfectly, or will you continue to nag, remind and lecture until they leave home at 18?"

Hoefle says that last question is usually met by silence. And that simple moment of contemplation, she attests, can be the start of a lifetime of change.

For parents seeking answers, Hoefle's book details solutions to every behavioral problem from not getting out of bed in the morning to not going to sleep at night.

Some suggestions are big picture: Rather than "punish," for example, help children see the consequences of their actions. Others are pinpoint precise: To cool a child in meltdown mode, she calls for trying a "clever, left-field distraction" such as "Hey, I know you are in the middle of something, and I don't want you to stop, but I'm going to go kiss Daddy - I'll be back in a second." Or simply walking away.

"If the child screams louder, then storms in to get you to react, you know the performance is for you," she writes. "However, if the child continues without looking your way, then maybe he really is in distress. This would be a reasonable time to try giving a big hug and a kiss. Your child may relax her body, soften into your arms and let out tears of relief."

As Hoefle says in a book disclaimer: "PLEASE NOTE: I am not suggesting that you stop parenting. All I am suggesting is that you stop using anything that interferes with the relationship you have with your children and their ability to become independent, responsible, respectful and resilient people."

Hoefle has two final words for parents who take her advice: Be consistent. You may get crying, stomping or screaming at first, but remain firm and friendly rather than fuel the upset and

everyone will learn.

"Remember that your child's actions are his choice," she says, "but your reaction is your choice."

kevin.oconnor

@rutlandherald.com

Copyright, 2012, Rutland Herald

Record Number: 708199905

For more information visit

[www.vickihoefle.com](http://www.vickihoefle.com)

[www.vickihoefle.com/duct-tape-parenting-about](http://www.vickihoefle.com/duct-tape-parenting-about)