

Read the introduction to an academic book about parenting. For questions 31-36, choose the correct answer.

## **Parenting in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

I decided to write this book for several reasons. I was dissatisfied with parenting-advice literature, finding it to be riddled with oversimplified messages, and often unrelated to or at odds with current scientific knowledge. I also felt certain after years as a professor, researcher, and author of textbooks on child development, that contemporary theory and research contain many vital, practical messages... ones crucial for parents to understand if they are to effectively help their children develop. Furthermore, I've been approached on countless occasions by uneasy parents, frustrated by a wide array of child-rearing issues. I became convinced, therefore, that parents needed a consistent way of thinking about their role to guide them in making effective decisions.

It's little wonder that parents are perplexed about what approach to take to child rearing. Today's world is one which makes parenting exceedingly difficult. In many industrialised countries, the majority of mothers of pre- school children are in the workforce, though not always through choice. This group in particular tends to lament the lack of practical advice for parents in their child-rearing roles. Many parents simultaneously complain that they're busier than ever and that due to the growing demands of their jobs, they have little time for their children. Nations of pressured, preoccupied parents have emerged in an era of grave public concern for the well-being of youth.

It would seem from looking at current media that the younger generation are achieving less well than they should and that they often display a worrying lack of direction, manifested at its worst in a variety of social problems. These problems seem to have infiltrated even the most economically privileged sectors of the population, affecting young people who, on the face of things, have been granted the best of life's chances. Accounts of children being deprived of their childhood and growing up too fast, or the dangers of promoting materialism to young people abound in the media.

In many countries there is a growing sense of 'youth alienation' and parents rightly fear for their own children's futures. But agreement on what parents can and should do to shield children from underachievement and demoralisation eludes those who seek it on the shelves of libraries or bookstores. Parenting advice has always been in a state of flux, at no time more so than the present. While the fundamental goal of parenting – to instil character and moral development – has stood firm amid the various passing fashions in child care over the years, the approach to accomplishing this has varied considerably.

Some authors, convinced that parents are in control of what their children become, advise a 'get tough' approach. The educational parallel to this 'parent-power' stance is to train and instruct as early as possible, and this has been justified by claims of maximising brain growth or securing high achievement by starting sooner. Other authors, however, attribute many of today's social problems to the excessive pressure put on children by parents. According to these 'child-power' advocates, children have their own built-in timetables for maturing and learning. Waiting for cues that children are ready, these experts say, will relieve the stress that fuels youth discontent and rebellion. The reality, however, is that there are no hard-and-fast rules.

Current thinking on child-rearing advice mirrors historical shifts in theories of development and education. The most disturbing trend in the literature has been a move to deny that parents make *any* notable contribution to their children's development. Indeed, according to one highly publicised book, children's genes, and secondarily their peer groups, not parents, dictate how children turn out. This public declaration of parental weakness comes at a time when many busy parents are poised to retreat from family obligations, and, indeed, it grants them licence to do so.

From the multitude of theories on nature and nurture, I have chosen one to serve as the framework for this book: sociocultural theory, which originated with the work of Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky. Early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, he explained how children's social experiences transform their genetic inheritance leading their development forward and ensuring that they become competent, contributing members of society. Vygotsky championed the idea that as children engage in dialogues with more expert members of their culture, they integrate the language of those interactions into their inner mental lives and use it to think, overcome challenges and guide their own behaviour.

**31** The author says that one reason for writing the book was the fact that

- . **A** research suggests the quality of parenting skills has deteriorated.
- . **B** today's scientific views of parenting seem to be flawed.
- . **C** there is a lack of parenting literature written in a straightforward way.
- . **D** the available advisory material does not reflect current academic thinking.

**32** What does the author say about the concerns parents have?

- . **A** Some of the issues are contradictory in nature.
- . **B** They are understandable given the challenges of modern life.
- . **C** They cause a disproportionate amount of stress in family relationships.
- . **D** The balance between work and family life is only a secondary problem.

**33** What view of young people is promoted in the media?

- . **A** They want to live an adult life before they are mentally ready.
- . **B** They are unaware of the opportunities provided for them.
- . **C** They are unable to appreciate the value of money.
- . **D** They fail to demonstrate a sense of purpose.

**34** What does the author say in the fourth paragraph about parenting advice?

- . **A** Its core objective has remained constant.
- . **B** Its ideology stems from contemporary social issues.
- . **C** It traditionally placed strong emphasis on the protection of the child.
- . **D** It currently benefits from techniques tried and tested by previous generations.

**35** In the fifth paragraph, what point is the author making about bringing up children?

- . **A** There is an absence of consensus on child-rearing among the experts themselves.
- . **B** Educational policies should be revised in the light of recent findings.
- . **C** Strict parents tend to have children who are academically unsuccessful.
- . **D** One approach to child-rearing appears to be more effective than all others.

**36** What criticism of contemporary thinking on child-rearing does the author make?

- . **A** It repeats theories which have no solid foundation.
- . **B** It places too much importance on formal education.
- . **C** It encourages parents to neglect their responsibilities.
- . **D** It undermines the role of friends in children's development.

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Answer Key:

- 31. D
- 32. B
- 33. D
- 34. A
- 35. A
- 36. C