

Parenting in the dawn of the 21st century

Objectives

Students will learn to

- identify the basic part of an idea or an opinion,
- discriminate this from supporting information or secondary ideas/opinions, and
- read between the lines and deduce the answer to questions which are not direct or straightforward (therefore applying their inferring skills)
- identify lexical items when reading and / or listening to the text with the help of the context
- rewrite these main ideas or opinions using their own words as much as and whenever possible (therefore applying their paraphrasing skills)
- summarize long texts into between a 10% and 20% of its original length (therefore applying their synthesizing skills)

Contents

Lexicogrammatical and discursive

- Format and structure of opinion articles
- Collocations

Domain areas

- Parenting
- Teaching and learning values
- Family and social relations
- Rights and duties
- Consumer society

Activities

Block I

1. Read the following article by P. Tyre from the Sept. 13 issue of the online edition of the *Newsweek Magazine*.

THE POWER OF NO

It's an unanticipated legacy of the affluent '90s: parents who can't, or won't set limits. Now a growing number of psychologists are warning of the dangers of overindulgence and teaching how – and where – to draw the line.

By Peg Tyre, Julie Scelfo and Barbara Kantrowitz
Newsweek

Part I. Eloise Goldman struggled to hold the line. She knew it was ridiculous to spend \$250 on a mini iPod¹ for her 9-year-old son Ben. The price tag wasn't the biggest issue for Eloise and her husband, Jon. It was the idea of buying such an extravagant gadget for a kid who still hasn't mastered long division. If she gave in, how would Ben ever learn that you can't always get what you want? Goldman knew there was a good chance the iPod would soon be lost or abandoned, but Ben nagged and pestered and insisted that "everyone has one." Goldman began to weaken. Ben's a good kid, she reasoned; she wanted him to have what the other kids had. After doing a neighborhood-mom check and finding that Ben's peers were indeed wired for sound, Goldman caved —but not without one last attempt to salvage some lesson about limits. She offered her son a deal. We give you an iPod, you forfeit your

¹ A digital music player, smaller than conventional walkmans or discmans.

READING PRACTICE 3

2008/09

birthday party. "Done," he said. Then, without missing a beat: "Now what about getting me my own Apple G4?"

It's an unexpected legacy of the affluent '90s: parents who can't say no. With school starting, the annual assault on the family budget to fill backpacks with all the cool stuff that "everyone" else has is just beginning. This generation of parents has always been driven to give their kids every advantage, from *Mommy & Me* swim classes all the way to that thick envelope from an elite college. But despite their good intentions, too many find themselves raising "wanting machines" who respond like Pavlovian dogs to the marketing behemoth that's aimed right at them. Even getting what they want doesn't satisfy some kids—they only want more. Now, a growing number of psychologists, educators and parents think it's time to stop the madness and start teaching kids about what's really important —values like hard work, delayed gratification, honesty and compassion. In a few communities, parents have begun to take action by banding together to enforce limits and rules so that no one has to feel guilty for denying 6-year-olds \$300 Nokia cell phones with all the latest bells and whistles.

While it's certainly true that affluent parents can raise happy and well-adjusted children, the struggle to set limits has never been tougher. Saying no is harder when you can afford to say yes. Recent studies of adults who were overindulged as children paint a discouraging picture of their future. Kids who've been given too much too soon grow up to be adults who have difficulty coping with life's disappointments. They have a distorted sense of entitlement that gets in the way of success both in the workplace and in relationships. Psychologists say parents who overindulge their kids may actually be setting them up to be more vulnerable to future anxiety and depression. "The risk of overindulgence is self-centeredness and self-absorption, and that's a mental-health risk," says William Damon, director of the Stanford University Center on Adolescence. "You sit around feeling anxious all the time instead of figuring out what you can do to make a difference in the world."

Today's parents —who themselves were raised on Greatest Generation values of thrift and self-sacrifice— grew up in a culture where "no" was a household word. Goldman remembers that as a teenager, she had to beg for a phone in her room. In a world where families spend "quality time" at the mall instead of in the backyard, her request seems almost quaint. Today's kids want much more, partly because there's so much more to want. The oldest members of this Generation Excess were born in the late 1980s, just as PCs and videogames were making their assault on the family room. They think of MP3 players and flat-screen TVs as essential utilities and they've developed strategies to get them. One survey of grade-school children found that when they crave something new, most expect to ask nine times before their parents give in. By every measure, parents are shelling out record amounts. According to market researchers Packaged Facts, families with 3- to 12-year-olds spend \$53.8 billion annually on entertainment, personal-care items and reading materials for their children. Teens are spending huge amounts of money themselves, some of it cadged from their families and the rest from after-school jobs. Last year 12- to 19-year-olds spent roughly \$175 billion, according to Teen Research Unlimited.

Part II. In the heat of this buying blitz, even parents who desperately need to say no find themselves reaching for their credit cards. Kechia Williams is a 32-year-old single mother of five who works as a custodian at Emory University in Atlanta. She rises at 4 a.m. to get to work at 6 in order to make \$9 an hour. She has to work overtime to pay for basics like new school clothes and supplies. And yet, her children do demand and often get costly gifts. The oldest boys, Darryl, 15, and Kwentavius, 12, have a PlayStation 2 and several games that cost \$60 apiece that they play on a big-screen TV. "I constantly have to remind them my paycheck will go only so far," she says. "But that doesn't stop them from wanting it. The stuff is all over the TV." Williams knows how they feel; she had very little growing up. "I can see it in their eyes sometimes, how bad they want something, and I want to get it for them."

Darryl and Kwentavius are responding to a tidal wave of marketing aimed at kids. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, the average American child sees more than 40,000 commercials a year. That's in addition to fast-food outlets in schools, product placements in TV shows and movies, even corporate sponsorship of sports stadiums. "There's virtually no escape from it," says Susan Linn, a Harvard psychologist. "The marketers call it 'cradle-to-grave brand loyalty.' They want to get kids from the moment they're born."

READING PRACTICE 3

2008/09

And this generation of parents is uniquely ill equipped to counter the relentless pressure. Baby boomers, raised in the contentious 1960s and '70s (the era of the "generation gap"), swore they would do things differently and have a much closer relationship with their own children. Many even wear the same *Gap* clothes as their kids and listen to the same music. "So whenever their children get angry at them, it makes this generation feel a lot guiltier than previous generations," says Laurence Steinberg, a psychologist at Temple University. Today's parents put in more hours on the job, too; at the end of a long workweek, it's tempting to buy peace with "yes," rather than mar precious family time with conflict. Anxiety about the future is a factor as well. How do well-intentioned parents say no to all the sports equipment and arts and language lessons they believe will help their kids thrive in an increasingly competitive world? But these parents are confusing permissiveness with love. Experts agree: too much love won't spoil a child, but too few limits will.

In their zeal to make their kids happy, parents fail to impart the very values they say they want to teach. Jenn Andrlick, a 23-year-old editorial assistant in New York, describes herself as a recovering "spoiled brat." As a child in Omaha, she says, she regularly manipulated her hardworking parents into fulfilling her every whim —special toys, dance lessons, fashionable clothes and a car. Now, as a young adult perched precariously on the first rung of her career ladder, she's finding it impossible to live within her means and still relies on handouts from Mom and Dad. Once she was the envy of all her friends because "I always had more than anyone." But these days, she says, she envies her roommates who know how to stick to a budget. And her mother, Debbie Love, keeps asking herself if it might finally be time to "cut her off."

No one is suggesting Scrooge as a parental role model. What parents need to find, psychologists say, is a balance between the advantages of an affluent society and the critical life lessons that come from waiting, saving and working hard to achieve goals. That search for balance has to start early. Eve and Jay Gagne, both 30, were both brought up by single moms in New Hampshire, so they know what it's like to go without. Now that Eve, an at-home mother, and Jay, a computer executive, have income for luxuries that their parents didn't, they love to treat their daughter, Sydney, 3, to clothes and toys. But Eve says they're trying hard to be reasonable and not spend too much money on perfect party dresses. "She's going to get dirty and she'll grow out of it, and it ends up costing a fortune ... When it comes down to it, nobody really notices the outfit. They notice her behavior." Recently, the Gagnes let Sydney play with a giant stuffed rocking horse at a toy store. Sydney wanted to ride it home, but the Gagnes said no. They could easily afford it, Eve said, "but we didn't want to give in to every whim." Sydney had a meltdown and her parents held firm.

Part III. Psychologists say that's exactly what they should be doing. "Children need limits on their behavior because they feel better and more secure when they live within a certain structure." Parents should not make the mistake of projecting their own needs or feelings on their children. "As adults, we don't like it when other people tell us what we can and can't do," he says. "To children, it doesn't feel that way." Children learn self-control by watching how other people behave, especially their parents.

Learning how to overcome challenges is essential to becoming a successful adult. Whether it's having to earn money to buy Stila cosmetics in this season's palette or adding more hours in the library to pull up a grade, kids need to have parents who are on the sideline cheering them on but not caving in. Raul and Toni Villaverde, who live in a suburb outside Miami, say they've tried to walk the line between giving their children what they want and providing them with a strong enough work ethic so that they will become self-reliant. With an older sister at Brown University, 10th grader Chandler Villaverde has set his sights on MIT. Toni has made it clear she expects him to keep his grades up. So far he's gotten mostly A's and B's. "I got one C one time," says Chandler. His mom's very palpable disappointment was enough to get him back on track: "I never got a C again." The Villaverdes also insist their kids do chores. Chandler takes care of the garbage and dishes, while his sister Lauren, 12, gets the mail, makes coffee and is learning to do the laundry.

Families like the Villaverdes are in the minority. Few parents ask kids to do anything around the house because they think their kids are already overwhelmed by social and academic pressures; adding lawn mowing or laundry almost seems cruel. And who wants to nag a 12-year-old (for the fifth time) about taking out the garbage? "When parents have so little time with their kids," says Irene Goldenberg, a family therapist and professor emeritus at UCLA, "they don't want it to be filled with conflict." But kids who have no responsibilities never

READING PRACTICE 3

2008/09

learn one of life's most basic lessons: that every individual can be of service to others and that life has meaning beyond one's own immediate happiness.

That means parents who want to teach values have to take a long, hard look at their own. "It's going to be a tough sell to your kids if you're not walking the walk," says Thomas Lickona, a development psychologist at the State University of New York at Cortland. "It starts with parents' leading a life that centers on higher values so you have credibility when you try to teach that standard."

Across the country, many parents and educators are reaching out for guidance on how to say no. The American Society of Professional Education, a continuing-education firm based in North Carolina, last year launched a seminar for mental-health professionals (which includes psychologists, social workers, family therapists and school counselors) to learn about dealing with overindulged children and their "enabling parents." In one session, the seminar explains the "distorted thoughts" of overindulgent parents, including the self-imposed pressure they feel to constantly keep their kids happy. In another, attendees learn how to convert overindulgent parents into "mentoring" parents.

In Eden Prairie, Minn., a group of concerned mothers recently invited Jean Illsley Clarke — a parent educator and author of "How Much Is Enough?" — to come help them deal with what one said was "the problem we're having with our neighbors." They all complained that it was *other* parents who eroded their hard-fought efforts to set appropriate limits for their kids. Sitting in the meeting room, 20 moms expressed their genuine frustration. "How do we keep grandparents from buying and buying and buying?" "How many birthday gifts should my kid get?" "How many Game Boys are enough?" Clarke urged the mothers to band together. "Parents have trouble knowing what is enough," she told them. Even children can understand that treats are reserved for special occasions: "Thanksgiving is really great, but if we had it every week, wouldn't it be awful?" She encourages parents and grandparents to discuss these issues so everyone sticks to the same rules, and to find other families who share their values: "Create your own village."

Part IV. That's exactly what some parents in Boulder, Colorado, are trying to do. The scenic college town on the border of the Rockies has long been home to progressive families who eschew cars in favor of bike rides to the local organic grocery. But over the past decade, an influx of wealthy families brought an infusion of SUVs and Starbucks. Parents were alarmed by a rise in teenage alcohol and drug abuse.

Lamenting that their kids were out of control, a group of parents and educators last year formed the Parent Engagement Network, which now offers monthly workshops that cover such topics as parenting skills, morality and ethics for children, and understanding the impact of media on kids. The group also distributes a pamphlet listing ways parents can show they care without buying things: notice them, tell them how thoughtful a certain action is, acknowledge their insights in a conversation, show excitement in their discoveries, listen to their stories.

But change doesn't come easily. The senior parking lot at Boulder's Fairview High School remains overrun with luxury cars, and many members of the most recent graduating class spent their spring break in Puerto Vallarta. Parents still feel they have a lot to learn about how to work with their neighbors to enforce the same values.

Psychologists say even the simplest steps can yield tremendous benefits. When Mary Pipher's son, Zeke, now 34, was a teenager, he had nothing in common with his psychologist mother, author of "Reviving Ophelia." She is bookish, an introvert who likes to spend time in the garden. He was a jock and a partier who stayed out too late and bugged her constantly for more spending money. Finally, she instituted a free zone: once a week, the pair would go out to breakfast with no haranguing or begging for money. Sometimes, the two would have deep conversations and sometimes they would say barely anything at all. But it was a big relief, says Pipher. "Going shopping together is not much better quality time than no time at all. That free zone is what parents want." And it's what kids want, too — even if they won't admit it. (2616 words)

2. Answer the following questions.

READING PRACTICE 3

2008/09

1. Explain why Eloise Goldman did not at first want to buy her son Ben an iPod and why she ended up caving in.
2. What does the "Pavlovian dog" metaphor suggest about how kids respond to advertising and marketing and the effect this can have on their bringing up?
3. Kids who've grown up having everything they asked for may have different problems as adults. Which of these are mentioned in the text?
4. Ketchia Williams seems to have a problem that has encouraged her children to ask her to get them almost everything they want. What is this problem?
5. There are a few reasons why today's parents give in to almost all of their children's whims and demands. Identify at least 3 of them.
6. Of what kind of attitude and behavior are Eve and Jay Gagne a good example of in relation to their child's education?
7. According to psychologist Dr. Steinberg, how do children and adult differ when it comes to accepting orders and rules established by others?
8. Why is it good, according to the text, to teach and ask children to help in the house, do errands, etc. apart from doing their schoolwork?

3. Synonyms. Look for words or phrases in the text which mean (approximately) the same as the following.

1. To yield, to finally agree to what someone wants, after refusing for a period of time
2. To behave in an annoying manner towards someone by doing or asking for something repeatedly
3. To bring up, to take care of a person until they are completely grown
4. Something that you have right to do or have, or when you have the right to do or have something
5. Erroneous, inexact, which does not adjust to the truth or reality (of something)
6. The careful use of money, especially by avoiding waste
7. To spoil something, making it less perfect or less enjoyable
8. A sudden desire or idea, especially one that cannot be reasonably explained
9. Something such as food, clothing or money that is given free to someone who has a great need for it
10. To slowly reduce or destroy

4. Antonyms. Find words or expressions in the text which mean (approximately) the opposite to the following.

1. Reasonable in price, inexpensive
2. Strengthen
3. Resist
4. Strong, difficult to be physically, mentally, or emotionally hurt, influenced or attacked
5. Veiled, unclear

BLOCK II

Now read the text again and find words or expressions which mean (approximately) the same as the following.

1. A piece of paper with a price on which is fixed to a product
2. A small device or machine with a particular purpose
3. A person who is the same age or has the same social position or the same abilities as other people in a group
4. To understand something or someone, or to find the answer to something by thinking carefully
5. To pay or give money for something, especially when you do not want to
6. A lot of energetic activity
7. A shop that is one of many owned by a particular company and that sells the goods which the company has produced
8. A special and enjoyable occasion or experience
9. To avoid something intentionally
10. To supply or produce something positive such as a profit, an amount of food or information

BLOCK III

1. Study these collocates for some of the words in the text.

- ... parents who can't, or won't, **set limits**.
- ... parents have begun to **take action** by banding together ...
- Recent studies of adults who were overindulged as children **paint a** discouraging **picture** of their future.
- ... what you can do to **make a difference** in the world.
- ... and her parents **held firm**.

2. Now fill in the gaps with one of the verbs presented below. The verbs are in the base form, so change them to the correct form when necessary.

- a) achieve
- b) set
- c) give
- d) stick
- e) do
- f) cut
- g) lead
- h) get
- i) cost
- j) draw

READING PRACTICE 3

2008/09

1. The son of an American taken hostage in Saudi Arabia has begged the White House and Saudi officials to _____ a deal with al-Qaeda kidnappers who have threatened to kill his father.
2. Phil sometimes drank a few beers, but generally he knew when to _____ the line.
3. Joan also has worked hard to _____ to her budget and refrain from using credit cards.
4. Even though relatively few children _____ their goals, 69% made progress.
5. Not only is this going to _____ him a fortune, but I'm concerned that all this dental surgery may be very strenuous and demanding for him to go through.
6. Britney Spears has _____ her sights on becoming a Bond girl.
7. Last night, Samuel _____ us a hand as we loaded our equipment into the minivan.
8. Many parents require their children to _____ chores around the house.
9. The commitment had to be total. It meant leaving one's family —just as the Buddha himself had done— and _____ a life of celibacy and strict morality.
10. She's used to _____ her own way and gets upset when she doesn't.

3. Study the following structures.

- **With** school starting, the annual assault on the family budget is just beginning.
- **Despite** their good intentions, too many parents find themselves raising "wanting machines."
- Goldman knew **there was a** good **chance** (that) the iPod would soon be lost or abandoned.
- **Learning how to overcome challenges** is essential to becoming a successful adult. (Participle clause as subject of the sentence)
- Now **what about** getting me my own Apple G4?

4. Now rephrase the following sentences using one of the structures presented above.

1. Why don't we go to that new Italian restaurant, 'Michetti's'?
2. The state grants awards up to \$2,000 per teacher or \$6,000 for a team of teachers, and the money goes directly to the classroom or school program.
3. It is very likely that she'll never regain consciousness and, if she does wake up, there will probably be brain damage.
4. There are advanced technologies. However, it is still difficult for forecasters to predict exactly what a storm will do, as evidenced by Hurricane Charley.
5. If you want to be a good firefighter, you must be able to stay cool and know what to do in an emergency.