



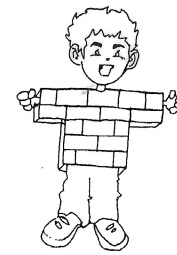
Three Kinds of Families

Brick-wall and jellyfish families, although at opposite extremes, tend to raise children who know what to think but not how to think or feel, and who lack a sense of a true self. They have neither faith in themselves nor hope for the future and are therefore at risk of damage or destruction from the three horsemen of the adolescent apocalypse: sexual promiscuity, drug abuse, and suicide. Neither family provides the structure a child can use as a backbone for developing mentally, physically, sexually, emotionally, and morally. Both families can produce children who as adults will believe themselves to be powerless and unable to live truly satisfying lives.

Backbone families are characterized not so much by what they do or don't do but how they balance the sense of self and the sense of community in all that they do. Interdependence is celebrated.

Backbone families can also be described by what they are not: they are not hierarchical, bureaucratic, or violent. Parents don't demand respect—they demonstrate and teach it. Children learn to question and challenge authority that is not life-giving. They learn that they can say no, that they can listen and be listened to, that they can be respectful and be respected themselves. Children are taught empathy and love for themselves and others. By being treated with compassion themselves they learn to be compassionate toward others, to recognize others' suffering, and to be willing to help relieve it.

The backbone family provides the consistency, firmness, and fairness as well as the calm and peaceful structure needed for children to flesh out their own sense of true self. Rather than being subjected to power expressed as control and growing up to control others, children are empowered and grow up to pass what they have learned of the potential of the human spirit on to others. Such families help children develop inner discipline, and even in the face of adversity and peer pressure, they retain faith in themselves and their own potential.



Brick-Wall Family Checklist

1. Hierarchy of control.
2. Litany of strict rules.
3. Punctuality, cleanliness, and order.
4. Rigid enforcement of rules by means of actual threatened or imagined violence.
5. Attempt to break the child's will and spirit with fear and punishment.
6. Rigid rituals and rote learning.
7. Use of humiliation.
8. Extensive use of threats and bribes.
9. Heavy reliance on competition.
10. Learning takes place in an atmosphere of fear.
11. Love is highly conditional.
12. Separate and strictly enforced roles for boys and girls.
13. Teach what to think, not how to think.
14. Risk of sexual promiscuity, drug abuse, and suicide.
15. Refuse to acknowledge the need to get help.



Jellyfish Family Checklist

1. Anarchy and chaos in the physical and emotional environment.
2. No recognizable structure, rules, and guidelines.
3. Arbitrary and instant punishments and rewards.
4. Minilectures and putdowns are tools of the trade.
5. Second chances are arbitrarily given.
6. Threats and bribes are commonplace.
7. Everything takes place in an environment of chaos.
8. Emotions rule the behaviour of parents and children.
9. Children are taught that love is highly conditional.
10. Children are easily led by their peers.
11. Risk of sexual promiscuity, drug abuse, and suicide.
12. Parents are oblivious to major family problems and fail to recognize the need to seek help.



Backbone Family Checklist

1. Parents develop for their children a network of support through six critical life messages given every day.
2. Democracy is learned through experience.
3. An environment is created that is conducive to creative, constructive, and responsible activity.
4. Rules are simple and clearly stated.
5. Consequences for irresponsible behaviour are either natural or reasonable, simple, valuable, and purposeful (RSVP).
6. Discipline is handled with authority that gives life to children's learning.
7. Children are motivated to be all they can be.
8. Children receive lots of smiles, hugs, and humour.
9. Children get second opportunities.
10. Children learn to accept their own feelings and to act responsibly on those feelings through a strong sense of self-awareness.
11. Competency and cooperation are modelled and encouraged.
12. Love is unconditional.
13. Children are taught how to think.
14. Children are buffered from sexual promiscuity, drug abuse, and suicide by the daily reinforcement of the messages that foster self-esteem:
 - I like myself
 - I can think for myself
 - There is no problem so great, it can't be solved.
15. The family is willing to seek help.



I Can Be Me

Backbone parents offer a network of support through the six critical life messages; they discipline by giving life to their kids' learning; they teach them how to think, not just what to think; they allow and encourage rebellion that is not life-threatening, morally threatening, or unhealthy. The kids say, "I can be me in this family."

An excellent way to teach the art of decision making is to let kids make decisions, guide them through the process without passing judgment, and let them grow through the results of their decisions. Mistakes and poor choices become a child's own responsibility. The hurt or discomfort arising from the choices goes away only after the child has worked out the problem constructively. By having power over the situation, the child's dignity, integrity, and self-worth are enhanced.

Since responsibility and decision making are prerequisites for self-discipline, kids need to be trusted to assume responsibilities and to be given opportunities to make critical decisions throughout their childhood. Responsibilities and decisions need to be age-appropriate and meaningful. Take a critical look at the responsibilities and decision-making opportunities you give your children at home, and check to see if you are increasing them as your kids get older. Keep the ones you need to keep as a wise and caring parent. The rest you can give to your children.

If you invite your children when they are young to express themselves by way of small rebellions, choices, and decisions, as they grow through the third age of rebellion, they will have the backbone on which to flesh out their own identity.