

Rejecting a Pre-Packaged Life

By Sandra Dodd

How many things do you do because you're supposed to? Because your relatives and neighbors expect it? Because it's easy and you don't have to think about it? How many of those things are taking you and your kids in a positive and healthy direction?

Changing paradigms is an option! If you're operating on one plane, with one set of rules and expectations, it is possible—and often advisable—to shift and see things differently. It's just thinking. It won't hurt you.

Is school the center of children's lives? Should it be?

Is the only acceptable goal of adult life having the most expensive house and furniture credit will buy?

It doesn't take much of a shift to consider house and education secondary instead of primary. What might be primary, then? Health? Joy? Togetherness and love?

Part of the pre-packaged life Americans are issued is the idea that happiness comes after college, after homeownership, after the new car. The stick that holds that carrot will not bend. If happiness depends on performance and acquisition, how long will it last? How long will your car be the newest on your street before unhappiness returns?

Here's a little paradigm shift for you to practice. Perhaps happiness shouldn't be your primary goal. Try joy. Try the idea that it might be *enjoyable* to cook, to set the table, to see your family, rather than the idea that you'll be happy after dinner's done and cleaned up. My guess is that such happiness might last a couple of seconds before you look around and see something else between

you and happiness. Joy, however, can be ongoing, and can be felt before, during and after the meeting of goals.

Enjoyment—that word itself is hardly used. Enjoyment is seen nearly as a sin by some people: "You're not here to have fun, you're here to work." Why can't work bring joy? Any tiny moment can be enjoyed: the feel of warm, running water when you wash your hands; a view of light and shadow on the floor, or pictures in the clouds; the feel of an old book. Seeing an old friend can bring pure, tingly joy for which there are no words.

If you practice noticing and experiencing joy—if you take a second out of each hour to find joy—your life will improve with each remembrance of your new primary goal. You don't need someone else to give you permission, or to decide if what gave you joy was an acceptable source of enjoyment.

Can learning be fun? If it's not fun, it won't stick. Can laundry be fun? If you have to do laundry and you choose *not* to enjoy it, an hour or more of your precious time on Earth has been wasted. Can looking at your child bring you joy, even when he needs a bath and has lost a shoe and hasn't lived up to some expectation that only exists in your mind? If not, a paradigm shift could help you both.

Your life is yours, and it is being lived even as you read this. Do not wait for approval. Do not wait for instructions, or for a proctor to say, "Open your lifebook now and write." Have all the joy you want, and help your children, neighbors and relatives find some, too. Joy doesn't cost anything but some reuseable thought and awareness. Tell your kids it's recyclable. They'll love that! ☺

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