

Jennifer Militzer-Kopperl's Notes for *Simplicity Parenting*

The book *Simplicity Parenting: Using the Extraordinary Power of Less to Raise Calmer, Happier, and More Secure Kids* by Kim John Payne contains phenomenal information that could be life-changing for many students and families. However, the book's organization makes the material difficult to access at times.

For those parents and teachers who appreciate a more linear approach to simplifying, I offer my notes on the book. The broad categories remain the same, but I have reorganized the material within the categories and arranged the presentation.

Overview

Some children are stressed out over facets of modern life, leading them to engage in behavior that looks like ADHD, Conduct Disorder, Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, etc. In reality, these children are often just slightly quirky; the stress they experience pushes them over the edge. Payne has found that 68% of children who are diagnosed with ADHD, etc. improve so significantly that they no longer qualify for a diagnosis if they are put on a simplicity plan.

The process of simplifying also helps the family, especially the parents. It allows them to create the kind of home life they want and allows them to back away from the pressures and stresses of modern parenting. Many marriages improve in the process. Couples gain a mutual sense of purpose and accomplishment as they move through the process of simplifying together.

Process

There are four broad areas to simplify. Parents who are interested in simplifying are asked to start with the area that seems the most do-able.

The four areas are:

1. Simplify the environment (books, toys etc)—Chapter 3
2. Simplify meal times, food, and sleep—Chapter 4
3. Simplify the schedules—Chapter 5
4. Simplify information—Chapter 6

Simplification is a chance to connect with what you value and to bring those ideals into your home. There are lovely, provocative imaginings at the end of each chapter to help you create a mental picture of what you would like to accomplish in each area. Start with those questions to become enthusiastic about what could be and use the suggestions and notes I have compiled from Payne to determine how you will make manifest what you have imagined.

Start small, with the one that seems most do-able or that seems to provide the most benefit for the amount of effort you'll put in. Be inspired by your success.

The Four Areas of Simplification

Simplicity Parenting Area One: Simplify the Environment

This usually refers to the child's room, but it can refer to other rooms as well, or the entire house. The child's room is a good starting point for simplifying the environment.

Here's a fun picture of what we hope to achieve: a sense of order and space, restful to the senses, room to move and play, beloved toys in sight/rest out of sight, a few beloved books on a shelf with 1 or 2 current books, restful place to sleep with no light and natural smells. A child happily playing in this space with toys that allow him or her to direct the play rather than Hollywood. A simple clean-up with a moveable toy chest. The child putting away the toys in 5 minutes or less.

Here are the steps for achieving a simplified space.

Step One: Go to page 93 and do the imagining prompts. This is to inspire you and to guide you in what you hope to achieve. This will give you the strength to start and will help you finish the task you set for yourself.

Step Two: Get rid of most of a child's toys and put the rest into a toy library. Cycle toys in and out of a child's room on a regular basis (once a month or every 6 weeks).

Guidelines for which toys to get rid of (pp. 69 – 72):

1. Broken toys
2. Developmentally inappropriate toys (If a child has outgrown a toy or is waiting to grow into a toy, get it out of his/her room. Store it, donate it, or toss it.)
3. Conceptually "fixed" toys—franchised toys being key.
4. Toys that do too much and break too easily
5. High Stimulation toys should go—Buzzes, beeps, flashing lights = bad.
6. Annoying or offensive toys—if you hate it, get rid of it.
7. Toys that claim to give your child a developmental edge
8. Toys you are pressured to buy
9. Toys that inspire corrosive play—this is a you-know-it-when-you-see-it thing.
10. Toy multiples—get rid of excessive duplicates of the same toy.

Keep the few toys that your child loves. You know what they are. Have them be on display in the child's room, ready for action.

[Mr. Payne did not say it, but if you are truly unsure, put the toy in a sealed box. Date it 6 months into the future. If the child never requested the toy, get rid of it. Do not even open the box.]

Good Suggestions:

- Do this when the child is not around.
- Halve the toy pile in one session. Then halve it again. And again if necessary.
- To avoid hurt feelings from relatives, put toys from them in a special tub and store it away from the child's room. Pull out the toy when the relative is visiting, and put it away once they leave. Be sure to label the tub for ease of retrieval.

Step Three: Reorganize the remaining toys

Put the toys into two classes: toys to be kept in the room and toys for the toy library.

Suggestions for the toys in the room:

- Keep a small number of toys at hand and visible at any time. Keep them low—at a child's level. Put the rest accessible but not visible in storage baskets or bins. (Ex. under the bed.) Goal: get rid of visible clutter.
- How do you know how many toys to have out at one time? The number a child can put away in 5 minutes by himself or herself. That makes cleanup and transitions easier.
- Have a movable tub or basket for storing the toys. It makes cleanup much easier for the child.
- Keep like toys with like toys in the storage tubs/baskets. It makes it easier for children to find what they want to play with and prevents more clutter from occurring when children dump out a bin

Suggestions for the toy library:

- Refreshen a child's stock of toys by cycling them in and out of a toy library.
- For every toy you bring in to the child's room, another must leave and go into the toy library.

Step Four: Simplified Play

What children need is unstructured time to play. Give them time and space to play. That's more important than the physical toys. That said, here are some suggestions for toys to add to the child's room/library.

Guidelines for choosing toys to add to your children's room/library:

- Touch
 - use natural materials for indoor toys (outdoors—nature provides!)

- suggestions: rattles, nesting cubes, cloth dolls, silks and scarves, heavy woolen blankets and cloaks, beeswax, clay, a basket of smooth pebbles, wooden blocks, gnarled roots and sticks, beanbags
- play kitchen toys for helping in the kitchen and play garden tools for helping outside (see pp. 78 – 79 for ideas)
- the toy should be real (real hammer vs. plastic hammer)
- Imaginary play
 - get stuff that is flexible, that can be used in the service of an idea or fantasy
 - costumes and dress-up clothes are great, but keep it simple so children can imagine into them (no fixed princess costumes). Better to have cloths that can become many things (skirts, cloaks, blankets, etc.)
- Experience
 - stuff that gets them out in the world and the four elements
 - good toys: buckets, nets, shovels and kites, scoops, bubbles, baskets, and containers for pouring and collecting
- Purpose and industry
 - Make the kids part of the industry of the house
 - tools for housework: small broom, dustpan, dust cloth, pet feeding, cooking, or laundry tools
- Nature
 - Yard time—have the child explore his/her own backyard in depth—through the year.
 - Park time
 - Empty lot time
 - Child needs his/her own special place
 - Summer forts—tree or cloth—are great in the yard
- Social interaction
 - engaging with family and friends
- Movement
 - Rough and tumble play
 - Good toys: bikes, balls, skates, swings, scooters, climbing ropes, jump ropes, play structures, tunnels, balance beams, hula hoops, basketball hoops, blocks, trucks, construction toys, sleds, snowshoes, marble runs, hopscotch, foursquare
- Art and Music
 - big pad of paper, sturdy crayons, pencils, paints, modeling medium like beeswax, clay, or Play-Doh, fabric, scissors, glue, and a space for art.
 - Whittling, knitting, beadwork, sewing, woodwork, candlemaking, paper mache, ceramics
 - Music—wooden rattles, egg shakers, drums, bells, pennywhistles, harmonicas, recorders, lap harps, rain sticks, thunder shakers
- Books
 - ages 8 – 9 = 1 – 2 books accessible with a dozen or fewer beloved books having a permanent place in the room on a bookshelf

- goal: time to read, not a thousand things to read
- how to evaluate the books:
 - is it developmentally appropriate
 - Is it based on a product or TV character?
 - Does it tell an unfolding story or is it all over the place?
 - The play it inspires—is it fun or corrosive?

Step Five: Simplified Physical Space

- Clothes in wardrobe and dresser
 - Reduce the number of clothes available to the child
 - The clothes in the closet should all fit.
 - They should all be seasonally appropriate
- Scent/lighting: get rid of perfumes and chemical smells in the child's room
- Sounds: soften and simplify the acoustics in the house before age 8 (rugs, etc.)
- Light:
 - have candle time once a day
 - get rid of extra lights (night lights) so children can sleep deeply
 - close the curtain—is the room nice and dark?

Provocative thought: A lack of exercise is often the issue when kids can't sleep, but a lack of creative expression can make sleep difficult.

Simplicity Parenting Area Two: Simplify meal times, food, and sleep

Before you begin, go to page 133 and do the imagining prompts. Let them inspire you. Imagine a good rhythm for your household, child, and self.

Two ways to benefit: rhythm and predictability

1) Rhythm

Overview: There are many rhythms: daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly. Look for ways to make the day predictable and certain and add a bit of ritual to those events. Make regularity and consistency in what you do together as a family.

Caveat: not all activities done regularly constitute a sense of rhythm. Things can be scheduled and dead. The value of rhythm is in the intention behind it. Ask these questions to check:

- Would this make life easier, more balanced?
- Will this help with what we need to do?
- Will this contribute to the way we want to live?

Benefits of establishing rhythm

- It makes the child feel safe and the adults calmer
- It makes discipline easier—when rhythms are set, fewer words are needed, and there is less struggle around transitions
- Islands of consistency throughout the day help keep the child flexible. Being constantly on the go can result in amygdale hijack (quick reactions, no ability to think things through or be flexible)
- If school day lacks enough out-breath times (recess, art, gym, etc.), rhythm at home becomes more important.
- It establishes trust and gives children a sense of order. It also offers connection. (As a family, you do things together.) And it gives you times when the child can check in with you.
- Relationships are forged in pauses.
- You have relationship credits (relational credits) in the bank for when the child is a teenager. The connection you forge with the child during the pauses and down times you have made during the day can help you through the teen years. Also, if rhythms have been set since the child was young, they are just how you do things in your family (less opportunity for arguments).
- Having shared time together gives children a chance to share their real problems with a parent who is available.
- Kids who eat with their families do better in school, eat better, build vocabulary, are less likely to smoke/drink/do drugs/suffer from depression, asthma, or eating disorders
- Fights with children decreased—ex. children who assert control by limiting what they will eat.
- Sitting at table with the family teaches social skills and impulse control. No one leaves until everyone is finished. Basic etiquette is observed. Things are passed.

Suggestions of times that can be made more rhythmical:

- Meals and bedtimes
 - observe a moment of silence before dinner: prayer, candle, silence.
 - Thank the cook, farmer, etc.
 - At Christmas time, choose a card and remember the person who sent it
- tooth-brushing
- waking up—
 - sing or hum to a young child in bed before getting up
 - give the child a tray with quiet things to do before the rest of the household gets up
- dressing
 - scarecrow of outfit for the next day—use a hanger to lay out the next day’s outfit
 - benefit: less choice/less conflict around what to wear
- Breakfast
 - preview the day—walk the child through the day
 - sit at table and listen to the child
- Musical practice--set up practice time. After breakfast can be ideal. It’s out of the way and it can calm a grumpy child down. It can get kids into the limbic system of the brain.
- To get kids out the door in the morning, have a chore right before the kids need to leave. Then the call of “Come on, let’s go” is more welcome.
- After school—
 - leave time for free time after school. Open, self-directed play is a nice balance to the rules and schedules of school.
- Books every night after dinner
- Favorite things at dinner—something they saw or did that was special or stood out. Bonus: parents can affirm something a child did. (Ex. “You cleaned up your play space without arguing. That was so helpful.”)
- Everyone helps with cleanup after dinner.
- After dinner, involve everyone in the cleanup is a way to transition to the evening rhythms and activities

How to Establish Rhythm

- Two ways to begin:
 - look for the small things that are in common each day
 - find the difficult moments of the day and bring rhythm to them (ex. transitions—leaving home in the AM)
- Always start small. Choose basic activities that can be made more consistent and work up from there. Go slowly.
- For younger children:

- Start when the children are 2 – 6 and they'll soak it up naturally. With a few weeks of supervision, they can go on autopilot. Follow these steps: start small, stay close, insist, and follow through
- Use melody (especially for kids 5 or under)—ex. soap song for washing hands
- For older children
 - It takes about a month
 - 7 and up—no musical delivery
 - Follow these steps: start small, stay close, insist, and follow through
 - Start small—something that will be pleasant or help the child in some way (ex. hanging up backpack when they come home from school). Once the benefit is seen (or can be pointed out), make something else more rhythmical
 - Discuss the change beforehand and consult with child about best way to adopt it. Do not plead, keep it short.
- The magic is in the process
 - ex. A child who helps prepare a meal is more likely to eat it
 - involve the child in some way—ex. set the table, help with meal prep, etc.

How to Simplify Food

- Reasons to simplify
 - food additives, sugar and caffeine are the enemies of rhythm
 - As parents simplify, their kids became less and less picky about food.
- Get rid of processed foods.
 - limit choices and complexity
 - simplify the number of food options available to the kids
 - simplify the tastes and ingredients of those options by avoiding highly processed and sweetened foods
- Questions while shopping
 - Is this food designed to nourish or to entertain or stimulate?
 - Is this food designed or was it grown or raised?
 - Did it exist 50 years ago?
 - Can you identify or pronounce its ingredients?
- Helpful things to know
 - It takes about a month to clean your child's palate of big-hit flavors.
 - If you want your kids to adopt a new food, you need to have them try it at least 8 times
- How to do it

- To wean off of sodas, create a soda fountain at home with seltzer water and juices. You can start with really sweet concoctions and then back off the sugar.
- If you choose to do this, commit to it. Don't present it as an experiment or interesting learning experience. Let the kids know this is the way it is and the way it will now be.
- To simplify dinner, consider having dinner correspond with the day of the week (Pasta Mondays, Soup Wednesdays, etc.)
 - it helps family dinner to actually happen because the menu is already decided, groceries are easier to buy, the fridge is already stocked, etc.
 - It's good for kids to realize that their personal preferences do not rule the day.
 - Eating out becomes a treat.
- Consider making multiple meals at once and freezing them.
- For teens who want out of family dinner, consider making extra so their friends can come over for dinner

How to Simplify Sleep:

- Why simplify sleep:
 - Not enough and self esteem is affected
 - Not enough also makes children reactive and unable to approach new things or changing circumstances
 - Even one hour too little sleep can make a 6th grader behave and learn like a 4th grader
 - Neural networks are developed and pruned during sleep
- How much sleep does Payne recommend? [NB: I do not necessarily agree with his recommendations here. I have seen kids who, to my mind, get too much sleep. They tend to behave as if they were years younger. Observe for yourself and adjust accordingly. I would suggest you see if your child has difficulty falling asleep or staying awake. Either one could suggest an imbalance in the amount of sleep the child is getting. Play with it and see if the situation improves.]
 - 2 – 6 years: 11 hours of sleep
 - 6 – 11: 10 hours of sleep works for some kids
 - teen years: up to 11 – 12 hours of sleep
- Sleep issues often stem from problems with anxiety and trust—kids need a greater feeling of connectedness to fall asleep
- unpack the day with your child
 - ask child open ended questions about his/her day as the child gets ready for bed (ex. What was a good thing, a courageous thing about today?)
 - Parent's response is minimal (no psychoanalysis or fixes or judgments. Just listen and notice.)
 - Then ask about the next day
- Create pressure valves during the day to release stress (2 – 4)

- naps for babies and toddlers; 30 minutes – 1 hour of calm in the middle of the day for kids up to 8 – 9 years (on weekends and holidays) (kids older than 6 won't nap unless they are really tired)
- after-school ritual—ex. snack
- moment of silence before dinner (start at 10 seconds, work up to 1 minute)
- work or projects a kid can lose self in
 - hauling rocks
 - digging
 - a hobby
 - a sport
- light a candle at some point during the day and let a child snuff it out
- bedtime stories
- Bedtime Stories
 - Fairy tales are great—lifetime archetypal lessons
 - Don't be afraid to tell the same stories again and again, especially for younger children
 - Family stories
 - Stories offer security and connection
 - Stories can help children through difficult times—a protagonist in a scary situation who finds a way out
 - Story is a way to tell children truths, indirectly.
- Bed Time Tips
 - bedtime should be inviolable—it happens within 20 minutes of the set time (10 minutes early or 10 minutes late)
 - Keep the same time for weekends and weeknights; otherwise, it is like jet lag.
 - Sleep before midnight is worth more than sleep after midnight—deeper sleep happens earlier in the night

2) Predictability

Use predictability to help when the rhythm is going to change or when more than one outcome is possible. The goal is that the child is not caught by surprise.

Suggestions:

- Advanced notice to transitions—Ex. “In a few minutes, you'll need to clean up. Then we'll go pick up Daddy.”—esp. good for toddlers
- Family meetings to wrap up the week—especially good for older children/teens
 - Pick a set time (ex. after Sunday dinner)
 - Review the last week—what worked and didn't work
 - Preview the upcoming week—review logistics of who goes where, when and how they will get there
- Be polite in the home

Simplicity Parenting Area Three: Simplifying Schedules

Before you begin, go to page 162 and do the imagine prompts. Imagine what you would like and let yourself be inspired by what you would like to accomplish.

Overview: Payne does not use this explanation, but it is a good idea to put his ideas into a larger context. Essentially, he is arguing for a type of parenting called “accomplishment of natural growth” rather than “concerted cultivation.”

Sociologist Annette Lareau studied parenting style and found that there were two philosophies, and they divided along class lines. The wealthier parents raised their children one way, and the poorer parents raised their kids another way. The wealthier parents used “concerted cultivation.” It is “an attempt to actively “foster and assess a child’s talents, opinions and skills.” Poor parents tend to follow, by contrast, a strategy of “accomplishment of natural growth.” They see as their responsibility to care for their children but to let them grow and develop on their own.” (Outliers: The Story of Success by Malcolm Gladwell page 104) Neither way is considered better, but they do yield different outcomes. See Gladwell for a fuller explanation if interested.

Payne believes that many children are overscheduled. They have too many extra-curricular activities. They may enjoy what they are doing, but Payne argues that they need free, unstructured time. His goal is to find a healthy balance between the structured and unstructured.

Why simplify the schedule?

- The main reason is to restore balance into the child’s life and the family’s life.
- Payne uses a western, agricultural analogy. (Incidentally, this analogy has been around for quite some time. It influenced American and European educational systems, but not Asian ones. It is one of the underlying reasons for differences in how the East and the West approach education. See Outliers for a full discussion. It’s fascinating.) In a nutshell, he compares kids to fields. Just as fields do better with crop rotation and fallow time, Payne says children do better with less controlled schedules. They need leisure and rest.
- Children who have this down time have an opportunity for deep, creative play. They can connect with what they are doing, and with who they are. It allows them to develop their creativity.
- Most kids are not going to grow up to be exceptional; instead we want them to enjoy their experiences. Goal: to get the kids to love something for its own sake, not for its potential in fame, glory, scholarships, etc.
- Too much, too young can burn a child out on an activity that should be fun and can make the child wish to quit sports as s/he approaches adolescence, just when the structure and rigors of organized sports have so much to offer in the child’s quest for individuality, independence, and maturity
- Too much sport too young can impede a child’s emotional/physical growth that occurs through play. Children can miss key developmental stages of play

- Having a child or two in 1 – 2 different sports can mess up a family schedule because it can start to revolve around sports needs.

Benefits for the Parents:

- Parents' lives improve when they reduce the complexity of the child's schedule.
 - Less driving!
 - Less planning!
- Parents get more free time
- Tensions decrease. (No more, "Hurry up! We're late for soccer!" every night of the week.)
- Parents no longer feel responsible to entertain the kids when they are bored. It is not the parents' problem but the child's.
- Parents benefit from being "off call" when they schedule times when they cannot be reached by cell or email and are just with their family.
- Parents are off the hook to deliver "exceptional" days and to make their kids' childhood full of magical rainbows, etc.

Benefits for the Child:

- The gift of boredom—i.e. boredom is the precursor to creativity. When children are bored, they have to figure out how to amuse themselves, and voila! They do.
- Kids benefit when they get their parents' full attention (rather than have the parents surreptitiously checking the BlackBerry).
- Anticipation
 - by not doing everything, children get to anticipate
 - anticipation helps child build identity and character—the child is stronger than his/her desire
 - it strengthens a child's will to anticipate gratification rather than expecting or demanding it
- Addiction--children who are overscheduled may be more prone to addiction, to seeking reliance on outer stimulation, compulsion, and instant gratification
- Kids learn to appreciate the everyday, the ordinary.
- By avoiding the overextended sports schedule, the kids avoid overuse injuries that result in specialization in one sport at an early age and year-round training.
- You can help the child avoid burn out in a sport.

Organized sports vs. Unstructured play

- It's not either/or.

- Play:
 - children negotiate the rules
 - learn the social process
 - figure out what they need by using mental picturing
 - has a multiplicity of outcomes
 - builds mental flexibility
 - child has to actively problem solve and take others' feelings into account
 - varies over the long haul
 - uses a broader base of movements
 - is portable
 - allows children to build their worldview
 - builds multiple and emotional intelligences
- Sports
 - in teen years, it can pull children out of their normal self-involvement

How to simplify the schedule:

- First step: awareness
 - of the importance of time to play and play didn't used to be a scheduled "playdate."
 - of the need for a balance between arousing activities and calming down time
 - of the child's needs. (Is this activity too much for him or her?)
- Realize it is up to the parents to impose balance. Kids cannot and should not be asked to do it themselves.
- Honor the importance of unscheduled time—of kids doing "nothing" but on their time and terms—and get out of the way.
- Open up the schedules so free afternoons can happen. Get rid of some of the child's scheduled activities.
- Schedule periods of boredom. Ex. 3 times a day, preferably before meals.
- Do not give in to "Mom/Dad, I'm bored." Do not try to entertain the child or suggest things the child could do. Do not be your child's entertainment committee. When they complain they are bored, do not solve it.
 - Be even more boring. Say, "Hmm." and nothing more. Or "Something to do is right around the corner." They will get bored of you and go off on their own.
 - Or...give the child a chore to do when s/he claims boredom and that there is nothing to do. [NB—my mom did that to me and my brother growing up. We NEVER told her we were bored again. We also policed our friends. Her boring chore was to pick gummy pricing stickers off of metallic shelving brackets in a stuffy room with no AC. All we could use was our fingernails. We could not leave until we were done. It was what she was doing when we claimed we were bored. She told us she would teach us what true boredom was. She did. I highly recommend this approach.].

- Balance the child's schedule so that hectic days are moderated by calm days. There is nothing wrong with stimulation. It's a good thing. It just needs to be balanced out so it is not overstimulation. Here's how you do it.
 - First, grade the days. Here's the formula: A = very busy, active; C = laid-back, calm (B= average day)
 - Every A day gets 2 C days after it.
 - A Triple A day needs 3 C days (either surrounding the AAA day or after the AAA day)
- Schedule Sabbath moments
 - If possible, schedule a day of the week that is slower, quieter than the rest. A family day.
 - If not possible to do a whole day, then schedule moments where you as an adult cannot be reached. No cell phone, emails, etc. These are distraction-free zone times.
 - Suggestions
 - Turn off the answering machine.
 - Stop checking emails after dinner and allow the dinner mood to morph into the evening mood and then the bedtime mood (it's easier to get the kids to sleep)
 - Read for 20 – 30 minutes in the evening. Kids see it and often get their books too. (Of course, have the TV off. Reading time is unplugged time.)
- For kids younger than 8 – 9 years, emphasize free play over organized sports and martial arts. Take the kids to the park and be a benign parental presence.
- One solution to sports scheduling:
 - kids 12 and up were able to choose 2 sports for the year, one major, one minor but had to take one whole season off
 - each child must research and network car-pool possibilities for their sport's season
- Schedule a break into days that are hectic. When there is too much activity, some kids act out. Honor the fact that they are overloaded. Get them away from the activity to restore some balance. It also gives the child a feeling of control.

Simplicity Parenting Area Four: Filtering Out the Adult World

Before you begin, go to page 203 and do the imagine prompts. Imagine what you would like to accomplish and gain enthusiasm before you begin the steps to create it.

Overview: Payne has two main concerns: 1) filtering out the anxieties of adult life and 2) creating a base camp of security so parents can stop the helicopter parenting and children can venture out to explore the world. He suggests parents tame TV and other screen time.

Screen = TV, computers, video games, handheld electronic devices: cell phones, iPads

Why TV is so bad

- It is designed to sell products. It is a conduit of clutter and will undermine simplifying.
- Kids who watch want the latest new things (toy, clothes, whatever).
- Kids see advertisements for sugary snacks or pseudo-food and want these foods
- It can disrupt family dinner.
- It uses up kids' free time.

Why you should simplify screens

- It'll make you more balanced as a parent, more than any other step. (Goodbye sensationalism, fearmongering, and violence.)
- Once you do decide to do it, it is one of the most critical changes you can make to safeguard childhood and ease your anxieties. It is also one of the most rewarding ways to simplify daily life.
- It's not as hard as you think it will be.
- TV provides no critical forms of interaction needed by babies for optimal brain growth (interaction with other humans, manipulation of their environment, problem solving activities such as peekaboo)
- American Academy of Pediatrics recommends no TV for children under two years of age and limited viewing for those over two.
- It fosters passivity, slow language acquisition, over-excitedness, troubles with sleep and concentration, dependence on screens
- After viewing, kids and adults have more difficulty concentrating.
- TV uses the orienting reflex to capture child's attention. Brain focuses on unexplained phenomena to determine if they are threats.
- TV Violence/Video game violence—it increases aggressive attitudes, values and behavior in children, especially in younger children who cannot differentiate between reality and fantasy (6/7 years old and younger).
- It's easier to get rid of the TV than it is to monitor it.
- Getting rid of the TV will almost double your family's free time.

- For young children, their brains cannot sensor out sensory input. Adults need to modify their environment to filter it.
- If parents reduce their exposure to media and media news, they can relax more. Home environment improves too.

How to simplify screens

- This is not the place to start, especially if you are an inveterate new junkie or if screens are everywhere in your house.
- Suggestion: if the kids are under 7 years of age, get rid of TV (or the child's ability to watch it, ever). Also, no computer time for this age group.
- Expect withdrawal period to be 2 – 3 weeks.
- At least make sure there is no TV in a child's bedroom.
- Put TV and computers out of communal family rooms and into a den or parents' bedroom.
- Consider TV holidays of a week or weekend

Base Camp—develop a place of safety (home environment, schedules, family identity, etc.) for child so s/he can go off into the world

- Trust/mistrust is part of child development.
 - If mistrust wins, child has these problems:
 - difficulty forming attachments
 - difficulty empathizing with others
 - clinginess and anxiety
 - chronically elevated levels of stress hormone cortisol.
 - Consequences: impairs learning.
 - If trust wins, the child:
 - can regulate emotions
 - is better able to learn
 - develop will, sense of self, and independence
- Parents' can also have trust issues
 - in their own instincts
 - in being overprotective
 - they can become helicopter parents (over-involved parents)

Helicopter Parenting

- Technology blurs the lines. Cell phones (umbilical cords), GPS, email, texting, etc. allows parents to be in constant communication and aware of child's every move, even on line.
- Types of helicopter parenting
 - sportscasters—blow by blow narration of everything a child sees, does, etc.
 - corporate parent—launching child into world = bottom line; parent helps child package self for the world

- little buddy/ best friend parent—no separation between adult world and child’s world. Kids overinvolved in decisions. Parent tries to avoid the word “no.” Parent either wants the child to be an adult or wants to be a child again. More equal, friendship-based relationship.
- clown parent—entertains child with larger than life experiences. Child gets disappointed with real life, parent is exhausted.

How to avoid helicopter parenting

#1: Talk less

- Why to do it
 - talking too much interferes with child’s ability to focus on what they are doing
 - children tune you out if you talk all the time.
- example with child’s art:
 - look and hand it back
 - if you must talk
 - make one observation without judgment or praise
 - ask a simple question
- Don’t make every moment a teaching moment or special moment
- Ways to avoid verbal clutter
 - be aware of the adult world and the child world in conversation. Some topics are for adults only. (Concerns about politics, environment, etc. in addition to sex, divorce, etc.)
 - do not disrespect political figures in child’s hearing to avoid the child disrespecting authority figures in his/her life (ex. teacher)
 - don’t use child as a sounding board or sympathetic ear
- Balance information with doing. (Child does something if concerned about the rainforest or pollution.)
- Be aware of the emotion running through your words and of your actions—they both speak louder than the words.
- Speak with respect to all others
- Filters for talking less—before you say anything, ask yourself these three questions: (Also, model them in your home.)
 - Is it true? (No gossip, hearsay, etc.)
 - Is it kind? (No put downs. No judgments, names, characterizations, “you always and you are so…”)
 - Is it necessary? (i.e. is it more important than silence.)
 - kids listen more when you say less
 - listen to the kids when what they say is necessary (sharing about a ladybug = good; listening to kids beg for a toy when you said no twice = bad)
- Give children short direct directions. Do not use requests. Do not end with “OK?”. (“Put your shoes and backpack away” not “Would you please put away your shoes and backpack?” or “Put your shoes and backpack away, ok?”)

- [Feel free to say “enough” or “stop.” Set boundaries. I can’t remember if Payne highlighted this point, but if not, I will.]

#2) Parents should work together

- If one parent is over involved, often the other is under involved (although sometimes there are two overinvolved parents)
- Overinvolved parent tends to be the mother. Solution: dad steps up
 - make small, practical steps
 - great beginning spots: kitchen counter or bathtub
 - dads should take on more of the daily responsibilities
 - ex. making lunches, bath time
 - make some areas exclusively dad’s—he’s not helping—this is his area and child knows to go to him
 - there can be no requests or reminders—dad has to step up and do it, consistently, every time, every day
 - accept that both parents will feel some discomfort initially
 - accept that he will do it differently, and that’s ok
 - accept that dad may feel inadequate at first
 - realign standards

#3) Less Emotional Monitoring

- Children under nine have unconscious, undifferentiated feelings most of the time. Do not ask them to analyze their feelings. It pushes them into premature adolescence.
- Do not hover emotionally.
 - allow child more leeway and privacy with their own feelings
 - let them express what they want to express without constantly asking them how they feel
 - be willing to listen and kids will share when there is a problem
 - allow kids to put bad feeling right by doing something (draw a picture, dig a hole, make something)

#4) Meditation to do right before sleep—remember the ordinary moments of the day with your children that meant something to you. Relive those moments. Imagine them. Feel the emotion. Fall asleep in appreciation and wonder.

Conclusion: There is much you can do to help your child and to bring your life into harmony with your ideals. Start small. Follow your enthusiasm. Know that there is help if you need it. Join or create a Simplicity Parenting support group.

Happy simplifying.