



## Good Teens Start With Good Beans

If raising kids was like making coffee; the choice of parental partners would be like choosing the selection of coffee beans; pregnancy would be like the care that goes into roasting the coffee; the first few years of family life would be like choosing the style of coffee maker; ages 6 to 12 would be like the brewing stage; and finally, the teen would be like the coffee in the pot.

When choosing a parental partner, like choosing coffee beans, choice is everything. You can go with a single make of bean or a blend. Some blends work more easily together than others. If the blend is complex, then more attention may be required when roasting or at the other stages of the production process. The point is not to necessarily avoid the blend, but to plan in advance for the differences in production that may be necessary to accommodate the blend. (In reality all parental partners represent a blend.)

In the past, most coffee was percolated. However, now we know that percolators, a automatic drip, French press, espresso machines, and more, can make good coffee. Each style of coffee maker yields a slightly different flavour, even if the selection of beans remains the same. Further, each coffee maker requires a different set of instructions. So too with raising kids. Depending on family circumstance, different care or procedures may be necessary to develop healthy well-adjusted teens. Children from underserved areas or financially burdened situations may need extra attention from school or social services to compensate for other hardships or deficiencies. Meanwhile, children from privileged situations may need help to gain a greater sense of community responsibility and awareness of those less fortunate than themselves – so as not to become over-flavoured in the end.

The brewing stage, like kids 6 to 12 years old, is when most folks step back and let the machine do its thing. So what ever is in place by this age sets the tone as the machine churns away. The beans were long since collected and roasted and the coffee is now in the particular roaster. All subsequent activities, events etc., are thus carried out within the context of the bean, the roast and the coffee maker. Knowing the choice of beans, how they were roasted and the kind of coffee maker, we can predict the end flavour of the coffee.

If for whatever reasons, there is a problem with the production process, different corrections can be made at any stage to still yield a favourable end result. However, depending on the stage of production, only certain corrective options are available. You cannot “unselect” coffee beans, nor can you “unroast” them. However, during the roasting process, some corrections can be made, much like opportunities of in-utero procedures to correct medical or physical conditions. If the coffee is brewing, but the coffeemaker is not working properly, you can look into getting it fixed, or even changing roasters mid brew. Either way, things will hopefully be better, but you have to know the final brew may never be quite the same. The experience will shape the taste of the coffee. If there is parental conflict or other social problems, the situation can be repaired or changed, yet some effect may remain with the children. The goal is to now improve a situation that was proving to be harmful or at least proving to not fulfill the potential of the child.

By the time the coffee is in the pot, there are fewer corrective options available. If the brew is bitter, sugar may be added, if too strong, perhaps milk. But, the basic flavour remains. It is most difficult to tinker with coffee once it is in the pot as compared to making changes along the way.

The moral of the coffee story is this: Good teens start with good beans. Consider all aspects of the production process, or in childcare terms, the developmental needs of your kids. Do so and you will have a better likelihood of well-adjusted teens. If problems occur, take corrective measures as early as possible. It's never too late to intervene, but early interventions make for better outcomes.

Gary Drenfeld, MSW, RSW  
(905) 628-4847  
gary@yoursocialworker.com  
www.yoursocialworker.com

Gary Drenfeld is a social worker. Courts in Ontario, Canada, consider him an expert on child development, parent-child relations, marital and family therapy, custody and access recommendations, social work and an expert for the purpose of giving a critique on a Section 112 (social work) report. Call him for your next conference and for expert opinion on family matters. Services include counselling, mediation, assessment, assessment critiques and workshops.