

## Notes for Keynote 2: Sending Our Children into the Future

True North is the tenth in my list of the ten essential signs of a fully functioning moral compass.

### 10. **Love**

Not because love is the least on the list but because it's the force that energizes all the others and holds them together. "The greatest of these is love" (1 Corinthians 13).

What, then, is love?

The answer is not so much *what* as *who*. "God is love," says the apostle John (1 John 4:16). Love is the Creator and Source of life. Jesus is Love in the flesh, Love incarnate, Love in person. And because we're created in the image of God, we recognize love in Jesus. We see love in the way he treated people, in what he did and how he spoke.

Senator Cory Booker, in an *On Being* interview (7/29/18), said that love is "I see your value." Love means we don't close our eyes, we don't turn away, we CARE: Compassion And Respect for Everyone. It's what Jesus did. But that's not where we are when we're born. So how do we get there?

Here's an overview based on research detailed by John C. Gibbs in his book *Moral Development and Reality*, where in addition to his own research, he draws on the research of Lawrence Kohlberg and Martin Hoffman, among others.

#### Stage 0:

1. **Newborn:** reactive cry (they cry, reacting to the fact that they hear crying)
2. **Six-month-olds+:** when others seem distressed, they comfort themselves
3. **One year +:** comforts others...because of *self* (you are upsetting me)

#### Stage 1:

2's and 3's: self-centered morality

"What's right? To get my own way." (Dr. Thomas Lickona)

4's and 5's: rule-dependent morality

"What's right? To do what I'm told to do."

#### Stage 2:

6 – 9: basic equality – an eye for an eye

"What's right? To be fair to people who are fair to me."

9 – 17: ideal Golden Rule reciprocity

- "What's right? To be nice so others will think well of me and I can think well of myself."

- Moving to "What's right? Whatever is good for the group."

### **Stage 3: Mutual Trust, Intimate Sharing** (17-39 years)

At this point, some people become Type A's, some become Type B's.

Type A: My Social Network

- moral judgments are based on current social norms

Type B: Global Network

- moral judgments are based on "what ought to be"
- develop a personal moral identity

### **Stage 4: The Common Good, Systematized** (built into a system, institution, community)

Type A: My Social Network

- depend on fixed responsibilities or authority/law

Type B: Global Network

- feel responsible to contribute to a *better* society
- believe in the idea of *moral* law
- act from a personal moral identity

**Postconventional** - "The final stages have been found to be rare." - Gibbs

*Prosocial behavior*: benefit others without personal reward, possibly at a personal cost.

When I teach on morality, I trace the stages of morality alongside the stages of physical, mental, and emotional development, but there's one major difference in two models. While everyone goes through each stage of human development, people don't necessarily move through all stages of moral development. In fact, it's possible to revert to a previous stage, at least for a while, or even to get stuck and not move beyond "What's right? To get my own way."

### **Stage 5: Principled Perspective**

- feel a social obligation
- believe in universal or natural rights
- adhere to a global theory of morality

### **Stage 6: Philosophical Perspective** (thought driven)

- see moral complexity
- make universal moral judgments based on deep thought

### **Stage 7: Cosmic Perspective** (action driven)

- value life from a cosmic, universal standpoint
- see a deeper reality with love as the key
- are quick to understand and forgive
- value the humanity of everyone
- dedicate their lives to humanitarian deeds
- demonstrate self-sacrifice

( like Gandhi, Mother Theresa, Jesus)

Through his research on morality, Lawrence Kohlberg came to the conclusion that we can nudge children to think beyond the stage they are in – but only one stage beyond.

So how do we nudge children to grow in moral wisdom? How do we help them find and use their inner moral compass?

### 1. Speak to be Echoed, Act to be Copied

Children learn what adults do by watching and listening to adults. What does a grown-up do when they're angry? Sad? Frustrated? Worried? Happy? We can teach all the lessons in the world, we can preach until we lose our voices, we can construct a million activities to teach morality, but if we're not living what we teach, all those lessons will lose their meaning.

### 2. Teach the Importance of Small Acts

The mental, emotional, and spiritual muscle needed to make major moral choices – and make them wisely – rarely just appears the moment we need it. That strength develops through exercising our moral muscle many times a day through a thousand small acts: good manners, small tasks that make classroom run smoothly as everyone pitches in, compromise (you give up a little, the other person gives up a little), and making a habit of asking, "Who can we help today? Who could we make one for? Who needs a kind word?"

### 3. Teach the Whys

Dr. Daniel Siegel, writing about the teen brain, said, "Choosing not to get a tattoo at an unknown place because you value your health is very different from saying 'I won't do it because my mother told me not to.'" If the reason to behave is "because I said so," then the child has no understanding of why to make the right moral choice when I'm not around.

One of the best reasons for making a wise choice is safety or health: "My job is to keep you safe and healthy, so I can't allow you to do that, because it might hurt someone." Or we can give a reason that focuses on the way life works best. With Jesus's teachings, the basic "why" of morality is built in: "You harvest what you plant" (Galatians 6:7).

### 4. Challenge Kids to Think

Discerning right from wrong requires thought. Ask open-ended questions – and not necessarily to make the occasion a "teaching moment." Make it a "learning moment" – for you. Discuss morality and moral issues head-on: What is morality? What is a conscience? How can we tell when someone has good moral values? Ask debatable questions like: What's the difference between cheating and helping a friend with his lessons?

### 5. Involve kids in community-helping activities.

Providing food and clothing for the poor or for disaster relief, helping elderly neighbors, welcoming immigrants to the community. If your church takes an active role in these types of opportunities, have your children join them. If not, seek them out for your classes yourself. Lots of groups would be glad to have your help.

### 6. Respect Children

Respecting children means that we do all we can to make sure they feel welcome and safe in our presence.

- Pay attention to children. Notice what's new with them (haircut, shoes, jacket . . .). See them, and let them know that you see.
- Speak respectfully to children. Avoid condescending or talking down to them.
- **Listen** to children. If possible, physically get on their level to communicate – as one educator put it, "Eye to eye and heart to heart."

Novelist Alison Winn Scotch reminds us that "Eventually kids become grownups too, and from there, the world is whatever they choose to make it." We don't know what their world will look like, but we can't go wrong if we show them True North: Love. No matter where, no matter when, no matter what the situation, our children can look to love as their guide. Love is always open for business, and it's available to anyone and everyone. It's our one purpose in life. Simple: Learn and practice love.

- Are you old? Learn and practice love.
- Are you young? Learn and practice love.
- Are you rich? Learn and practice love.
- Are you poor? Learn and practice love.
- Are you healthy? Learn and practice love.
- Are you sick? Learn and practice love.
- Are you educated? Learn and practice love.
- Are you uneducated? Learn and practice love.

We can talk about all kinds of moral issues, get on board all kinds of moral bandwagons, but if we're not fully engaged in lovingkindness, we're not headed True North. Our lives are out of balance, our views are out of focus, our positions are not believable.

Always head toward love. Love is unlimited in its reach. Love has no borders. Love flows past, around, over, and through all boundaries and divisions that we humans can construct. Love is one of the great wonders of the world. You can rest your full weight on love, for love never fails. Love is your help. Love is your health. Love is your hope. Love is your home. Live in love and you will live in God.