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## From Peg

by Peg L. Smith, Chief Executive Officer

During this summer season, one of our popular media stories has been about parents and "kidsickness," a phrase coined by Bob Ditter. It is also true that during the past two summers, more often than not, camp directors have mentioned to me the heightened expectations and demands from parents. What is this about? What are the implications? It appears the culture of parenthood in America is changing.

If this is true, what is at the core of this phenomenon? It would be easier for all of us if we could simply point to one causal factor. I believe there is any number of circumstances leading to this new parental profile. I want to share some of my observations.

1. **The Principle of Happiness:** I do not remember my parents striving to make me happy. Quite the contrary, there were times they made it abundantly clear that was not their goal. They did, however, want me to grow up to be a responsible, productive adult. I am sure that is true for parents today. However, I believe they want to make their children happy, as well. Is that a realistic goal and at what cost?
2. **The Fix-it Principle:** Life and learning is a process of successes and failures. Failure is the fertilizer for success. Today, it appears many parents, in their attempt to be sure their children are "happy," don't want them to be disappointed or face the consequences that come from mistakes. As parents, we negotiate "rescues." We excuse, defend, and fix far too many problems for our children.
3. **Stranger Danger:** For nearly two decades, we have been bombarded with dark images of a very scary world. Although there are dangerous situations and people in our world, it is a safer world when we navigate from a position of informed knowledge rather than one of fear and dread.
4. **Ages and Stages:** Youth development continues to be a mystery to the world at large. What are the key developmental stages a young person must experience in order to be a responsible, productive adult . . . and, yes, even happy? Too often, I fear we have forgotten the importance of resiliency, independence, and responsibility. As a parent, it is actually our job to give our children opportunities to fly "solo" even if we have other supports in place to help ensure a safe "flight."
5. **Fame and Wealth:** Have we also changed our definition of success? According to Teenage Research Unlimited, Inc., many teens believe anyone can be famous if they just try hard enough (one in five teens truly believes he/she will be famous) because our media and cultural environment suggests anyone can be a celebrity (TRU Study 2006). The road to success seems to be a rather long, arduous path paved by academics or fame, or, even worse, infamy. Will we lose our character, depth, and innovation if led down such a linear path?
6. **Technology Tether:** Technology is a wonderful tool. Yet, it can also serve as a tether or a noose in a world operating from a position of fear. Immediate access and satisfaction are today's norms. Parents didn't create nor do they own this reality, yet, they must manage the challenge with the opportunity.

I don't believe any one of these observations suggest anything dire. On the other hand, when combined do they create an environment for the Perfect Parent Storm? When we label parents "helicopter" parents or suggest they are suffering from "kidsickness," do we diminish the importance of how we might understand and add value to those parents who are attempting to parent in today's complex world? I know Bob and others truly understand how hard it is to be a parent today, and we use terms and phrases as short-hand descriptors of a rather complex situation. That said, we realize more than ever, how important it is to partner with today's parents. Because, there is one thing that

has not changed — parents want to do a good job raising their children. Now there's opportunity.

**Reference**

TRU Study (Fall 2006/Wave 48) conducted by Teenage Research Unlimited, Inc.

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