This piece is a longitudinal, historical, experiential analysis, anecdotal and selective as historical texts usually are constructed, but hopefully valuable nonetheless. The analysis presented is conditional and not definitive. It is open to amplification, change, and rearrangement, hence the word “suggested” in the title. It is an attempt to open the door for reflection, discussion and variation, so please respond with your own two cents. Hopefully, the coins of experience will pile up and we will have a burgeoning consensus as a workable guideline.

As parents, it seems we have to learn from scratch, almost as if we ourselves were never children. When we bring a child into this world as a conscious choice, we can’t avoid fearing that we will ruin the kid, act like our parents (or for some of us, not as well as our parents), and that our previously free lives will be curtailed and limited. We fear our own impatience and worry at times about the possibility of breaking into violence. We search for guides and books, role models, and other parents with whom we can share and compare.

In the end, raising children is an empirical, adaptive process to be learned anew, although there are plenty of resources to assist us if we look for them, even inside ourselves. Certainly, there is no one right way. I have a fond memory of Ben Spock, the great anti-war activist who was always in his three-piece suit at demonstrations. He was pulling out a few hairs from his already sparse head as he related to me the vast changes he had to make in his new edition of Dr. Spock’s Baby and Child Care in order to accommodate feminism and enlightened, nurturing father-care in 1969. He was pleased and chagrined, knowing he had missed the emerging consciousness. Greater social awareness and equalization were changing child-rearing views and practices. The methodology he had offered previously as a guideline for parenting was attitudinal and relative, and not a fixed approach for all times.

Child-rearing is an historically determined practice, varying from culture to culture. The positive influences that tend to motivate a child into becoming a loving, thoughtful, and...
productive adult become more and more clear. They can be abstracted from the particular context, which is driven by situational, cultural, gender, political, class, and psychological factors. “Determinants” is too strong a word. Humans are more flexible than that, but we are more easily wounded and—traumatized—than we give ourselves credit for being, and trauma is formative and deforming. Our era is the first to even define trauma, and we are still elaborating an understanding of that which is traumatizing. If there is to be progress in terms of our capacity to live respectfully, peacefully and with compassion for each other and nature, it has to begin in the family with child rearing. This progress must extend to those institutions that support families, like schools, health care, and community/spiritual groups and institutions. Society/family is a reciprocal bidirectional information exchange. Individual units, families and their members, are able to generate their own particular cultures, despite pressure to conform from dominator external structures. This gives the family both strength and vulnerability.

The principles that work for child rearing in general guide the use of substances in the family.

• Provide a secure, nurturing, affectionate, creative and friendly family environment.
• Provide safety from outside and inside-the-family negative forces.
• Embrace nonviolence. Practice one person/one vote, except for when a child’s economic health or safety demands parental guidance or protection.
• Use persuasion for control, except when safety requires a stronger protective and authoritative response.
• Use respectful, acknowledgement-based communication that recognizes differences in age and capacity, but seeks understanding in a language appropriate to conditions.
• Stress that friendship is the goal for now and all time.
• Be thoughtful, open-minded, and openhearted in developing growing children’s abilities, understandings, and independence.
• Encourage interdependence and inter-responsibility, from each according to ability and to each according to needs.

Overall, we can refer to these qualities for a child’s best possible environment as “love and respect.” Conscious and conscientious use of psychoactive substances in a family environment is contained and constrained by adherence to these principles.

I will offer a personal story about conscious use of Ecstasy in my own family.

I will offer a personal story about conscious use of Ecstasy in my own family. My oldest son, Noah, had been stricken with leukemia when he was about 13 years of age. He went into remission quickly, but the process was emotionally arduous. His psychological difficulties and their impact on our little family of four (and our larger extended community) were extremely harsh. Noah died four years later, near 17 years of age. The following is an excerpt from my forthcoming book, Noe—A Father/Son Song of Love, Life, Sickness, and Death:

We needed a novel form of family time, something so powerful it would sweep away the awful load, and give us a moment’s respite from carrying the overstuffed burlap bag of backbreaking woe. We needed a method for emotional time-outs, for being together tasklessly and purely in connection. Our MDMA experience called to us because of the power of its positive alteration of consciousness and the sensual but non-sexual intimacy we had experienced. Thus, we hatched the Family MDMA Inter-
basements and closets in stigmatized secrecy—our kids were late bloomers. We explicitly took the position that we would not be hypocrites to our children, and that they had the capacity
to come to clear understandings based on their own view—if
given accurate information. If they were interested in using
substances, they had an open door to us for discussion—and
use—if we agreed. As parents, we consciously avoided splitting
on crucial issues, attempting to come to a parental consensus
before making decisions with our kids. Knowing the potential
difficulties, we strove to protect them from the consequences
of illegalization. “Better we give you what you want than buy
some unknown, potentially harmful crap from someone who
charges you outlandish prices, has something on you that can
be used against you, and who could get you involved with the
anti-drug and the drug worlds, the cops and school authorities.”
In fact, they never asked until they were late teenagers, a far
better outcome than the common illicit and often difficult use
by thirteen- and fourteen-year olds.

This is not a tale to suggest emulation. Our circumstances
were relatively unique as was the history and culture of our
particular family. I offer it here to indicate that there can be
a very positive, beneficial experience within family life with
substances present—if you mostly know what you are doing,
cover the possibilities for difficulty, have outside support at the
ready, and if you practice honesty with those you love. Parents
have and will use substances in their families. If you believe
that what you are using is a potentially empathogenic substance
indeed, and if you accept the feedback of those around you
without quibble or quarrel, this terrain can be negotiated with
consciousness and benefit.

**Suggested Rule for the Road:** If you are uncertain about
the effect of a substance on your consciousness and behavior,
leave your kids out of it, do your imbibing away from them,
and make sure you can come home to your kids sanely and
lovingly—or leave off—for, I believe, the best thing
you can do in life is love and your kids
are the best ones to love and from whom to
receive love. Teach honestly that family values
at times differ from the views expressed and
imposed from outside—including laws—and
that the family does have as one of its goals
to selectively siphon the outside view in and
selectively siphon inner practices out. Obviously there are difficult choices and complex
mindsets.

If you act hypocritically in front of chil-
dren, they will most likely detect this and
come to not believe much that comes out of
you. Don’t have them cover for you or make
excuses for you. Don’t make them into liars
on your behalf or have them cover up on the
basis of a secret family life that no one outside
will understand. They can understand that a family has some
privacy needs and may have different values from those that are
externally pressured.

**Another Suggested Rule:** Potently addictive drugs can and
do cause havoc for families. Their use tends toward creation of a
family culture of deception, and parental self-involvement and
risks the integrity of the family. If you are raising a child, con-
sider not using substances that may blow you and them away.
There is no excuse for taking such chances with the lives you
bring into the world. Let that restrain you from thinking you
will get away with it. The cultivation of honesty with your own
children has the greatest reward—friendship and trust.

These are functional criteria based on valuing enlightened
love. It is not about morality. It is about the only relationship
that contains the gem of absolute love—that between children
and parents—reciprocal love born of the dependent responsi-
blity of nurturance and respect.

**A Corollary of a Suggested Rule:** Having limits is a
necessity for following the psychoactive path as creative and
mind-expanding. Use of virtually any substance can result in
dependency, sometimes surprisingly so. There have been a few
MDMA addicts who did it every day and in every way. Too
much of anything can result in a negative alteration. All psy-
choactive substances affect consciousness, narrowing focus, af-
flecting functionality, and while potentially mind-expanding are
also mind-constraining and behavior-altering. There are things
to do in private, away from kids who have childcare provided
by responsible baby sitters.

Alcohol intoxication is the most common
poison. The damage from alcohol intoxication
on the population is mind-boggling. People
do things under the influence of ethanol that
they would never do on the natch—violent
cries against children, violent crimes
against parents and relatives while kids
 watch, incest, beatings, and rape. The stories
are endless. There is also verbal abuse, argu-
ing, disappearing into dark holes, passing out,
memory loss, and driving while intoxicated.
Alcohol is paradigmatic. If you follow the
rules for sane alcohol consumption, you can
use responsibly and enjoyably in front of kids
and teach them limits. Otherwise...

There is a great riddle—still poorly
explained—that also may apply to other
substance dependencies—a cautionary.

Despite the mayhem and adversity, children of alcoholics are
four times as likely to become alcoholics themselves. There does
appear to be a genetic component, but its effect is probabilistic
and phenotypic, not a Mendelian linear influence. And I doubt
that the genetic basis is for alcoholism per se—rather I think
for a more complex set of behavioral possibilities. There are
other possible and contributing explanations that arise from the
influence of the home environment. One is that children are
great mimics and from an early age, even before their first year
is completed, they learn by observing other people’s behavior.
Children internalize and are damaged by what they see and ex-
perience. Perhaps there is a created hole, an incomplete gestalt
Conscious consumption of ethanol is the exemplar for the legal period. Alcohol products are on our shelves and accessible to our children. Medical marijuana is spreading nationally and full decriminalization is hopefully near. Parents are even promoting medical marijuana for their children. My colleagues and I receive requests from parents on behalf of kids as young as 12. What does this mean about parental behavior? Do parents assume an open non-hypocritical stance to their use of marijuana? Do they continue to smoke secretly and cover their tracks, as so many have done? Do they leave their stash out for children to find, or in accessible places? Do they offer their kids a joint and guidance? What age is appropriate?

Most of us would agree that marijuana intoxication is relatively benign, compared to overuse of alcohol. Nonetheless, there are potential risks for affecting children’s lives: inattention, sluggishness, difficulty in responding to emergencies, inexplicable foolishness, inappropriate behavior, and the munchies (aka binging). There may also be diminished motivation with chronic heavy use or, the possibility of withdrawal reactions—anxiety, insomnia, irritability. This is not a list of inevitable effects, rather an inventory for self-scanning and awareness.

It is also true that many parents have or will choose to smoke in front of their kids, and/or be stoned with their kids. There are joys as well as risks: great silly fun, heightened playfulness, penetrating mutual understanding, a break from the usual, release from tension—to name some.

Another benefit of legalization is our potential discernment of the distorting stigma of the “illegal” and with its removal an improvement in our self-regard and the cessation of the tendency towards rebellion and forbidden fruit reactivity. Being marijuana legal is a distinct pleasure. It is important to help kids learn about their potential interaction with substances, rather than avoiding the subject, for that engenders the notion of unavailable and judgmental parents, much as has been the situation with parents dealing with inevitable sexuality. Assisting our kids with information enables them to better assess the myths and propaganda that are bombarding them. Kids want facts and data just like we do, and they are good at detecting mystification and disinformation. Education by informed parents is a great assist to young minds struggling to have fun, be unique, and sort out truth from fiction. Difficulties often initially arise when children begin using secretly, when they are too young, or in potentially bad settings. Parental interventions that come out of the blue are often unsuccessful, or engender more rebelliousness.

Adolescents tend to establish psychological territories that parents are blocked from entering. But that can go too far, and parents may give up on knowing what their kid is doing and proceed in denial, despite evidence that their kid is having difficulty. The Oxycontin high school epidemic is a good example of this. Continuing the dialogue, inquiry, and wanting to know without intruding (except when safety demands) are prerequisites for navigating adolescence. Continuing the dialogue, inquiry, and wanting to know without intruding (except when safety demands) are prerequisites for navigating adolescence. Establishing an educational and intimate trust relationship from an early age is imperative for sanity with adolescents. Adolescents tend to establish psychological territories that parents are blocked from entering. But that can go too far, and parents may give up on knowing what their kid is doing and proceed in denial, despite evidence that their kid is having difficulty. The Oxycontin high school epidemic is a good example of this. Continuing the dialogue, inquiry, and wanting to know without intruding (except when safety demands) are prerequisites for navigating adolescence. Establishing an educational and intimate trust relationship from an early age is imperative for sanity with adolescents. It is important to attempt to work out parental unity and avoid splitting. “Do No Harm” always applies, as does “Prevent Harm When You Can,” especially to those with whom you closely relate. For example, there is data suggesting that heavy use of marijuana before the age of 15 is associated with a higher rate of schizophrenia and psychotic symptoms. In absolute numbers and percentage difference, this is a small change from baseline. Nonetheless, I don’t know of any child who needs to use marijuana heavily before 15. Some do and I believe that such use calls for thoughtful intervention. I am not a fan of heavy use after 15 either, save when there may be real medical utility. And marijuana does have many potential benefits for many people for treating a wide variety of illnesses, as well as for health and mindfulness.

Personally, I think it is a wonderful thing to hang with your mature child and spend quality time together, including—if there is interest and mutual consent—to trip together. It can engender understanding, closeness, friendship, and pleasure. For those of us who value psychedelic experience as mind-expanding, why would we not create a loving, careful set and setting in which to experience this with our closest friends—our children?

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