



A GUIDE FOR REFLECTION

Questions for Parents and Teachers



Chapter 1

WHERE HAVE ALL THE GROWN-UPS GONE?

1. The author believes that our culture is experiencing a fundamental shift in our understanding of what it means to be an adult today. What signs do you see of this cultural shift in your children/students? in yourself? in the parents and adults you know? In what ways are adults today different from your parents or grandparents?
2. What images come to your mind when you hear the word “adult” or “grown-up”? Who have been the “adults” in your life? When do you feel most “grown up”?
3. What are some of the questions your children/students are asking you? What do these questions—or the deeper

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questions behind them—tell you about the inner lives of these young people? What are they searching for?

4. The author notes that young people’s “inner core cannot develop in a vacuum, as it needs models of inspiration and admiration.” How do you as an adult nurture the discovery of the “inner core” of your children/students? When have you been able to model for a child/student what it is like to be your “true self”?

5. Who are the adults you have most admired in your own life? Why? What would you like your children/students to admire most in you?

6. As you look at our contemporary culture, what frustrates you about our collective resistance to growing up?



Chapter 2

LANDING THE HELICOPTER

1. What are some of the advantages and disadvantages of our ability to be so quickly and constantly in touch with young people today?

2. The author makes a distinction between “fusion” with our children/students and having an “influence” on them (p. 22). When and how have you experienced this distinction?

3. What excites you about being an influence on your children/students? What concerns you?

4. When are you most likely to “swoop in” or “hover” over your children/students? Why? Remember a time when you were tempted to solve a problem for a child/student, but did not. What was the outcome?

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5. Which important “inner voices” from the past or present do you rely upon to help you solve problems or confront situations?
6. What are your children/students hearing from you, over and over? What will they remember best about your words or actions?



Chapter 3 IS FIFTY THE NEW THIRTY?

1. What are some of the images that you associate with adulthood? What did you swear, as you grew up, that you would never do when you were an adult? Do you do those things now? In what ways have you become more like your parents or adult models from your childhood?
2. The author describes influence as “possessing a set of adult characteristics, such as patience, perspective, a sense of what constitutes real success and real failure in life, an ability to see the irony in life, and even the occasional sense of being profoundly out of step with some of the values and practices of the young” (p. 51). Reflect on times when you have experienced these characteristics in your own life. How did they change you? When have you needed them but could not find them in the adults around you?
3. When have you served as a “speed bump” for your children/students? What are some of the ways you might “slow things down” for your children/students, in order to allow them to develop their sense of perspective and patience?
4. When have you served as a “deep sea diver,” helping your children/students go beneath the surface and

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identify what they truly need? How did you “see” what was really meant or needed at the time?

5. Think of a time when you made a decision or took a stand that made you unpopular with your children/students. What did that experience feel like? How did you cope with the feelings? What was the outcome, in the long run?

6. How does it feel when you, as an adult, see yourself as “different” from your children/students? When do you feel “old” or “old-fashioned” in comparison with them? Reflect on a time when it was helpful to your children/students for you to be “old.”



Chapter 4 BEING WATCHED

1. When do you find communication with your children/students truly frustrating? When do you find it wonderfully refreshing and enlightening?

2. Think of a time when you, as a teacher or parent, were “being watched” by a young person practicing the “art of studying adults.” What did it feel like? What were you communicating to the young person by your words, gestures, moods, actions?

3. Where did you notice hypocrisy in your growing up years, when what adults said did not match what they did? How did you respond then? What do you think about those adults now?

4. When are you most likely to fall back on the adage “Do as I say, not as I do?” In what aspects of your life do you

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find it most difficult to live out your convictions and deeper desires?

5. The author observes that “smaller things need to be taken care of before we are truly able to take on some of the larger tasks of life” (p. 74). When do you find it helpful to your children/students to “sweat the small stuff”?

6. What kinds of “support” for your children/students are you most comfortable offering to them? If you lean toward more soothing forms of support, how do you feel when you must challenge a young person to grow into more adult behaviors and ways of being?



Chapter 5 EMBRACING ADULTHOOD

1. What have been the biggest “surprises of adulthood” for you?
2. In what ways have you discovered that you are like, or unlike, your own parents or adult role models from childhood?
3. What are the most important lessons you have learned from adults who hurt or disappointed you?
4. The author writes that helping young people with the challenge of sorting out the essential from the non-essential is “a crucial task that only a discerning and patient adult can help them to do” (p. 88). Who helped you learn how to practice that discipline in your own life? How do you help your children/students to sort out what is most important in their lives?

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5. When are you, as a parent or teacher, most likely to react in anger or shock to what a child or student has done or said? Why?
6. The author describes several values he has learned from young people, including time, absence, silence, a sense of occasion, and face-to-face contact. Which ones speak most powerfully to you? Which are the least appealing? Which would you like to learn more about?



Chapter 6 TOURIST OR PILGRIM?

1. In what ways do you feel you live “out of the box” compared to traditional notions in our society? When do you represent the traditional values your children/students rebel against—the “box” they are happy to be “out of”?
2. What role did religion play in your life as a child? What role does it play in your life as an adult? How do you relate to religious institutions? Would you describe yourself as “spiritual, but not religious”? What spiritual disciplines do you practice? How do they—or the lack of them—help or hinder you in your life or work with young people?
3. How do your spiritual values inform and shape the decisions you make in your life and the way you relate to young people? How do they affect the choices you make and the boundaries you set?
4. Think of a time when you had to draw the line with a child or student. What was the experience like for you? What did you learn from it? What did the child/student learn?

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5. What type of sacrifices or struggles do you worry are in store for your children/students in the years ahead? How do you help young people come to terms with failure and severe setbacks?

6. The author notes that “while a child collects experiences and moves from one to another, a mature adult can bring those experiences together and relish them for their beauty, depth, and mystery” (p. 119). Describe a time when you savored an experience, a milestone for a child or student. What was most satisfying about it? How were you able to share the moment with your child/student?



Conclusion KNOWING THEM BEFORE THEY KNOW THEMSELVES

1. Reflect on occasions when you have been able to be an adult interpreter for your children/students, noticing things about them they may not have identified or articulated yet. How did you convey that knowledge to them? How did they respond?
2. The author tells the story of a parent who suddenly “sees” his daughter for who she is, apart from him and his expectations for her. Have you had a similar experience? What was it like? How did it change your relationship with your child/student?
3. When you are in the midst of a conflict with a child/student, what needs of your own are you most likely to drag into the conversation? What “buttons” do young people tend to “push” for you?

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4. Recall a time when an adult was able to model for you the “grown-up” ability to listen with wisdom and compassion.
5. Who are some of the adults who had a significant impact on your life without their being aware of it? If you could contact them now, what would you say to them?
6. Reread the quotation from Anne Lamott’s book *Plan B* with which the author begins the chapter. How could you be more “alive” in ways that might help your children/ students to “bear adulthood”? How could you offer a different vision of adulthood than of people who are “grey-faced” and “stressed-out”?