

Renegade Mom: A Conversation with Heather Shumaker

- 1) The title of the book is sure to raise some eyebrows- after all, for many of us, sharing is one of the most fundamental values that we learn as children. Can you tell me a bit more about this rule?

We all want our kids to learn generosity. But the traditional way of forcing kids to share often backfires (ex: "Give Jack the truck. You have to share your toys."). When parents order kids to "share," kids may hand over the toy, but the action doesn't create any feelings of goodwill. Plus kids won't do it if parents aren't watching.

The renegade rule is all about waiting and taking turns. It's about respecting the child who has the toy, and waiting until she's "All Done." When she's All Done, the child gladly gives up the toy. Kids will even run over to the waiting child and offer it with a smile. That's what teaches true generosity – experiencing that inner glow and being aware of others. It's about delayed gratification, not instant reward. Of course, waiting can be hard for young kids, but that's all part of the learning. It works. Kids get this system. It's fair and easy to use for kids as young as two.

- 2) What does it mean to be a Renegade Parent?

A Renegade Parent doesn't follow conventional wisdom, but does give kids clear, age-appropriate guidance. You'll spend less time acting as referee and judge and more time helping kids gain life skills.

A Renegade Parent understands preschool kids need to move and makes space for active and even rough play. A Renegade Parent accepts all feelings, even angry and uncomfortable ones. But it's not a free-for-all. Being a Renegade Parent involves giving more freedom when it's playtime – letting kids take physical and social risks, for example– but setting firm limits on any hurtful behavior.

- 3) What are 'adult lenses' and why is it crucial to be aware of their influence?

What an adult sees and what a child needs are often different. If we see a child run through the kitchen, we see a misbehaving child. If we think about the child's needs, this is actually a kid who needs space to move, to run, to be outside. When a five-year-old is interested in swords and guns, that's a child who needs to explore good guy-bad guy play. He's not destined to become a violent adult. Too often our 'adult lenses' trip us up. The views are right for adults, not for young kids. Children have different needs than grown-ups do.

- 4) Some of the rules in *It's OK Not to Share* touch on some pretty controversial issues. How do you defend your rules against those who find them offensive?

The rules are controversial because they're different, but really they're just common sense backed up the thinking of some of our best child psychologists and neuroscientists.

Really, these rules are all about giving children freedom to play, and giving adults tips on how to set effective limits. My advice to parents who balk at some of these rules is to follow your child's lead and be prepared to change your mind. Some kids have a deep need to play with toy guns, for example, or dress up in princess clothes. Adopt the rules that fit your family. Take what's useful to you and leave the rest.

- 5) Bullying and school violence are hot topics these days- how can the Renegade Rules help prepare your child for the harsher elements of growing up?

Kids learn the very best bullying and violence prevention – they learn how to be assertive and deal with conflicts. They learn anger management. Renegade Rules also teach friendship skills. How to listen, how to make friends, how to join in and be accepted socially. So much violence stems from people who feel socially isolated and never learned to deal with their anger.

Even very young kids have conflicts, and one of the best early lessons is assertiveness – learning when to speak up, talking directly to the other person and gaining the confidence to do it. Adults still have trouble with this.

- 6) Do you consider yourself a model parent?

I'm a confident parent. I know what to expect and I know what works. I'm not lost when kids have conflicts or when a toddler screams 'You're mean. I hate you!' I often mess up or say the wrong thing, just like everyone else, but I have tools to draw on. That's why I wrote this book – to share these tools with other parents.

- 7) Do the Renegade Rules apply specifically to small children or can they help with tweens and teenagers as well?

Rules do change as children grow. The book is geared for kids ages 2-6, but some of the basics – particularly conflict mediation, direct communication, and acceptance of all feelings (not all behavior) hold true for any age. Parents have told me they even work on college students!

- 8) If you could only give parents one piece of advice, what would it be?

Don't forget the two most essential life skills children need to learn in the preschool years. One is learning how to handle their emotions in appropriate ways. The second is experiencing conflict with other people and learning how to resolve differences peacefully. These two skills are the foundation for becoming a civilized human. They both take practice. And free play gives kids the absolute best practice.