**On Your Mind with Dr. Jon Robinson**

**July/August, 2017, Baby and Back to School Issues**

Dear Dr. Robinson,

I’ve got two toddler boys, ages 2 and 4. My two year old, Jesse, idol worships his older brother, Adam. They can play nicely together. Adam’s thrilled that his brother is “not a baby anymore.” Sometimes, however, Jesse can be overbearing and gets on his big brother’s nerves. Someday I think Jesse will become physically bigger than his older brother and I worry about bullying behavior. Suggestions? Signed, Concerned Mom

Dear Concerned,

Good for you for staying on top of how your boys are getting along. Did you have siblings growing up? If not, you’re in no-man’s land, so ask some of your friends about their experiences. Raising boys is not the issue, since you are now into raising boy number two. But, let me caution you. Don’t overthink this parenting thing.

Most parents have no formal training on how to be a parent. As such, we are left with on-the-job training and a hint of parenting the way we were parented growing up. That can be a bit dicey, both because of our parental role models and because of rapid changes in technology and resources nowadays. Some parents want to be just like their mom and dad, while others want to be opposite of their mom and dad.

Three words of advice come to mind – include, mix, and confront. First, when you have questions about activities and play time, include your boys’ thoughts and feelings. Ask each what they want to do. Active listen their feelings and needs, so you can manage and direct activity accordingly. Put options on a family events calendar. To kids, that means you are taking them seriously.

Second, mix it up. Children’s attention spans are notoriously short, so allow for maybe three alternating activities (this, of course, in the middle of everything else you are trying to do, LOL). Also, mix it up so that each child has some of your time and attention individually. With children so close together, and the same gender, it’s seems easier to just include them both. However, each has his own interests, strengths and weaknesses and part of your job is to help them form an individual identity. This mixing it up, of course, is much easier with co-parenting and including your “village.”

Finally, confront. That doesn’t necessarily mean punish, but you do want to stop bullying behavior, bad choices, and selfishness with a spotlight question like, “Hold on there, buster. This isn’t like you. What else is going on here?” This gets their attention. Of course separate them to talk to them individually. Active listen their needs and feelings. Help each understand the impact of their words and actions and give natural consequences if indicated.

This is a lot to take in, but hang in there and you’ll become less Concerned and more On Top Of Things.

Dear Dr. Robinson,

It’s almost time for my kids to start back to school. Am I a bad mother for feeling relieved and overjoyed? Seriously, though, there is so much to do. We want to squeeze every inch out of summer vacation and yet still get ready for school. My eight and ten year olds just want to ignore the inevitable and play, play, play. What to do? Signed, Reluctant Taskmaster

Dear Reluctant,

Don’t beat yourself up too much for only being human. Such seasons always bring mixed emotions. However, a common issue with many children is difficulty with transitions. As school approaches, all of you are in transition.

Hopefully, your summer has gone well because you all had a family meeting to discuss summer plans, came up with a list, and put the list on a family event calendar on the wall in a common area in your home. Your kids are old enough to accept individual responsibility, check the calendar daily, and bug you just a little bit.

Now, however, with the new school year approaching, move on to the next family thing. That would be TRANSITION. Most families can look at a week of transition into the next thing. Allow two weeks if you think that’s better for your family. Start with that family meeting, complete with the required round of audible groans. Create a do list for each family member. No need for all of the shopping for clothes and supplies to be on you. Begin limiting screen time for your kids, if that’s not already happening, and have them do something to put their minds in school gear. Perhaps monitor their creating a three-page report or a poster about what they did this summer that was fun. Perhaps crank them up with pleasure reading.

Most importantly, give them a week of school night bedtimes and early morning awakenings. (More groans). Have a nice breakfast for them and plan something invigorating in the early morning hours. Perhaps a brisk walk? A swim? A trip to the local fast food for a fun breakfast outing?

Planned transition time with these kinds of elements will help your kids adapt to the changing circumstances, starting another school year, in a better frame of mind. When they leave for the first day? Then you can feel relieved and overjoyed.