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SHOULD IT BE MANDATORY TO GET
A LICENSE TO BE A PARENT?

Word Generation - Unit 3.24

Focus Words

visible | isolate | discretion | mandatory | outcome



WEEKLY PASSAGE

“Police!” shouted the officer, but no one answered. “Open up!” his partner shouted. Slowly, the door opened. Joel Steinberg was inside, carrying his nine-year-old daughter, Lisa. He had called 911 to say his daughter had gotten sick and stopped breathing, but Lisa had **visible** bruises and broken bones. Steinberg had beaten her to death. Although this terrible incident occurred in 1987, it is not an **isolated** event. An estimated four children die each day in the United States from abuse.

Some people say **mandatory** licensing for all parents could prevent such child abuse. With mandatory licensing, men and women would take parenting classes prior to becoming parents. They would learn what they should and should not do to raise children well. In the U.S., we mandate that people get licenses for activities that, if done incorrectly, could cause harm. For example, we license drivers, gun dealers, doctors, teachers, and plumbers. Why not license parents too?

Those in favor of licensing parents say that, in order to be prepared to be good parents, people need to know about children’s development and children’s developmental needs. License supporters point out that parenting can be very stressful. All parents need to acquire positive discipline strategies

and to learn where to get help when they need it. Also, parenting classes could improve parents’ behavior with their children. For example, after learning about the benefits of reading aloud to children, parents may decide to read to their children more frequently.

Others oppose mandatory licensing of parents. They say licensing won’t ensure that children are safe any more than licensing drivers ensures that there will be no car accidents. In other words, if licensing drivers does not guarantee a good **outcome**, why should we believe that licensing parents will ensure better parenting outcomes? In addition, no class could teach parents everything they need to know.

Besides, licensing opponents argue, we all have a right to have children. If someone cannot take the classes, should he or she lose the right to be a parent? Those who oppose mandatory licensing also say the way we raise children should be left to each family’s **discretion**. In addition, licensing parents is not practical. Even if a licensing program is a good idea, it cannot be enforced.

What do you think? Should it be mandatory to get a parent license?

Should it be mandatory to get a license to be a parent?

FOCUS WORDS OF THE WEEK

mandatory : (adjective) required

FORMS:

EXAMPLES OF USE:

NOTES:

isolated : (adjective) set apart from others; confined

FORMS:

EXAMPLES OF USE:

NOTES:

discretion : (noun) individual choice

FORMS:

EXAMPLES OF USE:

NOTES:

visible : (adjective) capable of being seen

FORMS:

EXAMPLES OF USE:

NOTES:

outcomes : (noun) results

FORMS:

EXAMPLES OF USE:

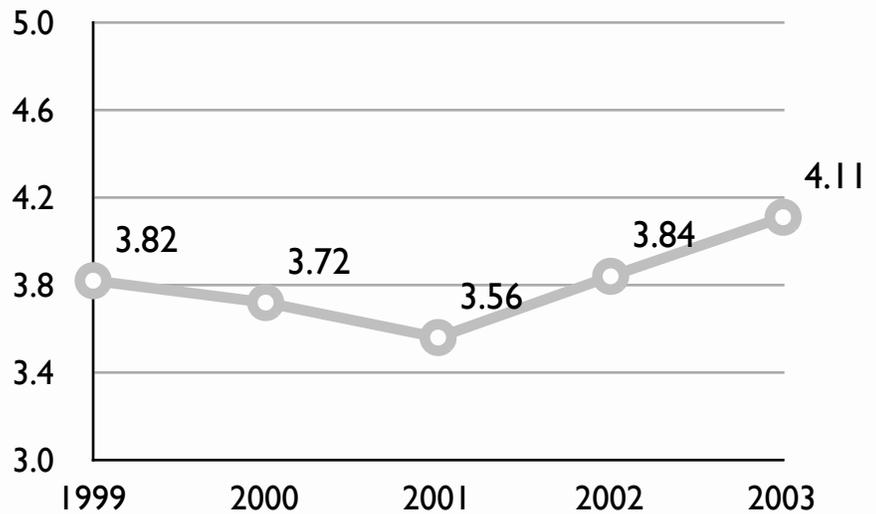
NOTES:

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PROBLEM OF THE WEEK

Option 1: Child abuse is a national tragedy. It damages and **isolates** its victims, and can lead to **outcomes** like depression and substance abuse. Parents use their own **discretion** to decide how to raise their children. Sadly, some of these parents use violence. This graph shows the number of young victims that die each day. Would **mandatory** parent licenses change these numbers?



<http://www.childhelp.org/resources/learning-center/statistics>

Which years are **visible** on the graph?

- A) 1999 – 2004
- B) 1999 – 2003
- C) 1990 – 2000
- D) 1990 – 2004

Option 2: Making parent licenses **mandatory** would be a huge project. The scale of the project is **visible**: there are potential parents all around us! We would need to think hard about what makes a good or bad parent and **isolate** the most important criteria. Whose **discretion** could we trust to approve or reject people as parents? How would we fund a project of this size?

There are about 300 million people in the United States. Say that we need one Parent Licensing Officer for every thousand people. How many Parent Licensing Officers would we need? (Hint: use exponents!)

Math Discussion Question: People who support **mandatory** parent licenses want this **outcome**: happy, productive children who will become happy, productive adults. But good parenting is often **invisible**. It is difficult to **isolate** the parental decisions that make a child healthy, happy, and productive. What makes a good parent? If the question were left to your **discretion**, what would you say?



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THINKING SCIENTIFICALLY

The physical, emotional, and mental cruelty experienced by abused children has many negative **outcomes**. Children who have suffered physical abuse from their parents or caregivers might have **visible** marks, like bruises or scrapes. But these children also carry invisible emotional and mental harm as well, which affects their relationships, behavior, and experiences well into adulthood. Some people never entirely recover from the abuse they suffer as children.

Ms. Kahn summarized some of the results from a research study she found on this topic: “Abused children often feel lonely, or will **isolate** themselves on purpose, because they are used to that feeling. Abused children are also accustomed to seeing people angry and experiencing pain, so they have trouble recognizing other emotions, such as happiness, sadness, fear, or surprise.”

“Wow, those seem like good enough reasons to me to make it **mandatory** for people to get a license to become parents,” said Victor.

“I agree with Victor that those *are* good reasons,” said Connie, “but I still think parental **discretion** has to be protected too. What’s right in my family might be different in other families, and that should be okay.”

“Wait a minute: we can’t just excuse child abuse as a difference in family lifestyles!” exclaimed Chris. “I’m not so sure about this idea of licensing parents, but child abuse certainly crosses a line and becomes everybody’s business.”

→ “Well, let’s find out more about this study, shall we?” says Ms. Kahn. “I have a summary of the data and results right here.”

Question:

Does abuse make children less able to recognize facial expressions that reflect common human emotions?

Hypothesis:

Children who have been abused will be less accurate in identifying facial expressions than children who have not been abused.

Procedure:

1. Researchers interviewed two groups of children: those who had been physically abused and those who hadn’t. These two groups were mixed together randomly so that the researchers didn’t know which group each child belonged to.
2. One at a time, each child was asked to look at a series of photographs. The photographs showed people with different facial expressions that reflect different emotions: happiness, sadness, anger, fear, and surprise.
3. Each child was asked to identify the expression on each of the faces in the photographs.

	Happiness	Sadness	Anger	Fear	Surprise
Children who had been physically abused	85% accurate 15% chose surprise	75% accurate 25% chose anger	100% accurate	80% accurate 20% chose sadness	75% accurate 25% chose fear
Children who had not been physically abused	100% accurate	90% accurate 10% chose fear	98% accurate 2% chose sadness	88% accurate 12% chose surprise	89% accurate 11% chose fear

Analyze the results:

1. Is the hypothesis supported by the data? Explain why or why not. Use data to support your answer.
2. How would you make this experiment better?



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DEBATING THE ISSUE



GO!

1. Get ready...

Pick one of these positions (or create your own).

A There should be mandatory licensing for parents. Licenses would protect children and educate parents.

B Parenting classes should be mandatory for very young parents, but parents over 20 should not be forced to get a license.

C Licensing for parents should be optional. Parents could choose whether or not to take classes to learn how to raise their children if they want to.

D There should not be mandatory licensing for parents. Everyone should be free to raise their children as they want.

E _____

Be a strong participant by using phrases like these.

I think it's more accurate to say...

That's interesting - can you tell why you think that?

I think the evidence is contrary to what you're saying because...

Let me share something from the reading that will help us...

2. Get set...

Be ready to provide evidence to back up your position during your class discussion or debate. Jot down a few quick notes:

