

For further information, contact:
Penny Simon (865) 675-1705
psimon@randomhouse.com

**A talk with Rosalind Wiseman
about her eagerly awaited new book
QUEEN BEE MOMS & KINGPIN DADS:
Dealing with the Parents, Teachers, Coaches, and Counselors Who Can Make—or
Break—Your Child’s Future**

Your *New York Times* bestseller *Queen Bees & Wannabes* (Crown Publishers, 2002) was a runaway success that strongly resonated with parents of teenage girls. What prompted you to turn from the teenagers’ to the parents’ perspective?

The inspiration for this book came during a talk I gave to a group of parents. In the middle of my presentation, I noticed that two mothers sitting in the front row were rolling their eyes, sighing, and shaking their heads while one of them whispered, “Not our girls. Not our girls.” At first all I could think about was how rude these women were, but then I realized that the dynamic among the mothers in that room was strikingly similar to what you’d find in a group of young girls—with one crucial difference. Because they were adults, the Queen Bee moms could act worse than Queen Bee girls because they knew no one would call them out on their behavior. In that moment, I knew that I would write about parents.

The two most intimidating types of parents you describe are the Queen Bee Mom and the Kingpin Dad. What are some of the most common conflicts that arise involving these types of parents and what are some strategies for dealing with them?

When a Queen Bee Mom or Kingpin Dad hears that their child has been hurtful to another child, a common response is: “Well, I just think she took it the wrong way. My child didn’t mean anything by it and, anyway, that child has always been a little sensitive.” I think it is important to remember that the bullies never get to define how hurtful their (or their children’s) behavior is for the victim. Different people might have different interpretations of an event, but no one gets to question another’s right to their feelings. So get your courage up and deal with the Queen Bee Mom and Kingpin Dad. Tell them exactly what you don’t like, state what you want instead, and then reiterate by telling them how important it is to you that you all work together to fix the problem.

You say that one of the hardest things for parents is knowing when to get involved in a child’s conflicts. Let’s say my child has a misunderstanding or a disagreement with a teacher—either about classroom behavior or about a grade he feels is unfair. How do I decide whether to step in and, if I do step in, what should I keep in mind when I meet with that teacher?

If your child has received a grade he thinks is unfair, he should talk to the teacher, not you. But you can help him prepare for that conversation. First, review the criteria for the assignment or test. Second, have your child articulate his problem with the grade based on the criteria. If your child still believes he’s right to complain, he should arrange to meet with the teacher at a mutually convenient time. This means he shouldn’t spontaneously demand a meeting right before class, during class, or when the teacher is going from one class to another.

The only time you should immediately get involved is if your child is being insulted, dismissed, or disrespected by the teacher. Have your child write down exactly how she is being treated that she feels is disrespectful and ask her what outcome she would like to see. Arrange a meeting at a time that is convenient for the teacher. Describe the problem, request what you (and your child) would like, and affirm your belief in treating teachers and children with dignity.

You make a point of inviting fathers to take a more active role in their children's lives and in the school community. What do you hope fathers in particular will take away from your book?

First and foremost, I want dads to stop passing the phones to their wives when someone calls about their child. Honestly, there are so many great dads out there, but there are still way too many of them that run away when their child is having a problem with other children. At the same time, I want to give dads the courage to stand their ground when moms interfere because they think the dads aren't doing "it" (whatever "it" is) right. Overall, I want dads to pick up this book and feel that it speaks to them and not just to their wives. I want them to believe that they can and should be involved in the social lives of their children. I'd also like to see fathers stepping up more when they see other dads bully other adults and children.

You say that parents often speak to each other in coded messages. What are some common code phrases parents use and what are they really expressing?

I have a lot, but here are two of my favorites:

- *My job as a parent is to protect my kids.* Parents love to be the mama or daddy bear. They persuade themselves that they are protecting their children from a life-threatening situation. Too often, though, they end up protecting their children from experiencing frustration, disappointment, or being held accountable for bad behavior.
- *My biggest priority is my children.* This one never ceases to amaze me because the underlying message is that most other parents don't feel as committed to their children. If another parent says this to you, it's hard to know how to respond. I've been tempted to say, "Really, that's so wonderful for you because I'd rather be watching TV."

According to your book, parents have a moral obligation to speak out when something unfair or contrary to their values takes place in the school community. Tell us about some of the reasons parents typically don't speak up and then tell us what effect that has on their children.

Adults are amazingly good at convincing themselves that they shouldn't speak up, and it's important to look closer at these rationalizations. Here are three of my favorites:

- *I can only change myself; I can't change someone else.* While it's true that you can only be responsible for your own behavior, "I can't change anyone else" can easily become an excuse to never confront anyone.
- *It'll only make the situation worse.* Sure, if you attack the other parent's parenting, competence, and integrity, of course she'll get defensive and attack you right back. But give yourself some credit. With a little preparation and maturity, parents are quite capable of having a conversation that positively addresses the problem.
- *I'm not going to stoop to the other person's level.* It's critical that parents have the courage to ask themselves what is truly behind this statement. Parents often use this response as a way to assert a moral superiority over the person with whom they are angry.

But I think my hands-down favorite is when a Queen Bee Mom or Kingpin Dad stands up at a parent meeting and says, "I think I speak for every parent here when I say . . ." Most other parents sit there silently thinking, "There's no way this person is speaking for me." But very few parents publicly contradict the Queen Bee Mom or Kingpin Dad. Instead we all complain about them to our spouses or friends on the drive home. Instead of complaining, I suggest saying something during the meeting. I know that's the last thing most parents want to do, but unless more of us are willing to speak up, the Queen Bee Mom or Kingpin Dad will succeed in setting the school's agenda. And your child will have to live with the consequences.

QUEEN BEE MOMS & KINGPIN DADS:
Dealing with the Parents, Teachers, Coaches, and Counselors
Who Can Make—or Break—Your Child's Future
Rosalind Wiseman with Elizabeth Rapoport
Crown Publishers ✍ Publication date: March 14, 2006 ✍ ISBN: 1-4000-8300-1
Price: \$25.00 ✍ 352 pages ✍ www.crownpublishing.com