

Professor introduces parenting guide

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When it comes to important phone calls, rarely do they come in the form of a survey. But such was the case for Alfred University (AU) Professor of Psychology Louis Lichtman, when a surveyor asked him a life changing question some 25 years ago: What do you think is the biggest problem facing our country today? His response? "Parenting." Lichtman's answer prompted him to introduce a parenting course to AU, which he has now taught approximately 80 times to over 1,200 students, all to glowing reviews. A quarter century after the phone call, the culmination of Lichtman's work on the subject has arrived in the form of his new book, "A Practical Guide for Raising a Self-Directed and Caring Child." The book serves as an alternative to Amy Chua's well-publicized "Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother," in which Chua advocates an authoritarian, parent-controlled approach toward raising children, where children are given orders and expected to follow suit. But Lichtman disagrees with Chua, and offers immense research to back it up. Lichtman instead advocates an authoritative style, with the differing suffix meaning that the child should be more self-directed. A democracy, where the rules are made but the child is encouraged to give feedback in the process. A specific instance in Lichtman's childhood provides insight into his approach. As a child growing up in Brooklyn, Lichtman was a huge fan of maple cake. But the rules of the family stated that cake was not to be served at breakfast. Lichtman got to thinking, and discovered that maple cake contained similar ingredients to the maple syrup on the pancakes he was sometimes served at breakfast. He presented this research to his mother, and it was determined that Lichtman could substitute maple cake for pancakes on occasion. In this instance, rather than be seen and not heard, Lichtman was encouraged to challenge, but not disobey, the rules. Lichtman's book differs from other practical guides in that it is largely research based. One instance would be the section on how to navigate your children through a divorce process, which now affects some 50 percent of marriages in the U.S. In this section, Lichtman provides some 32 scholarly sources to back up his advice. While recent attention has been on Lichtman's book, he has long been appreciated at Alfred, where he has taught for some 40 years. Having graduated from Brooklyn College in 1967 and received his Ph.D. from University of Maine in 1971, Lichtman has received three Alfred University Awards for Teaching Excellence, and received one more at the Alfred University Honors Convocation Friday, April 20. Lichtman's parenting course is a university favorite, and seems to be a rarity among colleges in the U.S. When he first introduced the course, Lichtman surveyed some 100 universities, finding that a mere eight offered a similar class. The course serves as a two-way street for Lichtman. It is discussion-based, and thus Lichtman over the years has received upwards of 1,000 first-hand accounts of parenting from students, either as child, mother or father, or even grandparents. Having taught the course for 25 years, Lichtman now cherishes the feedback he receives from former

students who have put Lichtman's methods to the test with their own kids. In a related community outgrowth of the course, Lichtman, along with two other Alfred University faculty members, founded the Alfred Montessori School.