

# What President Obama Can Teach America's Kids

by Bill O'Reilly  
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These are tough times for American children for a couple of reasons. The rise of the machines means that kids can now be exposed to material on computers or cellphones that is far beyond their emotional IQ. While high-tech can be a tremendous educational tool, explicit images and conversation easily found in cyberspace can rob children of their innocence and, in some cases, put them in actual danger. Even if parents are vigilant in monitoring the machines, kids can still get the bad stuff at school and on the playgrounds, as computer access is just about everywhere.

The disruption of the traditional American family is also adversely affecting millions of children. Right now, almost 22 million American kids are living with one parent; more than 80% of those are being raised primarily by Mom. Just 50 years ago, a child living without a father was somewhat of a rarity. Now it's an epidemic.

Thus, our modern age presents vast challenges to children, and they need to learn lessons quickly in order to prosper. And who better to teach them than the President of the United States?

As has been widely chronicled, Barack Obama had a tough childhood filled with instability and loneliness. However, that did not stop him from rising to become the most powerful man in the world. His breathtaking achievement presents five important lessons for all children.

## ■ Lesson One: Forgiveness

President Obama was just 2 when his father abandoned him and his mother in Hawaii. Four years later, his mother took her little son to Indonesia after she remarried. However, the home was somewhat chaotic as they tried to adjust to their new surroundings. So when Barry, as he was called, turned 10, he was sent back to Hawaii to live with his grandparents while his mother stayed abroad.

That kind of situation could ruin a child. But President Obama betrays no bitterness. In his books and speeches, he speaks lovingly of his mom. He admits she was somewhat "reckless" but also says he felt he was "the center of her universe."

As for his absent father, the President says the void he left motivated him to succeed. So, it is obvious that he is not wallowing in past pain. He does not harbor bitterness toward his parents. Instead, he accepted his situation and saw it as a challenge. He forgave his folks and embraced a positive outlook.

## ■ Lesson Two: Respect

Even though his mom and dad apparently put their needs ahead of his, he speaks of them in mostly affectionate terms. He finds a way not to demean them.

Patricia Saunders, a clinical psychologist who works with children in New York City, says: “Barack Obama dealt with his family situation by understanding it. He put his own ego aside and made a decision to act respectfully toward his folks. That maturity has served him very well throughout his life.”

#### ■ Lesson Three: Persistence

Barack Obama had few advantages as a child but decided to fight the good fight. That is, he got up when he was knocked down.

For example, in 2000, he lost his run for Congress in Illinois. He could have given up and gone into the private sector where high-salaried jobs awaited him. But he preferred public service. So, just four years later, he ran again, this time winning a U.S. Senate seat.

Psychologist Ruth Peters, who counsels children in Clearwater, Fla., believes that all the hard knocks Obama took in his young life prepared him for both defeat and victory.

“Some people shrink when they are faced with adversity,” she told me. “Others seem to gain momentum and are challenged when they fail. The President did not use his difficulties as an excuse to quit. He used them as motivators to persevere.”

But determination must be coupled with a very specific discipline in order to succeed in life. And that is the fourth lesson from the President.

#### ■ Lesson Four: Hard Work

A child does not go from taking English lessons in Indonesia to editing the *Harvard Law Review* without doing some tough work. The President earned his present job by performing in school and, later, in his various jobs. He was smart enough to lay a foundation for success. Early on as a kid, he understood the big picture.

“Barack Obama loves his work,” Saunders says. “And this is a great example for children. They must understand that work is very important and will ultimately define their lives.”

#### ■ Lesson Five—perhaps the greatest lesson the President can teach children: In America, anything is possible

This is something of a cliché, but never has it been more vividly illustrated. Barack Obama, a youngster in Hawaii without his parents around, has toughed it out and become one of history’s great stories, no matter what happens going forward. What he has achieved in his 48 years is simply astounding.

Consider the odds. The United States is a nation of more than 300 million citizens. Only one person is currently the Commander in Chief. That man had no fatherly guidance, is of mixed race, and had no family connections to guide him into the world of national politics.

That adds up to one simple truth that every American child should be told: “If Barack Obama can become the President of the United States, then whatever dream you may have can happen in your life.”

It all depends on lessons learned.

*PARADE* Contributing Editor Bill O’Reilly is the author of the best-seller “A Bold Fresh Piece of Humanity” and anchor of “The O’Reilly Factor” on the Fox News Channel.  
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