

***What is the ONE most important thing  
a parent can do for a child?***

I remember the day I first asked that question. It was in 1989 and I was teaching an 8th grade English class. We were reading Robert Newton Peck's autobiographical, coming-of-age novel *A Day No Pigs Would Die*. The topic for discussion was the character of Haven Peck, 13-year-old Robert's father in the story. My students were unusually animated and they all seemed to have something to say. (I did not realize what experts on parenting they were!) They had no trouble pointing out Haven's strengths and weaknesses as a parent, and they were all anxious to share their insights on how parents should behave. It was about the most interesting discussion I had ever had with a class.

At one point I asked what I thought was a pretty profound question – one that would give them cause to *stop and think* before clamoring to answer. I asked: “What is the ONE most important thing a parent should do for a child?”

Surprisingly, one hand shot up immediately. Scott was a somewhat morose kid who always sat in the corner farthest from me and as close to the back of the room as he could. He seldom participated and I'm sure he sat there because the seat was closest to the door. I was so surprised to see *his* hand up so quickly that I totally forgot to use the “wait time” strategy I had been taught in so many teacher training workshops.

There was fire in his eyes when I pointed to him indicating he could talk. He looked directly at me and his words were full of venom:

**“I'd let them keep their dreams!!!”**

Each word was pronounced clearly and separately, almost in a cadence. “I'd Let / Them Keep / Their Dreams.” Perfect iambac trimeter. Emily Dickinson would be proud. And I can still hear his words.

Scott is now grown and may have children of his own. The pain I feel comes from the fact that I don't remember anything about him except for this one incident. In fact, I don't even remember his real name. He just seems like a "Scott" in my memory. But his face and his words are clear: "I'd Let Them Keep Their Dreams."

Excerpt from *DreamKeepers – 1998*