

## **PERSPECTIVE—AMY BROWNFIELD, BURBANK, CALIF. MY RESPONSIBILITY AS A PARENT**

**At home and SGI activities, Amy Brownfield says: ‘As Buddhists, the first step after chanting for our child’s protection is to take action to ensure it. That means carefully supervising them.’**

I’m in the process of raising two daughters, Sheena, 15, and Maddy, 12, in the SGI-USA. During my entire 15 years of parenthood, I have also been either a district or chapter leader in the SGI-USA, and I’ve taken my children with me to every conceivable kind of activity. I have fond memories of doing home visits with one group leader when we had to take four children under the age of 5 to see a new member living in a crowded studio apartment. I’ve nursed babies and changed diapers, helped with homework, played games and been used as something to fall asleep on during meetings.

I’ve also had to chase toddlers or leave the meeting early. More times than I can count, after an enormous effort to get the family to the activity, I’ve missed 90 percent of what was said because of the kids. I remember several times having to drag my oldest daughter out of a meeting when she was 3 and 4 years old because she was having a full-fledged screaming tantrum.

For the first 7 or 8 years that I was a parent, I focused on raising well-behaved children. But somewhere along the line, I made the profound realization that what I needed was to become a well-behaved parent. Everything changed after that. The kids responded differently because I behaved differently.

I also realized that when I took kids to meetings, my position of responsibility as the parent could not be compromised by whatever role I had to take at the meeting. I still had to be 100 percent parent.

It’s my belief that kids are full-fledged SGI members and they belong at SGI activities. It is vital to both the safety of the children and the comfort of the other members that we keep our children under our immediate supervision at all times. If you bring a child with you that does not sit with you, it means that child is totally unsupervised. The volunteers who answer the phones, such as Byakuren, Soka Group and Gajokai members, are not responsible for your kids. They may be great at taking care of the community center but take it from me, some of them haven’t the slightest idea what to do with kids. It’s not their job anyway.

Don’t forget, we welcome everyone at our SGI community centers. Strangers can walk in off the street. For that matter, we don’t have door monitors to prevent children from just walking out. I think it’s a mistake to feel the kids will be okay on their own just because we are at an SGI community center. On the contrary, as Buddhists the first step after chanting for our children’s protection is to take action to ensure it. That means carefully supervising them.

Occasionally, there are unpleasant incidents involving unsupervised children. We can’t blame or banish the kids. As parents, we must take full responsibility. Kids belong at SGI activities but must always be under the direct care of the appropriate adult, most often a parent.

When we bring a child of any age to a meeting, we are bringing a full-fledged SGI

member to a Buddhist activity and we need to treat them as such. We must always be concerned for their safety and happiness. How can we help them enjoy the activity? When appropriate, it means bringing toys or books, providing a snack or a hand-held video game. Sometimes it means we have to leave the meeting early, which is perfectly okay and does not reflect poorly on a parent's faith. We want to make sure children enjoy coming to SGI activities.

I realize it's an incredible challenge to get a child to sit quietly beside you throughout a meeting. You have to come prepared and be flexible. You have to have prayer and solid determination behind you.

SGI President Ikeda says: "We should chant with the determination to lead our children, as well as our parents, to happiness and complete fulfillment. Each daimoku [Nam-myoho-renge-kyo] we chant with such determination becomes a brilliant sun illuminating the lives of our children or parents, transcending great distances and even the threshold of life and death" (*Learning From the Gosho: The Eternal Teachings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 168).

I'd like to ask the support of other members in nurturing these very special young people. We have the opportunity to get to know them now, because they'll be your leaders someday.