Taking Psychology Home

I do these as topics to start conversations in class and get the students to talk to their parents about psychology. When the students bring them in, I set onlinestopwatch.com for four minutes, and the group shares and discusses. We then make new groups of 4 and do this for three or four rounds.

**Developmental Psychology- 18 Skills for 18 Year-olds**

Come up with 18 skills all 18 year-olds should be able to do. Be specific and elaborate on each of the skills. For instance “cook” is too general. “Be able to prepare a basic breakfast, lunch, and dinner from scratch” is much better. These do not need to be all academic skills. Discuss with parents and others who are older than eighteen. The list will be graded based on variety and elaboration of the skills.

See lists in packet from Marilyn Vos Savant (Parade Magazine, 2001) and the former Stanford dean.

**Marriage- 15 Topics to Discuss before Marriage** (We spend a couple days on love and marriage after the AP test)

What are the essential topics a couple should discuss before marriage? Many churches now require couples to do pre-marriage therapy knowing the importance of having these conversations before getting married. The list should have a variety of topics and solid elaboration. Here is an example of one with good elaboration: “Are we going to have kids, and if so when do we plan to start the family and how many children would we like to have?”

**Social Psychology- 15 Social Norms**

Social norms are generally unwritten/unspoken rules of social behavior. These rules change over time (it used to be few American women had tattoos), across cultures (in some cultures it is rude to eat everything on your plate), and across situations (you might belch in front of your friends, but not at a nice restaurant). Write in complete sentences with elaboration. Try to talk to those who are older and have seen the rules change, and to others who have traveled to other states and countries.

**Tolerance vs Intolerance- Is Basic Human Nature Tolerant or Intolerant?**

I like students to bring in examples of how humans are tolerant or intolerant of other’s views and behaviors. Try not to have them focus on if you are born a certain way, but what has history and everyday behavior shown about tolerance. This is a good dinner discussion and students tend to come in with good examples. Have them score where they stand from 1 to 9.

**Problems with Rewards and Punishment-**

Students come to class with brainstorms of the problems with using both rewards and punishments. I generally have them try to come up with five problems of each. Also see if they can write about how rewards and punishments have been effective/ineffective in their own lives. I bring up Alfie Kohn who wrote Punished by Rewards.

Here is my general list:

## Problems with Rewards

1. Takes away intrinsic motivation
2. Discourages risk taking and creativity (fear of failure)
3. Maybe rewarding inappropriate beahavior
4. Person feels manipulated
5. People expect something for all behavior
6. Rewards have to get bigger and bigger
7. Can make unhealthy competition if comparing to others

## Problems with Punishments

1. Does not teach what to do
2. May learn physical responses to frustration
3. Suppresses behavior (fear of failure, learned helplessness)
4. Becomes “normal”, thus does not change behavior
5. Anger and resentment towards punisher
6. Punishment may actually be a reinforcer (attention, escape learning)
7. Teaches lying and deceit

#  Proper use of Punishments and reinforcement

1. Immediately after behavior for best results
2. Appropriate (overjustification) degree and length
3. Consistent for punishment, random for reinforcement
4. Reinforce/punish the behavior not the person- be specific, give explanations
5. Use reinforcement, extinction, and punishment together- reinforcement does work best