

Part 1 - Essential Parenting Attitudes

Parenting: A Complex Job Made Easier with the Right Outlook

Raising your children may be the most wonderful and rewarding job you'll ever have. It can also be the most complicated, challenging and frustrating profession in the world. None of us are born knowing how to be a parent, and most of us find that it's much more complex than we ever dreamed it would be. Taking care of a baby is our first step in the journey of parenthood. Just when we feel confident with our skills and ideals for raising babies, we turn around to find many of the things that we've learned do not apply to a walking, talking toddler. We adjust our approach, only to find that disrupted when our toddler turns into a preschooler, and again when he becomes a grade-schooler, and again when he enters the teen years . . . and yet again when our child graduates and moves on to college or adult life. There is no *stop* button for when your parenting job ends; as long as you have a child you continue to be a parent. We actually have a *brand new* parenting job each time our child passes from one milestone to another in his life. Just like any other undertaking, the more knowledge you have at each step of the way, the more confident you will feel and the easier your job will be, and the better your life-long relationship with your child.

There are many things that you can do to enhance your enjoyment of being a parent. Practiced skills and set guidelines can help you move from milestone to milestone with relative ease. These ideas can help you to raise your child to be a wonderful human being. You can discover these parenting skills on your own; they can be learned on the job through trial and error. However, the

error part can be prolonged and painful. Or, you can learn effective skills by analyzing and studying the success of masses of other parents who have gone before you.

It can help to begin your journey by examining your own feelings about what it means to be a parent. You can set off on the right road when you expel the negative beliefs that dampen your spirits, and then fill that space with positive, effective parenting skills.

Banish the Myths

As if it isn't challenging enough to raise children, most parents believe myths that complicate the process by making them feel confused, frustrated and inadequate. These horrible myths become dark, nearly suffocating clouds that hover over us, spoiling the joy of the child-rearing experience.

There is an oft repeated quote by John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester, who said, *"Before I got married, I had six theories about bringing up children. Now I have six children and no theories."* All of us have theories, ideals and expectations about parenting before we raise our own children. Once we become parents, we learn through experience that many of these turn out to be completely wrong. Sometimes these beliefs are naïve or misguided, sometimes they're total fabrications.

Here is a quiz to help you determine which common and distressing myths you believe. You may have never realized how intensely these beliefs affect you, but they do. After you identify the

myths that color your daily life, I'll share the truth about each one. By acknowledging that these myths exist in your life, you take the first step towards eliminating them. Learning the truth will erase your doubts and leave you open to learning effective new ways of raising your children. In the following table, indicate with an honest Yes or No if you believe (or have believed) the following statements:

YES	NO	Parenting belief
		If a parent is truly attached, committed and connected to a child, then that child will naturally behave properly.
		If you love your child, and if your intentions are good, parenting will come naturally to you.
		Good parents don't lose their patience and shout at their children.
		If parents are a perfectly matched couple, and they have a strong relationship then they will agree about how to raise their children.
		Parents are totally responsible for their child's behavior and actions. Outstanding parenting means that kids will turn out well.
		If you read parenting books, take classes, and learn effective skills and tools, then you will always be in control. Once you learn all the correct parenting approaches, your life as a parent will be trouble-free.

MYTH:

If a parent is truly attached, committed and connected to a child, then that child will naturally behave properly.

TRUTH:

You could be totally committed to your child from the moment of birth. You could read all the best parenting books. You could take parenting classes. You could do absolutely *everything* right. In fact, you could be a truly magnificent, spectacular, utterly faultless saint, and your child would *still* misbehave. The truth is: ALL children misbehave. ALL children make mistakes. ALL children will have temper tantrums, whine and fuss. Because ALL children are human beings – *young, inexperienced, naïve human beings*. And to be human is to be fallible – to make mistakes, to make poor decisions, and to, hopefully, learn from these.

Father-speak:

“We always thought that good parenting would mean that our child would not have fuss and have tantrums. Boy, were we wrong. It was almost harder to deal with the fact that despite our devoted parenting style our child was having tantrums than it was to deal with the actual tantrums.”

Adam, father to Zahava, age 4

When a child fails to behave, is not a reflection of a parent’s lack of commitment or skill. It is not an indication that the child is lacking in any way. It is simply a facet of our humanness.

It is our duty and privilege to love our children and to guide and direct them. To be committed to them, and to be devoted to parenting them in the best way we can. And to understand that our children *are* perfect – a realistic, human perfection that allows for mistakes and misbehavior along the way to growth and development. These mistakes are necessary to ensure the learning and growth of a child, and that is the beauty of parenting; that our children do not have to be flawless to receive our unconditional love and support.

MYTH:

If you love your child, and if your intentions are good, parenting will come naturally to you.

TRUTH:

Loving your child is easy. Raising your child is hard. Effective parenting skills are *learned*. Raising children is complicated, intense, and ever-changing. In order to be a calm, effective, parent you need knowledge and skills, and it's a very rare person who innately possesses these skills.

This concept is made even more complicated because there are no distinct black-and-white answers when it comes to raising children, and contradictory advice abounds. So parents must sort through everything they know, everything they hear, and everything they learn, to come up with the right parenting approach for each of their children.

Mother-speak:

“This is one of those myths that I believed totally, so I lost complete faith in myself when faced with my first son’s misbehavior. I looked for answers from everyone and anyone, and then I was left confused when I obtained totally conflicting advice. It has taken me two more children to finally figure out that all children have their unpleasant moments. Now, I believe in myself, read about things I have doubts on, and follow only the advice that makes sense to me.”

Janie, mother to Grayson, age 4, Emerson age 3, and Anna, age 2

MYTH:

Good parents don’t lose their patience and shout at their children.

TRUTH:

Even the most peaceful easy-going parent loses patience and yells from time to time – we are all human. No matter how much we love our children, they will try our patience, they will make mistakes, and they will bring us to anger.

All children have their “naughty” moments. And, guess what? When children are “naughty”--- parents lose their patience and <gasp> they YELL.

I am an experienced mom of four. I make my living writing books and giving lectures about how to raise children. I love my children with my whole heart and soul, and I try my best to be a good mother. Yet....my children misbehave. My six year old son misbehaves, and my three teenagers *still* misbehave. And, more often than I’d like, when my children misbehave... I lose my patience and I yell. Just like you. Just like every single parent in the entire world.

So what do you say we kill this oppressive myth? We should stand up and shout: Human beings make mistakes! Parents and children are human beings! Kids sometimes misbehave! Parents sometimes yell! That is NORMAL!

MYTH:

If parents are a perfectly matched couple, and they have a strong relationship, then they will agree about how to raise their children.

TRUTH:

It's very common for two parents, even those who are perfectly matched and in a happy relationship, to disagree about child-rearing approaches. Some may disagree about baby care issues, yet others will be perfectly in sync during the baby years and then find they are at odds when their child becomes school age or enters the teen years.

The way that we approach child-rearing is influenced by our own past experiences – both the things we choose to do, and the things we try to avoid. It is nearly impossible for two people to be in perfect agreement on every parenting decision. Good communication and ongoing discussion can help any couple to find agreement on important issues as they raise their children.

Even when we agree on basic fundamental parenting theory, we might slightly disagree on approach. Even if we agree on approach, our differing personalities guarantee that we won't always handle things in exactly the same way.

Mother-speak

“I have noticed many times that when my husband starts to discipline our son, I jump in and try to make what he has done seem not as bad. For some reason I get this maternal urge to SAVE him. Save him from what? I think about it later and realize that he was misbehaving and his daddy was correcting him, so no saving was necessary! Even though we are using the same technique, we use different verbal and non verbal approaches. That maternal instinct is always right there, but I have to continue to make an effort to let it go because my way is not the only way. I can see that Garrett is responding very well to the consistency of both of us in our separate ways.”

Brandy, mother to Garrett, age 2

MYTH:

Parents are totally responsible for their child’s behavior and actions. Outstanding parenting means that kids will turn out well.

TRUTH:

Adult’s personalities are all different, so are children’s. Even when two children are raised in exactly the same way, in the same house, and with the same parents, their unique personalities, and their different perceptions of life affect how they interpret their world. They can become very different people. It is true that a parent’s actions can greatly influence behavior – but personality plus life experiences outside the family have an impact on how a child responds in any given situation.

Father-speak:

“My brothers and I were all raised the same way, but we are three distinctly different people, with very dissimilar personalities and traits. We are so different that some people are surprised to find out that we’re even brothers.”

David, father to Brian, age 6 and Josh, age 3

Parents are not 100% responsible for every action their child takes. Children are separate human beings from their parents, and from a young age their decisions begin to affect the path they will take in life. Children are not a blank slate upon which we can write whatever we choose, nor are they a piece of clay that we can mold into any shape we desire. However, parents do matter, and they matter a great deal. How you raise your children will make an influential impact on the adult that your child becomes. There is a definite relationship between the way you raise your children and the level of happiness and success they will achieve in life. Positive, thoughtful, effective parenting has the greatest chance of reaping the reward of successful, happy children with healthy self esteem who grow into successful, happy adults who experience a satisfying life.

MYTH:

If you read parenting books, take classes, and learn effective skills and tools, then you will always be in control. Once you learn all the correct parenting approaches, your life as a parent will be trouble-free.

TRUTH:

Parents are people, and people are not perfect. No matter how many wonderful skills we have, no matter how much knowledge we have, there will be many times when our emotions get in the way and we don't react in the best ways. And, as a matter of fact, the more we know the more critical we are of ourselves. We begin to see the mistakes more clearly and judge our own faults more harshly. It's the best parents who try the hardest, yet they judge themselves by the strictest guidelines.

Everyone needs help as they raise children. No one should parent in a vacuum – we should take advantage of the many wonderful resources available to guide us, but with the understanding that we cannot possibly apply everything we learn every day.

In addition, children are people, too. They have volatile emotions, varying moods and plenty of needs and wants. And children change and grow from day to day as they learn about themselves and their world.

To aim for 100% perfection in parenting is an impossible goal. 70% is about as perfect as you can get as a parent. This 70% can result in a happy family. Even with the usual bumps and bad moments, this 70% will result in children who turn out well.

Parents who do the right thing 70% of the time should feel proud of the job they are doing.

Take some time to think about these and other myths, theories, ideals and expectations that you have believed. Ponder where these beliefs originated, and why you believe them to be truth.

Then contemplate what you learning about the truth of the matter. When you analyze myths and replace them with your own truth, it can help you to approach parenting in a more honest, uncluttered and enjoyable way.

“Do not believe in what you have heard; do not believe in traditions because they have been handed down for many generations; do not believe anything because it is rumored and spoken of by many; do not believe merely because the written statements of some old sage are produced; do not believe in conjectures; do not believe in that as a truth to which you have become attached by habit; do not believe merely on the authority of your teachers and elders.

After observation and analysis, when it agrees with reason and is conducive to the good and benefit of one and all, then accept it and live up to it.”

Buddha — (2,600 years ago)

Planning Ahead, Looking Ahead: Your Child as a Teenager

I recently lectured at a conference for childbirth educators. The theme was “Preparing Expectant Parents for the Realities of Life with Baby.” The organizers told me that the theme was chosen because one of the most common challenges educators report is that parents put a great deal more time and energy into decorating the nursery and buying baby clothes than into thinking about what life with their baby will be really like. Consequently, the most common complaints

that new parents have are: “*I didn’t know what to expect!*” “*No one ever told me raising a baby would be so hard!*” “*I feel clumsy, confused and inadequate.*” The reality of life with a new baby shines a beacon on the fact that the color of the nursery walls and the number of cute outfits in the dresser have nothing whatsoever to do with how confident, capable or prepared a new parent is in their new role.

It is the same manner of thinking that causes many parents of young children to believe that it’s much too early to be thinking ahead to when their children are teens, or even sixth graders. Here is a time when my personal experience as a mother allows me an inspired understanding. My youngest child is a kindergartener. My older three children are teenagers – my oldest just beginning college. This blend of ages is a blessing in my work as a parenting educator -- I can see both ends of the parenting spectrum.

Just as childbirth educators believe that understanding baby care *before* the baby comes home gives parents the knowledge for coping with the challenges they meet *after* the baby comes, I believe that looking ahead to the time when your child will be a young *adult* will provide you with tremendous guidance and insight as you raise your young child today. It’s almost as if you give yourself an opportunity to look to the future for a bit of emotional time travel and ask “What would I have done differently?” *before* the future arrives.

As a mother of an eighteen year old who’s soon off to college, and two other teenagers who are soon on their way as well, but also immersed in daily life with my six year old, I asked myself, what would I have done differently with my older three children, what *will* I do differently with

my youngest, and how would I approach parenting if another baby were to enter my life? Putting aside any trivial issues (I would have created a shoe cubby much sooner) this book allows me to share my most important realizations and lessons with you.

Look ahead, and then look back: What would *you* have done differently – that you can change now

Luckily, I am able to see with open eyes, make corrections, and use what I have learned as I continue to raise my children. And, even more, I'm able to share these thoughts with you. Of course, not every parent has the same goals, values or personality as I do. And each of you will create your own list, in time. However, what's most important right now is to simply take the time to envision your child as a young adult, and capture the most important traits and values you hope to see in that beautiful person, and the relationship you will have with that incredible human being.

Use your vision to guide you as you make the most important decisions in your daily life. This is an ongoing process that requires updating from time to time, but by keeping one eye on the future you will make better decisions today.

How today's actions will affect your future teenager

We cannot totally mold our child into the person we want him to be, of course. However, the ways that we respond to our babies, toddlers, and preschoolers will directly affect the way they

will be as school-age children, which will affect who they become as teenagers and then as adults. When it comes to the typical misconduct that parents of teenagers struggle with, the seeds of those behaviors were planted way, way, *way* back -- when the teen was a baby and toddler. Those seeds were unintentionally watered and fertilized during the preschool and early childhood years until they became sturdy plants, or, actually, more like overgrown weeds, that become very difficult to deal with.

If you could get a glimpse of your children as they will be in the future it would provide enlightenment and give you tremendous guidance as move through your days. You can't do that, but you don't really have to. Since all children are remarkably similar in many behaviors, you can gain the benefit of those families who have gone before you to plant the seeds for a more positive and pleasant future. Here are some specific examples of unpleasant teen behavior, compared to the preferred behavior, along with tips on how you can increase the odds that your child will grow into a teenager and young adult who demonstrates the good behavior that we all hope for:

Typical older-child/teenager misbehavior	Preferred behavior	How to help your young child to develop the preferred behavior
Leave dirty dishes all over the house.	Put dishes in dishwasher, run it, then put them	Toddler: Hand dish to you when done eating. Preschooler: Put their dishes on the counter or in

	away.	the sink. Child: Put dishes in the dishwasher. Help unload and put dishes away. Follow a clean up routine.
Leave piles of dirty clothes on bedroom floor.	Launder clothes and put them away.	Toddler: Carry his own clothes to a hamper in his room. Preschooler: Put clothes in a hamper in the laundry room, or sorted into bins. Child: Help sort clean socks; fold t-shirts. Put away own clean clothes into drawers or on shelves.
Talk back to parents when told to do something.	Do as told, even if unhappy, without backtalk.	Toddler: Avoid excessive use of “No”; tell child what you want, more often than what you don’t want. Preschooler: Politely correct inappropriate comments. Teach child how to express negative emotions in an acceptable way.

		<p>Child: Immediately address every episode of backtalk; define behaviors that aren't permitted; be consistent.</p>
<p>Ignore parent's requests.</p>	<p>Acknowledge a request and do as asked.</p>	<p>Toddler: Make requests simple, clear and age-appropriate.</p> <p>Preschooler: Make requests that are eye-to-eye, clear and specific.</p> <p>Child: Follow through with action (such as taking a child by the hand) if he doesn't respond right away.</p>
<p>Forget to do chores, like take out the trash.</p>	<p>Do daily chores without being asked.</p>	<p>Toddler: Have child help to clean up after self; make it an enjoyable process.</p> <p>Preschooler: Have daily clean-up routines.</p> <p>Child: Give child specific, daily responsibilities listed on a chore chart.</p>

<p>Bicker and fight with siblings.</p>	<p>Get along, and maturely handle disagreements.</p>	<p>Toddler: Teach how to share and how to be kind and gentle to siblings.</p> <p>Preschooler: Mediate sibling squabbles and teach children how to solve their problems.</p> <p>Child: Require children to work out their differences while you oversee from a distance.</p>
<p>Shout or use foul language.</p>	<p>Express anger appropriately.</p>	<p>Toddler: Acknowledge and label child's emotions to help him understand himself.</p> <p>Preschooler: Encourage child to talk about feelings; help child find resolutions to problems.</p> <p>Child: Teach anger management skills such as taking quiet time alone to cool off.</p>
<p>Teach possessions carelessly.</p>	<p>Respect and care for property.</p>	<p>Toddler: Don't allow destruction or rough misuse of toys.</p> <p>Preschooler: Don't have too much clutter of unused toys. Don't immediately replace broken</p>

		<p>toys.</p> <p>Child: Don't overindulge. Have child earn some money to buy coveted toys. Keep toys neat and organized.</p>
<p>Be a couch potato, watch too much TV, and not get enough exercise.</p>	<p>Watch limited TV, be active, and get ample exercise.</p>	<p>Toddler: Limit TV to thirty minutes a day or less; encourage active games and activities.</p> <p>Preschooler: Don't use the TV as a daily babysitter. Make outside play and busy activities the priority.</p> <p>Child: Encourage child to participate in sports; set your home up with plenty of supplies for active play; limit TV watching time to an agreed amount.</p>
<p>Lie about both big things and small things without concern.</p>	<p>Tell the truth, even in difficult situations.</p>	<p>Toddler: Teach about and model honesty.</p> <p>Preschooler: Don't punish for mistakes. Coach child to be honest.</p>

		Child: Focus on solutions to problems instead of punishment. Commend child's honesty.
Not communicate with parents.	Have open, honest communication.	Toddler: Play with your child daily. Preschooler: Take time daily to listen to child's ramblings. Encourage chatter. Child: Listen to child face-to-face without distraction. Try to see life from child's point of view.
Lack social skills; exhibit rudeness and thoughtlessness.	Be polite and considerate.	Toddler: Teach good manners. Preschooler: Tirelessly and politely remind child to use manners. (Please, thank you, excuse me) Child: Model good manners with your child and others. Expect child to use the manners he has been taught.

This list shows only a few of the most common and frustrating behaviors, but of course, it's not a complete picture of everyday life. The list could go on for many more pages to fill entire book! However, if you can begin to open your mind beyond the moment and look to where you and your child are headed in the future, you'll be able to make better, more effective parenting decisions. Every single time? Every single day? No, not by a long shot! Life is complicated, and days with children are hectic, but when you have guiding lights along your path, the end result is always, always better.

Building a Strong Foundation

This book is about how to live everyday life with your children in a controlled yet loving and joyous manner. It provides plenty to think about in regards to your role as a parent as well as ways to help you better understand your child. It is filled with practical tips that you can use every day to make life easier. However, all these ideas can work so much better when the foundation of your parenting approach is strong and stable.

What creates a strong foundation? What things make a parent calm and confident? What attitudes encourage a child's cooperation? What mindsets bring about effective, positive discipline? What are the most important concepts for you to learn and use during your child's early years of life? These are important questions with complicated answers.

As I sit here, sending my oldest child, now a lovely young woman, off to college, I have been able to look back over the past eighteen years and contemplate the things I've done to help her reach this important milestone. I asked myself: What have I learned? What are the most important lessons I should share with parents of young children who are just setting out on the parenting journey? After much contemplation, I would like to share with you the things I wish someone had told me when I was first starting out as a mother.

The big picture is more important than any one action.

From the time your baby is born until the time your child leaves home for college or wherever the future leads, the two of you may have over 100,000 hours to interact and connect. It would be absolutely, utterly impossible for all of those 100,000 hours to be blissfully happy and precisely choreographed. There will be plenty of rough spots, uncalled-for anger, and mistakes – both on your part and your child's. To even attempt perfection would be ludicrous and stress invoking, yet most of us parents criticize ourselves unnecessarily over every negative situation.

Raising a child requires that we make many decisions every single day, from the insignificant to the life-altering. Sometimes it is obvious that you have made the right decision, other times it is unclear, and from time to time it's apparent that you have made a mistake. Nearly every mistake that you make as a parent has been made by a multitude of parents in history.

What is more important than any single action is your overall philosophy and approach to raising your child. When love is your foundation, parenting skills are your structure, and your goal is to

raise your child to be a good human being, with whom you can have a pleasant lifelong relationship, then it is likely things will turn out as you hope.

Contemplate your most important goals for your family and determine which values you will use to guide your decisions. Learn good parenting skills and use them on a daily basis. And then, forgive yourself and your children the mistakes that inevitably happen along the way.

Relax more and stress less.

Oh, my! The millions of little things I've stressed about over the past eighteen years! Messy rooms, dirty faces, lost toys, peas not eaten. Not a single one of these things means a gosh darn thing today. Those insignificant, trivial details certainly make up a large part of life, but when they cause a disproportionate amount of angst they conceal the many little joys that children bring into our lives.

View the little things for what they are – little things – and don't let them get the way of taking pleasure out of every single day of family life.

Mother-speak

"I always say "appreciate every step of the way." Don't look ahead and wish the children were older and in school, or out of school and independent. Don't look behind and be sad over the fact that they grew up so quickly. Just enjoy the moment. Every stage has its pros and cons. No stage is perfect, and every stage passes eventually."

Bonnie, mother to Ariella, age 16, Yonina, age 14, Dovi, age 12, Mordechai, age 10, Yedidya, age 6 and Liora, age 2

Enjoy the play more.

Be willing to join your little ones in their incredibly enchanting play a little bit more often. You don't always have to have one eye on the clock when you're immersed in playtime with your child. Let the answering machine pick up a few more messages. Ignore the 'ding' of incoming messages on your computer until the fort is complete, the play-doh zoo is built, or the book finished.

Of course you play with your children, but far too often you probably feel guilty for that playtime – something “more important” is waiting to be done. If you were to make a list of all those oh-so-important things that have interfered with playtime in the past, I'm sure the list would appear just a little bit foolish. The important things all got done, I'm sure, although you probably can't remember them all. And I'm certain that a bit more playtime wouldn't have caused chaos. And once your child is a busy teen, or a young adult moving out of your home, you'll realize that the most important thing of all was that playtime spent with your child.

Mother-speak:

”I was trying to finish all my errands today and clean my house. As I was trying to mop the kitchen floor, my daughter kept standing right in front of me, making it impossible. I tried to explain to her that mommy needed to mop. I tried to distract her with a toy, and take her to another room to play, but she just kept coming right back. So finally I decided the dirty floor

wasn't that important, and sat down with her on the floor to read a book with her. After a few more books, she went off contentedly to play on her own, and I finished the floor.

Your comment about not watching the clock while you play with your child made me think of myself, obstinately trying to mop the kitchen floor while my little girl stood right in front of me making it impossible. Giving her the little bit of attention she needed *right then*, not waiting till it was convenient to me, removed her as a physical obstacle to my mopping job. But more importantly, it changed her in my mind from an obstacle into a little person who really needed her mommy to be with her for just a few moments.”

Sarah, mother to Axa, age 2

Parent and child playtime *is* important. Not only for building children’s skills and knowledge of life, but for building relationships between parent and child, too. So, plan for, carry out, and enjoy more playtime with your children. They won’t be little forever, you know, and you won’t regret the time you spent with them.

To My Grown-up Son

By Deb Barone

My hands were busy through the day

I didn't have much time to play

The little games you asked me to.

I didn't have much time for you.

I'd wash your clothes, I'd sew and cook,

But when you'd bring your picture book

And ask me, please, to share your fun,

I'd say, 'A little later, son.'

I'd tuck you in all safe at night,

And hear your prayers, turn out the light,

Then tiptoe softly to the door.

I wish I'd stayed a minute more.

For life is short, and years rush past,

A little boy grows up so fast.

No longer is he at your side.

His precious secrets to confide.

The picture books are put away,

There are no children's games to play,

No good night kiss, no prayers to hear.

That all belongs to yesteryear.

My hands once busy, now lie still

The days are long and hard to fill.

I wish I might go back and do

The little things you asked me to.

Give yourself more credit for what you do right, and don't examine so intently the things you do wrong.

We all make mistakes and life is never perfect. Even when we *don't* use our parenting skills, even when we are too stressed, and even when we don't take enough time for playtime; life is usually plenty good enough, because we're probably doing more things right than we realize. Family bonds truly can fill in any gaps with a love that transcends mistakes. A caring heart and a warm embrace can make up for less-than-perfect moments. And if you try to be a good parent, the odds are definitely in your favor that you will succeed.

Dedicated parents read parenting books, so I know that if you are reading these words you are a parent who truly cares about doing the best job you can. I also know that the more you read, and the more you learn, the more self-critical you can become. It would take a God-like superhuman being to put into practice every single idea that you learn, every moment, of every day. The fact that you learn and do your best to apply what you learn is commendable.

Do your best, learn from your mistakes, and appreciate that you are doing a grand and important job. Give yourself a pat on the back, and give credit where credit is due. You are doing a better job than you think.

Mother-speak

"Why do we mothers all feel compelled to be Supermom and then feel let down when we can't do it all?"

Romi, mother to Carter, age 4 and Brinley 19 months

Let your heart win out over voices of insistent, insensitive and unwanted advice.

When it comes to child-rearing nearly everyone has an opinion, and most people adamantly defend their own beliefs. Not only that, but many people judge other approaches harshly. They often feel compelled to convert others to their way of thinking.

Make decisions about how you want to raise your children. Read books that align with your beliefs, and spend time with other parents who think as you do. Be open to new ideas, but sift them through your moral strainer before you apply them to your own family. Once you make thoughtful decisions move forward with confidence.

Be willing to break the rules.

Thrown caution to the wind and follow your heart more often. Cherish every single moment with your children – even the not-so-perfect ones. Loosen up a bit and know that you don't have to be the serious, dull, authoritative boss every single moment of every single day.

Maybe this comes from my experience (raising four children), maybe it comes from being an older mother (fifty is within striking distance.) Or maybe it comes from the confidence of being

viewed as a parenting expert. Probably it's a combination of all these things, but I have learned to let my hair down a lot more often.

Lately I've been brave a little more often and have risked breaking the rules in favor of good, old-fashioned family bonding. I've taken my teenagers to rock concerts that end at midnight – on a school night. I've let my six-year-old join my bed in the middle of the night (and enjoyed every single snuggle.) I've let the kids order pizza when no one feels like cooking, and eat dessert before dinner so the ice cream won't melt. There's something almost decadent about purposely going against the norm. And there's something very fulfilling about doing it anyway, when it's definitely the right thing to do for your family at that moment.

Of course I don't break every rule, and the ones I selectively break I don't do so every time. But when my heart says *yes* I'm willing to be a little bit less of a stuffy grown up, and more of a carefree kid. And everyone benefits from that.

If I Had My Child to Raise Over Again

by Diane Loomans

If I had my child to raise all over again,
I'd finger paint more, and point the finger less.
I'd do less correcting, and more connecting.
I'd take my eyes off my watch, and watch with my eyes.
I would care to know less, and know to care more.

I'd take more hikes and fly more kites.
I'd stop playing serious, and seriously play.
I would run through more fields and gaze at more stars.
I'd do more hugging, and less tugging.
I would be firm less often, and affirm much more.
I'd build self-esteem first, and the house later.
I'd teach less about the love of power,
And more about the power of love.

See the world through your child's eyes.

Children are...childish. Their actions, thoughts and words originate in a place of innocence and an egocentric understanding of the world. If a child wants a cookie he is thinking only of the rich taste of chocolate and the pleasure it would bring him. He's not thinking about how it affects his appetite for lunch, how it fits into his overall diet, how the cost fits into the family grocery budget, or if asking fifteen times will make his mother mad. He purely and simply wants a cookie.

If we can avoid evaluating our child's motivation from an adult perspective, but rather to view his behavior on face value – as an innocent and undiluted need or want – it will help us choose how to respond in the most helpful and effective ways. It will prevent tears and anger – from both you and your child.

Remember that your child is a child, and has a lot to learn about life. Keep in mind that he isn't out to get you, he isn't trying to anger you, and he doesn't have a master plan to drive you crazy. He's just going about life in his blissful little world.

Discipline doesn't have to be unpleasant to be effective.

There are times when our children teach us more about parenting than any expert documents and research that we could study. One such moment of insight occurred for me just last week. I was walking down a busy street with my little Coleton. As typical of a kindergartener, he was curious about every leaf and bug along the way, and he kept lagging behind. Being in a hurry (as we adults too often are) and being concerned about Coleton wandering off, I shouted at him to keep up and quite dawdling. He did catch up with me then, and with tear-filled eyes said, "Next time you feel like being mad at me, why don't you just hug me instead, and then tell me what you want me to do." So, we did hug, I explained that he needed to stay close, and we held hands and continued on our way.

Don't be too quick to jump into unforgiving or harsh discipline. Try the gentle methods first – kind requests, polite appeals and, as Coleton recommends, a hug.

Know that it's not that important.

What's not that important? Well...nearly everything. The majority of the annoyances we suffer with our children are due to minor issues – whining about bedtime, fussing about sharing a toy,

lack of desire to eat a green bean. For the first six or more years of a child's life I can't really think of a single thing that child could do that would truly warrant a parent's anger. Yes, of course we get angry at our children, we are human. But what I'm trying to say is that a young child is incapable of doing anything that would significantly affect us – the things that push our buttons are inconsequential to the grand picture of life. If we could somehow get through our days with this concept in mind we parents would be happier, calmer and much more peaceful.

Keep clear about your priorities. Life will be more peaceful when you can convince yourself that a green bean is only a green bean – not an attack on your values, your parenting skills, or your domestic talents.

Give the small stuff small attention and the big stuff big attention.

I remember a professor in college telling the class on the very first day, “If you put the same amount of attention into sharpening your pencil as into writing your thesis you will only succeed in making yourself a nervous wreck.” As a parent, you must deal with a million details every single day of life. If you make everything equal on the scale of importance – from putting toys in the toy box to choosing the right preschool, you will very likely make yourself a nervous wreck.

If you can truly manage to give the small things small attention and the big things big attention you will not only be happier and calmer – you *children* will likely be happier, calmer and better behaved. Why? Children (and all human beings) have a limited amount of capacity. If your child is attempting to master and respond to an endless amount of parental expectations, then most

certainly some will fall through the cracks. If you give the same amount of energy to all things, then you cannot control which things stick, and which fall. So, in response to your intense expectations on all fronts, your child might master putting his toys in the toy box when he's done playing, but push his baby sister over and step on the dog on his way to get there.

As you move through your days with your child, know that everything cannot be perfect, and your child will not obey all the rules. So make choices, let the little stuff go for later (or for good) and choose your "big stuff" wisely.

Rest assured that your kids love you, even when they hate you (because they really don't).

Raising children requires that you act like a grown up – that you must tell them *no* when they want to hear *yes*, you tell them *stop* when they want to *go*. Many such decisions are for your child's safety, many are for his own good, and some are for your own good. I have yet to know of a child who is capable of understanding adult decisions and responding to a *no* or a *stop* with a cheerful, "*Good for you, Mommy! Excellent parenting decision.*"

Remember that children are egocentric – they are concerned primarily with their own needs and wants, and your *nos* get in the way of them doing what they want to do. Therefore they get upset. Their response may be anger, tantrums and tears, and you may get the feeling that they hate you. But they aren't even thinking about *you* – they are thinking about the thing they want to do, but can't. You just happen to be the bearer of bad news.

Know that your child's unhappiness about your decisions, and his tears or anger when he is disciplined is normal, natural and not truly directed at you. While your child may not thank you for your good decisions, now (or ever), those decisions are an important part of everyday life and the development of your child as a good human being.

Your most important goal as a parent is *not* to make your child happy every minute of every day – that would be easy: an endless supply of candy and ice cream, and say *yes* to every request.

Your actual goal is much harder: raise a first-rate human being.

Relax, because when you're prepared for the worst, it almost never happens.

Part of the parenting job description is to worry. With our babies we worry about little things like diaper rash, and big things like SIDS. With our toddlers we worry about things like bruised knees and delays in developmental milestones. As our children grow, so do our worries.

Worry itself is useless. Studies even tell us that most of the things we worry about never happen. It is better to be prepared, be knowledgeable and then very simply stated: don't think about it so much. Banish needless worry – it's a waste of a good imagination.

When the worst does happen, you'll get through it and you'll move on.

Bad things do happen. Some which we have no control over, and some as a result of decisions made, but either way, when bad things happen, we cannot manipulate time and make them not happen. In all but the most extreme cases, we human beings are resilient and adaptable. We can adjust how we think and what we do, and move past even the most difficult situations.

When difficult situations arise take time to analyze them. Talk to others. Read books. Make a plan for how you will handle things. And then proceed to carry out your plan.

Live in the moment

A parent's job is complicated and time consuming. Add to this the countless other tasks that fill up our days and it is a never ending process of juggling a few too many balls. One of the biggest problems comes from not only handling the balls in your hands, but looking at and thinking about all the other balls that are still up in the air. As you are busy looking at them, the ones in your hands suffer because they never get your full attention.

Let's take a practical example. Think of the times you sit on the floor playing with your child. Not being in the moment is when you are watching the clock, worrying about other things you must do, or being bored with child's games. Being in the moment is choosing to truly connect and enjoy your child – even if it's for only ten minutes. Watching her mouth form words as she speaks, watching her hands as she expresses her ideas, enjoying the enthusiasm of her imagination, listening to her ideas, absorbing what she believes and cherishing the little person that she is.

The added beauty of being in the moment is that your child will feel the difference. Having mommy or daddy sit beside her on the floor as she plays (but whose mind is elsewhere) feels very different than having the same parent engaged and absorbing the beauty of the moment. And it is the combination of many such moments upon which a relationship is built.

The more that you can embrace living in the moment as a part of who you are, the more fulfilling your everyday life will be.

Discipline and Emotional Control

Take a moment to think about how you respond to emotionally challenging situations in your own life:

When you and your spouse have a disagreement, do you always respond with a calm, purposeful explanation of your position?

When your mother-in-law gives you unwanted advice, do you cheerfully thank her for her kind wisdom (and then call your best friend to rave about her thoughtfulness?)

When your child spills chocolate milk on the living room rug, do you joyfully whistle while you apply rug cleaner?

When you delete the wrong file, burn dinner, or the dog pees on the carpet do you smile and cheerfully announce, “No problem! That’s life!”

While I am sure there are times your response to emotional situations such as these is calm and pleasant, I suspect that far too frequently your reaction is annoyance, anger, impatience, and maybe even an adult-sized temper tantrum. The human experience involves facing numerous challenges, yet we don't always have the patience, understanding or restraint to respond in the best possible way.

So, here's the million dollar question: If we capable, mature adults cannot control our emotions completely, is it even remotely possible that our children would be capable of such a feat?

Is it possible that this lack of emotional control is at the root of young children's negative behaviors? That misbehavior is the symptom, but the real problem is immaturity? Look at the following list of the most common childish misbehaviors and determine if these could be caused by a lack of emotional control – an inability to handle strong emotions such as frustration, anger and powerlessness:

Behavior	Could be caused by a lack of emotional control? Yes or No?
Backtalk	
Biting a playmate	
Clinging	
Crying	
Hitting a parent	
Impatience	

Interrupting	
Kicking a sibling	
Screaming and yelling	
Separation anxiety	
Squabbles over sharing	
Stubbornness	
Teasing	
Temper tantrums	
Whining and fussing	

Are you a bit surprised that ALL of the most common childish misbehaviors are likely caused by a child’s undeveloped emotional control? Yes, all of them! Every single one! Is it possible that any child on the face of this earth could be born with mature understanding and emotional control? No, of course it’s not. Even the smartest, sweetest, most peaceful, pleasant child could not possibly exit the womb with the wisdom and ability to totally control his emotions. (And let’s not forget that adults don’t even possess this gift.)

So what does this mean for you and your view of your child’s actions? You now have the key to understanding your child’s misbehavior in a way that can allow you to gently discipline in the context of the true meaning of the word: to teach and to lead.

Next time your child misbehaves: has a temper tantrum, hits a friend, or yells at you – instead of looking at him and thinking “What a brat!” you can instead think, “Whoa. This child is

seriously lacking emotional control.” You can step back, calm down, and understand that it’s not a lack of parenting skills, and it’s not a defect in your child’s personality, it’s just ordinary human growth.

Father-speak:

“We have an old Irish saying that I use when one of my girls is hollering or fussing, "*You'll be better before you're married.*" It doesn't offer much comfort to the child, of course, but it does help the grown-ups! All these little trials will pass and someday be forgotten. It's a philosophy that puts the end goal in perspective. The point is getting them safely and sanely to adulthood.”

Raymond, father to Elena, age 4 and Eva, age 2

The most important concept to remember

Your child doesn’t whine, fuss and have temper tantrums because she is trying to manipulate you. She isn’t purposely being “bad.” She doesn’t misbehave just to make you angry. Simply put: your child’s misbehaviors are a direct result of the fact that she cannot control her emotions.

This is biologically, psychologically and absolutely normal.

A child is emotion in motion – untamed emotion in constant motion. Only with maturity and experience will a child develop the tools that bring emotional control.

If you can keep this one vital fact in the forefront of your mind, I guarantee that the next 18 or so years will be much happier and immeasurably more peaceful for you. It will also give you the presence of mind to help your child learn how to develop appropriate emotional control.

The Four Parts to Discipline

Discipline is a very complicated and complex matter. We want to enjoy our children, we don't want to stress about the little things, and we want to be forgiving to our children and our selves. However – there are many, many things we must get our children to do, or stop them from doing. There are lots of daily tasks that must be completed. And children don't always listen, they don't always do the things we want them to do, and they have a limited amount of knowledge and emotional control. As I see it, there are four distinct parts to the purpose and goal of discipline:

- 1 – To correct immediate behavior
- 2 – To teach a lesson.
- 3 – To give tools that build self-discipline and emotional control.
- 4 – To build the parent/child relationship.

Let's examine how this applies to a few typical situations so that you can begin to understand how these four purposes colors almost every discipline situation with your child.

Situation:

Your child is having a temper tantrum in a store because you won't buy a new toy.

1 – **Correct** immediate behavior

Take your child to a restroom or unpopulated corner of the store. Wait for your child to stop the tantrum.

2 – **Teach** a lesson

You can't have everything you want. You need to express your emotions appropriately.

3 – **Give tools** to build self discipline and emotional control

Help child write a list of toys that she wants, but can't have right now.

4 – **Build** the relationship

Demonstrate leadership, understanding and patience.

Situation:

Your two children are squabbling over a toy.

1 – **Correct** immediate behavior

Put the toy on the counter while you get your children to stop tussling and pay attention to you.

2 – **Teach** a lesson

Children need to learn how to share toys and take turns.

3 – **Give tools** to build self discipline and emotional control

Help children by setting a timer so each can have a five minute turn with it. Show them how to do this in the future without your help.

4 – **Build** the relationship

Show them how to play together and how to settle disputes. Show them that they can look to you for help in handling problems.

Situation:

Your child is upset with a playmate and bites her on the arm.

1 – **Correct** immediate behavior

Separate the children. Provide attention and care to the child who was bitten.

2 – **Teach** a lesson

Get down to your child's level, put your hands on her shoulders, look her in the eye and tell her, "Biting hurts. We don't bite. Give Emmy a hug now. That will make her feel better."

3 – **Give tools** to build self discipline and emotional control

Give your child a few hints on how she should handle her frustration next time; “If you want a toy, you can ask nicely for it or you can come to Mommy for help.”

4 – **Build** your relationship

Show your child that you are on her side even when she makes mistakes. Demonstrate that she can count on you to teach her how to handle strong emotions.

Discipline is not a one-time maneuver

You say you’ve tried to get your little one to put his toys away, but he never does. You’re after your daughter constantly not to whine, yet that screechy voice continues. You repeatedly attempt to get your two children to share their toys *nicely* yet it seems that daily you’re refereeing an argument over toys. No matter what you do, the same issues keep coming up over and over again.

Think about something that you do, or don’t do – that you know you should do differently.

Perhaps it’s exercising or eating healthily. Maybe it’s keeping your desk organized or your closet clean. Perhaps it’s staying calm when your flight is delayed or you are stuck in traffic. In all of these examples it’s likely that you struggle to always do the right thing, even when you know what the right thing is. So, if you, the mature adult, still don’t do everything the right way how could you possibly expect such a feat from your young child?

Discipline means to teach – and it is a very rare lesson that can be learned in one simple session. Furthermore, young children cannot easily apply what they’ve learned in one situation to another. So even minor variations create entirely new scenarios – for example, learning to share toys with a sibling at home isn’t easily transposed to the situation of sharing playground equipment with a friend at the park.

Mother-speak:

“Too often we are caught saying 'how many times have I said....' - we forget that children *need* repetitive teaching to learn.”

Sonja, mother to Ekatarina, age 3

What this all means is that you must teach the same, or similar, lessons over and over and over and *over* again in many different ways until, perhaps, your child will master the idea and claim it as his own. Even then, just because a child knows what is right doesn’t mean he will always do the right thing. (Do you *always* drive the posted speed limit?) Our job as parents is to help our children learn right from wrong, and how to make the right decisions in life. It is to guide and teach our children, every day, in many ways.

Discipline means teaching, and as such, it can encompass almost every interaction you have with your child. When you are thoughtful about your role as a parent, and when you keep your eye on your long-term goals and use carefully planned parenting skills, then your essential parenting attitudes will be properly aligned and your job as a parent will be more fulfilling and rewarding.