

# "Back to Basics" Parenting

## 1. Debunking some myths, and re-learning some basic facts:

- a. Raising kids isn't difficult – trust your common sense
- b. You don't need a shelf full of books to tell you how to do it
- c. You can make plenty of smaller mistakes and your kids will still turn out fine - relax.
- d. Not all "old-fashioned" parenting methods are bad, no matter what the "experts" tell you
- e. Kids behave like kids because their brains are wired that way – until their early 20s!
- f. Don't leave parenting your kids to others – it's *your* responsibility
- g. Kids are born with the foundations of their personality, gender identity, sexual orientation, certain physical abilities, and intelligence hard-wired into their brains – parents and life experiences can influence the rest
- h. Kids aren't "pure beings" that adults corrupt. They're imperfect *because* they're human.
- i. Sugar doesn't make kids hyper (12 studies have proven this) but it does rot their teeth
- j. Coloring inside the lines isn't about stifling creativity – it's about developing fine motor control skills

## 2. The parents' three basic jobs (BOTH parents!)

- a. Nurturing – helping their children develop into good people
- b. Education – not just formal school, but education for life
- c. Health & Welfare (food, clothing, shelter, medical care)

## 3. Basic parenting goals

- a. Preserve your marriage
- b. Prepare your child to leave home (eventually)
- c. Teach your child what she needs to know to be a good citizen
- d. Teach your child how to live well with others
- e. Teach your child what he needs to run a household
- f. Prepare your child for a career
- g. Expose and teach your child to enjoy the finer aspects of life – as you see them

## 4. What kind of kid do you both want? What kind of adult do you want them to become?

- a. It's *your* job to teach them to be the kind of people you want them to be, and no one else's.
- b. Do you want them to learn your own religious, political philosophies?
- c. How about manners, consideration for others, open-mindedness, social skills?
- d. Set high expectations for behavior, education, and other things that are important to you
- e. Before you have kids (or right away if you already have them!), get your minds together on these questions

## 5. Get your own moral and ethical house in order

- a. What kind of kids do you want? Think about it. Make a list of desirable attributes.
- b. Think about the examples you set. Do you need to make some changes in your own lives?

## 6. Keep balance in all things

- a. Nurturing – discipline
- b. Time together – time apart
- c. Work – play
- d. Letting your lives get seriously out of balance is the single most destructive thing you can do to your child
- e. For instance, don't allow nurturing to preclude discipline when it's clearly needed

- f. Don't try to manage "balance" unless you want to drive yourself (and your kids) nuts. Allow things to occur as naturally as possible.
- g. "Balance" doesn't mean equal. Some things need to be given greater weight – for instance, time together as a family should have more weight than time apart when they are younger, but the opposite might be true as they near 18.

#### **7. Build a relationship with your kids**

- a. Spend one-on-one time with them a few times a week, more when they're younger – let them help you with your work, share a hobby, practice sports skills, etc.
- b. Don't over-do it. Just like food, kids can become addicted to attention
- c. Be accessible, but don't allow unnecessary interruptions
- d. Don't hover – supervise and guide as necessary
- e. You are an adult – behave like one – you are not your child's playmate or best friend

#### **8. Protect your marriage relationship**

- a. The marriage came first, and it should still be there after the kids are grown and gone
- b. Kids don't come first – the marriage does (that doesn't mean you ever totally ignore the kids)
- c. Nothing makes a child feel more secure than having two parents in a stable relationship.
- d. Make time each day for just the two of you – tell the kids to go to their rooms and play so you can be alone together for a while. Dinner preparation works well.
- e. For single parents, schedule regular "me time" without kids every day.
- f. Single parents should also take time for themselves, dating, shopping alone or with a friend, adult activities, etc.
- g. It's never "your kid" or "my kid" – always "our" kid. Even if you're divorced.

#### **9. Protect your child's future**

- a. Little or no TV before age 6 (TV in early years has been tied to ADD)
- b. Watch eating habits – don't allow between meal snacks with the exception of a small, healthy one after school.
- c. Moderate your child's sugar intake to reduce the possibility of developing diabetes
- d. Parents - give up smoking and other bad habits
- e. Teach kids not to put *anything* into their bodies that doesn't absolutely need to be there. This applies to drugs, over the counter medications, excessive food, etc. Don't run for the medicine cabinet every time a child has a minor sniffle. Despite what the drug companies have conditioned us to believe, it doesn't make you a bad parent. Children shouldn't learn that pills can fix every problem.

#### **10. Parents as teachers – your most important role**

- a. Parents are a child's first and most important teachers
- b. Schools are for academics – parents need to teach the rest
- c. You are with them for life – school teachers have them only nine months each
- d. Parents teach all the really important life lessons
- e. Look for "hidden" skills and talents – encourage them as appropriate
- f. Share hobbies and interests
- g. Remember, you know more than your children do
- h. Important lessons need repetition – repeat them consistently and often

## **11. Who runs things?**

- a. A family can't be a democracy – kids don't have the knowledge, skills, or life experience to make good decisions yet
- b. As they get older, you can bring them into the decision making process when you feel it's appropriate
- c. Kids' opinions and preferences can be taken into account when parents make decisions sometimes, but in the end it's the parents who must make the decisions.
- d. "Because I said so" is a perfectly good reason
- e. Stick to your decisions – don't let your kids pester you into changing your mind
- f. Be clear in your directives to kids – don't "ask" them to do something – say "it's time to put your toys away and get ready for bed"
- g. Don't argue with your kids – they can't understand adult logic yet, just their own selfish needs

## **12. Discipline & Behavior**

- a. Discipline and punishment aren't the same thing
- b. Discipline is a skill you teach – it's also called "self-control" or "self-discipline"
- c. Make sure your kids "take ownership" of their behavior and responsibilities by holding them accountable
- d. When a child lacks self-discipline, the parents need to impose it externally until the child learns and internalizes it
- e. Set a standard of acceptable behavior and stick to it
- f. Be consistent!

## **13. Punishment is only used to make lessons "stick" if they don't seem to be "getting it"**

- a. Use gentle correction whenever possible, but have stronger methods ready when you need them.
- b. Punishments need to be "memorable" to be effective, but don't go for the "nuclear option" every time.
- c. Time-outs only work well for pre-schoolers. From 1st grade on you'll need to be a bit more creative.
- d. Make the level of punishment roughly appropriate to the seriousness of the behavior you are correcting. Err a little on the strong side if in doubt to be sure they get the message.
- e. Younger kids need shorter punishments. The older they get the longer they need to be.
- f. Make punishments reasonable so you won't be tempted to not follow through
- g. Once imposed, never back down from any reasonable punishment
- h. Be sure both parents are "on the same page" regarding unacceptable behaviors and punishment to prevent the child from using "divide and conquer" techniques
- i. Stuff that works:
  - i. Grounding
  - ii. Missing a favorite activity, one or more times
  - iii. Loss of a favorite privilege or toy
  - iv. Restriction to one (boring) room
  - v. Early bedtime
  - vi. Any mix of the above
- j. Brief spankings are okay, used very sparingly for serious offences, but never beatings! This is very much a personal choice issue.

#### **14. Teaching Manners and Self-Discipline**

- a. Set high standards for behavior and don't back down
- b. Begin teaching basic manners (please, thank you, not interrupting others, basic politeness) as soon as they are able to understand – age two or three for most kids
- c. Teach kids to sit patiently and wait from an early age

#### **15. Contributing to the family and learning life skills**

- a. Every kid should have at least one family chore as soon as they can handle it
- b. The complexity and number of chores should increase with age – starting at age three
- c. At 6 a child should be able to set a table, keep his room clean. By 8, they should be able to do their own laundry. By 10 they should be able to cook a complete simple fami By 18, they should be able to run a complete household.
- d. Children should not be paid for doing family chores. It's part of their contribution to the family's well being.
- e. Chores teach skills, responsibility, and the importance of contributing to the family's well-being.
- f. Keeping one's room clean is not a family chore – it's a personal responsibility
- g. Never do anything for a child they can do for themselves (okay, you can help out if your child is sick or injured, or clearly overwhelmed – that teaches compassion)

#### **16. Allowances & Money**

- a. An allowance should be provided to teach them how to manage money
- b. The allowance should not be revoked except in cases of seriously poor spending choices, and then only until an understanding can be reached between you
- c. Make the child responsible for purchasing certain luxuries with their allowance – special clothing, sports equipment, snacks, toys, etc.
- d. Teach the concept of saving for larger purchases
- e. Money can be earned for “extra” one-time jobs that aren't their regular chores – until they are old enough to go out and get a part time job on their own.

#### **17. Education and School**

- a. Education must begin in the home
  - i. Read to your children often – even long after they can read for themselves
  - ii. Encourage them to read on their own
  - iii. Teach problem solving skills and strategies
  - iv. Place a high value on education and communicate that to your child
  - v. NEVER say “I wasn't good at (insert subject) either.” This is the same as giving your child permission to stop trying.
- b. Keep expectations high, and set high academic standards
- c. If possible, choose schools that also set high standards and expectations
- d. Let teachers know your expectations early on, and follow up
- e. Encourage strengths, support weaknesses

#### **18. Avoid creating addictive behaviors**

- a. Don't praise everyday accomplishments, when a simple acknowledgement will do
- b. No “food on demand” – this leads to food addiction and obesity
- c. Too much attention – leads to kids who need constant attention and won't give you a moment's rest. However, don't go off in the other direction and ignore them either!

### **19. “Head fakes,” or, why we want kids to do stuff like sports and Scouts**

- a. It’s not about the skills they learn or fun they have, but the kids don’t know that.
- b. Most kids won’t be pro ballplayers or wilderness adventurers.
- c. It’s about learning other life lessons
  - i. Teamwork
  - ii. Leadership
  - iii. Value systems
  - iv. Fair play
  - v. Self-sufficiency
  - vi. Putting others before yourself
  - vii. Being of use to the world
- d. Scouting offers a far broader range of life lessons than sports – if the troop is well run.

### **20. Countering the “self-esteem” mistake**

- a. Psychologists are in growing agreement that the so-called “self-esteem movement” of the last few decades was a terrible mistake. Some schools continue to use the program though, and you may need to temper it as best you can.
- b. High self-esteem is a result – not a cause – of good performance.
- c. Self-esteem is a side-effect of positive results achieved through hard work – it can’t be given out like candy
- d. Kids need to know where they stand – phony praise has no value
  - i. The effort has to be their own
  - ii. Don’t tear a kid down – be supportive
  - iii. Praise important results, but don’t overdo it. Most of the time, a simple acknowledgement is all that’s needed.
  - iv. Recognize effort, but make it clear that results are what really count.
- e. Other people are just as important as you are
- f. You can’t be anything you want to be, but you have the right to try
  - i. You have the right to follow your dreams, but try to temper them with reality – a kid who can’t carry a tune won’t make it as a singer, no matter how badly they want it. Desire, not matter how strong, does not equal talent.
  - ii. Only a small percentage of those who dream of it will ever become professional athletes, actors, or performers.
- g. It’s important to be comfortable with yourself – but truly loving yourself is a dangerous path to travel. Cases of clinical narcissism have reached an all time high since 2000.
- h. Self-control is proven to be a better predictor of future success than self-esteem

### **21. “Different” kids**

- a. Not all kids are typical – physical and mental disabilities, mental illness, birth defects, sexual orientation, gender identity
- b. Even if they are “different” they still deserve your full love and support
- c. Sexual orientation and gender identity are hard-wired before birth. There is nothing you can do about it. This is long-settled science.
- d. Gender identity (transgender) disorders are now thought to be a true medical birth defect, and the evidence is strong
- e. Relabeling won’t help much – (i.e. calling a disabled student “differently abled.”) Every label of this sort will eventually acquire a negative connotation – we’re going to run out of accurate descriptions if we change them all the time. It’s how you treat them that’s important.