

Parenting Geez!!!!!!



You don't have to feed the kid to the elephants

Some Parenting Solutions

Peter Damien Ryan 2005-2008

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A Quick Guide to Some Practical Solutions

When I was a boy of fourteen, my father was so ignorant I
could hardly stand to have the old man around.
But when I got to be twenty-one, I was astonished by how
much he'd learned in seven years.

(Anonymous, often erroneously attributed to Mark Twain)

This E-Book is offered as an aid in the great journey of parenting.

It is a combination of two E-Books – the second part has been added as a bonus and deals with some of the issues surrounding the difficulties of blending families after re-marriage.

Neither part is intended to be a complete guide to parenting – but they are ideas and interventions that can provide solutions to issues that arise in families.

Peter Damien Ryan

Parenting is never easy – and in some cases bloody difficulty

So why inflict it on yourself?



But, Let's Face It - Where would you be without the kids?

Hey, stop those thoughts of world travel, peace and quiet and buying a Beemer!

Children really brighten up a household they never turn
the lights off.
(Ralph Bus)

So don't give up – you can, and are probably doing a good job of it already

But, if there are some difficulties or it seems you are mired in an eternal cycle of clashing with the kids
there are plenty of resources out there to help

The following few pages – have been gleamed from different places – and offer some ideas and solutions
But, please note (my disclaimer!) they do not offer a guarantee for the perfect kid
or the perfect parent for that matter.

Recommended Reading (for the fuller Picture)

Parenting books by Chris Greene, Steve Biddulph and John Irvine.

Having one child makes you a parent; having two you are a referee. (David Frost)

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When there's fighting talk

IF you have more than one child, chances are that they fight. The good news is that the first 16 years are the worst and, with an average of 1.7 kids predicted per family, sibling rivalry could well be on its last legs. I mean, it's hard to fight with a 0.7 but the bad news is that it's worse if they are close in age, of the same sex, or in hitting distance of each other. Anyway, here's how to head for a fight-free family.

Is it worse when parents are about? If so, they are jostling for position and you're best not taking sides.

- ◆ **Is it jealousy-based?** In this case you'd be better off getting to the bottom of the jealousy rather than smacking their bottoms.
- ◆ **Is it just normal bicker and banter!** This is the healthiest way kids learn how to cope with life.
- ◆ **Does it have a pattern!** For example, always in front of TV, just after school, at the table, in the car, or probably all these together. If you can pick where, when and with whom, this is your line of attack.
- ◆ **Check the environment.** If there are lots of fights and anger around then the kids' fights are just acting out the mood of the house. Often the kids are at their worst when their parents are arguing too.

How you manage their fights depends a lot on how old they are, how savage it gets and how you cope with conflict. Family Circle magazine published an article called **Stop Your Kids from Fighting in 30 Days.**

This is how it works.

Week 1: Theme: Surrender.

Start by surrendering your *role* as referee. Tell them you're out of it and they can sort it out but it mustn't include inflicting pain.

Week 2 Theme: Teach.

Like all lessons in life, these are better caught than taught and I so your example is the best teacher. But when they feel angry, share some ideas on safe ways to get it out, like bouncing a ball, punching a bag, whatever works, and get ideas on how they could also have handled the problem,

Week 3 Theme: Adopt a positive attitude.

Every day find at least five things to praise - The more kids hear about their good points the better they'll behave.

Week 4 Theme: Be systematic.

Train the kids when they get into conflict to go through four stages:

Step 1: State what the problem is.

Step 2: Brainstorm solutions.

Step 3: Get the kids to pick the best and trial it.

Step 4: Refine it at a weekly finger-food family meeting set up to solve family problems.

Of course, it's not quite so easy if the kids are not yet of an age to reason and be fair, or if their reasoning is impaired. In these circumstances the ideas in Chapter 8 of the book, **Who'd be a Parent?**, might be useful. But as fighting is about the most common problem for parents, I thought I'd canvass their tribal wisdom on how to handle kids' fights.

Here are a few of their suggestions:

"When our second daughter arrived, I said to her in front of our older one how lucky she was to have such a loving sister. I believe this really helped and they've been great mates all their lives."

"**Don't fight. Don't even think about arguing with them.** You only hype them up and it's not worth it. Settle the problem when the Kids are not angry." "I separate them *and* then ask each in turn how they think their brother or sister is feeling."

"This may not sound sensible but if they started fighting I'd have a play-fight with my husband. They hated that."

"I found I could stop lots of fights over toys by simply saying, 'When you're finished, your brother can have it'."

"Just remember that fighting often stops if there's no audience."

My tips to prevent fighting have been learnt over 18 years and six children.

- Don't allow one child to dish out the ice cream for another.
- Do have just one child and keep him isolated.
- Don't allow kids near each other unless they're asleep.
- When you see two children talking, send one to their room because a fight will soon follow if you don't.

When all else fails, don't worry -- that's kids."

acknowledgment: Dr John Irvine "Sunday Times" 22/11/98

All expectations, great and small

DANIEL was a mess. His father thought he was a wimp who went to water at the drop of a tea towel. His mother thought he was 'a soft kid, misunderstood by his father who wanted a macho male rather than a sensitive-son.

The result was that the softer mum went on Daniel, the tougher dad went to compensate; the harder dad drove, and Daniel was caught in the middle of an expectations war which had him seething at the savaging of his self-esteem.

Certainly some of the worst parent-child clashes I have seen stem from either a clash of expectations or unrealistic expectations. For instance, many young couples expect babies to sleep through the night and get upset when they don't, or expect toddlers to eat what they're given or do as they are told, or to stay still while being changed, or expect good kids to tell the truth and being devastated when they don't.

The list could go on, so let me share a few developmental averages:
It's normal for babies to have screaming fits of colic -- it's not parent failure.

Eight to 18-month-olds scream when separated from parents. It's not being naughty, it's normal separation anxiety.

Two-year-olds say no to everything and throw tantrums to show you that their ego has landed. Two and three-year-olds won't be able to share.

Four-year-olds are know-alls -- little children don't know that they don't know.

Fi Five-year-olds and over will have imaginary fears and be scared of school, shadows, ghosts (even soap, would you believe).

Si Six to nine-year-olds emerge as the greatest liars since you were their age -- and it's not confined to that age group

Se Seven-year-olds plus will become super competitive as they struggle to gain status with their peer group.

Eight-year-olds will act awfully independent -- too old to be kids and too young to know they still are.

Eleven-year-olds become super smart as they rise to the top of primary school and feel like big fish in a small pond.

Fourteen to 16-year-olds change from compliant kids to sneaky, backstabbing bitchy, volcanoes -- that's the turbulent teens

acknowledgment: Dr John Irvine "Sunday Times"

Whatever the reason for parents' unrealistic expectations, frustration is the outcome for parents and **low self-esteem the outcome for the children**, who grow up feeling that they're just not good enough. The single best remedy is to link up with other parents and mix with other children the same age so that expectations are based on more than just one child. The second best is to get advice from those who have had wide experience - grandparents, child-care staff, child psychologists, teachers, mother-craft nurses.

But let me share this: Children actually know what you think of them and no words or cover will hide it. So if you want a fun way to learn about each other, here's a game the family can play.

Put some of the words listed below on separate slips of paper, then use separate match boxes for each member of the family, read out a word and get the kids to post it into the box of the family member it best describes. Or you can keep the game brief by just asking them to choose those words which they think you feel about them. Either way, it's an eye opener.

Sad, glad, happy, angry, mad, frustrated, warm, proud, quiet, joyful, shy, nervous, scared, bad, lucky, safe, upset, hassled, silly, alive, hopeful, creative, stubborn, loved, strange, funny, cool, beautiful, encouraged, uncomfortable, excited, confused, afraid, weird, stupid, worried, insecure, rotten, selfish, grouchy, put-down, used, sick, awkward, furious, crazy, embarrassed, talkative, curious, clever, unloved, free, sensitive, ugly, successful, disappointed, likeable, good, strong, left-out, energetic, hateful, unimportant, important, hurt, sorry, rejected, bashful, smothered, calm, great, cheerful, fresh, brave, gross, inferior, worthless, worthwhile, depressed, troubled, hopeless, skilful, capable, confident, smart, tearful, accepting, jealous, secretive, positive, wonderful.

Another useful activity is to share with your partner what you actually want or expect from your children, as that drives more of our behaviour than we ever realise.

But keep in mind those words that have smartened me up many times -- success is getting what you want; happiness is wanting what you get.

When the Fur Flies

WHAT does your family fight about mostly? In an extensive survey a few years ago, researchers found the following topped the list. (From the book *What do you really want for your Children*, published by HarperCollins).

- ◆ Jobs not done.
- ◆ Visits from relatives.
- ◆ Money wasted.
- ◆ Taking out the garbage.
- ◆ Messy rooms.
- ◆ Kids not organising themselves.
- ◆ Personal habits such as smoking, eating and drinking.
- ◆ "You don't understand me."
- ◆ "You're not the person you used to be."
- ◆ The cheque account.
- ◆ Personality traits -- bossiness, laziness, ~ workaholic.
- ◆ "You embarrass me."
- ◆ "Where are we going on the holidays?"
- ◆ Doing dishes.
- ◆ "You're always yelling."
- ◆ ""You're never wrong."
- ◆ "You're late."
- ◆ "Stop trying to control me."

You can usually measure the family score in the decibels as the hurt rebounds around the room and doors slam, kids cry, adults argue and the cat sleeps on. If you want to get rid of those same old fights, just remember a few home truths.

1. Most fights revolve around the idea that **"if only you were more like me then I wouldn't have to get upset"**.

No one will ever be the way we want them to be. We can ask that they comply with basic rules of co-operation, respect, caring and trust, but we can't make people the same as we are. As Stephen Covey reminds us in his book, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, if we want things to change, we do the changing.

2. **We get treated in life the way we teach people: to treat us.** We can't expect people to understand our every problem and think of us first. It is our duty to make sure we let them know what we want or don't want so that we give them the security of knowing how to act to please us and how to avoid hurting us.

3. **Behaviour rather than words is the greatest teacher.** If we want the kids to put away their clothes or bring them to the laundry, then all the lectures and self-pity in the world won't make any difference.

But if they find things aren't washed unless they're in the basket or if they find that all their television time is taken up doing what they should have done earlier, then, it means something.

Be consistent

It's only by insisting and consistently ensuring they do it that their game plan will change. If there's still no co-operation then it means they're not taking you seriously and that's the time to pull back on services rendered (like cooking, cleaning, chauffeuring, billeting, bedtime stories, homework helping etc) until they get the message that you really mean business.

If family members are treating us badly it's not their fault, it's ours. It's only when we decide to insist on respect and stop playing the victim that we will see a change.

4. People are more important than things. Sometimes it takes a real fright to life or car accident to shake us back to the real priorities. When we fight over silly things we put possessions ahead of people.

5. **Communication is the key.** In a wonderful book by Research Press called "A Couples' Guide to Communication", John Gottman, one of the world's most respected writers and researchers on marriage, said there were several steps to stop things getting out of hand. Call a stop action -- all discussion stops and you talk about and agree that the argument is out of hand.

Feedback -- ask for feedback on your impact. When giving feedback make it clear, brief, concise and remember your goal is to makes things better -- **not to get even.**

Listen to the feedback. Summarise and validate -- sum up **how you think your partner felt about what you said.** In other words, see the position from his or her point of view. A hard thing to do when you're hurt, but it is the best way to go.

Check how close your intent has come to the impact received.

We can't expect others to understand us all the time. They're unique, life is tough. Every family member is busy trying to keep up and they can't be expected to understand automatically why the door was slammed or why they are getting the cold shoulder, **unless we communicate.** Then it's fair to expect some understanding. **It's hard to argue with a peaceful person.** If we can accept ourselves and be at peace with who we are rather than bitter over who we aren't, then we can have some self-respect, which is not easily seduced into fighting and screaming.

Participation in fights is optional. **If we're trying to teach kids self-control, then it would be much easier if they saw some self-control from us**

acknowledgment: Dr John Irvine

Teenagers who believe they've graduated from anything parents have to offer

There never has been any formula for raising teenagers but today it's harder than ever.

Teenagers are physically, socially, sexually and intellectually more mature at a younger age than ever before but they're educationally and financially dependent on their parents for longer.

But it's not just that. The pace of change is too fast for many parents to keep up, let alone keep one step ahead of the kids. They're not able to give leadership, even if they have time to. On the other hand, the emotional and social pressure on teenagers is enormous. As families become weaker in influence, teenagers are being forced to turn away from their older tribe and remake tribes of their own (goths, grunges, skaters, homies, nerds, ravers, punks, emo's, surfies, hippies and jocks).

It's a scary business, trying to find some identity and stability in something as volatile as teen relationships.

Here are some steps to a better life with your teens

Step 1: Involves changing our attitudes from running their lives to controlling our own.

Step 2: Involves changing the communication style from what teenagers should do to what we can do. This means it changes from questions and accusations -- "Why don't you put your clothes in the laundry basket?" -- to "I want 24· hours' notice when you want clothes washed by a certain time."

Step 3: Involves letting go of issues over which we really have no control (home-work, their clothes, drugs) but standing firm on areas that are ours (house rules, parent values, school reports etc).

This process could take the following form:

A: State your feelings and thoughts. ("I'm sick of nagging you about home-work.")

B: Hand over responsibility. ("From now on it's your problem.")

C: Show trust. ("I know you're capable of doing what's right.")

Step 4: Involves taking a stand on parent life issues such as the decibels from the stereo, help around the home, lies, rudeness, mistreating parents' belongings, etc. Try this approach:

A: Negotiate an agreement.

B: Insist with persistence.

C: Take action -- in a way that can be carried out.

D: Arrange a limited strike. ("I'm tired of doing this and not getting any help so I won't be cooking for the rest of the week.")

In more general terms, the sequence is: DEFINE the problem, BRAINSTORM solutions, EVALUATE possibilities, SELECT solutions, PLAN the solution, IMPLEMENT a plan.

In summary, effective discipline of teenagers involves the following:

D -- decide not to tie parent happiness to teen behavior.

I -- independence as the goal, but not just for the children,

S -- see life through their eyes so you're not the enemy.

C -- contract any agreements fairly and respectfully.

I -- insist on personal life and fulfillment; that's the energy source.

P -- plan family meetings once a week

L -- listen to what they're saying so you're the ally not the enemy.

I -- "I" messages must be the **style** (rather than "you" messages).

N -- natural consequences, are the best teacher whenever possible.

E -- encouragement (not praise) is **the** parents' new role.

And how do we do all this? With quick wit, a sense of fun, consistency and an honest memory

Annoying Parents and Kids

WHAT bugs you about kids! Is it that they never listen, won't *take* no for an answer, are cheeky, defiant, lying, won't get to sleep, play up in public, bullying, fighting and homework performance? If these bug you, then you'll be delighted to know that such problems ranked as the top 10 parent complaints in the survey contained in "Who'd Be A Parent -- The Manual That Should Have Come With The Kids!" by Dr John Irvine (Pan Macmillan).

But it wasn't just the naughtiness; It was the little habits that bugged parents. Things like:

- Never cleaning up
- Messy rooms
- Not washing hands after using the toilet
- Always blaming someone else
- Always wanting the front seat
- Continually changing stations on the car radio saying "hate that"-- when whatever it is they hate hasn't been on long enough for them to know
- Wet towels on the floor
- Always saying they'll do things in a minute
- Empty shampoo bottles left in the shower
- Loud music turned to three different stations in three different rooms
- Water jug put back in fridge with no water in it
- No matter what you ask them the answer is always "dunno"
- Never putting things back where they came from
- Leaving the sink in a mess
- Yelling "I'm coming" -- but they never do.

Part of the answer to these frustrations is to be able to unravel their jargon so it doesn't become so infuriating. The following are the Top 20 parent put offs.

20. "That's not fair" means: "It's so fair I hate it."
19. "Why can't I!" means: "I'll whine you into submission."
18. "Why do I have to do it!" means: "I'd like you to do it."
17. "You don't understand." means: "I can't think of an answer."
16. "Waddiddya say!" means: "I'm not listening."
15. "It's not my job." means: "No."
14. "You've already told me that." means: "It's not working."
13. "But mum, I didn't do it." means "I did."
12. "It's not my fault." means: "It is."
11. "I've already done it." means: "The rest is up to you."
10. "How would *you* like it?" means: "I'm softening you up."
9. "Can I have just one more minute?" means: One more hour.
8. "Make up your mind." means: "I'm trying to unmake your mind."
7. "I know you won't let me." means: "Any decent parent would."
6. "Don't bother." means: "Please bother straight away."
5. "I hate my sister." means: "I hate my sister"
4. "I'm bored." means: "A pest is looming unless you buy me off."
3. "It's too hard." means: "Do it yourself."
2. "Duurr!" means: A generation gap to sap confidence.
1. "Mum, where's my !" means: "Mum, find it."

But according to the kids, they're not the only ones with bad habits. When I asked them what things their parents said or did that bugged them, these mumbly-mouthed, parent-deaf specimens suddenly found a voice.

This was their top list.

Parents telling jokes that aren't funny

Telling stories about when they were a kid

Nagging

Telling you off in front of your friends

Cutting your lunch sandwiches into quarters like finger food

Putting you on the big guilt trip

Not listening or giving you a chance to explain

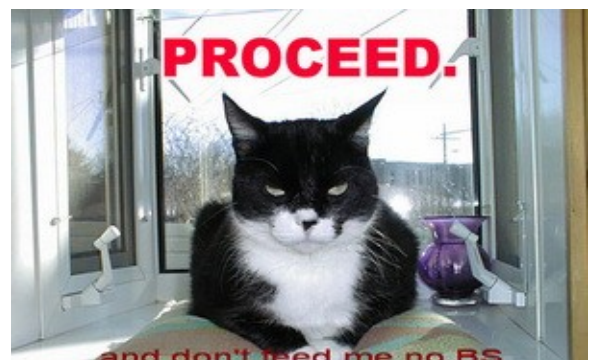
Asking dumb questions like: "How was school?"

Being treated like a baby

Calling you "darling" in front of your friends.

And here's a goodie: "Telling you off when they have a whistle in their nose."

Kids who make the future worth fighting for, tomorrow worth living for, today' worth crying for and , yesterday worth forgiving.



Tangling with Toddlers the “Ego has Landed!”

JANE could hardly talk. What she could rasp out convinced me that she would kill her toddler unless I could do something, and fast. Her son never did as he was told and always knew how to push her buttons. If she said not to do something, he would just go ahead anyway and do it, even if he was punished for it. She had tried smacking, ignoring, screaming and putting him in his room but he just went berserk and smashed everything he could. Jane hated him for it.

For those who have been through these times with a difficult toddler you may not be surprised to hear that one to two-year-olds are at greatest risk of being murdered. They are not called the Terrible Twos for nothing. Forget the four-letter words, two-year-olds have discovered two two-letter words that can cause much more havoc.

The first is "me" -- *"me want cookie", "me want up" and "me full".* >>>>>>>>>>

"Me" has arrived on earth and the whole world must celebrate.

The second word is "no" and it's reserved for anyone who challenges "ME"
"Come here", **"NO"**;
"Eat up like a big boy", **"NO"**.

But while it's OK for them to say no to you, you try it on and just watch their performance

The name of the two-year-old game is to let you know their ego has landed; they are now food master, sleep master and slanging master; suddenly they're like greedy, grinning aliens who have been sent to torment. Too many parents take toddler rebellion personally and see it as another rejection. Such a misunderstanding of toddler motives can cause hurt, hate and bitterness that can last a lifetime. So it's worth getting to know what toddlers are all about.

Much of the problem is their age; their ego has arrived and the world is theirs, which means what they see is theirs, who they want is theirs and no one else matters. But part of the problem has also been the treatment of the two-year-old.

In the days of Benjamin Spock, this was when kids started to come into their own, so the owner's job was to watch them unfold and to enjoy them. The problem was that the untamed toddler was not a pretty sight and many of these kids became spoiled -- or at least slightly Spock-marked. Thus toddler taming became popular as parents tried to manacle the Spock-marked monsters. That could be by way of medication, forced restraint, smacking or by getting outside trainers (child care staff) to teach them.

If we want to have good kids we have to train them, not tame them. But there are a few definite musts for toddler survival.

Don't even try to go it alone; toddlers and parents need company. That might be a play group, family day care, friends, neighbors, grandparents -- company means sanity.

Despite appearances and behavior, toddlers are not out to destroy anybody, they're out to show their clout. Play up any good things they do such as "Aren't you clever to pick up so many toys" and they'll steadily give you more of the best and less of the rest. On the other hand, play up the annoying things they do and the ego thinks that's the way to go for attention. Here's a few hand-on ideas:

- Catch them being good and you'll get more of it.
- Praise work better than preaching.
- When they lose control they lose their rhythm, so settle them down with rocking, rhyming, singing, massaging, counting - whatever gets them back into the swing.
- Remember that kids are great actors; change the scene and you change their act, rant and rave and their act's intact.
- Discipline means determination with diplomacy; the more consistent the rules the faster they learn, the more praise they get the more they want to learn.
- They're big on body language, so attention, smiles and cuddles work better than stars and stripes.
- Punishments must be fast and firm; use their name or "no" followed by what you want them to do to redirect their energy, but if they're off the planet, hold firmly in a quiet cuddle or on their bed until they calm down.
- Tantrums are just angry egos in action so soothe, settle or ignore rather than adding to the anger.
- Whingeing is the top tactic of tired Twos; it offers little effort for maximum impact, let whinge mean rest until they're back at their best.

Two-year-olds are life at its rawest and richest -- the world awaits them.

As some character said: "Every kid' is born a prince, it's the civilising process that makes us all frogs."

Motherhood - a lifetime job

DID you know that researchers and planners now expect that more than 25 per cent of young women in Australia will elect not to have children? And who would blame them! With success being ever more clearly defined in economic terms, with marketing pushing our expectations ever upward, with the loss of social status and independence that comes with having children, it's hardly an attractive option.

Becoming a mother in today's world is a big task and means many more sacrifices than society often realises. I'm looking at a position-vacant advertisement that I'm sure many readers would easily qualify for:

Applications are invited for the position of manager of a lively team of four demanding individuals of differing needs and personalities.

The successful applicant will be required to perform and co-ordinate the following functions:

Companion, counsellor, financial manager, buying officer, teacher, nurse, chef, nutritionist, cleaner, driver, child-care supervisor and recreation officer.

Qualifications: *Applicants must be independent and self-motivated and be able to work in isolation and without supervision. They must have flexibility to perform a number of conflicting tasks at the one time without tiring and be able to communicate on a range of issues with people of all ages, including public servants, school teachers, doctors, dentists, trades people, business people, teenagers and children.*

They must be creative, active and outgoing and have imagination, sensitivity, warmth, love and understanding to encourage the physical, mental, emotional and social development of the team members.

Hours of work: All waking hours and a 24-hour shift when necessary.

Pay: no salary or wage. The successful applicant may be required to hold a second job, in addition to the one advertised here.

Benefits: No guaranteed sick, maternity or long service leave. No guaranteed life or accident insurance. No worker's compensation. No superannuation.

In summary, the position is for a housewife and for some reason the writer has remained anonymous.

Many talk about the influence of their mothers in their lives but perhaps none puts it better than former Australian Federal Opposition Leader Kim Beazley "My mother was a very strong *influence* in my background.

Basically she was a supportive influence; if ever there was something I wanted to do she was right in there behind it. And so, she was a strong mother, a good one, a very busy one, and I was damn lucky."

The mothers I meet tend to have the same commitment as Mrs Beazley but are torn between caring for the kids, a career, housework, spousework and all those other demands outlined in the above job description.

So I asked Kim Beazley what, in his opinion, made his mum such a good mum.

This was his reply: "Attention, attention. It should not be required of women, not at all, but let's deal with facts. Those were the times when a large number of women in middle income families did not choose to work and therefore she gave us undivided attention. And I took it for granted at the time, there was no question about that, but gee it was nice to get it."

The message is as true today as it was in Kim Beazley's boyhood days. Unfortunately, in a world that's going forever faster, more leisure time is something technology promised but has failed to deliver.

Maybe the message is to take stock and take time so that little feet may have a chance to keep up. Certainly our manic money-making efforts to meet all the kids' wants and needs are in danger of neglecting their real needs. Small wonder, then, that the modern child looks forward to going out with money and daddy.

[By John Irvine]

Parents in the 'NO'

IF you're a regular shopper, you'll have little trouble picturing and even feeling this scenario, depicted in a Readers Digest article called "When to say no to your kids".

"There was a mother with two children and one of them, an eight-year-old girl, let it known that she wanted a particular pair of party shoes. First demanding, then whining, cajoling and shrieking, she pleaded *relentlessly*. Mom, I want the shoes. Buy me the shoooes!"

"Her mother, trying to fit shoes for her daughter's baby brother, held her off with gentle nos for about 10 minutes. Then her nerves collapsed. 'Bring the patent leather party shoes', she told the assistant. 'I can't take it any more.'" The writer sought expert opinion (including mine) on what mum could have done to prevent this problem. Some suggested letting kids earn pocket money so what they yearn they can earn, others suggested a little less of TV which keeps telling children the misguided message that happiness resides in what you eat or own. Others recommended simply getting into the habit of never buying things for kids when you're out so they never learn to be "gimme greedy" and others advised being merely clear and firm when you say no and stick to it without debate or explanation. The problem is that for many families, *no has never really meant no*.

- First there's the type of no that was used in the shoe shop, where no means "yes if you nag long enough". You can guess what will happen next time this child really wants something.
- Then there's the overplayed multi-toned "no, noooo, I said no, naah, noo-w". The kids have to guess which means no, which is fun, which means yes and which means I wasn't listening.
- Then there's the "I said no, are *you* deaf or just stupid!" The no is packed with enough insults to guarantee some "gimme" aggression.

Some kids are more determined than others but no kid keeps doing things that never pay off.

So here's some rules for parents who wish to "No" best.

1. **Don't say no unless you mean it.**

2. **Don't take toddlers head-on** because they're at the age where they need to defy to prove their independence and power. Just divert or distract them. They quickly adapt if their pride's not hurt.

3. With older kids, wherever you can, use a why or "I can't do that because .. ."

4. **Don't overuse no.** It will only work if life isn't all stop signs. If they hear yes a lot, then a firm **no** rings through loud and clear.

5. **Use yes instead.** For kids who won't accept no and have begun performing, some parents get clever and say yes to get their attention and then let the fine print do the rest once they're listening. For instance, "Yes, Joel, are you listening? I said yes, I hear what you want and when we get home we can talk about it." It sounds silly, but often, by the time they realise they've been conned, you've taken the edge off their anger.

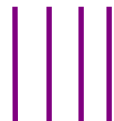
6. **Don't get into a slanging match.** Say no, give a simple reason if you've thought of one in time, and don't get caught up in long debates trying to justify your decision.

7. **Think about why saying no is proving to be such a problem.** Is it fear that they won't like you, fear that they're just too strong for you or fear that you or your partner are being too tough so you have to balance things up a bit? Providing kids are getting lots of cuddles and kisses and green lights in their lives then some red lights are part and parcel of learning about life.

The bigger social problem is that in a world so manacled by money and materialism we see more and more kids grabbing for as much as they can get but never feeling satisfied. If we spent more time meeting their needs (fun, friends, fantasy, family, faith etc) rather than trying to meet their wants, we'd have happier kids

Who's the Parent??

A couple of years ago, a Family Circle magazine survey indicated that over two-thirds of the thousands of parents surveyed felt they were losing control of their kids.



According to a 1997 survey of 2000 adults outlined in an edition of Reader's Digest, two-thirds thought teenagers were rude, irresponsible, wild and spoiled, and more than half those surveyed thought that these failings applied to children aged five to 12.

So what's gone wrong! Some would argue loss of morality, others the lack of corporal punishment, cultural confusion, women at work, single parents.

And even the experts are equally divided.

In the Digest article, one professor, Dr Laurence Steinberg from Temple University in Philadelphia, argued: **"The most fundamental problem is parents' lack of involvement in their kids' lives"**

Another, Dr. William Damon from Stanford University, says **overindulgence is the problem.**

Dr John Irvine offers seven suggestions which I've adapted.

1. Be a parent, not a pal. It's nice to be good friends with your kids but they can get friends anytime, anywhere. They only have two parents. We're much better off learning to become a pal to our partner and giving the kids strong leadership from our extra 30+ years on earth.

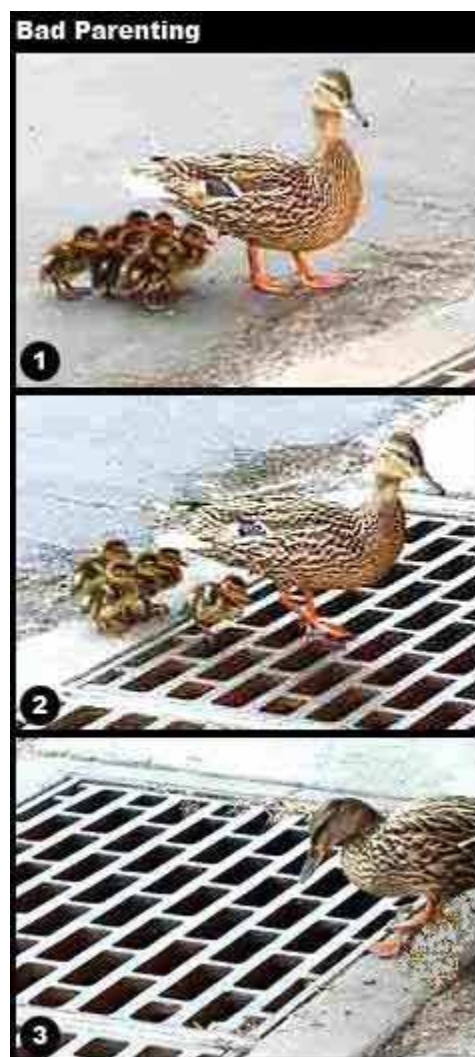
The strength of the marital relationship has incalculable value for a child's stability.

2. Discipline early. If you want good kids then you must train them to be good, it won't happen by accident. This means practising and praising behavior you want and punishing behavior you don't. That punishment does not just mean smacking If kids get good ground rules early in life it saves having to use harsh and hurtful punishment later on.

[for other effective strategies see: "Who'd be a Parent." by John Irvine; "Toddler Taming" by Chris Greene; and "Raising Boys" by Steve Biddulph]

3. Spend time with your kids. In a hurried world there is no such thing as "quality time". What kids need is down time, lap time, hug time, talk time to unload their day. Don't underestimate the value of a hug [any sort of positive touch] and words that affirm your child's positive behavior - in combination.

Beware of being detached or distanced emotionally..... if this is awkward for you ... then do something about itdon't just let it be so.



4. Control the electronics. TV or the computer is not a babysitter !

Many experts are convinced that popular (media) culture has superseded the family. Certainly many parents look aghast when their kids come out with some horrible comment that's never been used in family conversation but which they've probably heard hundreds of times on the TV.

Likewise apply careful watch on their computer access - internet and games - and the time spent on it

5. Know what your child is up to. According to the article, latchkey kids are more likely than supervised kids to smoke, take up drugs, drink alcohol and have premature sex. If you're a working parent make sure the kids are in good hands or have after-school programs to attend. Also teach them how they can be trusted.

6. Don't get carried away with "self-esteem".

Recent research is suggesting that gratuitous comments to kids oozing fake praise in the name of building self-esteem probably has the opposite effect.

Real self-esteem comes from achieving something challenging, by overcoming problems, not from over protection.

Note: there is a difference between gratuitous praise comments and genuine affirming praise.

7. Stay married. Research consistently shows that children of single parents tend to do more poorly at school, have poorer incomes and job prospects and are more likely to get in trouble with the law.

It's an ideal easier said than done. Some marriage breakdowns are inevitable, some are in everyone's interest, but if the relationship with the other parent isn't working out then the experts unanimously advise **getting help before getting out.**

If your marriage does end - then don't ignore the vested interests of the children – e.g. don't use them as weapons against one another - work hardest at ensuring that they have genuine access to both parents ... learn the art of living as separated or blended families.

In a society with so much pace and competing pressures, every family is at risk unless we find ways and means of finding a balance and learning to judge [assess] what is genuinely worth having in the frenetic pursuit of material goods we all can find ourselves doing.

Under stress, humans have two reactions, fight or flight.

- Some of us choose to fight and so we shoot from the hip or the lip.
- Others choose flight and leave others to cope with their feral offspring.
- Others of us choose not to notice struggling families and in so doing bequeath to our kids a more dangerous and hostile world.

We can each do our bit by taking a stand and helping teachers and other parents to do the same because the trend is obvious even to outsiders.

As someone once remarked: "I can't believe how good parents are at obeying their children"



Dr Peter Ryan 2007

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Re- Marriage & 'Blended' Families

TIME NEEDED

Blending is not easy and can take a long time to achieve.
A family [individuals and/or the whole family] needs time to 'grieve'
and rebuild its identity after a divorce [or death of a parent]
before it is ready to join another family [i.e. in a 2nd marriage]

TOO MUCH TOO SOON

Too quickly/too early can be disastrousRebounding into another
relationship too quickly can mean one has acquired too little [of a
new identity] to offer yet.
There is a need to really master a new identity - especially after
divorce - because the person needs to learn the mistakes of the first
marriage and have time to 'heal'.

40% plus of 1st marriages end in divorce and 60% plus of 2nd marriages end up in divorce

WHY?

Rebound accounts for some
But more importantly

1. A taboo is broken - the precedent for divorce has occurred.
2. **[NB]** The presence of children from the previous marriage
of either partner in the 2nd marriage.

1. The difference between

[a] families who are successful and
[b] those who aren'tis based on two main factors:

There is recognition that it has to be new family and not a rehash or
imitation of the old [no matter how good the old one was - or appeared to be]

It does not happen without real work.

Another possible consideration of importance is age appropriate involvement of the
children, especially, if they are in their teen years or close to it. Their lives are affected by
whatever parental/adult decision making process is occurring.

"Individual fulfillment" ought to take priority over family/marriage fulfillment is often the choice
by parents remarrying

They make it an **Either / Or** choice rather than a **Both / And** choice.

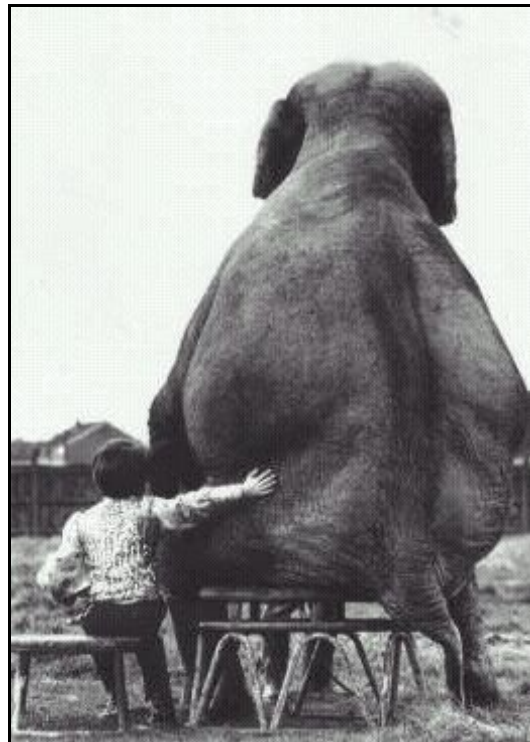
n.b. - [this is a very human tendency - it does not necessarily mean that parents do
not care about their children or that they are selfish per se.](#)

What is occurring is an approach to the 2nd marriage which is similar to the approach & preparation for the first marriage - which is natural because that is the 'familiar' experience.

However, there were no children when the original courtship and marriage occurred - in the 2nd there are - which adds an entirely different perspective and set of dynamics to the relationship.....coupled with a very natural desire to get settled, to heal and to 'be married'.

What hasn't occurred is a family /marriage first priority and then individual fulfillment in that context.

Understandable personal needs can be met at the expense of the children's needs.



The Three "L's"

[Three things most often neglected in the process]

1. **Loss**
2. **Lack of Control**
3. **Loyalty Conflicts.**

Nb: These are normal issues in building new families – i.e. they are not pathological [the family is not 'sick']

LOSS:

The children will still be grieving into the second marriage

NB: Grief is not 'gotten over' - but it can be reconciled [by time].

Do not expect children to "get on and get over it" - they need time to copebut it will still be present and a fact of life ["we sigh for what is not"]..... there has been a loss and, once it has been reconciled, it is transformed not removed.

Nb: There is no time limit on LOSS - it is always there we do something with it or not. [take some quiet time and think on someone you have lost - even if you haven't given them thought for a long time - are they really forgotten?]

Families that do not reconcile loss or deny its reality are incorporating a handicap into the building of a new family.

*The adults, and especially the children, need to give themselves permission **and** time to work through [i.e. grieve] their loss. Parents often hurry their children through it because they do not like to see their children in pain however, being forced to put something aside too early keeps it alive.*

The Loss has to be accepted - on both sides - or loyalty conflicts occur.

LOYALTY CONFLICTS

A new family is not simply to replace the old. Families are not objects [like we replace a car after a smash]. If the new family is seen as a replacement - then conflict will usually occur and loyalty is divided or misdirected.

LACK OF CONTROL

In the original family - - the system is intact.

In remarried families, the system introduces new factors of control that stresses a new family and its areas of controle.g. custody & visitation rights of parents & grandparents etc.

Parents who triangulate with a child exacerbate the three "L's" - by this parents 'force' an alliance on a child against the other parent. Parents often make it difficult for a child to love a non-custodial parent.

Situations of Risk for the Step- parent

Neglect of the three "L's" in turn, can have negative effects on the step-parent who may be trying hard to fill in the gaps gaps which shouldn't be filled just 'because'[they're there etc].

TIME is needed to develop trust and respect.

The 'new' couple may try too hard, too fast ... and thus over-parent and step parents fall for this trap more easily

It's better if the step-parent simply starts out as another adult in the house, and just be a friend - not a parent - this helps recognize that the children need time to really trust the step-parent.

Step-parents need to work this approach with the biological parent.

*The biological parent needs to be careful **not to force** such a role on their new spouse just because of personal needs [e.g. someone to be authoritative etc]. If the new step-parent is forced too quickly to act as a disciplinarian it becomes a course to disaster - the children will react against them they need time to see the step-parent as a 'legitimate' parentand not simply as an interloper who replaced their other [non-custodial] parent.*

The converse applies: Step-parents cannot presume that the step-children will automatically accept them as authority figures. Authority cannot be imposed.

- 1:** Sometimes a step-parent will never move from being an 'adult' friend which is better than forcing themselves onto the children as a replacement parent it may even have more influence.
- 2:** For men as stepfathers - they will often get into power struggles with the children ...he usually will meet resistancemen have been conditioned to take such a role women expect it of them.

.....and, if conflict occurs between the step-parent and children, and sides have to be chosen, the biological parent will side with his/her own children even if he/she has put the step-parent in an untenable situation in the first place.

..... and of course, this can be disastrous for the marriage especially, if the step-parent did not want to take the hard-line approach in the first place.

..... stepmothers can be forced to be nurturers when it is too early for that to be a legitimate role she also needs to not try too hard.

3: a rule of thumb

At whatever age a child is at the time of loss [eg 9 yo] then it is double that age [18], when that child will arrive at full acceptance of the step-parent.

New step families are under excessive pressure to conform to a norm for families that simply don't apply to them ** they are not biologically intact families, but 'blended' and thus there are new parameters and standards which need to replace the old.

This has significant relevance in considering the role of negotiation / involvement of the children.

One may have to step back from the "I decide what's best for the children" stance and look more objectively at the "**we**" involved factor - as distinct from the "**I**".

[** eg: a new norm of families which deviates from the traditional image or institutionalized ideas is indicated by facts such as [in the USA] by 2005 step families will be the dominant family model ...and Australia won't be far behind]

Phases of Adaptation in Remarried Families

NB this is not a re-creation of the original family that is a recipe for disaster - nor is it for 'instant' families.

[1] Initial Family Issues

- [a] Name for the new parent [i.e. *is mum / dad really appropriate?*] This is more important than it seems words have meaning, especially for children who are also literalist.
- [b] Affection for the step-parent and the non-custodial biological parent. This is often a loyalty issue children can feel disloyal to that biological parent if they give their loyalty to the new step-parent *children are still learning that loyalties don't necessarily conflict*.....it is a loyalty myth but it is accepted as real i.e. one can't be loyal to both and it is made worse if the custodial biological parent triangulates with the child against the other (non-custodial) parent.

Loyalty to both biological parents is often conflicted seen as an **Either / Or** instead of **Both / And** and that's in the hands of parents.

Both the custodial and step parent can ease a lot of potential loyalty conflict by the way they speak of and about the non-custodial parent as well as making it possible for the child to maintain as full as possible a relationship with the non-custodial parent.

[This will more likely disperse rivalry than create it]

- [c] Loss of a natural parent when children are triangulated into their biological parent's rancour.

Divorce or death of a parent is a similar loss & grief issue for children, whereas adults can discriminate between the two more easily they can conceptualize the difference.

Children grieve indiscriminately and cannot conceptualize the difference and this is made worse if the custodial parent is openly anti the non-custodial parent - or if the non-custodial parent has little contact with the children [due to restrictive visitation rights, living interstate etc.]

- [d] "Instant" love in new familiesparents can impose this expectation on the children - which ignores grief, loyalty and time blame is then apportioned when it should not be *a cause for major dysfunction and damage to marriage.*
- [e] Fantasy about the 'old' family structure *"hope springs eternal"* children still carry fantasies about re-uniting the biological parents and step-parents are visualized as obstacles to this - usually unconsciously - and therefore the children will unconsciously try to sabotage the new family arrangement.

[2] Family Development

- [a] Discipline by the step-parent: will only work if the children care about the reactions of the step-parent [i.e. the relationship between them]. This is a "legitimacy" question. Negative reaction can be interpreted as "open" defiance - yet it is often valid legitimacy - the step-parent has yet to earn the parent role [if it assumed too early, or forced].
- [b] Confusion over family roles: occurs if parents try to re-impose old values / ideas from the original families / first marriage - instead of recognizing that new is better. So be creative and consider the implications of involving the children in the process.

..... "That was thenThis is now"

- [c] Sibling Conflict: rivalry between the children [biol. & step] is in proportion to the unavailability of the parents, who are often trying to focus on their marriage first - individual focus over family
Focus is on - *either / or* instead of **both / and**.
- [d] Competition for time: the more the child can spend time with the non-custodial parent, the more likely the child can accept his/her loss of his/her biologically intact family, and accept the new step family. This reassures the child that she/ he hasn't lost dad/mom.
- [e] Extended Family: children have extra / double the amount of grandparents ... which can be confusing. NB: contact with the parents of the non-custodial parent is an issue too.
- [f] Sexual conflicts: there is a loosening of sexual inhibitions abuse is more likely than in biologically intact families the lack of 'blood' ties - falsely indicates that boundaries are different, less clear - thus an [*apparent*] less of a taboo against incest.
- [g] Time & Patience: a minimum of two years is needed for even basic re-organization and building of a new family structure. If *given* time and patience - the new family can be as successful as a biologically intact family [although it won't be the same as the originals]
..... this has to be added to the time after the divorce.

[3] Self and Others

- [a] Stigma: - it's still evident, even if less so nowadays "from a broken home" "not his real dad" ... classifications still used & which categorize engender feelings of being not as good as biologically intact families. Don't discount the children's feelings about such.
- [b] Expectations: step-parents have unrealistically high expectations of themselves - as do custodial parents who are acting in compensation for breaking the marriage/original family.

[4] Adult Issues

The effect of parenting on the marital relationship: the general rule for biologically intact families of "putting the marital relationship first" - [because children won't adjust well if the parents are unhappy] - rule does not apply

WITH step families - for the first two or three years the children may really need to be put first - i.e. the children are insecure - so newly re-married parents need to be conscious of this.

In the early years, the quality of the relationship between the step-parent and the children is a greater predictor of stability than the marital relationship itself.

[5] Financial Concerns

The obvious reasons: such as less freedom, poorer circumstances [usually] due to a division of resources and income - thus having less luxuries etc - stress all the family members.

Living with Teenagers and Young Adults

- Discipline, Communication & Negotiation

Quid Pro Quo - *a negotiating process*

[based on the QPQ intervention of Steve Drewry, Dayton Ohio; and The Mirages of Marriage - Wm Zederer/Don Jackson [W W Norton Publishers NY 1968]

Aim:	To assist both parties hear and to <u>listen</u> to each other.
Application:	Scenarios when there is constant bickering over rules, disciplines, freedom and rights.
Prerequisite:	A preparedness on both sides to respect the other, and to respect the process - ie agree to give it a serious try. [see (a) to (e) following]

This process is best worked one on one - that is: one parent and one child. If more are involved eg the other parent and / or other children - then some form of using the process separately is best - don't gang up on one parent or against one child.

- [a] A third party observer / adjudicator is recommended - *but not the other parent* - someone more objective - perhaps a favourite uncle / family friend or a counsellor - whom both sides can respect.
- [b] Use non-argumentative or non-blaming language. [try using first person language "I" - not "you"]
Avoid the trivial [eg not taking out the trash]
Stress MORE OF [eg a good behavior/attitude] rather than LESS OF
- [c] This **IS** an artificial forum - you won't be comfortable with it at first - it is a 'deliberate' process and this makes it seem somewhat awkward or too structured - but the usual casual or informal approaches have not worked. The process must be exact to be fair.
- [d] Be real - requests should be feasible/reasonable; age appropriate; legal and safe. be prepared to define these parameters if needed & be open minded.
- [e] Solicit & confirm at least a 50% commitment to the success of the relationship

Stage One:

Step One: Teen / young adult speaks first - parent is the listener.
[5 mins] [or flip a coin to see who goes first - this will demonstrate impartiality/fairness more clearly if that's an issue]

Speaker states the attitudes, behaviours, traits [reactions, freedoms, disciplines methods etc] that he / she wants more of.

NB: *Simply state them - give no reasons, explanations etc*

NB: *The other person simply listens - no interjections* [can make notes]

Step Two: The listener then summarizes what the speaker wants.

Step Three: Reverse roles [parent becomes speaker] and do Steps one and two.

Step Four: Both - then lists ways in which he / she has contributed negatively to family conflict, disruption, points of dispute or lack of sharing & communication.
[*listener must listen - no comments to be made*]

Stage Two:

Step One: Hand over the list made of the other person's "wants / needs".
Both - think about your list and prioritize - note the top three.

Step Two: **Teen / Young Adult first.** [parent listens -no interjections]
"Pick your number 1 priority and give your parent a good concrete example"

Step Three: **To Parent** - "Will you agree to work towards this?"

Step Four: **To Teen / Young Adult**
"What will you do to help your parent work towards achieving your #1 priority for you?"

Step Five: **Reverse the roles** [teen listens - no interjections]
To Parent:
"Pick your #1 priority and give your son / daughter a good concrete example"

To Teen / Young Adult
"Will you agree to work towards this?"

To Parent:
"What can you do to help your son / daughter work towards achieving your #1 priority for you?"

**NB: Deal with only one priority at a time.
If agreement cannot be reached - move to the next priority and repeat stage two**

Stage Three:

First: Give the above [#1 priority] a chance to be put in place

Then

Each will assist the other
Each will tell the other their needs

Apply Stage Two [steps 1-5] to each of the next two priorities.

If the list is longer - be practical -don't overload - and don't just put them aside - agree to a time to deal with them [soon].

**Just because an agreement about one priority needs or wants fails to be fulfilled - don't immediately write off the others. You're a family - not a business or disputing nations.
Seek to put it back in place or renegotiate it before applying any punitive reaction. Talk & listen.**

General Bickering Behavior a defusing intervention

When one child wants to accuse / blame a sibling - or complain about them - or tell them off:

Step One: [a] To accuser: "List 3-5 things that you like, admire or appreciate about your brother/sister"
[b] Now list your complaints / accusations.
[c] What explanations/reasons can you give why he/she acted/acts that way?

Step Two: **reverse roles** - the other child works through step one [a-c].

Step Three: To each child: "What can you do to help your bother / sister avoid those faults / actions getting to you?"

Each must listen without interruption. Can be for child / child - or - child / parent.