

More of the Ten Commandments of Parenting – revisited

Part II: The last six

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Last time we touched on several important aspects of good parenting, such as listening to and treating your children respectfully, picking your issues, working with your child to problem-solve, and sharing your values and expectations.

Here are the final six of my Ten Commandments of parenting.

5. Discipline with love. If you must criticize, comment on the action or behavior of the child and not on the child himself. Point out what they did wrong and why (e.g., hitting hurts), provide an acceptable alternative response (e.g., we use words to express our anger) and move on.

Set limits for acceptable behavior. Teenagers need structure and rules, even though they may fight them with every bit of strength they have.

Remember, you're still the boss. If you have to punish – which, if you are doing other things right, should be rarely necessary – make sure the punishment is immediate, fits the crime and is consistent.

Often your disapproval alone can be an effective learning tool. At times, withdrawing attention or removing privileges also works well.

Spanking is never justified. It sends children the wrong message. If adults can hit to solve problems, why can't they? Once an adult has begun to hit his child, it becomes easier to do it the next time. Usually, when an adult hits, screams or yells at his child, the adult is frustrated and has lost control.

Disciplining with love is one of the most difficult, yet most important, tasks of parenthood and seems to get harder, not easier, as your children get older. Whenever possible, praise good behavior and ignore bad behavior. Often, we do the opposite, reacting only when a child misbehaves.

6. Reward good behavior. Find lots of opportunities to “catch them being good” and deal with inappropriate behavior appropriately.

While some people are critical of praising a child “just” for trying and participating, I believe our sincere belief in their efforts lets them know we believe in them. When children are showered with love, praise and encouragement for trying, they're likely to want to please you and will persist even when frustrated. Their success, in turn, enhances their self-esteem and the cycle is a good one.

Let them suggest small rewards they can receive when you catch them “being good” all week. Young children like stickers and star charts, and older children enjoy contracting. These go together with hugs, finding the necessary time to play a game and an extended bedtime from time to time.

7. Keep your promises. Say what you mean and mean what you say. If you take commitment and responsibility seriously, you help exemplify for them the values you feel are important. Consistently following through on things that you promise helps teach them about trust and security. This is the basis of a healthy relationship.

8. Be fair. You don't need to, and often should not, treat your children the same. They are of different

ages and as such have different needs. For example, an eight- and an 11-year-old child may very well have different bedtimes. Each child, nonetheless, deserves to be treated with his own unique needs in mind, while still being treated fairly, yet not necessarily equally.

If children perceive you to be unfair in your treatment, you may find that their behavior deteriorates.

9. Never do for children what they can do for themselves. While it's much easier to just bend down and tie your daughter's shoes for her when you're in a rush, don't! By doing so, you rob her of the opportunity to experience a real sense of success and independence. The amount of time saved isn't really worth it, and the boost to her self-esteem at the discovery of successfully having the bow stay in position, after having worked so hard to tie it, goes further than you'll ever know.

10. Make your house into a home. Spend meaningful time together and arrange it so that family members actually want to be together – a relatively foreign concept to some.

Make time to sit down and eat together as a family. You might be surprised at how infrequently families eat together. What a shame! This is an important time to connect, hear stories about the day and check in with each other. Is everyone okay? How was the day, and if it was okay, what made it okay? If it wasn't, what went wrong and what could make tomorrow a better day?

What family projects do you hope to attempt over the next few months? What is of interest to the children? What are your group and individual goals? Is there a game your family may want to play together, or a place that you'd all like to go and visit? How can each person be a part of arranging it?

Without finding good reasons to be together, the family members slowly seem to move away from each other, with everyone most likely having individual screen and cellphone time. Make the time to listen to each other and find the time to make sure you have laughter in your lives and in your home.

PARENTING CAN be very difficult. Some days you'll feel quite overwhelmed. This is the reality that governs most of our lives in the year 2020. Your challenge will be to work hard to make all the pieces within the family fit together successfully.

You'll also need time away from your family to refuel. While being a parent may be described as a “full time job plus,” one of the best gifts you can give your children is to be someone who is happy with herself. Go for a walk, go on dates with your partner and enjoy some quiet moments alone. Give each other the support you need to parent effectively.

If you need an extra hand around the house or outside professional care to enable you to feel less overwhelmed, find out how you can take advantage of this for the sake of your children, your family and your relationship with others. ■

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'KEEP YOUR promises. Say what you mean and mean what you say.' (TNS)