

# Revisiting the Ten Commandments of parenting

## Part One: The first four

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It's 6:15 a.m., dark outside, cold inside and the alarm went off a while ago. The kids have to get up, there's breakfast to be made, lunches to be packed, you have to get to work, the laundry is piled high, company is coming for Shabbat, and just thinking about it all makes you wish you could pull up the covers and escape to some desert island. You're exhausted and the day has yet to begin.

It's 11:30 p.m. Your nine-year-old asked all day to be treated like a 19-year-old and acted like a four-year-old, your 16-year-old seems to only want to connect when chauffeured around or at midnight, your five-year-old seems to delight in the word "no" and fights constantly with your 13-year-old, who has too much screen time, and your partner wonders why you yell at him for seemingly no reason. You've managed to fight with everyone in the family, and a few others, today. You're filled with anger, guilt and resentment.

Having and raising children is without a doubt one of the most difficult and yet potentially rewarding jobs a parent will be called upon to do. Parenting can be tough, and many times you'll feel frustrated to the point of wondering whether it's all worthwhile. Sometimes, it's hard to know whether you'll survive the day without harming anyone physically or emotionally. However, when you see your angels sleeping, or have a great conversation with your adolescent, and even get told, "Mom, you're great, I really do love you," you know, at least in that moment, that it's definitely worth it.

How do you raise children to feel good about themselves, cooperate with others, and be warm and loving? How do you help them become respectful and responsible adults, while you maintain your sanity and actually "enjoy" raising children?

After more than 35 years of clinical practice, I thought I'd revisit this and share the Ten Commandments of raising children that have worked (most of the time) for my patients, my own children and now my children's children.

*Children see through you in a minute and understand you better than you think*

**1. Treat your children with respect** and do unto them as you would like them to do unto you. Always remember how you'd like to be treated. Make time to listen to your children. Look them in the eye and be there with them when they speak.

If you can let your children know that they have a voice and that what and how they choose to communicate is important, you'll stay connected with them through both the good and difficult times.

Remember, your job is to responsibly parent and not only be their best friend. Some days you won't be. Let your children know your expectations – clearly, calmly, openly and honestly.

Children see through you in a minute and understand you better than you think. If you "lose it," take the time to walk away and calm down, but make sure you return to talk about it. If you can't handle things, seek professional help.



HOW CAN you maintain your sanity and actually 'enjoy' raising children without resorting to extreme measures? (TNS)

**2. Pick your issues:** It's easy to fight from morning till night, but rarely worth it. Your complaints may feel serious, but perhaps, at times, you may be overreacting and may need to lighten up and give in on the small stuff. Ask yourself if it really matters, or do you just think that it does? Is it really a "10," or are you just making it into one?

That said, don't be afraid to teach them right from wrong and let them know how you honestly feel. There will be times when you feel strongly about something and you need to say "no" – give your reasons and move on.

Many children would rather prolong the discussion than "give in." Not every "no" deserves a three-hour discussion.

Children also need to "win" and feel good, so some balancing can be required. At the end of the day, you're the boss. Can you offer them options so that you both can be happy?

As your teenager grows into a more independent person, he learns that

with freedom comes increased responsibility, and while you may have been attempting to micromanage his life, your role will change to be a more consultative one. He may not make the same decisions as you, but this is how he'll learn. At times, his friend's opinions may seem more important than yours. He needs your support to help figure it all out.

Going from having some control as a parent to now assisting from the sidelines is a difficult transition. That's your issue and not your children's, and if you're able to do it successfully, you'll help them become terrific, competent and responsible adults.

**3. Work together to solve problems** and find appropriate solutions. If children are part of the solution, they'll be more likely to work together when the going gets tough. Listen to what they have to say and you may be pleasantly surprised by their answers. Siblings can learn to work out their own issues through

actively negotiating acceptable alternatives to difficult situations.

Be there to give guidance as needed. Teach everyone to admit when they're wrong. Be a good role model yourself: apologize when you make a mistake. Children need to know that you, too, are human and aren't perfect. This gives them the freedom to make their own mistakes and grow.

**4. Share your values and expectations.** Don't be afraid to tell your children what you think is important in life and what you consider as appropriate behavior. Let them know why you believe what you do, while being open to hearing their thoughts.

There's a fine line between giving feedback and being perceived as critical. If you see them tuning you out, you know you've blown it for the moment. Go back later when they may be more open to hearing what you have to say. You may need some help in saying it differently. Don't embarrass your children. While you can say just about anything to anyone, how you choose to say it will determine how it gets heard.

Above all, it's important to let them know how much you love and appreciate them, many times a day – even if you're convinced they know it. They love to hear it again and again.

Sometimes you may agree to disagree, but good communication enables you to help your children set age-appropriate and realistic goals.

Children of all ages can contribute to the well-being of the family and can learn to accept responsibility proudly. I watched my children from a very early age sort, fold and put away laundry and help with other household chores, showing great pride in their role within the family.

Oops, I'm all out of space, so must save the next six for next time. In the meantime, happy parenting. ■

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