

# The Core Essentials Of Effective Parenting

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I therefore sign off with a reflective poem to help you reflect upon and develop a deeper relationship with those offspring who have been placed in your custody for the most vulnerable parts of their lives.

### **A Parents Poem to their Child**

*In the whole universe there is nobody like you  
Since time began there has been no one like you  
Nobody has your smile, your eyes, your hair  
Nobody shares your handwriting or your mannerisms  
Nobody can paint your brush strokes or fully enjoy the same  
food, music and company as you do  
Nobody in the world sees things in exactly the same way as you*

*Your laugh and what makes you laugh  
Your tears, and what makes you cry are unique only to you  
Don't strive to emulate others – there is no need  
Don't measure your worth through future ambitions or worlds  
wealth  
Don't strive, just be you – universally and historically unique  
A rare one off*

*Out of the billions of potential applications  
I am thrilled and proud to proclaim you are my child  
And I, your parent  
In this temporal world  
Where both destinies touched for a fleeting moment in the swirl-  
ing ocean of time.  
Let us cherish our experiences of togetherness.*

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## Self Esteem

A child's sense of self worth can never be underestimated. In my experience as a parent, teacher and Head-teacher, there is a link between low self-esteem, achievement and behavioural problems. How often do you find people who feel in-control, experiencing success and living in a secure environment lashing out at others in a negative manner? Conversely, those who feel helpless, unsuccessful and insecure are often negative towards others. Although there can be numerous reasons for low self-esteem and it can vary according to your own perceptions of a situation, it is in your interest to raise your own child's self-esteem whenever possible. If you need more convincing, see below:

### Self Esteem

**“A persons judgement of Self influences the kinds of friends he chooses, how he gets along with others, the kind of person he marries, and how productive he will be. It affects his creativity, integrity, stability, and even whether he will be a leader or a follower. His feeling of self-worth forms the core of his personality and determines the use he makes of his aptitudes and abilities. His attitude towards himself is a direct bearing on how he lives all parts of his life. In fact, self-esteem is the main-spring that slates each of us for success or failure as a human being”.**

TES Summer 89

D Briggs (70)

Cited by M White

There are many strategies that can increase self-esteem. Simply spending time with your child may be enough. On the other hand you may have to guide and support your child for some time in a particular area where she/he feels he is failing. Whatever strategies you employ, attempt to refocus on your child wearing imaginary rose tinted glasses if you're feeling negative about them at the moment. All the guidance in this book will become so much more effective if you help them deal with their feelings about themselves as well as their feelings about the relationship they have with you.

Keep your questions specific and open, for example:

- How would they have felt if they'd been in your shoes?
- What were the specific reasons and why did they behave as they did?
- Now they've had time to consider their actions – how do they now feel?

The best way to develop more sophisticated questioning skills is through practice. When you are tempted to yell, “**Did you break that dish?**” or “**Did you make that mess?**” you're likely to receive the predictable “yeah” or outright denial. In future, try including the word how, and await the response, expectantly. Through your child's explanation you may even find that the breakage or the mess were accidents that could have happened to anyone – that's probably stretching the realms of credibility a bit too far – but you get the gist of how selective questioning can really enhance communication with your child.

### Remember:

The Mediocre Parent	Is aware of	telling
The Good Parent	Is aware of	directing
The Outstanding Parent	Is aware of	communicating

Likewise, when it comes to statements, focus on the behaviour you want, not what you don't want! For example, in situations where your child is displaying an indifferent behaviour like, not listening and/or ignoring what you are saying, keep the focus on what you want them to do.

In the above example, instead of saying “**don't ignore me**”, simply say, “**please listen to what I am saying**”.

This way, the child does not have to digest a “not what to do” statement which focuses on the negative behaviour, but a “what to do” one which focuses on the positive behaviour.

So in future, don't say “**don't keep fidgeting**”, merely say “**please keep still**”.

## Introduction - Setting the Context

**Would you allow your child to play on a toxic waste site or swim in contaminated water? Of course not. You would have assessed the risks and as a caring parent replied to your child's request with a firm NO.**

What a shame parenting isn't always as black and white as the above examples. If it were, there would be no need for so much advice and guidance on parenting skills.

In the above example, no matter how many times your child accuses you of being a spoil sport or unreasonable, you'll probably stick firmly to your decision!

In the real, 'shades of grey' world however, decisions about our children's behaviour are not based on such obvious scenarios, which often results in less clearly defined decisions about discipline.

In this day and age, we are raising children within a society that bombards us with contradicting messages. Our consumer-led nation encourages children to consume vast quantities of crisps in order to collect book tokens for their schools. Yet in the same school's health curriculum, pupils are warned about the long term effect of junk food and discouraged to consume too much of it. The media portrays kids as being 'cool' if they drink certain brands of fizzy drink - yet is it widely believed that many of these drinks are saturated in chemicals and can have an adverse effect on both the physical and emotional state of children.

Coupled with the above, a passive 24/7 culture of exposure to television viewing and computer games which distract from sport and outdoor activities, is depriving children of exploring the physical challenges that are available in the outside world.

Considering the above examples, is it not surprising that we are raising a nation of children who appear to be less healthy, more emotionally volatile, less fit and lacking in basic social and communication skills.

I haven't mentioned the above simply to depress, but merely to touch on some of the difficulties parents now face raising children in modern Great Britain. It's not surprising in our society of mixed messages, that parenting has become one of the most precarious past-times of all.

One thing is certain; parenting doesn't get easier with age! I am personally grappling more now with discipline issues, and having more rows with my wife about parenting strategies, than ever before. I do believe however, the following personal reflections are universal truisms that can really help with raising our children.

## Personal Reflections on Parenting - 5 Basic Lessons

“I hate you dad”

...my nine year old mumbled just loud enough for me to hear as she stomped up stairs, still gripping the novelty playing cards that I'd banned from the dinner table. Meanwhile my fifteen-year old had shut herself in her bedroom having given me 'that look' because I wouldn't allow her to go to the 'in-party' Saturday night. Apparently, I'm the only father in the world who's worried about alcohol, drugs and over-amorous teenagers. I Think Not!

Meanwhile, my eldest daughter accused me of being 'too soft' with both her younger sisters as she reminded me how unreasonable I had been with her.

As a relatively experienced parent and educator, I share the above scenario with you to illustrate You Are Not Alone! No matter what walk of life or measure of education a parent has experienced, effective modern day parenting seems to be an elusive art form.

### So, What Does Effective Parenting Look Like?

Much of the following reflections derive, not from being an 'expert' parent, but from the many mistakes I have made over the years together with tips and effective strategies I have learnt from other parents along the way:

**1** **Acknowledge and learn from your mistakes.**  
**(You'll make plenty, unless you abdicate your parental responsibilities which, although very tempting, will cost you a fortune in bail charges.)**

Not only will your children hurt and embarrass you, they are also 'little experts' at making you question your own judgements. If they don't like your decision then you will be compared unfavourably with their friends' 'more reasonable' and enlightened parents. Guess what, those very same parents also have your qualities rammed down their throats too, all depending on who's in the frame for offspring manipulation.

**Never make spontaneous decisions and always swap notes with other parents first.**

Adults disappoint us everyday, whether work colleagues, friends or relations. Similarly, we regularly disappoint ourselves by our shortcomings. So what hope is there for younger, less experienced children, to live up to our higher expectations? It is therefore crucial that we should not inadvertently set our children up to fail.

### **Avoid Sarcasm**

Condemn unacceptable behaviour, but not the person. Don't label the person as a bully, rude, a thief etc. You can tell him/her quite firmly that his/her behaviour (not personality) is unacceptable. Remember that labels often stick!

### **Give Responsibilities**

Most people respond well when given responsibility. Keep requests clear and concise. Look for opportunities to give praise and encouragement.

## More General Tips on Communicating with your Child

You may already be aware that over 50% of our communication is through our body language. So it is therefore not surprising when we stand arms folded with a scowl on our face our child becomes very defensive and effective communication is blocked. The tone of our voice is also said to account for over 30% of communication.

The actual words we use are therefore often eclipsed by the tone and visual messages we transmit. It is believed that the actual words only account for 7% of overall communication. Furthermore even when relaxed, it is said that we only ever remember one third of any communication and two thirds of that is what we have said ourselves. Yet when we are furious with our children, we go into verbal overdrive and bombard them with words, words and more words. From an emotional perspective this is understandable, but as a communication exercise it is very limited. How often have we witnessed both children and adults having a good stand up verbal exchange – although there's a lot of noise and many words flying through the air, one thing is always evident – not a lot of real communication and listening is going on.

Therefore, practice the art of communicating your displeasure as opposed to simply displaying your anger.

Remember: stillness, relaxed, but controlled posture and gestures equate to assertiveness. This parent is in control and means business. Lots of spontaneous jerks and un-found movement is reminiscent of that ineffective hotel proprietor – Basil Fawlty. Keep the tone, pace and volume of your voice under control unless you really want to be a Basil Fawlty clone. As illustrated above, it makes sense to use words economically. Simply say what you mean and mean what you say. Stick to the facts and don't let your child direct you from the main focus of your message. In all communication, the **main thing** is to keep the **main thing**, the **main thing**.

It may sound obvious but the best way to move forward from a conflict situation is to ask questions. Remember the person asking the questions usually controls the direction and pace of the conversation. The person answering the questions is simply responding to the questioner. It is well worth keeping this in mind when you are tempted to make indignant self-righteous statements to your child, which do not demand an intellectual or emotional response.

## Building Constructive Relationships/ Effective Communication

There are certain general ground rules, which will help you form constructive relationships and win respect.

### **Treat all people fairly and equally**

Remember appearances may be deceiving and it is easy to jump to wrong conclusions. Always take time to clarify a situation. Your attitude will in turn affect the other person's attitude towards you.

### **Adopt a friendly and approachable manner**

It is important that you're seen as someone who is approachable. Other people will usually respond well to warm understanding natures, but a stern and distant manner will prevent them from approaching you.

### **Be Polite**

Speak politely in order to show people, by good example, how others should talk to you. If you do get 'ratty' or make a mistake, don't be afraid to say you are sorry.

### **Be Willing to take an interest in each person**

Try and make others feel special by having a chat with them. It's the time you give as much as the content you share, that makes the difference.

### **Always be Positive**

It is important to remember when dealing with people's problems that encouragement is more effective than criticism. Remind them of the positive things they've achieved.

### **Be Trustworthy**

You are in a responsible position of trust – be careful not to tell others about confidential issues. People know deep inside that those friends who never partake in juicy gossip can be trusted with their deepest secrets.

### **Stay Calm**

When you face a difficult situation, try to stay calm and control your anger; this will help you remain in authority.

### **Rudeness**

If you consider a person has been deliberately rude to you, ask him/her to repeat what was said. This will give the opportunity to retract the statement or apologise.

### **Don't raise your voice**

Don't shout, it is far better to wait until things quieten down and then you will be able to get your message across.

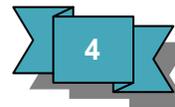
The following two points will help to minimise negative scenarios.

- Every morning say to yourself, "I live in an unjust world and life isn't fair". That's the reality. If you start the day with this attitude, you will be less aggrieved by our offspring's behaviour and more objective in the way you respond to it!
- Never put temptation in the way of your child. Anything from leaving a fiver on the table to letting them use your bank card number is asking for trouble. However many times have you been tempted/taken risks when you have found yourself in a position of trust? Think carefully before you answer. It amazes me when parents returning from their foreign holiday are surprised that the teenager they left behind threw a party of a lifetime after promising not to do such a thing.

***Minimise temptations and negative situations will be reduced.***



If, after disciplining your child, you feel your stance was reasonable, for heaven's sake, stick to it! Changing with the wind to avoid conflict gives your child the message that you are a wimp. Unfortunately, having discussed this issue with many Head-teacher colleagues, it appears that children often get the upper hand nowadays resulting in frustrated parents venting their anger at the local primary school! Remember, the more your child views you as 'easy meat' the more he will try to manipulate you. Surprisingly, there is evidence to suggest that children receive **fairness** as a far greater virtue than **frivolity**, although they would never admit to mum or dad! So adopt clear guidelines and no matter how much sulking, verbal abuse or down right spitefulness you experience, stick to your guns.



***Being unpopular is often the sign of effective parenting.***

It is one thing to be at the wrong end of verbal disapproval from your offspring, but doesn't it hurt when they withdraw all their affection from you? Simply ask yourself again: was my stance a reasonable one? If you still believe it was (perhaps after confiding with a third party) the phrase 'blow'em' comes to mind. Yes, it is really hard when such an atmosphere prevails, but remember, it was your child's decision, not yours, to create such a negative situation. Whilst acknowledging that you do not like living in such tension you must simply ride it out. After a while, your child is as likely to be fed-up with the situation as you are. Be ready to spot the signs of them wanting to be friends again and help them back into intimacy. Do not however be too rushing and gushing. In a sensitive manner, let them know exactly how they made you feel. If your child displays a degree of humility then it may be timely for you to do the same. Admit the times as a parent when you don't always come up to the mark. The details of such 'one-to-ones' may be forgotten, but the mutual prevailing sincerity of those moments will last a lifetime.

**5** *It is not always productive to get things back on an even keel too quickly. Don't harbour bitterness and resentment but do remember infected relationships, as infected parts of our bodies, need time to heal albeit within a nurturing and purposeful environment.*

## Creating a Safe and Positive Environment

Do not be afraid to give more responsibility to your children. If you are forever making decisions for them how will they learn and develop strategies to cope with every day risks? Overly protective parents may even make their children's future lives more hazardous by denying them the experience of risk assessment whilst still a youngster.

The following rules may be a starting point for handling some responsibility back to your child. Go over the list together and add further rules as and when appropriate. Make sure that you allow plenty of time for this exercise and it is conducted within a non-confrontational and relaxed atmosphere. This should avoid your child feeling that a dictatorial adult is simply imposing the rules upon them.

### Six Rules for Safety - Child's Checklist

- 1 I will always let my parents know whom I'm with and, where I'm going and how I can be contacted. If I have a mobile phone I will ensure it is fully charged and on at all times. If there's any change of plan, I will phone home.
- 2 I will stick with my friend / friends and will not go anywhere alone.
- 3 We will stay away from isolated places.
- 4 We will not speak to, or accept gifts from, strangers and will remember that strangers also mean seemingly very posh well-dressed men and women.
- 5 We will never go with another older child, teenager or adult even if we know them well. If anyone invites us to be with them after saying 'no thank you' we will phone our parents.
- 6 Sometimes it is nice to be hugged by a relative or family friend. If I think they do it too much or make me feel uneasy about it, I'm telling my parents.

## Six Rules to Enhance Positive Negotiation

### Further rules for our own family

When considering the six safety rules with your child/children, keep in mind these further 6 rules, which enhance positive negotiation. Parents check list:

- 1 **Talk with, not at, your children - maintain eye contact and open body stance.**
- 2 **Don't always make decisions for them - let them suggest alternative solutions to their problems. Discuss, don't dictate.**
- 3 **Always praise them for sensible solutions and approach their more bizarre brain waves with sensitivity**
- 4 **Allow them to express their own feelings - give them time to find the words to describe how they feel. Afterwards tell them how you feel.**
- 5 **Encourage them to take responsibility for their plans and actions. Let them make mistakes, take limited risks, experience frustration and failure, and be ready to support them when you get the green signal.**
- 6 **Be positive, show them that you love and trust them (even if you don't at that particular moment) and try to give them the benefit of the doubt. Conversely, tell them when and why you are disappointed with their behaviour.**

In our school, it is vital that our school dinner supervisors communicate effectively with the pupils. You may therefore find the following tried and tested guidance notes for our own supervisors also helpful in maintaining constructive relationships with your own children.