

Designer Label Parenting

One of the most frustrating parenting experiences would have to be finding yourself using methods of parenting you would rather avoid. You know, when you have to cajole, yell and scream at the children before they will listen to you. Super-mums and super-dads of course never do anything like this. But the average mum and dad with average children do. It is amazing how a six year old can be just that age in the morning and really only two or three by the end of the day. Regression is not a fancy psychological concept, it happens everyday in almost every household: children no longer act their age and for the duration of the Parenting Peak-hours neither do their parents. These Parenting Peak-hours differ from one household to the next but getting-the-kids-to-school and getting-them-to-do-their-homework must easily be in the top ten of the least favourite parenting activities. Just as getting them to have a bath, eat and go to bed at a reasonable time is too. Some parents feel that the Parenting Peak-hours never cease.

The trouble with children

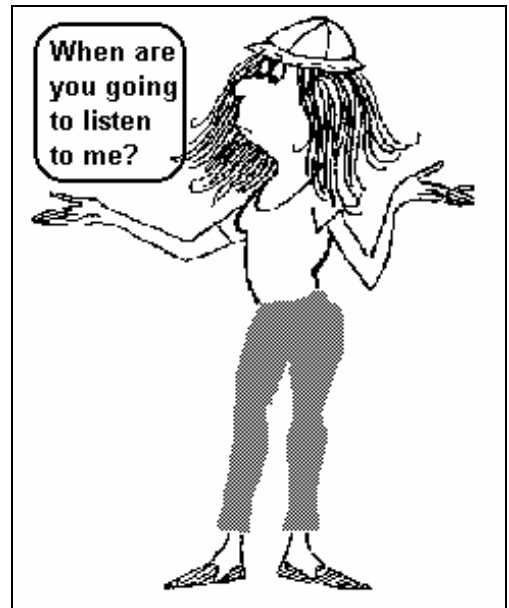
The trouble with children is that they really are very unprofessional; they let emotions get in the way of any sensibly planned parenting working day. If only children would respond to our polite requests for co-operation with "yes of course Daddy, I'll do it immediately" or "thank you for your wisdom Mother, it is really very late and of course I should have been asleep by now".....if only.

Children in general don't respond all that positively to suggestions or instructions that



are contrary to their plans. However, can we really expect our children to always willingly fall in to line with our plans?

It is **not** a child's ultimate fantasy to be co-operating with his/her parents on a sensible basis. It is a parent's ultimate fantasy that s/he does. Often we like to work with our children on a basis of mutual co-operation, while in reality we need them to do as we tell them to without them having the right to decline, gracefully or otherwise. How often are we negotiating and arguing with them as we would with adults or colleagues, meanwhile elevating children to a position of power that is exciting, confusing and/or frightening to them at the same time?



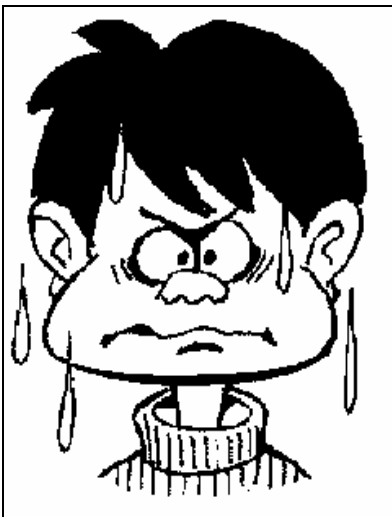
Do you want to be friends with your child?

Many parents want to be friends with their children. Maybe you do? Well, picture this: your best friend is coming for dinner and you have made a real effort to cook something special but s/he is not eating and is just picking at the food. Would you raise your voice and tell him/her that if s/he doesn't finish the main course there will be no desert?

Being friends with our children is a privileged status we have to work hard for. This status will only be achieved when they still confide in us freely once they reach adulthood. Before adulthood we parents - from time to time - need to be in charge of our children. **Being in charge is mutually exclusive with being friends.** Not putting ourselves in charge is like driving across the Harbour Bridge in peak-hour and allowing our child to pull on the steering wheel, while we patiently explain that this is really too dangerous and that mummy or daddy should make the car change lanes.

Parenting should be easy

It would seem that parenting only feels right if we are able to do this in a most comfortable and casual way. If we need to use other than subtle and nicely positive techniques, we feel that we somehow are failing in our mission as a parent.



Imagine that your child is invited to a birthday party. When you arrive there, you find to your disquiet that all sort of brightly coloured lollies and carbonated caffeine containing drinks are available in abundance. As soon as you have had a chance to say hello to the child's mother, you find yourself wondering if this is the same spotlessly clean child you left your house with this morning because s/he now has spilled a drink over the lovely new outfit and the face is covered with chocolate. Next thing you know your little "friend" starts pushing the other children because s/he doesn't want to let go of the presents that belong to the birthday child.

Designer Label Parenting requires you to handle this smilingly and with little effort. You know however that the only thing that will really work is to act decisively and to take your child home even if you have only just arrived. It would be wonderful if the other parents at that moment would admire your courage, but most likely they will think that you lost it.

Children's and parents' privileges

Maybe at times we are expecting too much of our children. Many books and articles about parenting are written in such a way that the "lay" parent could be forgiven for thinking that it is possible to raise children without ever having to raise one's voice, that it is possible to never have to firmly grab hold of your child in a heated exchange of words. Or if you use these parenting methods, you should feel eternally guilty.

The truth is that it is a child's mission in life to go for what s/he can get. We can't hold that against them. However it is a parent's privilege in life to remain sane under all that comes with this thing called parenting. Some children can be raised with ease and we feel that how we parent them comes naturally. Some children require a lot more energy, patience and determination. Some children require a parenting style that is far removed from how we would prefer to parent. A constant mixture of frustration, pain and guilt is felt because how we want to parent doesn't seem to work and how we are required to parent doesn't feel good. When parenting high-maintenance children we need to perhaps grieve for the child we didn't get but recognise as well that we need to grieve for the parent we can't (afford) to be!

Preferred & Required Parenting Style

Life can be seen as a park with deep ponds and patches of newly sewn grass. Some children can be guided through this park, by setting out a few stakes with a bit of string. These are the children on whom any reasonable parenting style can be practised with success. Other children will need 2 meter high steel fences to keep them off the grass and out of the water. Only firm and resolute, but *not punitive* parenting will stand a chance here. To parent on the principle of co-operation might work with the first child but it is guaranteed to fail with the second one. Generally we need to adjust our **Preferred Parenting Style (PPS)** to the **Required Parenting Style (RPS)**, as determined by the child.

At times this means that we might have to be far more insistent or directive than we would like to be; "*Get dressed now.....please!*" sounds quite different from "*Please, get dressed now?*". Some parents place themselves under great pressure to always achieve positive parenting fulfilment. They don't offer their child the high boundaries that s/he needs in order to avoid compromising the Preferred Parenting Style. The child then needs to adapt to the parent's Preferred Parenting Style instead of the other way around.

When this doesn't work and the parent has to be less "democratic" than s/he prefers to be, the child can easily get blamed and the relationship between the parent and the child can sustain damage.



Couples that parent together

With High Maintenance children it is more important than with "other" children that

- both parents agree what the Required Parenting Style is
- both parents agree to react to difficulties in a similar fashion

High Maintenance children can put a severe strain on the marital relationship especially if the parents do not agree on the Required Parenting Style. One way of dealing with this is to set up a Required Parenting Plan which states all the child's needs in terms of

boundaries and rules and the required parenting responses. When both parents can agree and act on this plan the benefits will be great for everyone including the child concerned.

It is important to realise that parenting is not a level playing field, it can't be and it shouldn't be. Children depend on us for their psychological security and that means not only love but boundaries as well. Don't be afraid to lead. Don't expect co-operation, compliance is good enough. Don't think that getting-to-school-on-time is only a meaningful experience if the child dressed him/herself, had breakfast, brushed his/her teeth and is ready to go to school on time, all of this voluntarily and without arguing with his or her siblings. Don't wait until your child provokes you to blow up. Use your strength constructively: raise your voice when you want to. If it is necessary to be intentional, directive and you feel you have to skip the niceties, so be it, and after all you are in charge. When you blow up when you *decide* to -not when you are *provoked* into blowing up-, you will find that this will be a far less painful experience for everyone involved. Remember, the more you place yourself in charge, the more secure your children will feel.

When it is time to set boundaries be decisive and when it is time for love and affection spoil them with kisses, cuddles and all things nice.

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