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# FAMILY • SERVICES

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## Afraid to Say “NO!”

*How We Have Lost Our Way As Parents Today*

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### It's Hard to Stand Up To Our Own Children

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Parenting today is a daunting task! We have lost our way. One discouraging trend many counselors and educators are noticing is that parents are having an increasingly difficult time providing a protective rim around their children. We are anxious and unsure. We are afraid to say “No” because we lack the confidence to do so. We avoid conflict and we hesitate to take a strong stand because we don't believe that we (or our children!) can survive the ordeal. Moreover, we feel compelled to protect our children from disappointment and to soften their frustration. Their unhappiness has become the enemy!

We struggle hard to be better parents, and yet tragically, our children are suffering the effects of what many experts say is a “generation of child-centered, over-indulgent parenting.” In her book, *Spoiling Childhood: How Well-Meaning Parents Are Giving Children Too Much--But Not What They Need*, Bay Area clinical psychologist Diane Ehrensaft, Ph.D. offers an intriguing look at the problem we are all facing as parents today:

“Our most important job is not to make our children happy, but to prepare them for life.”

-Elizabeth Pantley

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*“The paradox (is that) we are a generation of self-involved parents, with a great deal of weight placed on our own personal happiness. Yet we are also a generation with a tremendous investment in being good parents, who go overboard to provide what we think will be best for our children. It is this lethal combination that puts us at risk for spoiling childhood.”*

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We are confused parents. We live in a time when family life is in rapid flux. All the old roles about mothers and fathers, men and women, have changed shape and form. Families look different. Besides the many life stresses and social problems that confront parents today, parents also bring all their own insecurities, conflicts, and emotions into their experience of raising their children. There seems to be no sure footing about how we navigate these uncharted waters.

Often, we feel like we are standing on shifting sand. We have lost the confidence that our parents' generation had. The old rules don't seem to work--and yet the “new” way seems have gaping holes in it. We do not seem to have a reasonable set of child-rearing guidelines to inform us. We are stretched too thin: between home and work, between our needs and our children's needs, between action and inaction.

◆  
“We turn to our children to provide stability and reassurance that somebody indeed loves us and that we are not alone.”

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### Parenthood As Never Before

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Dr. Ehrensaft says there are four major factors that make the phenomenon of parenting both remarkable and tortuous today:

- **We have no time to parent.** We are straddled with enormous responsibilities. We are constantly breathless. We feel pressed to “parent perfectly,” with no time to do it.
- **We fear for our children's future.** We have lost the confidence that we can give our children a better world than we had.

- **We have fragile family ties.** Children are often the only reliable connection adults now have in their family life. We rely on our children even more in the absence of extended families and stable neighborhoods. Children provide us with a sense of belonging in an age of isolation.
- **We suffer from the Peter Pan Syndrome.** We are a unique generation in our hesitancy to cross the threshold to adulthood. We are heavily influenced by the cultural shifts towards consumerism, fulfillment, and immediate gratification. This coexists with the impulse to cling tenaciously to the joys of youth and to the delusional belief that youth runs eternal.

## Changing Childhood: *Half-Child, Half-Adult*

Childhood is also being redefined. Children's development is being vastly accelerated, tastes and styles of children and adults are merging steadily, parents are sons and daughters to be high-achievers time, our children are having difficulty pass on into adulthood.

Ehrensaft points out a strange phenomenon fluctuate between pushing their children and that children are being rushed or that they children who are being pushed and hurried to. Not by selfish parents, but by confused what a child is and are unconscious of the and holding them back."

Children are suffering from a muddled as half-adult to half-child. Paradoxically, we sophisticates" in one setting--and we coddle Ehrensaft calls this childhood double exposure the "kinderdult" phenomena: the miniature adult ("the enlightened") and the cherub ("the innocent"). For example, at one moment we talk to our children as though they were able to handle complicated decisions and the sharing of information that might be overwhelming to a 30-year old. Yet, at the next moment, we "worry that if every passing wish is not granted, we will trample on their fragile constitutions," so we surrender to their screaming requests and their demands for immediate gratification.

### **MUDDLED IDENTITY:**

YOUNG  
SOPHISTICATES  
vs.  
BABES IN THE WOODS

⊕  
**The same children who  
are being pushed and  
hurried on the one  
hand...are being  
coddled and catered  
to on the other.**

bolstering their own esteem by pushing earlier and earlier, and yet at the same leaving the nest and being encouraged to

that exists for children today. Parents holding them back. It is not "simply are being infantilized. The same about are coddled, protected, catered parents who have no clear picture of vacillate between hurrying our children

identity: they swing from being treated approach our children as "young them as "babes in the woods" in the next!

## Bartering For Love

Many parents today will recognize in themselves that tendency to bend over backwards to take their children seriously, in the name of love and respect--but in reality, it is in the spirit of "bartering" for love. While it is good that we have made more room for our children in the world of adults than years ago, we have gone overboard in the latitude we have given them to "run the show."

### **BARTERING for LOVE**

♥  
It is a heavy burden  
for our children  
when we need them  
to love us!

Dr. Ehrensaft cautions us that "it is nothing but a burden for our children when we bid so strongly for their love and fear so greatly that we will lose it."

*"If we can remember that our children want not just respect, but also safety from their own impulses, from their own destructiveness, from their own unbridled desires--we take a giant step in extricating ourselves from bartering for love."*

## Decision-Making Beyond Their Years

In our rush to gratify our children, we often deprive them of taking on responsibilities for themselves and others. Yet at the same time, we burden them with too many adult-like responsibilities when we put so much emphasis on their respect and partnership. The freedoms we allow our children in "bartering for love" force them to assume responsible behaviors that tax their developmental capacities.

Children are often not ready to be given equal voting power in the family--and yet we rush to give it to them. Children who are allowed to make all their own decisions may be forced to be hyper-vigilant about their own welfare at a time when they need their parents to handle that function! We must develop a more realistic notion of ministering to our children in ways appropriate to their ages and stages.

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## Wall To Wall Parenting

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Many parents, taking to heart the new dictum of “quality time as an antidote to absence of time,” try to make sure that every waking moment of their child’s life is filled with stimulation, fulfillment, and access to undivided attention. Dr. Ehrensaft calls this “wall-to-wall parenting.”

One of the great dangers for a child is that it exposes him to emotional suffocation. Parents arrange constant activities, take on worry with their child over his friend not playing with him, suffer over a teacher’s lack of attentiveness, and stay up with their child doing his homework for him. Parents are *intensely* involved--in their child’s activities, his achievements, his feelings, his desires. At times, we over-listen, over-indulge, over-attend, and over-function for our child. Life is a whirlwind of activities designed to bring pleasure, but there is no down time, no “nothing time” for a child to just “be.” Ehrensaft describes it this way:

**“EMOTIONAL  
SUFFOCATION”**  
is the great danger.

As parents, we all too often over-listen, over-indulge, over-attend, and over-function for our children.

*“From a child’s point of view, there is no breathing space to be alone, to negotiate one’s own problems, to discover one’s own solutions. Children can soon rely on parents to do everything for them and grow to expect that everyone will attend to them in the same focused way--teachers, child care providers, other relatives, even friends. They expect immediate recognition and attention.”*

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## The Golden Rule: “The Pursuit of Happiness”

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The psychological force which fuels our conflicted parenting today is the golden rule which most of us have been brought up with: the pursuit of happiness. We have a new cultural belief that says that no one should ever have to suffer--neither adult nor child. As parents, we try to buffer our children from unhappiness. We think that frustration, disappointment, and sadness will unnecessarily wound or traumatize our child. Most of us doubt our child’s capacity to tolerate pain. Dr.



**We give our children a false picture of reality.**

Struggling is a part of life,  
but we don’t prepare  
children for it.

We teach them to expect to  
be satisfied and happy  
all the time.

But, the truth is,  
we simply can’t have it all!

Ehrensaft observes that parents today “worry that their children have suffered. And because they are a part of a generation that does not believe that they or their children should ever have to suffer or that any good could ever come from suffering, their guilt escalates and they offer reparations. They want their child’s acceptance...(and) they do this by creating a fairyland. “

The real tragedy in this attitude is that we actually hurt our child more in our attempt to protect him. Why? Several reasons. One, we don’t allow our child to develop the “resiliency muscle” that comes from learning that he can face and handle difficult situations, so we keep him from developing critical coping skills. Two, we give our child a false picture of reality--one that is rose-colored and unreal! This results in profound disappointment for our child later on, when he finally comes face to face with “the hard knocks” of real life. And third, we create a self-centered, self-absorbed child who will forever expect those in relationship to him to indulge him and keep him happy. Such an attitude is a sure condition for relationship failure in adulthood.

We have to be willing to give something up and confront the limitations of our golden rule. We simply can’t have it all, nor can our children. And life is not just about happiness. Life can be happy, but it can also be sad. It can be fulfilling, as well as frustrating. Life offers us pleasures, but also suffering. The real challenge of life is learning how to ride the waves! This is what we, as parents, must try to teach our children. Our real goal should not be to divert our child from pain, but to offer support to help him or her get through the inevitable deprivations, frustrations, and losses in life.

*With the exception of early infancy, loving our children does not equate with shielding them from suffering and providing them with never-ending happiness. Bonds of love are more sturdily built by our attempts to regulate the degree of heartache our children must endure at a level they can handle and by imparting to them the coping skills to face adversity when it comes their way.* (Ehrensaft)

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## We Want To Be Pals -- Not Enforcers!

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What stands in the way of our setting firm limits? Why do we have such a difficult time providing that ‘protective rim’ around our child when it means holding firm to consistent rules and not giving in? David Elkund, author of *The Hurried Child* and *Ties That Stress*, puts it this way:

**ARE WE  
PROTECTING  
OUR NEEDS**

or

**THEIR  
NEEDS?**

*“When we worry about our children liking us, we put our children’s needs ahead of our own!”*

*“Yes, young people may not like us when we set rules and standards, and that is too bad. When we try to be pals to our children instead of parents, we deprive them of their most important source of internal rules, standards, and controls.”*

The truth is that our children cannot and should not like us ALL the time! If they do, then we’re not doing our job of providing something strong for them to push up against. When we are able to take charge (even in the face of our child’s “I hate you’s”), they experience our loving strength. They are reassured by our constancy. While they may feel and express intense anger at us in the moment, internally they continue to love, admire, respect, and feel protected by us. They will be able to relax their vigilant pushing when they come to trust that we are *truly* taking charge--so they don’t have to! Experiencing our clear “yes’s” and “no’s” helps children to internalize controls for themselves. Without our doing that for them, they will have no inner guide that helps

them delay their wants, contain their emotions, and have empathy for others.

When we worry about whether or not our child will love us or not, we compromise our children’s needs. It is our own doubt and insecurity that actually hurts our child. To be a good parent means having the courage to face our child’s momentary anger and rejection for a long-term gain!

**“NICE GUYS DON’T ALWAYS WIN  
WHEN IT COMES TO RAISING A CHILD  
WHO FEELS HEALTHY AND SECURE!”**

D. Ehrensaft, *Spoiling Childhood*

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## The Dangers of Indulgence

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• **Children have identity confusion: they don’t know who’s in charge.**

When we don’t take a clear, consistent stand, children don’t know what to expect. Will they be able to trust what we say? Or can they push harder and will we give in? Do they get to make the important decisions--or do we? Who is the parent? Who is the child? What are the boundaries in this family? Blurred boundaries can be extremely confusing to a child and can interfere with his identity formation. Some children have great difficulty developing a sense of autonomy because they have not learned where mom or dad leaves off and where they begin. As parents, every time we have difficulty saying “no” to our child because it will hurt *us*, it’s a time to look inward. Usually, that’s a clear sign that we are having trouble seeing our child as separate from ourselves.

• **Children are at risk for becoming narcissists.**

When we rush in to meet our child’s every need or when we consistently try to control our child’s world to minimize his experience of disappointment and unhappiness, we give our child a false, self-centered impression of reality. Although we are parenting with the best of intentions, we may be “creating tyrants rather than respected and confident subjects.”



We run the risk of  
**RAISING  
KINGS AND  
QUEENS**

who have a false sense  
of their own entitlement!

Over-listening and over-gratifying can actually over-stimulate a child's sense of omnipotence and entitlement. It can give him the erroneous impression that his place is at the center of the universe. Furthermore, when we ascribe to our children a sense of rationality and decision-making that is far beyond their years (sometimes to the point of being questionable and outlandish!), we nurture in them the assumption that they are far, far too important! Sometimes, in our quest to be fair and democratic, we lose sight of the cognitive and emotional limits of our children. We inflate them to the level of "king or queen of the palace." Sadly, we are raising children who will never be content unless the focus is on them!

The results of such indulgence are as dire for the children as the consequences of parental self-involvement. Children become overly self-aggrandized, with a sense of entitlement that makes it difficult for them to live cooperatively in a world of peers. They never learn the meaning of the word "no." They are pressured and pushed, feeling they always have to accomplish for their parent's pleasure. They have a false sense of independence and autonomy. They are never happy unless the focus is on them. They lack empathy for others. They will be thwarted in their later intimate relationships and will never develop an authentic sense of self. They are at risk for becoming narcissists.

Children hear this message:



*"I am loved and accepted only when I am perfect."*

- **Children can quickly come to believe that their job is to affirm us.**

Children quickly adapt to the messages we send. One disturbing message that many children perceive is that we need them to achieve so that we can feel successful as parents. They come to believe that our acceptance of them is dependent upon their being "perfect." This is perilous ground: children learn to achieve for others, not for the personal joy of success and mastery.

Children also hear the message that we need them to love us so much that we cannot tolerate their rejection of us. They feel our need for reassurance that indeed somebody loves us. This causes them to take on an unhealthy responsibility for our feelings and our emotional well-being. It draws children into the role of being a caretaker for their parent, rather than the other way around. This is a hazardous role-reversal that can evolve into patterns of codependency later on in life.

**CHILDREN ARE DEPENDENTS, NOT FRIENDS!**

*By transforming their child into a friend rather than a dependent, parents hope not just that their child will grow up to be the most creative person he or she can be, but that their child will appreciate how understanding and supportive they are and love them forever and beyond question.*

*A better solution is to remind ourselves that children are not just short adults. They are, as our tax forms remind us, dependents. They rely heavily on hierarchy and generational difference to know that there is a protective rim around them.*

(D. Ehrensaft)

- **Children can feel too big and become frightened by their power.**

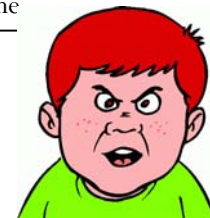
Children feel protected and safe when their parents are strong and firm. When we don't stand up to the challenge and take charge, our children experience anxiety. When we are hesitant to take on our enforcer role, or when we collapse in the face of our child's resistance, our children feel TOO BIG and TOO POWERFUL. This inflated sense of power can be psychologically troubling for children who need the reassurance that a caring adult is strong enough to protect them. Their way of coping with the void is to take charge themselves. Children want to be cared for--not conceded to!

- **Children grow up thinking they can barter for love.**

A child whose every need is satisfied is deprived of the security of knowing that we love them whether we give them what they want to not. Showering a child with goods can serve as a bargaining chip in love. The message is: "I love you and I hope you love me." A child will carry this thinking that love can be bartered for into adult love relationships. He or she will not have learned that love is not built on gratification alone. Moreover, such a child could persist in the search for reassurance that he or she is indeed loved, no matter what.

- **Children don't get protection from their own impulses.**

Children often have feelings and impulses that they cannot contain on their own. They are still unsocialized little human beings who are 'in process' in



"I have too much aggression and my parents have too little!"

their development. It is psychologically frightening for children to be out of control and unable to stop themselves. Without us to provide the protective rim, they cannot learn to internalize the controls that help them to “put on their brakes.” Many modern parents, confused about setting boundaries and governed by guilt, allow their children to hit them. Ironically, in tolerating this behavior, their child again gets the message that he is more powerful than his parent. His behavior broadcasts the message loud and clear: *“I have too much aggression, and my parents have too little!”*

- **Children cannot develop a good sense of self without pushing the envelope.**

Children need to push up against something strong and firm to know who they are and what they can do. If they fear retribution (my parent is a “gorilla”!) or, if there is no boundary to butt up against at all (my parent is a “wimp”!), they cannot test their wings and learn to become capable and independent. Pushing and testing are an essential part of the learning “dance” for a child.

- **Children will continue to push when no one takes charge.**

Paradoxically, children will increasingly act out in the hope that someone will contain them when they cannot contain themselves. This is a twisted attempt to keep themselves safe. Children cannot tolerate the anxiety that their parents may not be able to protect them. They will fill the void and take charge themselves.

- **Children do not get what they need because we misread their messages.**

We can misinterpret our child’s needs and under-attend to our child’s messages. We need to decipher what our over-indulged child is telling us when he says *“I don’t want that any more”* after we have granted his every wish. Maybe the real message is: *“That’s not the bucket I need filled. None of this will make me happy because it’s something else I really need from you. I need you to tell me ‘No, you can’t have everything you want!’”* If we listen more deeply to what our children are communicating below the surface and what they really need from us, we can hear them asking just to be little children who can count on their elders to place reasonable demands on them to help bring them forward, but not too fast.

### A Case History

#### *“From Nirvana To Purgatory...”*

Pamela and Gordon believed that a crying child meant a failing parent. As a small baby, their son, Richard, was given a warm and enriched environment. He had two parents who anticipated his every need and quietly removed obstacles from his course before he ever knew they were in his way. In his early months, this was appropriate behavior on his parent’s part, and it seemed to pay off. He had a bucolic and blissful first couple of years, and a fairly peaceful third year as well. His parents remained attuned to his every need. Richard smiled most of the time and Pamela and Gordon felt full and happy as parents. They all seemed to have found nirvana.

But then it was time for Richard to attend preschool. Nirvana quickly turned to purgatory. Pamela and Gordon, in their strong commitment to being the best parents they could be and with their staunch belief that the best way to do this was through gratifying Richard, missed the boat. *They failed to present their son with the “gradual failures” that would allow him to function in the real world.* They failed to understand that limit setting and letting Richard find his own way out of a situation were supposed to be the next items on the agenda in helping Richard move forward as a confident, loveable, and loved preschooler. They just kept providing and providing. As a result, Richard was not accustomed to “failures in attunement.” He did not comprehend why his every need was not met at school by his teacher of ten children, as it was at home. His conflict-free home life existed in stark contrast to his new battlefield at school. Soon the battles were carried home. No one was happy anymore.

Richard was deprived of the basic tools that would help him cope in the world: patience, waiting his turn, dealing with frustration, problem-solving, hoping for something better.

Pamela and Gordon became deflated. They couldn’t understand why their regime of “sensitive parenting” had misfired. I asked them how each of them would feel if the other one catered to every one of their needs and anticipated their every want. Would they really like that? Pamela said she would feel suffocated. Richard groaned that it would be like living with his mother again. I asked them to consider if Richard was really all that different?

Even though he seemed to clamor for such attention, at the same time Richard was no longer happy when he got it. Perhaps he had outgrown that early blissful period when everyone circles around us and was now longing for something different?

I asked them to do an experiment. ... They were to pick something he was balking about doing on his own... and were to ask him to start doing it (himself). When he came crying for help, their first task was to encourage him to keep trying on his own. If he grew frustrated or furious, they could tell him “We know it’s very hard but we think you can handle it.” They were to hold back from jumping in to gratify his demands to do it for him.

It wasn't so easy--Richard ranted like a caged bear for the first few days, furious at the loss of home services. But to Pamela and Gordon's credit, they stuck with it, and they had a child who was a happy self-dresser within a couple of weeks.

This was their first step in a longer path of putting greater demands on Richard, fueled with the new insight that it was not harming him but helping him when they thwarted some of his wants and allowed him to work through his own disappointments and frustrations. As Richard was able to discover that deprivation once in a while wasn't really such a bad thing, he settled down into his preschool life, and rather than either nirvana or purgatory, a more down-to-earth, peaceful era ensued both at home and at school.

Diane Ehrensaft, *Spoiling Childhood* (p. 163)

## HOW "TAKING CHARGE" HELPS OUR CHILDREN

- **Children develop best with a strong parental structure.**

Children need to feel the loving enclosure of limits to push up against so that they know how far they can go and when they have gone too far. They need to feel that someone greater than they are is able to STOP them when they are not able to stop themselves. All of this gives them comfort and trust that their world is safe, that they know what to expect, and that the people they need and love the most are predictable.

Children should *not* be free to do whatever they want. It is not even clear that they want to. Instead, it appears that they depend on their parents to "build structures around them that are appropriately measured," both to free children's desires but also to bind them so that the children do not get carried away. Dr. Ehrensaft says that in her clinical practice she explains to parents that "*children need to know that somebody with a driver's license is driving the bus so that the bus doesn't careen out of control.*"

### **STOP!**

Children need us to stop them when they cannot stop themselves.

- **Children develop empathy and concern for others.**

When we expect that our children pay attention to our needs and the needs of others by respecting limits and controlling their emotions, we are teaching them the life-skill of empathy. When we do not let our child get away with hurting another person, when we refuse to satisfy his needs at the expense of others. When we resist giving in to "me first" behavior, we are saying to him:

*"No, you cannot be the king of the universe. You are part of a whole-- not the only one! You must learn the give and take of relationships and living in a community. You must learn that growing up means caring for the needs of others, as well as your own.*

In doing this, you will be nurturing the development of important values in your child. Most of all, you will be helping him to build character. As corny as it sounds, you will be fostering the development of a "really nice kid"!

- **Children learn an appropriate sense of self in balance with the world.**

Rather than children experiencing the wild swings between gratification and deprivation (between being "His Majesty the Child" or being "The Invisible Child"), when we take back our parental authority in a healthy way, we give our

children a balanced view of their place in life. Their sense of self is neither too inflated nor self-important, nor too lessened and diminished. By holding the line firm, we help our children to develop "a sturdiness" both on the inside and the outside. We help them to learn how to assert themselves and to show respect and concern for others.

- **Children develop resiliency.**

Many researchers in the child development field are taking a serious look at what factors promote the development of resiliency in children, as well as what factors hinder it. Interestingly, the latest research findings indicate that children who have had a strong nurturing relationship from one adult caregiver, as well as structure, rules, and responsibilities in the household, are more resilient in the face of stress. Furthermore, resilient children also seem to have been imbued by their



### **HEALTHY PARENTAL AUTHORITY**

gives children a balanced view of their place in the world.

families with a sense of meaning in their lives. They manage to believe that life makes sense, that God helps those who help themselves, a conviction that lends meaning to the adversities that each of us encounters. (*Young Children*, Nov. 84). Children whose every need is not indulged and who are supported in their struggle to solve problems and overcome difficulties without undue parental interference actually develop better skills for coping with life. Their “resiliency muscle” is strengthened by their experiences of facing and mastering frustration. These children develop a self-reliance that is different from that of their “protected” counterparts who are far less confident in facing the challenges of daily life.

• **Children build self-esteem through mastery.**

Many of us have fallen into the dangerous trap of thinking that children develop positive self-esteem by having us shower them with affirmative words and by our being constantly available to gratify their every need. Infants do, in fact, need this constant, predictable attunement to their every need in order to develop a secure attachment. However, as children develop, their needs change. From the toddler stage on, children develop good self-esteem from the experience of mastery, in conjunction with the trust that their parents love them unconditionally. The sense of mastery comes from trying something new, solving problems, and overcoming obstacles. Mastery comes from trying and not giving up, from struggling “till it hurts,” from succeeding, even if it’s incredibly difficult. This sense of personal competence is what creates authentic self-esteem. Sadly, we cannot give this inner competence to our children. We can only give them the tools and the support to develop it for themselves. We can resist doing it for them, resist holding them back, resist softening the blows, so that they can say “*I did it!*” and know that truly the “prize” was theirs and not their parents, after all!

## WHAT CAN PARENTS DO?

• **Take Charge!**

Resist letting your children control you and “drive the bus”! Take back the driver’s seat!! Be sure that your body, tone, and actions are communicating, “*I am the parent. I am in charge.*”

• **Expect Your Children Obey You.**

Change your attitude. You must believe that your children need you to be the strong one. You must believe that they really DO want you to take charge. Then it is much easier to convey that you expect your children to respect you and respond to you because you respect yourself and your role as parent!

• **No Guilt, No Excuses, No Explanations.**

Your job is not to make your child happy, but to prepare him for life. Life is not always fair or easy. But we must teach our children how to survive it and cope with it. We need to challenge our

**WHEN YOU  
SAY IT,  
MEAN IT!**

Think.

Warn.

Act.

Follow through.

### PARENTING BOOKS

#### To Better Your Skills

- *The Preschool Years: Family Strategies That Work—From the Experts* by Ellen Galinsky and Judy David, 1988.
- *Kid Cooperation* by Elizabeth Pantley, 1996.
- *Love and Logic for Early Childhood* by Jim Fay and Charles Fay, 2000.  
Visit the Love and Logic website for many great parenting books, audio CD’s and DVD’s: [www.loveandlogic.com](http://www.loveandlogic.com)
- *How To Behave So Your Children Will, Too* by Sal Severe, 2000.
- *Redirecting Children’s Behavior* by Kathryn Kvols, 1998.
- *Setting Limits with Your String-Willed Child* by Robert MacKenzie, 2001.

beliefs that our ties to our children are tenuous and that we must keep them happy and pleased with us all the time. We need to extricate ourselves from guilt-ridden parenting which leads us to “barter for love.”

• **When you say it, Mean It!**

- Think
- Warn
- Act
- Follow through

Expect resistance, but don’t give in! If you don’t follow through every time, your child will see that he can manipulate you and that your talk means nothing.

• **Develop Parenting Skills & Use Them**

Educate yourself. Read some good parenting books. Operate out of a clear parenting framework. Develop a parenting plan with your spouse. Define your rules and expectations. State them clearly. Practice

different behavior strategies to *prevent* problems, as well as to handle problems as they arise. Read. Learn. Practice.

**PARENTING FROM  
THE INSIDE OUT**

by  
Daniel Siegel, M.D. and Mary Hartzell, 2003.

∞  
Explore the extent to which our  
childhood experiences actually do  
shape the way we parent.  
Read this remarkable new book!

• **Know Yourself (From the Inside Out)**

Take a look inside yourself. Try to do an honest appraisal. What gets in your way? What are your own fears/needs that keep you from being as clear and strong as you'd like? Do you and your partner need to get on the same page to become a stronger parenting team? Do you bring emotional baggage with you that needs sorting out?

Our own childhood experiences profoundly shape our parenting, but we may not always be aware of how this happens. For clues, read this terrific book to find out what patterns and expectations you bring from childhood into parenthood.

• **Buddy up!**

Find a "parenting partner." Or a parenting coach. Consult a childhood professional. Don't try to make changes alone. Come out of isolation. Talk and share with others. Find someone who holds your views. Strategize together. Provide "hotline" phone support for each other. Give and receive strength when you are in danger of blowing it or giving in. See if you can learn from others who appear to be clear and consistent with their children. Listen and observe. Learn from mistakes as well as good examples.

• **Avoid These Mistakes**

These are the most common pitfalls most parents fall into:

- Giving in
- Having fuzzy expectations
- Allowing bad manners
- Being inconsistent

The next time you blunder and fall into one of these pitfalls, listen to the warning bell go off in your head. Stop! Take a deep breath. Think. Then remind yourself to be strong—for your child's sake, not yours.

• **Give your child "Nothing Time"**

Try not to allow enrichment, achievement, and "doing" overshadow whimsy, fantasy, and creative play. We all want our children to be creative, but we've forgotten how they get there. All we really need to do is give them time and space to play. Sometimes children just want to BE! They do not want to be cheered on. They do not want to be taken from one lesson to another. They do not want another supplemental learning experience. They just want to be left to their own resources. Let's give them their childhood back.



**AVOID:**  
Giving In  
Inconsistency  
Fuzzy Expectations

**FACE  
THE TRUTH!**



When I don't stand up to my child,  
I am being selfish.

I am taking care of my own feelings  
at my child's expense.

I am hurting him, not helping him.



**BE A STRONG PARENT.  
GIVE YOUR CHILD THE GIFT OF CHILDHOOD.**



**Sources:**

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