

Becoming a parent does not come with an instruction manual for all the things you will face. It is one of the most important and difficult things you can do as well as one of the most rewarding. There is little training in how to raise a child. It is an enormous responsibility which is usually taken for granted. Most parents learn as they go, influenced by the way they were brought up or by what they have read or watched others do. Parenting styles may be different but we all share a common goal. We want our children to turn into healthy, happy, well adjusted, successful, honest, caring, responsible adults who will be respectful of others' feelings and property, be able to get along with others and be able to cope with difficulties. It is a lot to ask. Your children and your community rely on you to do this well.

# being a parent

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## Your feelings

**One of the most important things in parenting is your own attitude to it. Do you feel scared about it or are you thoroughly enjoying it?**

As a parent you will experience a range of emotions which are all normal and yet which can make you feel like you are on a roller coaster ride. You will feel love, joy and pride but also more frightening emotions which can be very strong, such as anger, panic and hatred. Often parents feel that they are not appreciated by their children or valued by others. Such emotions can leave you feeling guilty as well as thinking you are not a good parent. It is important to remember you're not expected to be perfect and that all parents feel that they have made mistakes at some stage. Most parents at some time feel tired and upset and question what it is all about.



## Things that might make it easier

### Find out what you don't know

- ① Be aware of how children grow and develop.
- ① Be wise enough to know that you can do things differently.
- ① Be strong enough to say you don't know how to.
- ① Be big enough to ask for information or advice.

### Value yourself

You are doing an important job. Be proud of the efforts you have put in through the day, no matter how small the tasks. When talking to friends about parenting don't moan and groan. Talk of it as a special career.

### Look after yourself

See yourself as a person first and as a parent second. Be careful not to expect too much of yourself and of others. Take notice of your own special talents. Praise yourself for simple things. Don't dwell on your mistakes. Mistakes are for learning from, not for making you feel bad.

### Accept your feelings

Understand that mixed feelings are normal. At times of stress or changes in your family you can be swamped with a range of emotions. At these times it is important to reach out and speak to your partner, to your friends, to family members or to someone not caught up in the emotion.

### Reward yourself

Do at least one thing a day that makes you feel good. Get someone to fill in so that you can have 'time out' to do whatever you feel like doing even if it's 30 minutes - have a bubble bath, read a book, kick a football.

### Talk to yourself

The way in which you talk to yourself matters. If you say "My child is trying to get at me" or "Why should I put up with this?" you will react very differently than if you say to yourself "What's happening to my children to make them behave like this?"

### Trust yourself

Everyone has their own ideas about parenting and sometimes it's easy to become confused or to feel inadequate. Listen to other people's ideas - this is how we all learn. But do what feels right for you. Trust your own judgement.

### Work out your own values

Clear values and beliefs are very important in forming the basis of a good foundation in raising children. Try to reach some common agreement with your partner if you have a difference of opinion. A shared and clear understanding of parenting practices makes for an easier road. If you differ try not to put each other down.

### Get support

Make sure you've got a listening ear. If you feel alone and can't find support within your family, look everywhere until you find someone to talk to about your concerns. Parenting is too hard to do in isolation. Don't be afraid to ask for help ... it is not a sign of failure ... it is the smart thing to do. You will probably find that others feel the same as you.

### Sorting and fixing

Being a parent is hard enough when everything is going well around you, but so much more difficult when things are going

wrong in other areas of your life. If you have violence in your home, money difficulties, ill health, arguments with neighbours or hassles at work, you must try to sort out the problem. Avoiding doing something about it will only make things feel worse for you. This may mean that, for the first time in your life, you seek advice from a professional if you have been unsuccessful in sorting it out within your family.

## Take care of your relationship

One of the best things you can do for your children is to look after your own needs for support and love. Your closest relationship will probably be with a husband or wife or partner, but it may be with a special friend. Make regular time for your adult relationship where you can be alone together, do things you enjoy together, talk over the day's happenings, share ideas, share feelings and just relax. These times are really important to clear up any misunderstandings and one of the very best gifts that you can give to your children.

## Managing anger

There are times in all parents' lives when they feel very angry. Most of the time parents manage to handle it successfully, but sometimes the anger can be in danger of getting out of control. Anger is always mixed with another feeling such as guilt, frustration, sadness, feeling unwanted or feeling used.

Try to do something about whatever is causing the underlying feeling if you can. Get to know your own body signs when anger is building up and act before it blows up. Work out when you are most likely to lose your cool and plan to do something different at those times, for example when you first get home from work.

Get some space ... go outside, go for a walk or a run. If you have very young children and no-one to mind them take them with you.

The critical thing is to admit you are angry and deal with it in a way that won't harm your family.

# REMINDERS

- ① Parenting is forever, so make the foundation solid.
- ① Find out the right ingredients to raise a happy child.
- ① It is a marathon not a short distance run, so pace yourself.
- ① You are the most influential person in your child's life.
- ① Mistakes only matter if you keep repeating them.
- ① Don't waste time and energy feeling guilty - change what you are doing.
- ① Seek help from others, but keep on believing in yourself.