

Five things parents don't need to do!

John Cowan – The Parenting Place



1. Don't neglect yourself

You are the most valuable asset in your child's world and so – for their sake – you need maintenance. That means finding time in the day and money in the budget to indulge yourself with those little pleasures that nurture you and put energy back into you.

When our children are babies it is very natural for our whole lives to spiral in on those little bottomless pits of need, taking all our time and energy. But as they grow into children and teenagers, they need us less and less to dress and feed them and more and more to show them how to live.

A big part of your job as parent is to model a healthy lifestyle to your children. But if your world is still totally fixated on your children you are not modelling a healthy lifestyle, you are demonstrating a neurotic one! They need to see you having your own friends, going out as a couple, getting exercise, listening to your own music, doing art and hobbies, relaxing and having fun. You need to get away from your kids for whole weekends, to recharge and nurture your adult relationships, or just to relax on your own. Of course you will leave your kids in good care but, even so, some of you would be paralysed with guilt at the thought of going away. Honestly though, your kids deserve refreshed switched on parents. They will be the ultimate beneficiaries of having happy, healthy parents.

2. Don't be Angry

Anger doesn't work. I wish it did because I am naturally rather gifted at anger. But it never seems to deliver good results, and always seems to dent the relationship. As a certifiable grump, two techniques help me dissipate my anger. The first is pausing – slow down, take some breathes, count to ten (or five hundred). The second is harder but works very well: I try to see the incident that is upsetting me from their perspective. When I do that I invariably discover that my initial explanation ("They are doing this

deliberately to annoy me") is never as good as my second analysis (which is often something like: "They are frustrated because they don't know how to get what they really want".)

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In fact it's a neurotic one!

3. Don't give in

Hold the line on your standards. Media sneaks the prevailing standards of popular culture right into your home and, if it clashes with your values, you have every right to protect your children from its influence. Of course it is wise to check whether our responses are reasonable – sometimes I react with fear to things that are new that I don't fully understand – but if you are settled in your mind, then your standards are your home's standards.



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I love technology – you probably do as well – but make it behave itself at your place. It has to watch its language and behaviour just like everyone else in your home. And it should have a bedtime as well – good rules around the when and where kids can play on their games and devices.

Another line of pressure on your family standards may come from peer pressure on your children. Your kids will try to pass the pressure they feel on to you through phrases like, “But you are the only parent that doesn’t allow...” or, “Everyone else is doing it, why can’t I?”. Don’t just dismiss their objections out of hand. Think about it, ask them to explain their thinking on it and then give your ideas. Your reasonable answers might be the ‘ammunition’ they need in their heads to be able to defend their own values and standards to their friends.

4. Don’t give up

“It ain’t over till it’s over” and, as a parent, “it ain’t ever over”. I don’t know who said that (if I did I’d give him my strong opinion about the word ‘ain’t’) but I do appreciate the sentiment. There are no shortcuts in parenting. Neglect an issue, refrain from sorting out a behaviour problem or character flaw and, invariably, it will just come back as a bigger, nastier problem later on. We might be fed up and tired, but the only battles that go on forever are the ones we refuse to fight.

Don’t retreat from your kids, even when they offend you. Sometimes their behaviour will hurt you and even break your heart, but maturely rise up over your resentment.

Don’t give up on a child with problems. Even if you send them away they will always have a place in our hearts and their failures will feel like your failures for the rest of your life. Take a break, by all means, then get some help, get some advice, and re-engage with grit and love.

Don’t take it too seriously

Honestly – parenting is the best gig in town. Kids will give you grey hair and high blood pressure, but they will be your greatest source of please and pride as well.

Three things to conclude with:

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Honestly – parenting is the best gig in town. Kids will give you grey hair and high blood pressure, but they will be your greatest source of please and pride as well.

Three things to conclude with:

1. Don’t sweat the small stuff
2. Fun is a parents secret weapon
3. Relax and enjoy your children



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