

the best of...

Happy Kids

by Michael Grose



Raising kids to thrive.

Confidence. Character. Resilience.



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A message from Michael Grose

Dear Parent,

This year Happy Kids celebrated its 10th birthday.

For over decade now I've had the privilege of sharing my thoughts and ideas about raising kids with parents through this free newsletter, which has been a real joy.

To mark the 10th birthday of Happy Kids I've gathered together my favourite 10 Happy Kids articles of 2009 and placed them in this ebook. I think it's a great read. I hope you do too.

Feel free to download a copy for your friends and colleagues.

As these articles really skim the surface of what are essentially important parenting topics, I've included links to further learning programs on my website where appropriate.

I hope you enjoy the Best of Happy Kids 09.

Regards,



Michael Grose

PS: Get 10% off my 6 seminar DVD programs when you order online. Just enter **Happy Kids 09** in the discount voucher. Offer ends 31st March 2010.

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ONE: What's your family brand?

We live in a world of brands these days. Everything from the clothes you wear, the car you drive, even the newspaper you read has a recognizable brand. Sports stars and celebrities such as Greg Norman, Oprah and Elle McPherson are global brands that everyone recognises.

Families, also develop their own unique brands, leaving their mark on children's character and personalities.

As every parent knows kids in the same family have completely different temperaments, talents and interests even though they come from the same gene pool. It can be frustrating to know that you raise your kids in similar ways yet they can grow up to be so different.

Birth order plays a part in this. Siblings, like niche marketers, want to be different to each other. So one child maybe the academic star, another the sports nut and a third child becomes the family comedian. That's the way of family-life.

Yet despite these differences your kids will have lots in common, which is caused by the family frame.

The family frame is the total family environment that kids experience. In many ways, the family frame is similar to the brand of a product or service. It is a reflection of how others perceive you and what you stand for as a family.

The following four aspects help establish your family's brand:

- 1. The family atmosphere.** What's the atmosphere like in your family? Is it serious or is it fun? Is it a place where encouragement rules or is it a critical, negative place? Is the atmosphere terrific or toxic? Is it a tense place where everyone walks on eggshells or is it a place where humour and relaxation are common? The atmosphere is about mood and mindset. You can impact on the atmosphere by consciously adopting the mood and mindset you want. If you want an upbeat atmosphere then you need to set the tone yourself.
- 1. Shared values and attitudes.** What behaviours do you value most highly? What type of kids are you trying to raise? To discover your shared values step and look at what your kids have in common. If they are all independent, even your most dependent child, then independence is a shared value. If all your kids are tolerant of others then tolerance is shared value. Values and attitude are both modelled and taught and reflect parental priorities.
- 2. Parenting style.** Your parenting style will influence the family frame. For instance, a permissive style, where anything goes, often produces a chaotic family style where respect for others is lacking. The preferred style for raising kids today is an authoritative style, which is like a guided democracy or a benign dictatorship. Someone needs to be in charge, preferably parents; however you don't have to use the same authoritarian methods as parents of past generations.
- 3. Family rituals and traditions.** Rituals and traditions are those habitual, repeatable, unique behaviours that bring you together as a group and also identify you as a family. They include mealtimes, celebrations, birthdays and other traditions that are unique to your family. Rituals not only anchor your kids to their family but they make quite a statement about what you value. I know one family, for instance, that's BIG on noisy, all-in discussion type mealtimes which are just what that family is about. In many ways rituals are iconic of family-life.

So take a minute or two to reflect on your family brand. What are the values your kids have in common? Think about the rituals and traditions you are establishing. Reflect on your parenting style and that of your partner. Think a little about the regular family atmosphere. These make up your family brand and will leave a lasting impact on the type of adults your kids will become.

TWO: Kids who learn the hard way

Does your child act before he thinks?

Does your child pat a dog, even though you warn him not to?

Would your child ignore a 'wet paint, don't touch' sign and check it out for themselves?

If you're busy nodding your head then chances are your child is a heuristic learner. He likes to learn through trial and error.

"You can tell me all you want, but I'm going to find out for myself" is their motto. Experience is their teacher. The lessons learned at the school of hard knocks can be bitter, which makes parenting these kids pretty tough.

Inside school these kids are hands-on and tactile. They love to experiment and tinker. They learn about flight by making paper aeroplanes and flying them through their classrooms. They'll adjust the nose, tail and wings to make it fly further.

They learn about human behaviour by watching the reactions of classmates as the aeroplanes fly. They'll notice that some people will react differently. Mates will love it and most likely laugh. Others will cringe and roll their eyes.

They learn about limits when the teacher keeps them after class for flying paper aeroplanes in the wrong place at the wrong time. They'll adjust their behaviour to avoid being kept in. But if the pay-off is big enough in terms of getting a reaction from peers, they may choose to continue flying paper aeroplanes in class instead. The pay-off is worth the risk of being caught!!

These trial and error kids learn many of their life lessons through experience. They'll test the boundaries parents set, ignoring their well-meaning advice. As young adults they may take their time settling down, perhaps travelling overseas to get some experiences before deciding the path they choose. You can pass on your wisdom, but they need to find out for themselves.

Trial and error learners are more likely to be **boys**, and are worrying in the teenage years, which are highly experimental anyway.

The risks for trial and error learners when young involve scraped knees, hurt egos and different forms of disappointment.

They are minor compared to the risks that ten-foot-and bullet-proof teens take. This can be scary, but it doesn't mean parents should shelter their kids.

Here are some tips for parenting trial and error kids so they stay safe, while absorbing life's lessons along the way:

- 1. Make their problem, their problem.** Sometimes we as adults can take on their concerns and make them our own. If something doesn't bother a child, and there is no risk involved or no infringement on other people's rights then let them be. Hint: A jumper is something a parent puts on his/her child when they're cold.
- 2. Let them experience natural consequences.** Natural consequences are fabulous teachers so step back and allow kids to experience the outcome of their decision, whether pleasant or unpleasant. For instance, if a child spends all his pocket money on the first day of the week he may learn the value of planning if his pocket-money is not topped up. NB: The use of natural consequence doesn't apply when a child's safety or well-being is at-risk!
- 3. Link behaviour with outcomes.** Annoying the family pooch to the point where she snaps provides a clear learning. Sometimes the lessons need some explaining. So be prepared to reinforce a lesson if they don't get it. "The reason your friends don't go to the footy with you is that you keep annoying them..."
- 4. Keep explaining.** Sometimes the lessons take a while to sink in so you need to be patient and also keep explaining. It may seem like nagging but there is often no other way.

Allowing kids to absorb life's lessons is a tough gig for parents. But for some kids and some situations, it's the only way! The key is to try your best to keep kids safe along the way, and be ready to pick them up and support them when the choices they have unpleasant consequences.

For more ideas to help you raise kids that learn the hard way, high maintenance kids and those who like their own way. Find out more [here](#).

THREE. Working from the same script as your partner

The days of 'go see your mother' are out. Shared parenting is now the go.

However, if you have a partner your biggest challenge maybe to get on the same wavelength and work from the same parenting script.

You maybe strict, while your partner is lenient. You may value family mealtime highly, while your partner is ambivalent about breaking bread as a family.

Differences in parenting are natural reflecting past parenting experiences, gender differences and your experiences of children. They are a sign of independent thinking, and can provide a sense of balance to family life.

BUT different approaches can cause discomfort, stress and anxiety to one or both parents, particularly when communication and empathy levels are down.

In some cases, the differences can lead to inconsistent parenting where there is no agreement on rules and standards of behaviour and inconsistent follow-through when kids behave poorly. It's like driving a car when there are two sets of road rules. There'd be accidents in the first five minutes.

Similarly, there is chaos in a family when there's more than one set of rules. The rules and boundaries the govern children's behaviour and family life need to be agreed upon.

Parents who work together need to know when to compromise, when to keep out of the way and when to present a united front. Knowing when to take each approach takes practice and depends on the issues at hand, your parenting styles and your individual values.

Getting on the same page as your partner takes work. It can be done whether you and your partner live together or not.

Here are some ideas to help:

1. **Have regular family meetings.** They don't have to be too formal, and they are a great way for both parents address family issues together with their children.
2. **Keep your partner informed.** It helps if the primary parent, usually mothers, can keep partners informed about what's going on in children's lives. These can include updates about behaviour, educational achievements and their general well-being.
3. **Defer to your partner.** Kids have a habit of putting their parents on the spot, particularly about issues such as going out or buying the latest fad. Rather than respond to children's requests yourself, get into the habit of deferring to your partner. Not only does this keep your partner in the communication loop, but it helps you work as a united front.
4. **Share insights with your partner into your own childhood and family.** These types of reflective conversations can lead to a deeper level of understanding and often reveal why you both feel strongly about different parenting matters.
5. **Divide areas of responsibility.** Don't keep all the responsibilities to yourself. Bring your partner into the loop, and give them a share of the parenting jobs.
6. **Communicate concerns to your partner about differences** but avoid disagreeing openly in front of the children. Find a time later to air any concerns you may have and generate alternate strategies or ideas for your partner to try.

From my experience you can get away with parental differences when kids are young, however it does become a big problem as kids move into adolescence. Some teenagers can become adept at driving a wedge between parents who are on different wavelengths. They generally go to the parent who will give them the answer they require when it comes to the tricky areas such as going out, access to alcohol and relationship issues.

That's why one of the greatest gifts you can give your children is the consistency they experience when both parents work together.

FOUR: *Sowing seeds of future success in your child*

I was pretty stoked by a recent gardening effort of mine. An olive tree, which I'd planted **seven years ago** finally, bore its first fruit.

Yep, for seven years I saw no fruit! That's seven years of **constant** watering, fertilizing and weeding before I saw any results.

I felt like giving up on it long ago. I couldn't see the point!

But my wife kept telling me that olive trees were slow maturers. She kept reminding me that it would come good eventually. I just had to hang in there. She was right! And the results are the worth the effort as the tree's full of olives... just outside my back door.

Raising kids is a lot like growing an olive tree... or any plant, for that matter. You have to hang in there as you often don't see the results of all your efforts straight away. With some kids it takes a very long time to see the fruits of your labour. But you have to keep plugging away and doing your best as a parent. That's why patience is one of your best assets.

You also need a lot of faith in your own parenting when you raise these slow maturers. You have to believe that your efforts are having an impact, despite not seeing any results.

There are two areas, in particular, where parents need to be patient – developing confidence in kids and teaching kids to behave well. I have written a great deal about developing good behaviours in kids lately, so I won't touch on that topic here. (If you want more information then Bring out your child's best behaviour is my most comprehensive resource on that topic. Check out [here](#).)

But I'll take a look at confidence-building...

Kids up to the ages of nine or ten are in a heavy self-esteem building phase. The job of latency (between 4 – 10 years of age) is for kids to figure out 'what they can do' and 'how they fit into the various groups in their lives.' They look to parents, as the significant adults in their lives, to be their self-reference system. That is, mum and dad believe I'm capable so I must be!

When parents show faith, point out their strengths and support their learning efforts in a positive rather than critical ways kids begin to build up a strong internal picture of themselves. That picture builds up over time.

The higher regard a child holds a person the more likely their encouraging efforts are to impact on them. That's gives parents a head start over teachers, coaches or other adults in the confidence-building area.

I saw a dad recently make the most of an opportunity to impact on his ten-year-old daughter's confidence levels.

The ten-year-old had a little moan to her dad about a struggle she was having with some schoolwork. He listened without interruption. Then he quietly sat next to her and let her know that he thought she'd be able to tackle this learning task, although it wouldn't be easy.

He then told her why he thought she'd do it...

He said that she was one of the most determined people he knew. He mentioned some past examples where she had really applied herself and had succeeded.

I swear I saw this little girl grow about five centimetres while listening to her dad. She went off to her bedroom straight away to tackle the learning task with new confidence.

What did this dad do that was so special?

He gave her a little motivational talk. But more than this, he sowed a seed for future success by pointing out a strength, and then showing her how to apply this strength to the job at hand. Simple, yet potent stuff!

How often do we get little opportunities like this every day to sow a seed of future success in our kids, yet we blow it because we are too busy, or just don't know how to respond?

As parents we get plenty of opportunities to **sow seeds for future success**, we just need to recognise them and respond in a way that has an impact on kids.

Here are simple three ways you can use straight away to sow seeds for future success in your kids:

- 1. Describe their strengths.** "Gee Jess, you are so good with people. That smile of yours really puts people at ease." Telling kids what they are good at develops greater understanding and becomes part of their self-reference system." Self-knowledge is just about the best knowledge you can develop in kids.
- 2. Use the 'Confidence sandwich' when giving kids feedback.** Kids need feedback if they are to improve in any skill. Some kids react poorly to feedback, seeing it as a criticism, rather than an opportunity to improve. If this is true of a child of yours, then sandwich feedback between two positive comments. E.g. "Your kicking was fabulous today. You got some real distance with those kicks. Your marking will improve if you... You should be pleased as well how you share the ball around with your team-mates."
- 3. See assets in liabilities.** Poorly organised kids can be creative; stubbornness can be seen as knowing what you want, and being a poor decision-maker can be seen as flexibility. It all depends on your viewpoint.

Effective parenting is about making the most of the ordinary, everyday interactions that you have with your children on a daily basis. You get opportunities every day to promote confidence in kids. You've just got to make the most of them... and be patient, just as I had to be with my olive tree, as you may not see the results straight away.

But you've still got to put in the work regardless... that takes faith, patience and persistence. Three great qualities in any parent!

Find out more ideas about promoting real self-confidence in kids with one of my confidence-building resources. Check them out [here](#).

FIVE: *The triangle of parenting success*

Effective parenting is linked to three distinct elements – **family culture**, **family structures** and **communication tools and techniques**.

Most people focus on technique, when they want to impact on their kids. That is, you may want your kids to be less shy so you look for tools (what you do with kids) and techniques (what you say to kids) you can use to help kids overcome shyness.

But you can also make changes to your family's culture and its structures to impact on kids' confidence levels. For instance, you can make sure that self-sufficiency is a core value and that your parenting style is authoritative (a mixture of encouragement + limits) rather than distant or authoritarian. This is about culture!

You can look at the structures that promote greater interaction and more confidence. For instance, make sure you have at least four meals a week together as a family so kids get used to interacting with others and build up their confidence levels over time.

Here's more information about the three aspects of the **Triangle of Parenting Success**, with some straight talking in terms about what you should do in each to promote the best interests of your kids:

1. **Family culture** includes your values, atmosphere, and parenting style.

If you want you kids to thrive:

Make sure your family culture is a positive, pleasant and supportive one. Kids should receive more encouragement than criticism. Forgiveness, honesty and tolerance need to be openly practised and modelled. The prime values that should drive parental behaviour should be shared responsibility, self-sufficiency and mutual respect.

2. **Structures** include such things as family rituals, the use of routines, the rules and boundaries you put in place, and the rights of passage you use in your family.

If you want you kids to thrive:

Make good use of rituals to maximise opportunities for communication and teaching. Mealtimes, birthdays and other celebrations should be regular and have a particular strong stamp that is unique to your family. Rules and boundaries should be consistent, rather than rigid. Kids should know what's expected, and understand that parents will use consequences that are fair and reasonable to promote a sense of personal responsibility. Rites of passage should be evident that to grant kids greater rights and freedoms as they get older.

3. **Tools and Techniques** refer to what parents do and say on a daily basis to teach their kids, get cooperation and promote confidence.

There are too many of these to cover here but in my Secrets of Well-behaved kids seminar I recommend parents use the **tools of logical and natural consequences**, **thinking time** and **behaviour rehearsal** among others to teach kids appropriate behaviours. I also discuss the use of communication techniques such as the **proximity principle**, the use of **choice** and **Maggie's magic technique** to get greater cooperation from kids.

To make changes and improvements in family-life it's important to look at all three areas, not just the communication techniques and tools you use.

- ✓ **Check out your family's culture.** If you're not sure, just ask you kids to tell you about their family. Alternatively, imagine what they would say about family-life. That's a good place to start.
- ✓ **Take a look at your structures.** Are they working for you and your family?
- ✓ **Then look at techniques and tools that you can use.** Work out the most effective tools and techniques for your family and then make them your parenting habits.

Use the Triangle of Parenting Success to guide you on your way to raising kids to thrive. It's powerful model, with broad application.

For more information about the Triangle of parenting success and lots of great techniques to help you raise well-behaved kids check out the Raising well-behaved kids seminar DVD (with workbook). Find out [more](#).

SIX: Simple ways to prevent sibling rivalry

“How do I get my kids to stop fighting and arguing with each other?”

I’m asked this question all the time.

I’ve worked out how to eliminate sibling rivalry – just stop at one child.

If it’s too late and you have two or more kids then **you need to build a broad repertoire of strategies** that will minimise the impact of your children’s rivalry on you.

Sibling competition is part nature, part nurture. It has a positive place as it is often through competition that we improve and get better.

There’s no doubt that sibling rivalry destroys peace and harmony in many families. In extreme cases it can make family-life hell for parents when kids refuse to cooperate with each other or they always put each other down.

Where does this competitiveness come from?

- ✓ **Temperament plays a part.** Some kids are just naturally competitive and like to be the best. If they can’t be the best then they often won’t compete or do an activity.
- ✓ **Gender impacts as well.** Due to their physiology, boys tend to be more competitive than girls. As many teachers know, one way to get the best out of boys is to turn a simple learning activity into a quiz or game.
- ✓ **Family position plays a part.** You may notice that kids adjacent to each other in families tend to fight a little harder with each other for supremacy than they do with other kids. So two child families experience a lot of competition.
- ✓ **Family atmosphere contributes to competition.** Some families are more competitive by nature than others. Parents can unwittingly turn simple activities into competitions with statements such as “let’s see who’s the best at...”
- ✓ **Competitive role models impact as well.** You may have to curb your competitive nature, and resist turning every game into a full-blown, ‘I’m gonna beat you’ affair!

Prevention is the best approach. Teach your kids that there is a time and a place for competition just as there is a time and place for cooperation.

Here are 7 simple strategies that when persistently practised prevent a great deal of sibling rivalry and minimises its impact on you:

1. **Have fun as a family.** It’s hard to fight when you’re having fun and enjoying each other’s company so look for ways to inject some fun and games into family life.
2. **Have one-on-one time with each child.** Kids like their parents one at a time and will often compete for parental attention. Set aside some regular time for each child and give them A-grade attention on your terms.
3. **Expect kids to help each other.** The key word in this sentence is ‘expect’. Parental expectations are potent. So get older kids hearing younger kids read. Get younger kids doing jobs for their older siblings. Get all kids helping you. Get the picture? The helping habit doesn’t rule out sibling rivalry but it helps establish a cooperative tone in your family.

4. **Put kids in situations where they have to work together.** Most homes are compromise free places. Kids rarely share bedrooms or televisions these days so they don't learn how to compromise or negotiate. A simple way to do this is to ask kids to do jobs in pairs so they learn to work together.
5. **Encourage more, praise less.** High praise parents produce competitive kids, as they will compete with each other for parental approval. Use encouragement instead to get the best out of your kids and reduce one reason for kids competing. Encouragement focuses on the processes (effort, improvement and contribution) of what they do rather than the results. You can learn all about the wonderful art of encouragement in **Bringing out your child's CONFIDENCE**.
6. **Put children in the same boat when they misbehave.** This principle always gets resistance when I mention it in talks. When one child messes around every child experience the consequence. For instance, if one child is fighting in the TV room, then it goes off and every child misses out. Sounds unfair, but it actually reduces fighting over the long-term, as kids will gang up against you. It actually unites kids a lot of the time.
7. **Conduct family meetings when the eldest is five.** Family meetings give you an opportunity to focus on children's relationships, providing a vehicle to teach kids to resolve conflict themselves. Some kids of the male variety need to be taught the skills of conflict resolution, and meetings provide a regular and safe format to do this in.

And if you have children that turn simple activities such as getting in the car into a race for the front seat then remove the competitive element as much as possible. That means insist the kids swap around, or even leave the front seat free if kids fight over it.

Strong, firm parental leadership that reminds kids about acceptable behaviours is always the best approach when kids behave inappropriately – even when competition is driving it.

For more on a practical approach to reduce sibling rivalry and see an end to mindless sibling squabbles take my Sibling Rivalry at home Parenting Program. Find out [more](#).

SEVEN: Parenting the family underdog

One of the unwritten laws of family-life is that talent and ability is unevenly distributed between siblings.

In most families there is one child who seems to have more than his or her fair share of ability. Everything some kids turn their hands to— whether schoolwork, sport and socialising – is done successfully and effortlessly.

If you have such a child then there is a fair bet that you will also have a child who struggles in the same areas. For these children achieving success takes more effort and concentration than it does for their sibling.

Just as it is easy for parents to marvel at the talented child, it's frustrating and, at times, heart-breaking to watch your child struggle to attain even mediocre levels of success at school, in their sport or leisure activities.

It's harder still when you know that no matter how hard your child tries they just can't be as successful as their sibling who gets all the glory and accolades from relatives and friends.

As a parent it's important to be realistic about what each child can achieve so keep your expectations in line with their ability and maturity, and avoid making comparisons between siblings.

Here are some ideas to keep in mind if you are parenting a child where success, at school, sport and other common childhood activities, just doesn't come naturally.

1. **Be your child's cheerleader.** Kids who have to work really hard to achieve need someone in their lives who is able to boost their self-confidence, particularly when they are struggling. Make a fuss over small successes so they can puff up their chests every now and then.
2. **Focus your comments on contribution, improvement and effort.** It's difficult praising kids when the results aren't there but you can always focus your comments on their contribution to the team rather than kicking the winning goal, improvements shown in reading or the effort they are making at art.
3. **Remember that persistence pays.** Children who persist learn an important life lesson – that is, success in most endeavours takes effort. Those kids who sail through their childhoods without raising a sweat can struggle when eventually they do have to work long and hard to succeed.
4. **Help kids identify their strengths.** Kids are like niche marketers – they define themselves by their strengths. "I am a good reader," "I'm sporty." "I'm really good at art" are some of the labels kids will use. As they move into adolescence the number of options for success open up, so help them find one or two areas that they enjoy and can easily achieve success in.
5. **Don't put kids on pedestals.** It's difficult living in the shadow of a superstar so avoid making a huge fuss over the achievements of a particular child – it makes life difficult for those who follow. Recognise results but balance that by focusing equally on their efforts as well.

Raising kids who find life a breeze is easy. However parenting kids who take longer to mature, or kids that must put in 110% effort to achieve is challenging for any parent.

Raising the family underdog requires parents to focus on kids' strengths, be liberal with encouragement and have realistic but positive expectations for success.

EIGHT: *Raising Mighty Boys*

Raising and educating boys is still a hot topic in Australia and other parts of the world. It appears to me that those adults who do best raising and teaching boys have a significant understanding and appreciation of what makes boys tick.

Here are seven keys to successfully raising well-adjusted boys, regardless of whether you are a mother of father, sole parent or in a dual parent relationship:

No. 1: You must like them.

Approval is at the heart of working successfully with boys. They will walk over broken glass or hot coals if they sense you like them. In a sense this notion holds many of them back as many boys will only work for a teacher if they like them and close down on learning if they sense the teacher doesn't like them.

Take the time to nurture a relationship with your sons or the boys that you interact with. Some boys like to talk; others like to share an activity; some like you as an adult to do something for them; others are very kinaesthetic and love to be touched, cuddled and hugged; while some just love gifts and mementoes. Work out the relational preferences of the males in your life and make sure you match these.

No. 2: Most boys just want to blend in

Boys are group-oriented by nature. They want to fit in. They tend to play group games and form themselves into structured friendship groups. Boys generally don't want to stand out from their crowd.

Don't put them down in front of their friends and understand that they may make poor friendship choices rather than be in a group of one – by themselves. They prefer the 'wrong friends' rather than no friends at all.

No 3: They are hierarchical and they like to know who is in charge.

Boys like limits and boundaries as they make them feel safe and secure. They also like to know that someone is going to enforce those rules so don't be afraid to be 'in charge', although you don't have to use the same authoritarian methods as perhaps your own parents used.

No 4: Many boys hide behind a mask

Some boys, eight years of age and older, wear a mask to protect themselves from being hurt or to portray a tough guy image. This mask can take many guises including; 'tough nut', 'cool guy' and 'class clown'. They will attempt to communicate with that mask.

Refuse to communicate with a mask. Make them feel comfortable, joke with them, even tickle them but get them to drop the mask if you really want to get through to them.

No. 5: Loyalty is an incredibly strong driver for boys

Understand that a boy's loyalty to friends, family, teachers and cause are key male drivers and you go a long way to understanding the male psyche. They are incredibly influenced by their peers, which can hold many of them back. It takes a brave boy to get too far ahead of the pack so they often hold each other back when it comes to achieving.

Loyalty to others can get boys into trouble. Call a boy's sister an insulting name and you are in for fight. Insult his friends and you are asking for trouble.

No 6: Use short-term goals to motivate them

Want to know how to motivate a boy to learn? Just make sure he can see some type of benefit in the task he will work hard to get it. You need to make sure the benefit is tangible and short-term though for many as they are less likely, compared to girls, to work when there is no foreseeable gain for them.

No. 7: A boy's brain matures differently to a girl's brain

In the first five years of life a girl's brain is busy developing fine motor skills, verbal skills and social skills, which are all highly valued by parents and teachers. Meanwhile, a boy's brain is busy developing gross motor skills, spatial skills and visual skills. These are all handy hunting skills. So boys often start school with a distinct disadvantage when it comes to learning and fitting in.

There is no doubt that raising boys can be a challenge for many parents. It appears to me that those adults who do best raising boys have a significant understanding and appreciation of what makes boys tick. They also adjust their methods to suit boys' thinking, behaviour and learning styles.

Now you can take one of my Raising Mighty BOYS seminars without leaving home. Find out [how](#).

NINE: *What's with teens today?*

Recently I took a phone call from a journalist from the South China Morning Post in Hong Kong, who wanted my opinion on the current state of play with teenagers in Australia. I've given him background information before so I was happy to help.

I gave him some essential tips about successfully raising teens, but more about that later.

He told me that there's been an increase in the number of school suspensions of teenagers due to anti-social behaviour including: drug-taking, videoing of fighting and bullying behaviours, racism, and sexual activity at school.

He wanted to know if Australian schools were experiencing similar problems.

My initial response was that these types of behaviours, while relatively new to Hong Kong, are not so unusual here.

Schools for some time in Australia have had to develop strategies to deal with a range of behaviours that would quite frankly, shock the pants of people of past generations.

Parents and teachers in Hong Kong are now facing with a similar set of circumstances that parents and teacher are experiencing in many western countries.

That is, teenagers today **courtesy of modern media, the internet and other circumstances see things; know things and do things earlier than teens in the past.**

And they are now growing up at the speed of light. Generational bracket-creep is a fact of life.

Everyone knows that forty is the new thirty for older generations. Now eighteen is the new twenty-one, sixteen is the new eighteen and thirteen is the new fifteen for young people.

The journo was a little shocked. I could sense that he felt more than a little powerless. After all, he was a parent himself so his interest in the topic was both personal and professional.

So what do we do about young people? How should parents raise young people today?

Well, we don't put our heads in the sand, cross our fingers and hope for the best when kids move into adolescence was my reply. There is plenty of evidence that effective parenting makes a massive difference to young people's outcomes, as does keeping young people connected and engaged at school.

Here's a quick rundown of the main tips I gave this journalist for parenting 21st teenagers:

- 1. Build relationships with young people.** It's a fact of life that having a decent relationship with your teenager will give you some leverage. That means you need to work hard to develop relationships with teenagers. Ideally these relationships have been developed in childhood, but if they haven't it's not too late. There are a number of things you can do. Check out *Bringing out the Best in Teenagers* for more information.
- 2. Be their parent, not their friend.** This may seem like a cliché but being their parent has real meaning. Be willing to set some boundaries rather than lower them, particularly around areas such as going out, parties and the use of alcohol. In fact, it means saying no alcohol, before the age of eighteen. More on this topic in my [Blog](#).
- 3. If you can't stand the heat...** There's a great deal of heat, not mention hormones, involved in raising teens so you need to be willing to engage them in robust conversations, challenge their views and support them as they grow up. You need to enjoy the thrust and parry involved in raising a young person.

4. **Talk with other parents.** Talking with parents of your young person's friends is vital. Young people are highly connected through social media, and other communication technology, yet parents are frequently disconnected from each other and raise their kids in isolation. Teens tend to gang up on parents, saying things such as 'everyone else is drinking at the party.' 'Is that right? I'll just check that one out for myself' needs to be your attitude. Check with other parents. Better still. Draw strength from other parents so you can set some limits on their behaviours.
5. **Understand that a teenager is a work in progress.** Teenagers aren't kids. They'll tell you that! But they are not adults either, which many claim to be. There's a great deal of must-know information about the adolescent brain will help parents respond appropriately to their requests, their behaviours and their blowouts.
6. **Attend to their mental health.** Young people live with a type of pressure, not experienced by any other generation of teenagers. Increasingly, schools are attending to the emotional and social wellbeing of young people, and their efforts need to be supported by parents.

The challenge for parents is not merely to survive their young person's adolescence (although that's a worthy goal), or even to get their young person through high school unscathed. These are no longer the end games for parenting teens.

The real task is to prepare teenagers for the years between 18 and 25, because negotiating the next steps after school are becoming the trickiest years of all for teens. That's why it's doubly important that parents stay in the parenting game with teens so they can effectively guide them through the abundance of freedoms they face and myriad lifestyle choices that they are required to make.

Go [here](#) to learn more ideas and skills to help you stay in the game when raising teenagers.

TEN: *Tough Love parenting*

Children with parents that use an authoritative approach are best prepared to do well in life, according to a recent British study.

When children experience a mix of discipline and warmth they're more likely to develop important character traits such as self-regulation, empathy and application by the age of five than parents that use permissive, authoritarian or disengaged styles.

The study of 9,000 UK households in the Millennium Cohort Study found that while family structure and parent income levels did impact on children's development it was parenting style that had the greatest influence on outcomes for kids.

An analysis of school results is revealing. One quarter of kids with authoritative parents were in the top 20 per cent at school. Next came permissive parenting with 18 per cent, 15 for authoritarian and 11 per cent of this top cohort going to kids of disengaged parents.

Children from wealthiest backgrounds were more likely to develop characteristics for success than parents from the poorest backgrounds but, when parental style and confidence were factored in, the difference between children from richer and poorer families disappeared; indicating parenting was the most important influence.

Parenting style is not necessarily fixed. It changes over time according to children's needs, our wellbeing and even their ages. Common sense suggests parents need to be stricter with some children than with others and there will be times when parents need to release the pressure on kids, and adopt a more permissive approach for a time.

Certainly parental mood and well-being contributes to how parents respond to kids. But most parents will default to one style.

Recent research suggests that if parents want kids to develop the characteristics to succeed, **then they should default to authoritative or tough love parenting.**

Here are 10 characteristics of tough love parenting:

1. Set **limits and boundaries** that expand as kids get older and become more capable. Boundaries make kids feel secure and teach them how to behave well.
2. Use a **negotiable style** with children according to their age and stage of development. Parents also need to realise that not everything is up for negotiation. There are times when the word 'no' needs to be heard as parents act in the best interest of their kids.
3. Use **consequences** and other tools to teach kids to behave well and develop a sense of personal responsibility. Resist the temptation to let kids off the hook when they do the wrong thing. Firm but fair is the key here.
4. Use **family rituals** such as shared mealtimes to make sure you interact regularly with your kids.
5. **Encourage** kids for improvement, effort and contribution rather than their ability at school, in sport and other areas of their lives. Focus your positive comments on their participation rather than results of what they do so kids learn that trying and persistence are important.
6. **Recognise cooperative behaviours** with positive attention such as praise, physical touch and rewards and **minimise negative behaviours** through a range of measures such as ignoring and using consequences.
7. Teach kids the skills needed for **independence** from an early so they learn to look after themselves. Avoid regularly doing things for kids that they can do for themselves.
8. Adopt an **open communication style** in your family where kids learn that there's nothing so bad that they can't talk about it.

9. Encourage a sense of **empathy** in children by recognising their emotions and giving them permission and assistance to talk about their feelings.
10. Encourage **generosity and kindness** in your kids. They do this by sharing toys and other items, helping others and doing chores that benefit their family. This sense of community that authoritative parenting promotes is the real strength of the style.

At a time when it feels like the voices of parents seem to be drowned out by the din of modern life this research is a great reminder that it's effective parenting not media, celebrities or peers that have the greatest impact on future outcomes for kids.

Want to know more about tough love parenting? I've created a tough love parenting pack to help you learn the skills needed in this great approach. Find out more [here](#).

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