

## Enjoy Being a Parent

Does being a parent feel a lot harder than you think it should be? Would you like to have more fun as a parent?

Parenting can be hard work. Many parents feel that they have lost control and their life is spent running around after their children. This can leave them feeling worn down and unhappy. Does that sound like you?

## What can I do??

### 1. You don't have to be perfect

Do you think you should be the perfect parent? Perhaps you have a vision in your mind of how the perfect parent should be. Or maybe you know somebody who makes parenting look a doddle. In reality the perfect parent doesn't exist. If you talked to someone you see as the perfect parent you would find they are not perfect at all. They are probably muddling through the best they can, just like the rest of us.

There is no manual. All children are different. What works in one family doesn't work in another. So give yourself a break. It's true some people are better at parenting than others. If you feel you have weaknesses, work on them by all means. You can get better in the areas you want to improve in. But you don't have to be perfect. If you can accept this then you will look at your role as a parent in a different way.

### 2. Your children don't have to be perfect

Were you the perfect child? No? I thought not. I certainly wasn't. In the same way you don't have to be the perfect parent, your child doesn't have to be the perfect child.

If you have a friend or family member that always tells you how great their child is, take it with a pinch of salt. Don't be fooled. It may be that their child excels at one or two things. Occasionally there might be a child in your social circle who is good at lots of things. So what? There is no need to compare or judge your child by their standards. Appreciate the talents your own child has.

Children have a tremendous amount of ground to cover. Things go wrong in their life. Don't expect too much. They don't always bounce back immediately so sometimes they will get frustrated and can be difficult to live with. That can be hard going at times, but bear with it and life usually gets easier.

### 3. You don't have to solve all your children's problems

Are you a parent who jumps in ready to save the day, at the first sign of trouble? There is no need to do this. It may even harm your child in the long term. Sure if something major occurs you are going to step in and be there for your child. But a lot of minor issues are best left for your child to resolve.

If you jump in at the first sign of trouble, when is your child going to learn how to solve problems? Developing those skills is part of growing up.

Micro managing your child's life is time consuming. It also suggests to them that you don't have the confidence in them to resolve their own issues.

#### **4. Share the load with other parents**

Whenever you can, set up reciprocal arrangements with other parents. This can include picking up each other's children from school, lift shares to activities and looking after each other's children from time to time. All of this frees up time for you.

There are other advantages too. For a start you are likely to build friendships with other mums and dads. It gives your children opportunities to improve friendships. It also means you get to know more about who your child is hanging around with. Watch out for parents who take advantage of these relationships. Anyone who expects you to become an unpaid childminder should be eased out.

#### **5. Slow down and do less**

Stop and think. Have you been sucked into a routine where you are always rushing around? Your child doesn't need to do every after school club and activity. While it is good for them to join in and learn new skills, what impact does this have on you? If you find being here, there and everywhere stressful (and most people do) slow down and cut out some activities.

It is much better for your child if by doing less you are happier and have more energy. There is also danger that if your child has entertainment constantly laid on then they will not develop the ability to entertain themselves.

#### **6. Get organised**

Being more organised can make a significant difference to your happiness. If you go out to work or used to, you probably had some sort of plan of what you had to do during the day. This meant you knew what needed to be done and when you had to do it.

Write down what you plan to do during the day and the week. Estimate the time tasks take and write that down too. When you have completed a task, tick it off and write down the amount of time it took in reality.

One of the biggest factors in reducing happiness is when you don't get as much done as you think you should. If a task takes longer than you thought it would, don't give yourself a hard time. It simply shows your estimation skills are a work in progress. Planning helps you to learn how much time tasks really take. Knowing this can reduce frustration when tasks overrun. You can also judge more easily if certain tasks are really worth the effort.

After planning for a month or so you should have a much better idea of how much you can fit in to your day.

#### **7. Identify what bothers you and do something about it**

Are you too accepting of things that get under your skin? If you are, identify your big issues and do something about them. A lot of people are unhappy and stay unhappy because they let things drift. Identify what bugs you, bite the bullet and sort it out.

You may put things off because you want to keep the peace. But what is the cost to you? There is no point in keeping someone else happy if it means you are unhappy instead.

### **8. Let it go!!**

Having suggested that you work out what bothers you and to do something about it, I'm now going to suggest you do the opposite! You can't fight everything. Pick the things that really get to you to act on them. But learn to let smaller things go.

Life isn't perfect. It is made up of a series of random events that we have little control over. So ask yourself if something is really worth getting het up about. If it's not, forget it and move on.



I use a technique where I score an incident between one and ten. It is based on how much the incident will affect my life. When I first started using this technique it surprised me how worked up I could get over things that were unimportant in the greater scheme of things. I learnt to let a lot go and I'm much happier for it. Don't let someone else dump their bad day on you.

### **9. Please yourself as well as your children**

Now you have saved yourself countless hours by no longer needing to be perfect, no longer needing to solve all your children's problems, sharing the load, doing less, getting organised, resolving issues and letting go, you will have a lot more time on your hands.

So what can you do with that time? Spend it on yourself. Just because you are a mum or a dad doesn't mean you don't have your own life too. Devote time to your hobbies. If all your hobbies have lapsed, restart them or find something new to do. Make life an adventure - get out the house when you can and spend time with other people, preferably when your children are not around.

It is also very easy to neglect your marriage or relationship - if you are so dedicated to your children that you don't work on your relationship then you are storing up trouble. Spend quality time with your partner.