

ISSUE 12

Parenting *ideas* MAGAZINE

A farm animal's
guide to children's
temperament

Becoming better parents

**KIDS WHO
catastrophise**

*Babysitting
Ready?*

*Separation
Anxiety*



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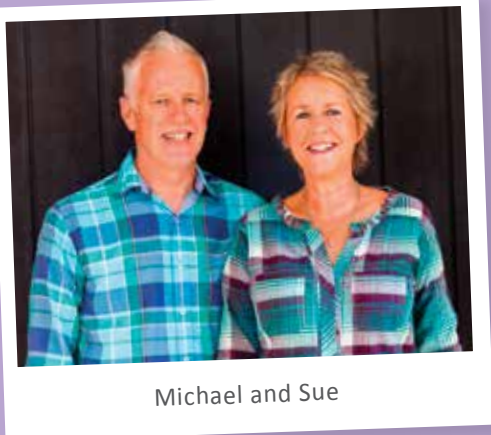
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Michael and Sue

editors' note

This magazine maybe new, but Parentingideas already has a strong track record of supporting and educating parents. In fact, it's over two decades since we conducted our first parenting course and contributed our first column to a major daily newspaper.

We've always believed that if we are to have better kids we need to have better parents. And, of course, better parents are informed parents. Parenting education is for all.

Parentingideas helps parents stay up to date through our presentations, seminars, blogs and Parentingideas TV. This magazine is the natural extension of our educational work.

Most of our hand-picked team of writers are parenting educators or professionals who work with children and their parents. Their work is knowledgeable, heartfelt and supportive of kids and parents. These experts also feature on our website so head over to Parentingideasclub.com.au for more of their professional insights.

Enjoy this issue of Parentingideas magazine!

Michael and Sue

contact us

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Separation Anxiety

amongst different age groups in children

Although the average age range for developing an anxiety disorder is between six and 11 years, the typical age of onset varies between different disorders. Here is a look at one of the more common disorders that may start at any time: separation anxiety.



A collection of fears and worries about being separated from loved ones can manifest anytime: in a child from as young as a few months old right through to a fully grown adult. It can happen after a traumatic event or seemingly for no apparent reason. To understand why your child is clingy, appears worried or obsesses with thoughts depicting doom, a lesson in identifying the important factors at play is in order.

THE UNDERLYING FEAR

“Children with separation anxiety disorder feel constantly worried or fearful about separation,” says Rebecca Swinbourne, a child and adolescent psychologist at Sydney South Child Psychology.

She describes a chain of thoughts that involves one or more of the following:

- Fear that something terrible will happen to a loved one.
- Worry that an unpredicted event will lead to permanent separation.
- Nightmares about separation.

Cindy Russell, a life skills educator who coaches children and adults to manage their anxiety, suffered from separation anxiety herself while in primary school.

“I used to describe separation anxiety as the most intense fear you can imagine. Like hearing over a loud speaker the world will be ending in 60 seconds,” she says.

Over the years, Russell recognised that her fear was brought on by the unconscious mind feeding on irrational thoughts – thoughts that in fact posed no real threat. But her mind would react with severe panic, as if there was a detrimental threat, including symptoms such as a lack of oxygen.

DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE

Although only about three to four per cent of children will be diagnosed with separation anxiety, it is not uncommon for a child to feel anxious at the thought of being physically separated from a primary caregiver, says Swinbourne.

“It is developmentally appropriate for ‘stranger anxiety’ to appear between eight and 10 months of age, and separation anxiety between 14 and 18 months. Usually stranger anxiety tapers off around age two. Separation anxiety tapers off more slowly and may last until the child is five years old.”

Though less commonly seen in adolescents, Swinbourne explains that anxiety around separation may be ‘carried’ into the later years and may manifest as other disorders, particularly if there has been no intervention.

THE TRIGGERS

Like any other type of anxiety, separation anxiety is caused by the interplay of biological, cognitive, genetic, environmental, temperament and behavioural factors, says Swinbourne.

Stressful or traumatic events like a stay in hospital, the death of a loved one or a change in environment could all trigger the condition.

Russell believes that her curious nature and habit of questioning as well as analysing life and death contributed to her developing a “fear of the unknown”.

“I would get thoughts about bad things happening to my parents. I felt safe when I was with them,” she says. She also believes that her anxiety played a part in her own daughter displaying signs and symptoms of the condition.

This link is not uncommon, says Swinbourne. “In fact, it may not necessarily be a disease of the child but a manifestation of parental separation anxiety as well – parent and child can feed each other’s anxiety. In addition, the fact that children with separation anxiety often have family members with anxiety or other mental disorders suggests that a vulnerability to the disorder may be inherited.”

Signs of separation anxiety

Younger Children

- Clinginess
- Tantrums
- Oppositional behaviour, especially when separation is imminent
- Sleeping problems and nightmares
- Aches and pains
- Breath holding
- Specific phobias (eg. thunder, lightning, water, darkness, death).

Primary School Children

- Sleeping difficulties / nightmares
- Oppositional behaviour
- Excessive homesickness or shyness
- High levels of worrying and seeking reassurance
- Ongoing reluctance to go to school and participate in normal activities
- Specific phobias (eg. germs, natural disasters, traumatic events like a plane or car crash).

High School Children

- Avoiding social situations
- Marked fall in academic achievement
- Debilitating perfectionism
- Irritability
- Restlessness and fidgeting
- Excessive disobedience or aggression
- High levels of distress such as crying
- Overuse of alcohol and drugs



Experts' tips to minimise a child's anxiety

THE IMPACT

Russell remembers feeling constantly panicked at the height of her illness. "I experienced separation anxiety in the way many children do throughout my school life, not wanting to leave my mum to go to school and feeling quite unsettled the whole time I was away from home. It started to have quite a drastic impact on my everyday life at school from about Year 8. I could not concentrate or have fun with friends as I was constantly consumed by fear."

Although the fear did not affect her school work, she found it impossible to fully engage with any activity – from going on excursions to events outside school to just hanging out with friends. She frequently felt that she 'had to' leave school and go home and a special pass from her secondary school that allowed her to do just that was the only way she would be willing to go to school.

The separation anxiety then manifested itself into obsessive compulsive disorder and Russell would often have thoughts like "if you don't count in even numbers in everything you do, something bad will happen" or "if you don't eat that cookie something will happen to your mum".

MANAGING IT

It is important for parents to remember that many fears are a normal part of development, says Swinbourne. "But children and adolescents who develop anxiety disorders do not seem to have the resources and coping mechanisms available to them at the time (internally and externally) to overcome these fears, hence they manifest into disorders," she explains.

Swinbourne advises parents to help their children understand the 'fight or flight' state that their body and brain can go into as a result by offering a two-step management process. "First parents can help their children to recognise when they begin to feel the physical signs of anxiety and teach them to relax their body and slow their breathing and heart rate down." "Secondly, once the body is relaxed, it gives the brain the opportunity to rationally assess the situation and challenge their default response (the anxious behaviour)."

For younger children, it is more appropriate to calm them down by holding them, distracting them or engaging in a fun activity and then reassuring them that they are safe in the company of their caregiver, she says. ■

- Talk to the child about what they are feeling. Bringing awareness to their thoughts will not make it worse.
- Ask the child how they would like to feel in the same situation and if they can think of a time they have felt that way. This gives them an example of where they are already doing this.
- With your child, think up some steps that the child can take to get them one step closer to the way they want to feel when separating from you.
- Talk everyday about how they applied one of these steps, what worked and what didn't.
- Celebrate their successes, no matter how small.
- Be patient and be a role model by showing them how you successfully cope with your own anxieties.
- Do not stop when things are okay: continue to focus on helping the child be clear about what they want and what steps they can take to get it.

EMPOWER THEM WITH SKILLS TO HANDLE IT

Russell believes that teaching children life skills, whether at home or at school, is an effective way to boost their management skills when thoughts overwhelm them. Specifically, she says becoming aware of their own thought processes and the vocabulary they use (eg. recognising strong words like 'should' or 'have to') can help as can an ability to be unaffected by the opinions of others.

In the 'Be Unreal' program she runs for school students, Russell teaches children to use their imagination to create stories and paint situations in a way amenable to them. "The program brings awareness to the imagination, how we use it in our everyday life to tell ourselves stories about what is happening around us. While our stories lead to us experiencing a situation in our way, someone else may experience the same situation completely differently due to having different stories." Understanding that there is a choice and that making a choice is what leads us to where we want to be is another lesson she hopes the program will teach: "Living from a place of 'I want to' rather than 'I should' and taking small steps, everyday, to live/be/feel the way we want."



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Kids who catastrophise

“If I don’t do well in the tests it’s the worst thing ever!” Do you have a child who automatically assumes the worst case scenario in any risky or new situation? If so, you have a catastrophiser on your hands.

Catastrophisers exaggerate their worries and place enormous pressure on themselves. The default mechanism in their thinking always goes to the most negative outcome possible. The results won’t just be bad, they’ll be catastrophic!. For instance, they won’t just mess up if they give a talk to their class at school. They’ll make total fools of themselves and the whole class will laugh at them, or so they say. Catastrophising makes kids feel miserable. Worse, they often don’t want to do anything because they expect the worst possible outcome.

So what to do with a catastrophiser?

Your approach will depend to some extent on your child’s age. Under fives generally don’t overtly catastrophise, however even young children can be negative. Make sure you model upbeat, positive thinking as young children take their cues from their parents, particularly the parent they spend most time around. School-aged children need to be encouraged to keep things in perspective. Challenge your child’s propensity to catastrophise.

Here are five ways to challenge your child’s catastrophic thinking:

1 “What’s the most likely scenario?”

Sometimes it’s useful to introduce a dose of old-fashioned rational thinking. “Yep, you could break your leg if you go skiing. But the odds are that you won’t.”

2 “Does it really matter?” “You may be right, but is it the end of the world as we know it?” One way of dealing with hard core catastrophisers is to admit that they could be right, but even if they are right and the worst case scenario does happen, the sun will still shine tomorrow. Take kids to the worst possible scenario and they may see it’s not so bad.

3 “Where does this fit on the Mood Meter*?” Catastrophisers get themselves in a knot about relatively insignificant things. Okay, making a fool out of themselves may not be insignificant to kids, however compared to plenty of other events ... well, perspective is a good thing. Help them get some perspective by giving their worry a score out of ten, on how important the issue really is.

4 “That’s unhelpful thinking.” Sometimes kids’ thinking is so out of whack with reality that they become anxious about minor things. Thinking such as, ‘everyone must like me’, ‘I must never make a mistake’ and ‘bad things always happen to me’ are extreme and need to be replaced by more moderate, realistic thoughts. Eg. “It would be nice if everyone liked me but not everyone will. It’s important to have some good friends.

5 Replace extreme words for feelings with more moderate descriptors:

Today’s kids talk in extremes – ‘awesome’, ‘the best’ and ‘gross’ roll off their tongues

easily these days. Extreme language leads to extreme thinking. So encourage kids to replace “I’m furious” with “I’m annoyed”, “It’s a disaster” with “It’s a pain”, “I can’t stand it” with “I don’t like it”. Sounds minor but by changing kids’ language you change how they think about events and, more importantly, how they feel.

I suspect that many parents will identify strongly with some of the above.

We all catastrophise from time to time, particularly when we are under stress. It takes a cool customer to moderate their thinking the whole time. So be mindful of your child’s need to jump to the worst from time to time. A bit of reassurance is all that’s needed in these one-off scenarios.

But if you, like your child, are a serial catastrophiser, then it will be useful to challenge your unhelpful or extreme thinking when it happens. Not only will you model realistic thinking for your kids, but you will get an insight into what you need to do to change your child’s catastrophising. ■



WORDS Maggie Dent

A farm animal's guide TO CHILDREN'S TEMPERAMENT



Something we don't talk about much anymore is that children are born with a certain temperament. I call the temperament spectrum 'the rooster and lamb continuum'.

Imagine the cartoon character Linus (from the 'Peanuts' comic strip); he would be a lamb. Lambs are generally quieter children, more accommodating and content with life. They make us look like fantastic parents.

Then imagine Dennis the Menace; he would be a rooster. Roosters are often loud, strong willed and full of beans. Roosters' parents frequently feel like we're doing a terrible job.

ROOSTERS

If most nights you collapse on your couch from exhaustion because of the high energy levels of one of your children, you most likely have a rooster.

Typical rooster characteristics include:

- independent
- stubborn
- argumentative
- selfish
- power driven
- self-important
- dislike sharing
- impatient and impulsive
- fast learning
- angry
- entertaining
- adventurous

Roosters have a strong sense of their importance, a powerful character and they can be highly spirited. A rooster is not better or worse than a lamb – just different. It is good to give roosters small opportunities to develop autonomy and independence, perhaps allowing them to be your 'special helper', so they feel important and valued.

Parents who have children with rooster tendencies need to invest time and energy to build the 'caring' traits of emotional awareness, empathy and understanding before age five. Otherwise these children will tend to become dominant, bossy or even bullying. This can cause problems when building friendships.

Rooster children often love challenge, change and adventure. They can get excited when these opportunities occur and can get frustrated if they have a lamb sibling who struggles with the same opportunities.

Give your roosters plenty of opportunities to diffuse energy – especially in nature – whether that be through sport, fishing, bike riding or even in creative pursuits such as dance or music.

One annoying trait of roosters is that they tend to question your parenting – often. This can cause angst, especially if you have expectations that children are meant to do as they are told or be seen and not heard. If you can, bear in mind that this questioning is not because your child wants to annoy you. Rather it is because they are seeking clarification of the choices you are making on their behalf.

Ironically, if we want our children to grow up and value themselves and their choices, and to encourage self-assertiveness, we need to value and respect their needs and wishes by really hearing them.

LAMBS

Some of the characteristics of lambs are:

- sensitive to discipline
- sleepy
- distress easily
- dislike loud noises
- like solo time
- withdrawing
- shy
- struggle with large social situations
- patient
- like routines
- easy going.

Lambs can tend to be 'slow to warm' in social situations. This means that even with people they know they can take a while to be comfortable interacting.

Forcing children to connect or interact before they have 'warmed up' can be quite stressful and often make them more fearful. The same goes for shy children – slowly build confidence by respecting their sensitive nature.

As lambs often lack personal courage and confidence, it is important for parents to help build these emotional competences while they are under five if possible. Lambs need extra time building comforting patterns and attachment, and they love regularity and routine.

Encouraging them to take risks in their play and learning, and ensuring you build their capacity to be assertive and capable socially, can really help lambs become stronger and more resilient. Never force a lamb to do something they are reluctant to do.

Often children born with a lamb temperament have the deep-seated desire to help others, whether they are animals or people. They have a natural degree of empathy from an early age and can sometimes become worried when things happen, even across the world. It is important to be mindful of the media that lambs are exposed to. They are easily scared and sometimes moments of terror can be etched into their mind forever.

Importantly, you should affirm and encourage the caring side of their nature while teaching them to be careful not to be used by others.

A DELICATE BALANCE

Even though the role of temperament has a big influence on parenting choices, it is helpful to think of the continuum as a guide to what competences or qualities children need to develop in order to be a blend of both rooster and lamb traits.

In families, roosters and lambs can help each other – the roosters can help toughen up the lambs, and the lambs help to build sensitivity and gentleness in the roosters.

The ability to have a calm, harmonious home environment is determined by the loving connection that the children feel from their parents, and that compassionate communication occurs between everyone – whatever their temperament. ■

MAGGIE DENT is an author, educator and speaker dedicated to quietly changing lives through common-sense wisdom. She has four adult sons and is the author of five books including the forthcoming release, *Nine Things: A back-to-basics guide to calm, common-sense, connected parenting birth–8* (out mid 2014).
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Raising calm kids

WORDS Jenny Brockis

Let me share the stories of two very different kids who shared a common challenge.

The first is Isobel. Isobel had always been an anxious kid. From the time she first started day care she would cry incessantly when her mum tried to leave, several staff having to peel the distressed child off her mother so she could leave and get to work.

In primary school she made a number of friends but lacked self-confidence. By the time she was in secondary school, she was known as a bit of a loner. Her good friends stuck by her, but she was always quiet and kept largely to herself. Her teachers noted she worked hard, but never seemed satisfied with her results.

In Year 10, Isobel started missing school. She had multiple days off due to illness and would sometimes play truant. It wasn't until she spoke with the school counsellor, that the depth of her low self-esteem was finally recognised.

The second child is Jamie, who was always a bundle of energy. He had continuous 'ants in his pants'. His hyperactivity led him to be assessed for attention deficit disorder, though this was ruled out. His teachers found his classroom antics difficult; he would constantly distract the other kids and muck about. His peers got fed up with his continuous pranks and he got into a lot of fights. His school grades were falling and both his parents and teachers were at a loss about what to do.

Jamie ended up being suspended from school. It took several sessions with a psychologist before he allowed himself to admit that his antics were all a front and that deep down his biggest fear was that he was dumb, a no-hoper. By acting out, he thought this would prove to everyone that this was the reality.

As you can see, Isobel and Jamie were two very different kids. But they both shared the common challenge of anxiety.

Anxiety, especially in those under 25, is increasing at an alarming rate. It's thought that the constant busyness of modern life, with little or no down time, is part of this problem. New technology allows our kids to connect with each other at a level never previously available or even imagined, but paradoxically this has led in some instances to a huge sense of disconnect.

Our brains were not designed to be constantly stimulated. But today, making the choice to sit and not do anything even for a few minutes is often overtaken by the compulsion to check for updates, to send a text, a post a selfie and to stay connected.

"I'm bored" appears to have been taken off the option board now that self-entertainment is available 24/7. But boredom can teach children resilience, coping skills and reflection. It also promotes innovation and imagination.

All brains need some time out. So what can we do to help our kids restore the necessary balance?

One of the most effective ways is to help them to know how they can quieten down their mind if it's making them feel mad or sad. Knowing that they can be in control of their feelings and can direct their own mind so as to feel better is a life skill of enormous value.

Recognising the need for this, some schools have implemented 'Quiet time' back into the school day because they find it allows kids to feel calmer, happier and more focused on their work in class. But even if your school doesn't have this, you can teach your own kids how to enjoy quiet time. Choose to spend this time with them and you will both feel more relaxed!

Tips for Quiet Time

- 1 Choose a time that suits you and your child. Morning or evening, just what ever works best for you as a family.
- 2 Schedule in ten to fifteen minutes for the practice. You may need to start with just two to four minutes at first.
- 3 Find a place that allows your child to stay quiet. This could be their bedroom or any other room in the house that they like being in and in which they can feel relaxed.
- 4 They can choose to sit or to lie down on a blanket or rug on the floor. Try to avoid their bed as they may fall asleep, which isn't the purpose of the exercise. Get them to gently close their eyes or look down towards the ground. Now it's time for them to take a slow deep breath in through the nose, hold it for one to two seconds and then breathe out. Get them to do this two more times.
- 5 After the third breath, ask them to continue breathing in the same way, now noticing the air as it passes in and out through their nostrils. After the next ten breaths, direct their focus to the rising and falling of their chest or tummy.
- 6 The next sequence requires them to notice any tension or muscle tightness in their shoulders, tummy or elsewhere and then, on each out breath, to let all that tension just float away, enjoying the sensation as they allow their muscles to become more relaxed.
- 7 Continue with the breathing exercise until you reach the end of your allotted time. When it's time to stop, your child can just open their eyes, wriggle their toes and fingers and after a moment or two get up to resume the rest of their day.

Practicing regular quiet time should start to produce some positive differences quite quickly. Once they have mastered the technique, it will always be available to them any time they feel over anxious or stressed. Just three deep breaths may be all they need.

Alleviating anxiety using self-regulated relaxation is a very powerful way to help your kids stay resilient, happy and focused. ■

DR. JENNY BROCKIS is a brain health specialist. Her focus is on promoting optimal health and function for all brains. She is also an author and speaker, and mum to two young adults.
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WORDS Malcolm Dix

STOP the Bus

Raising children is like employing an apprentice. Our role is to prepare them to succeed in a big, complex and hectic world.



MALCOLM DIX is a father of four. He's negotiating life in a blended family of two teenagers and two toddlers. He is also a recovering social worker and stand up comedian which comes in very handy. He runs parenting workshops in Perth on Raising Mighty Kids and he's also a tragic Dockers fan and lover of Test cricket, chilli and Game of Thrones.

This is part of an actual conversation I overheard between a mum and her five-year-old son at Auskick last week:

"Mummy is going home because Mummy doesn't feel well, but I'll be back when the class is over, okay? It's not long to go, only another hour, that's 60 minutes. But I promise I'll be here next week, okay? We can play together then but Mummy has to go now because Mummy is feeling sick, okay? But I'll be back really soon, okay? You'll be okay without me and before you know it, I'll be back to pick you up, okay?" (There was a lot of "okay?" flying about!)

Now at this point I was about to suggest we talk to one of the Auskick coaches and ask them to keep an eye on her son as well as offering for the boy to team up with my five-year-old son until she returned, but then she said something that blew me away:

"...so don't worry [her son, by the way, didn't look at all worried] because if anything happens, remember Daddy is here..."

Um, stop the bus ... Daddy is here?!?! And sure enough, standing five metres away hiding behind a beanie and sunglasses was Dad, looking somewhat embarrassed and frustrated but saying nothing.

Now while I obviously don't know what the lead up to this conversation was, and maybe there was a valid reason for the mum to be speaking like that, but in the words of my own five-year-old, what the heck?

Some obvious questions sprang to mind:

- If mum was sick, why did she leave the house in the first place?
- Why couldn't she let Dad take their son to sport without her? Maybe Mum needs to let go and trust that things will be okay without her involvement?
- Why is Dad standing there saying nothing? Perhaps he needs to be more proactive and spend some one-on-one time with his son.

Now I'm not having a go at this specific family – in fact, in years gone by, I've been that Dad many times over. But I think their example highlights the fact that sometimes when it comes to parenting, less is definitely more. Less explaining, less worrying, less doing for our kids what they can do for themselves.

I often say that raising children is like employing an apprentice. If an apprentice, after many years of training and learning, graduated with little idea how to apply their trade there would be major questions asked of the teachers and trainers. Somebody would be called into question, and the apprentice would be sent back to complete certain tasks.

In a very real way our children are our 'apprentices'. Our role is to prepare them for

their future so they graduate with the all the skills required to apply their 'trade' to the big, complex and hectic world that awaits them. Ultimately our job as parents is to do ourselves out of a job. These days, I'm seeing more kids 'graduating childhood' without the basic survival skills required, such as how to operate a washing machine, iron a shirt, manage money, cook, use basic manners, sew on a button or even operate a can opener. (Regrettably, each of these examples are from my two older kids only a few years ago so I'm not making this stuff up. I've rectified this, by the way, but it took much frustration, repetition and not just a little bit of muttering and incredulous shaking of my head.)

And then there are the more complex issues children encounter as they grow older such as learning how to cope with failure, loss and disappointment; rejection; being let down or betrayed by friends and all the other challenges life will hurl at them.

It would do us parents well to remember that we don't have our 'young apprentices' forever. One day the time will come for them to move on for whatever reason – study, work, relationship or simply to run away and join the circus. When that moment happens, will our 'apprentices' fly with gusto or crash and burn? One thing is for certain: kids cannot learn to fly if parents keep them tethered.

I was the youngest of four kids. I was never made to cook, do dishes, wash my clothes, make lunches, clean my room (let alone the house), iron my clothes, etc. I was never encouraged to read books, leaving me free to play cricket and footy for hours on end, and never really had a good bedtime routine established. Nor was I ever taught basic handy 'young man' skills, or how to manage money or budget. Sure my childhood was fun and easygoing but by the time my 'apprenticeship' was over and I moved out of home, I crashed and burned big time.

In hindsight it took me years and years to recover and made for many painful moments that could have been avoided. To be honest being a young adult often sucked as I was constantly trying to catch up to many of my peers. I henceforth have no desire for my kids to repeat the same mistakes my own parents made. (Don't worry, there will be plenty of other mistakes they can and will make).

So the question is this: how is your young apprentice going? Are you laying the groundwork to enable them to fly or are they going to crash and burn like I did? All I know is that I sincerely hope they manage to avoid the countless pitfalls I repeatedly tumbled into.

And the best way to do that is start young, so get cracking good people. I wish you all well and may the parenting force be with you.

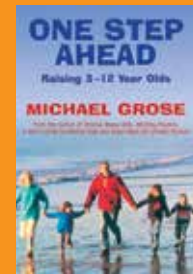
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Here's a selection of books that are ideal for parents. New issues are always arising in our fast changing world and, of course, some of the same old parenting issues still need expert advice.

Raising Girls is both a guidebook and a call-to-arms for parents. The five key stages of girlhood are laid out so that you know exactly what matters at which age, and how to build strength and connectedness into your daughter from infancy to womanhood.



Shock, horror – teenagers actually want to be controlled and have their parents involved in their lives. This updated edition includes the six distinct stages of the teenage years and fabulous tips to make sure your meet their developmental needs.



This book features practical messages about the three stages of boyhood so your parenting can hit the mark at every year of your son's life. It has an invaluable guide to common concerns such as finding the best school, safeguarding against internet pornography, and helping him to relate to girls.



Learn how your child's birth order impacts on their behaviour and personality development. This book helps you make sense of sibling rivalry & offers guidance on how to match your parenting with each child's birth order position.



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There is no law that states what age a person can begin to babysit. Children develop and mature at different ages, so it is almost impossible to give an exact age at which one older child can be responsible for another younger child. However, regardless of what age you and your child decide to venture out to begin babysitting, the law is clear about the responsibility of parents to look after their children. This is important for both the parent of the babysitter as well as the parent whose children are being looked after.

TIPS TO ENSURE YOUR CHILD IS THE BEST BABYSITTER IN THE BUSINESS

SAFETY COMES FIRST Great babysitters know that safety is a top priority. The best way to find a babysitting job is to go to the people you already know. Spread the word with family friends, work colleagues and neighbours. Never answer or post babysitting job advertisements, and do not answer an ad looking for a babysitter. You and your child likely do not know the person who is posting the ad, nor do you know the kids. Only babysit for people whom you already know.

BE PREPARED Any job worth seeking and getting requires some work. Having an interview with the potential babysitters means your child gets to know the family a little bit better and can then make a decision about whether they want the job in the first place. Being a responsible babysitter means being mature enough to recognise your limitations. Just because someone offers your young person a job, doesn't mean they have to take it. Parents must also give their permission for each job.

KNOW YOUR PRICE Babysitting is a great way for teens to learn responsibility and make some extra money. Unfortunately, many people, adults included, are uncomfortable talking about payment terms. Most parents will ask what babysitters charge, so you and your child might as well give some thought to the answer. We know that babysitters should charge more if children are younger (as they are much harder work and require constant supervision), when there are more children (as there is more responsibility), and as it gets towards midnight. Most youth and parents feel that a fee of around \$10 per hour is a good starting point.

BABYSITTER'S KIT Think of the babysitting job as a mini-vacation for the kids being looked after. It is a fun time when children have a slight change of routine and get to show someone new what they like and are really good at. A great babysitter knows how to have fun and is always prepared, and that includes having a babysitter's kit. This kit will contain items that help your child be a great babysitter on the job. Basic supplies like crayons, playdough, puzzles, stickers and games should always be in

the kit, and the sitter can add specific activities depending on the ages and interests of each family that they go to. We recommend a torch in every kit as well: it is a small item that gives great peace of mind should the power go out on the job.

AGES AND STAGES Babysitting usually means caring for children with a range of ages and capabilities. Each age group has its own characteristics and will require different skills from your child. As they gain experience, your child will have the opportunity to babysit kids of all ages. When they first begin we suggest they stick with toddlers and school-aged kids. Infants are very hard work, and require a specific skill set. A great way for kids to gain valuable experience babysitting is for your child to ask family or friends if they can babysit for a few hours while they are still at home. This gives them full responsibility and the security of the parent close by.

HAZARD DETECTIVES The most important thing great babysitters do is to keep the kids they are caring for safe. It is important your child takes preventative and proactive measures, which means being aware of hazards and avoiding dangerous situations. Learning how to look ahead and predict dangerous situations to prevent accidents and injuries is crucial.

ACCIDENTS AND EMERGENCIES I always remind the babysitters I train that "no one ever plans an accident". In my experience it is the unknown of an unexpected situation requiring immediate attention that makes teens quite anxious, and rightly so. Working through 'what if' scenarios is crucial for helping your child know what to do in an emergency situation. What will they do if someone comes to the door? What can they do if they smell smoke coming from the kitchen and the children are sleeping upstairs? Do they know when to call an ambulance and when to call the parents? Knowing some basic first-aid skills also provides peace of mind to parents and babysitters alike.

Great babysitters provide excellent and constant supervision. Accidents may still happen though almost all injuries can be prevented. Every accident, no matter how minor, must be reported to the parents upon their return. In addition, make sure your child lets the parents know what everyone got up to, when the kids had the most fun and when the kids really shone.

With this information your child is now much more prepared to become not only a good babysitter, but a great babysitter, and that is fantastic! Parents everywhere are jumping for joy because one thing is for certain: great babysitters are always in demand. ■

WORDS Michael Grose

Teen time

DISPELLING
THE MYTH THAT
TEENAGERS DO
NEED PARENTS



Teenagers need their parents more than at any other stage, yet too often they are left to their own devices.

‘The younger the child, the more they need their parents’ has been traditional wisdom for some time. Many parents respond to this mantra by spending as much time as they can with babies and toddlers, then ramping up their careers as their kids move into school age. The older the children, the less time is put aside for them appears to be the current practice.

THE TWISTS AND TURNS OF DEVELOPMENT

This notion assumes that child development and children’s independence is a linear process where parents can increasingly step back as kids get older.

BUT this is wrong!

A child’s development is full of twists, turns and reversals so that a 10-year-old who is beginning to experience the confusion that can come with early adolescence has a far greater need of her parents than she did at eight.

While toddlers are very adaptable and can be satisfied with attention from caring adults, teenagers are far more in need of the special care and supervision that their parents provide.

The age between 10 and 14 is a particularly needy time. Friendships become complex and the challenges of school can overwhelm children at this stage. They benefit a lot from late afternoon and evening chats with a parent. Mornings are too rushed for the types of conversations they need.

THE MYTH OF ‘I DON’T NEED YOU’

Ken and Margaret Mellor, in their wonderful book *Teen Stages*, dispel the myth that teenagers don’t need their parents. The authors state that teenagers need their parents, but they won’t let on.

My experience raising three teenagers supports the fact that teenagers want their parents to succeed in managing, guiding, nurturing and supporting them. Adolescence is too hard for them to go through on their own. They benefit from the close physical presence of a parent – not in a smothering way – but someone who is monitoring their wellbeing and supervising their behaviour.

This can’t be done by mobile phone. Yet most teens won’t show their gratitude if you provide the close parenting they need. It’s not until they reach their early to mid twenties that they come clean and deliver a sort of belated apology to their parents. In the meantime, you need to hang in there.

PARENTING TEENS IS TIRING

While parenting toddlers can be physically tiring, responding to the mental and emotional demands of teenage children is equally if not more exhausting. If you come home totally fried by the demands of work, the last thing you want to engage in is mind games with a tricky but needy teenager. You’ve got to be fit and focused (on them) to parent teens well!

MINIMISE BEING HOME ALONE

Late afternoon is a recognised danger zone for adolescence. Toddlers stay in long daycare and primary-aged kids use after-school care or are happy to be picked up by others. However, for teenagers who are testing their independence this is tricky time.

Teens who are left to their own devices are more prone to engage in risk-taking behaviours, lose themselves online or in some cases become addicted to computer games. The world is trickier than when we grew up. Cyberbullying, self-harm and depression are now part of the adolescent landscape.

Teenagers still need supervision, whether it’s through structured activities such as sports training or after-school or holiday programs. They also need parents who check up on them, make sure homework is completed and ensure that they have fulfilled their family obligations including completing their chore list.

TURN CONVENTIONAL WISDOM ON ITS HEAD

It’s time to turn conventional wisdom on its head and start dedicating more rather than less time to raising teens. That way we’ll go a long way to giving them what they need, that is, parental guidance, management, nurturance and support to help them safely negotiate the twists and turns of the developmental journey from childhood into adulthood. ■

MICHAEL GROSE: Stay one step ahead of your teens with great ideas and expert advice from Michael Grose. Join Michael’s NEW Parentingideas Club today at parentingideasclub.com.au. You’ll be so glad you did!

Confidence in the schoolyard

for children on the autism spectrum

PART ONE: The difference between friendly teasing and unfriendly teasing/bullying

In our culture, friendly teasing is an important part of friendship and work relationships...

I work with Trevor who likes to spend time in the op shops around the corner from our workplace. He likes to purchase soft toys and other assorted items. As we work with children soft toys come in handy for teaching play skills.

The thing is, Trevor and I are quite different in our working methods in that I prefer to have only a couple of games and toys in my workspace, whereas he likes to have many, many "resources" at his disposal.

So when Trevor comes down the hallway with another suspicious looking plastic bag with a furry ear sticking out, I only have to say, "what have you got there Trev?" with a smile to tease him. Over the years Trevor and I have built enough rapport to know when we are teasing each other, and, if there's any doubt, we say, "friendly teasing!".

While it's natural for most of us to pick up on these cues and know where to draw the line when it comes to teasing, children on the autism spectrum often struggle to understand non-verbal cues. When it comes to the complex verbal and non-verbal interactions of teasing and bullying, these children can have difficulty identifying the difference between what is friendly teasing and what is unfriendly teasing or bullying.

Some children on the spectrum can be under reactive to different social cues. I once worked with a 12-year-old boy with Asperger's syndrome, who, when asked about his 'best friend',

told me the boy would be his friend if he gave up his lunch money. My student was completely unaware of the qualities of good friendship and didn't realise he had been bullied.

It's also possible for children to be over reactive, particularly when they have sensitivities to touch.

Another student of mine was an 8-year-old boy who was so sensitive to touch that when another child unintentionally brushed against him, he thought the other boy was bullying him. The other child hadn't even noticed what happened and didn't know that my student was upset until my student pushed him back.

It is possible for children on the spectrum to learn skills that can help them identify the cues of friendly teasing – and of unfriendly teasing or bullying.

It can be tricky as different situations can be quite subjective, but here are some general guidelines we can teach to help them understand the friendly/unfriendly difference:

UNDERSTANDING THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN FRIENDLY TEASING AND UNFRIENDLY TEASING/BULLYING:

IN FRIENDLY TEASING:

- they say it with a smile and eye contact
- they only do it once or twice
- they stop when you ask them to
- they are friendly to you most of the time.

IN UNFRIENDLY TEASING AND/OR BULLYING

- they do it over and over
- they don't smile or make eye contact
- they aren't friendly to you most of the time.

Helping kids identify the differences between friendly and unfriendly behaviour is the first step in providing them with the skills needed to handle teasing and bullying. The next step is to give them strategies to handle both. We will look at those strategies in Part Two: Strategies to handle teasing and bullying.

TIPS FOR PARENTS

- Encourage your child to build friendships. Even one good friendship is helpful in reducing the risk of teasing and bullying.
- Help your child identify the difference between friendly behaviour and unfriendly behaviour/ bullying. A fun way to do this is to watch some TV together and point out examples of friendly behaviour.
- Model the appropriate reaction when someone does friendly teasing to you! ■

ANGELICA ROSE: Founder and principal of Voice and Movement, an organisation dedicated to helping children make and maintain friendships. For the past 11 years, her unique *Drama for Everyday Life* Program has been delivering social skills in a practical and fun way to children and adolescents with Asperger's Syndrome and high functioning autism, with outstanding results. For your invitation to a free information evening and other events: www.voiceandmovement.com.au



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ABCDEFGHIJ

Letter

A by-the-letter parenting guide

Build your parenting know-how one letter at a time.



BIRTH ORDER

In real estate there are only three factors worth considering: position, position and position. Investors know the importance of, well, position.

Buying the worst house or property in the best street is considered a smarter option than buying a terrific property in a less than desirable location.

Location is also important with kids. Their position in their family affects their behaviour, personality and learning. There are three birth order positions, each with their own set of attributes. These are first-borns, second-borns (who are frequently middle born) and youngest children. Traditionally only-children have shared first-born characteristics, but with the rapid increase in the number of only-children they now have a category of their own.

There is significant evidence to suggest that family position influences career paths and even our choice of lifetime partner. Anecdotal evidence suggests that positions of responsibility and power in both community settings and within the workplace are more often held by first-borns than second-borns or those in other birth positions.

When choosing a partner for life, birth order may be a more accurate indicator of compatibility than a horoscope. I suspect there is a large number of first-born women – with experience caring for younger siblings as children – who have married a youngest-born who is just looking for a mothering type. A little research among the people around you will reveal that such notions are not as far-fetched as they might sound.

Want to know more about how your child's birth order personality? You'll get a detailed description as well as essential parenting tips for each position in my book *Why First Borns Rule the World and Last Borns Want to Change it*.

BOUNDARIES

Kids need boundaries. They make them feel secure and allow for healthy development. Boundaries and limits are the simple ground rules within families that teach children how to behave and how to be safe and social.

Parents these days can be unsure about setting reasonable limits and boundaries for kids. But they are an essential part of discipline, laying the foundation for positive, cooperative behaviours.

Boys, in particular, learn through the use of limits and boundaries. Put them in a group situation and they like to know what the rules are and who's in charge. They then feel safe and secure.

Both genders love to push against boundaries. Pushing against parental boundaries is their job! It's been estimated that children will push against parental boundaries – with tantrums, whining and arguing, etc. – about one-third of the time.

What this means for you as a parent is that when you impose limits and boundaries you will need backbone and a thick skin, particularly with some toddlers, teens and argumentative types.

The upside is that when boundaries are used well they are super-effective. Recently, I saw a neighbour use limits to teach his four-year-old son about safe riding. The child was allowed to ride his bike on the footpath for two houses on either side of his own house. The boundaries this father set worked well because they were clear, specific and realistic.

Let's take a look at each of these criteria.

- Clear: the four-year-old had the two-house limit explained to him in language he could understand.
- Specific: two houses is two houses.
- Realistic: the limit was within the four-year-old's skill and experience range. It makes sense.

by letter:



The boundaries set in this case weren't fuzzy (which can happen if a parent doesn't take the time to explain and make sure their child understands), general ("Don't go too far!") or unrealistic ("You can't ride outside at all").

I've seen this four-year-old ride a little further than two house blocks – as I said, kids like to push boundaries – but he knows he shouldn't be and he only goes a little bit over. It may be time for his dad to push the limits out a little further, maybe to the end of the street.

This type of limit setting can be applied to any situation and any age group, including teenagers going out at night. "You can go out but I expect you home by eleven o'clock" is the attitude here.

All that's changing here is the nature of the limit, as this will always depend on a kid's age and the situation involved.

Teens, like toddlers, have a tendency to push against the boundaries. A smart management technique with teenagers is to involve them in the limit-setting process. I'm not suggesting that everything should be negotiated, but in my experience kids are more likely to stick to boundaries when they have had a say. There are no guarantees though.

One smart way to extend the limits is by rewarding responsible behaviour with greater freedom. The four-year-old may have his riding range extended when he shows he can ride safely in the restricted area.

Teens can also have their boundaries extended as a type of reward for responsible, cooperative behaviour.

Setting boundaries may sound like an old-fashioned idea but rules and boundaries are essential for consistency, and this is the bedrock upon which modern discipline is built.

BOYS

Boys can be hard work for many parents. Sometimes mothers I meet in parenting seminars tell me they are flummoxed by the in-your-face, direct nature of their sons. Loveable yes, but they can be challenging as well. It makes a big difference when you understand what makes them tick.

HERE ARE SOME THOUGHTS:

BOYS ARE WIRED FOR ACTIVITY

It seems boys' brains were designed by a different architect than girls'. While girls develop verbal, social and fine-motor skills quite naturally, boys are wired to be more active, boisterous, competitive and territorial, which is one of the reasons why parents of boys are usually kept busy in the early years.

BOYS ARE SLOWER MATURERS

The maturity gap between boys and girls is anywhere between 12 months and two years, and seems to be consistent all the way to adulthood. Parents should take this into account when deciding the school starting age of their sons. Girls are often well placed to succeed, while many boys get lost once they leave school.

BOYS WANT APPROVAL

Most boys ache for approval from their parents, their father in particular. At the same time, while wanting the best for their boys, some dads can be too hard on their sons. It's better to foster a strong relationship than drive them too hard.

BOYS WANT TO BLEND IN

Boys are group oriented by nature and tend to be very loyal to their friends. As a rule, they don't like to stand out from the crowd so they respond best to private praise and won't respect you if you embarrass them in front of their friends.

BOYS NEED A DISCIPLINED APPROACH

Boys like to know that a parent will enforce the house rules, so don't be afraid to be firm. This doesn't mean you have to use

the same authoritarian methods as parents in the past may have used. Just be firm, fair and consistent – these are the keys to effective discipline for boys.

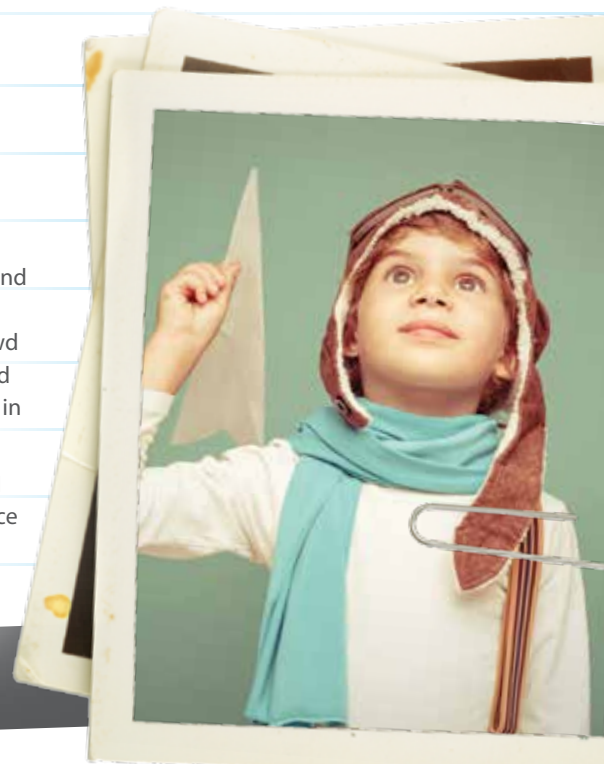
BOYS ARE PRAGMATIC LEARNERS

Boys generally need a reason to learn so it pays to link their learning to their interests. If they love skateboarding, chances are they want to know more about it. Use this as a lever to motivate them, especially if reading is a problem.

BOYS ARE SINGLE MINDED

Boys have a specialist brain, which tends to be logical and rational. They don't have the same connections between the right and left sides of the brain that girls have. That's why parents often have to coach boys of all ages in the finer points of communicating. And remember that this brain architecture can be an advantage as it can help boys focus hard on tasks, make quick decisions and get to the point when needed.

There is no doubt that raising boys can be a challenge for many parents. Those who do best understand and appreciate how their boys think, feel and behave and adjust their parenting accordingly. And they feel comfortable in their company as well.



more over the page... >>>>>>

ABCDEFGHIJKL

more ...

Letter by letter:



BULLYING

Bullying is an insidious behaviour that transgresses children's natural right to feel safe and secure. It can adversely affect their learning, emotional wellbeing, further peer relations and their sense of self.

Bullying takes many forms and guises including physical and emotional abuse, intimidation, harassment and exclusion.

It now has a well-publicised cyber dimension which has moved the goalposts for many kids. In the past, simply being at home was enough for a child to escape bullying behaviours they may have experienced elsewhere. Cyberbullying now means that kids can't escape the bully like they once could.

Bullying is not the domain of one gender. Girls bully just as much as boys but they do it in less physical ways. While boys use physical intimidation or verbal abuse to wield power, girls are more likely to use exclusion or verbal sarcasm to assert themselves.

Bullying should not be confused with teasing, rejection, random acts of violence or physicality and conflict. While children will often tease or fight, this bickering should not be confused with bullying.

Bullying is about lack of power as the bullied person is powerless to stop the teasing or physical abuse. Bullying is the selective, uninvited, repetitive oppression of one person by another person or group. It should not be tolerated or practised by the adults who inhabit their world.

If you think your child is being bullied then handle with care as children often don't want to admit that they are on the receiving end of bullying. Some kids keep their cards close to their chest so it helps to be on lookout for warning signs such as items being stolen or the child changing their route to school or withdrawing from their usual activities.

IF YOU THINK YOUR CHILD IS BEING BULLIED:

- listen to their story and get the facts
- help them manage their feelings and give them support and coping skills
- get the school or organisation involved as bullying needs an intervention
- help build your child's networks and identify loyal friends
- build their self-confidence and reassure them that they will get through this period. ■

Next: C – confidence, character and consequences ...

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Do you have childhood traditions (things YOU loved to do as a child) that you are sharing with your kids? What kinds of things, if so?

What jobs do your kids help with around the house?

And do you give pocket money for chores?

Here's some really useful advice on handling troubles at school. Tip number five is a really important one.

I'VE LEARNED THAT PEOPLE WILL FORGET WHAT YOU SAID. PEOPLE WILL FORGET WHAT YOU DID. BUT PEOPLE WILL NEVER FORGET HOW YOU MADE THEM FEEL. - MAYA ANGELOU

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Lakshmi Singh



Maggie Dent



Bill Jenings



Angelica Rose



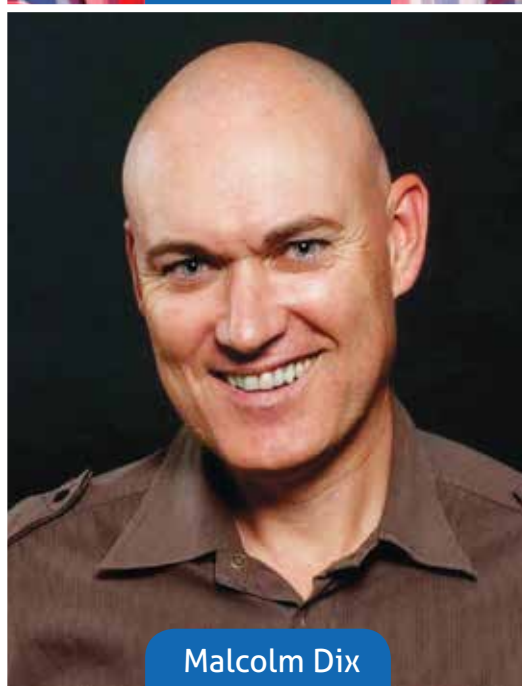
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