

Parenting *ideas* MAGAZINE

Becoming better parents

DRUGS
kids are
actually using

When does fun
flip into addiction

Making
memories
that matter

20 by 10
Jobs to work
your way out of

*Why music and kids
go hand in hand*



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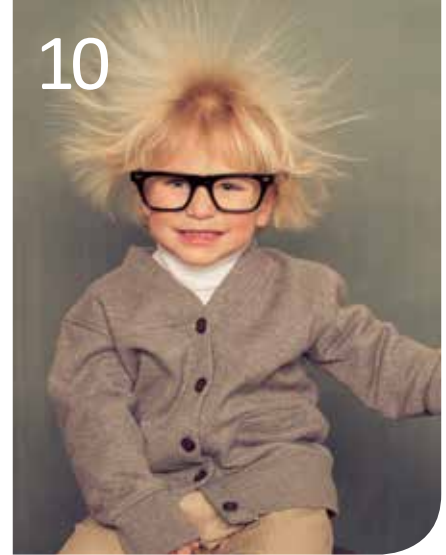
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Michael and Sue

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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20

Build confidence and
resilience by developing
your child's independence

jobs to work your way out of by the time your child turns

10

Most parents I speak with want their children to become independent. It's a no-brainer really. They want their children to be able to make their own choices, to think for themselves and to embrace responsibility.

Yet, as revealed recently on the excellent ABC television program *Life at 9*, most nine-year-olds don't feel ready to embrace independence. (The *Life* series has followed the development of a group of Australian children over two-year periods since they were one.)

Paradoxically, one of the main reasons for this is that parents often limit the development of their children's independence. For instance, in an experiment on the program children and their mothers built something together. It was demonstrated just how unconsciously parents tend to make decisions on their children's behalf: in every mother-child pairing it was the parent who took the lead and made the decisions about what they should build.

Later, after the children were given the chance to build their own construction, they universally preferred the one they had built independently over the one created with their mother. Self-esteem is built when children do things on their own, not when they are done for them.

On the responsibility front, less than 50 per cent of the nine-year-olds in the series do regular chores. However 90 per cent of children who grow up in large families do things such as get themselves ready for school and help around the house.

Disturbingly, most of the nine-year-olds in the study think the world is a dangerous place. Fear of strangers, increased traffic and the sheer size of suburban neighbourhoods mean today's nine-year-olds spend more time in the car than walking around their local area. Three in

four children are driven to school, where just a generation ago that number was more like one in three.

Keeping kids safe and free from responsibility prevents them from learning, and stops them from thinking for themselves. The more children move away from parent protection the more they move toward dealing with adversity and importantly, autonomy.

Developmentally, nine is the age when children should be getting out of their comfort zones. It's an age when kids need the freedom to flourish while also needing nurturing and monitoring from their parents in order to provide the safety necessary for healthy autonomy.

Generally the nurturing and monitoring is already in place. What is needed is an increase in what kids are expected to do for themselves. After all, life will eventually place these expectations on them anyway.

With this spirit of building autonomy in mind, **here are twenty tasks that children could and should do for themselves by the age of ten.**

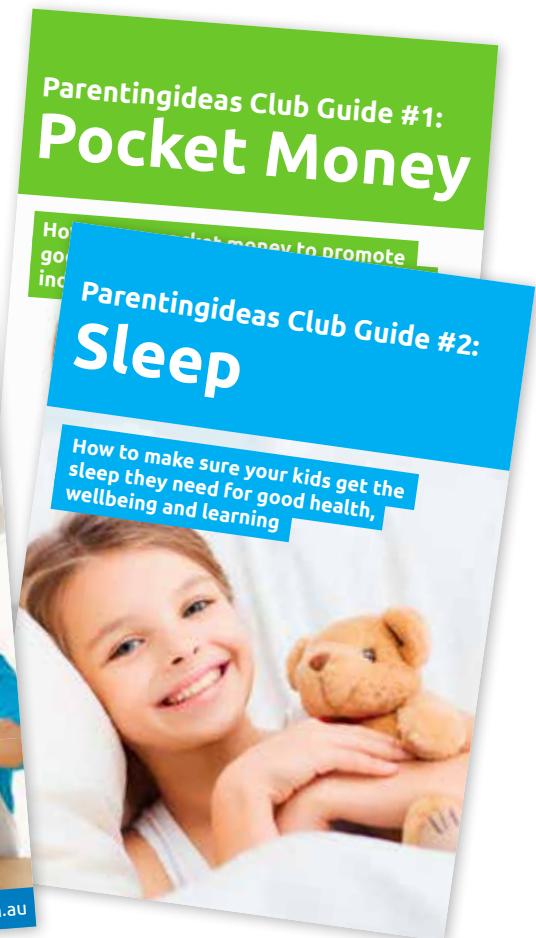
- 1 Get themselves up in the morning using an alarm.
- 2 Pack their own school bag each morning.
- 3 Make telephone calls about simple requests such as asking if a store has an item in stock.
- 4 Look after the rubbish including putting bins outside.
- 5 Prepare healthy snacks before, during and after school.
- 6 Make their own breakfast.
- 7 Cook one evening meal a week.
- 8 Walk to the shops on their own.
- 9 Tidy their own bedroom and make their bed.
- 10 Clean their part of the house including tidying, sweeping and vacuuming.
- 11 Keep clothes and shoes clean including using a washing machine and an iron. At the very least put their dirty clothes in the laundry basket.
- 12 Care for personal items such as toys, technology, sports and leisure equipment.
- 13 Take messages to school including delivering excursion notes and other important messages to the front office.
- 14 Take responsibility for personal hygiene such as teeth cleaning, bathing and keeping their face and hands clean.
- 15 Feed and look after pets on a regular basis.
- 16 Pack and unpack the family dishwasher or alternatively wash and dry the dishes by hand.
- 17 Prepare the weekly family chores roster.
- 18 Choose clothing each day within suitable limits.
- 19 Make their own in-store purchases and shop for some personal items.
- 20 Manage their own simple expenditure such as lunch money, entertainment expenses and some personal items.

Keep this list handy so you can refer to it often. If ten is a fair way off for your children, then I suggest you work your way toward it by creating junior versions of each of the tasks above.

Your aim as a parent is to make yourself redundant at the earliest possible age. The best place to start this process is at home. Learning to do things for themselves gives kids tremendous satisfaction but, importantly, it also prepares them for the real autonomy that they will need to seriously thrive when you're not around. ■

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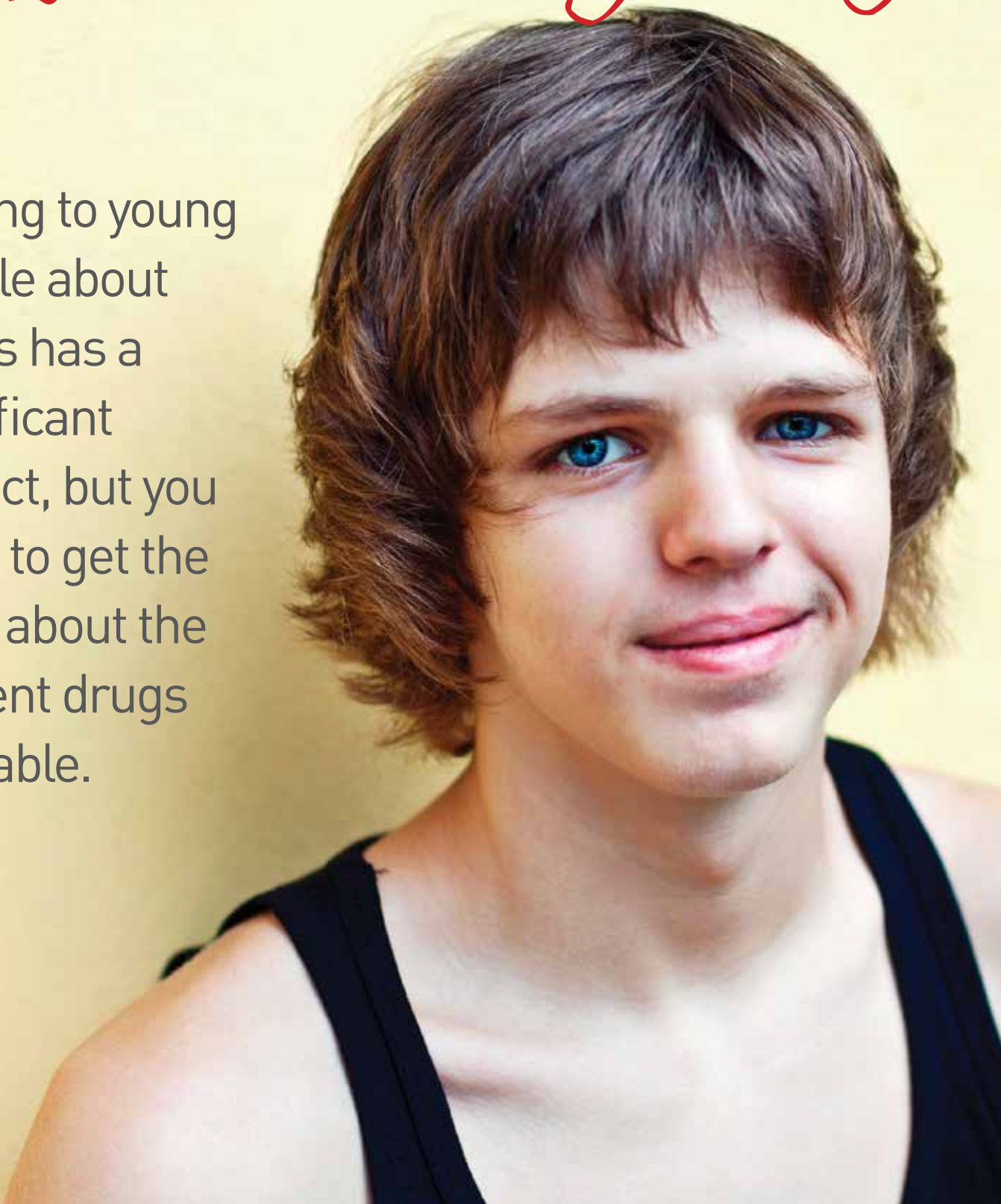


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The DRUGS

kids are actually using

Talking to young people about drugs has a significant impact, but you need to get the facts about the current drugs available.



The DRUGS *kids are actually using*

WHAT YEAR OLDS 12-17 ARE REALLY USING

 **australian
drug FOUNDATION**

* National Drug Strategy
Household Survey Report

**2011 Australian School
Students Alcohol and Drug
(ASSAD) Survey

*** 2009 Australian
Guidelines to Reduce Health
Risks from Drinking Alcohol.

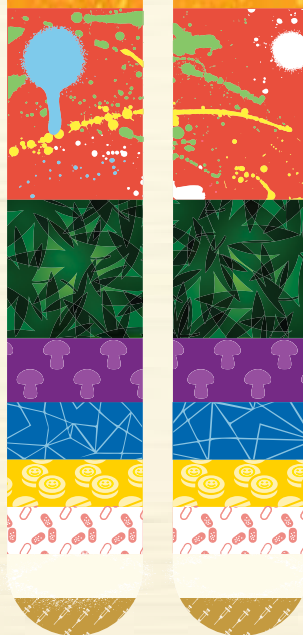


HAVE TRIED **17%**
INHALANTS **

HAVE TRIED **3%**
HALLUCINOGENS **

HAVE TRIED **2.7%**
ECSTASY **

HAVE TRIED **1.7%**
COCAINE **



SHORT TERM

Alcohol contributes to the 3 major causes of teen death: injury, homicide & suicide.

Young people are more likely to drink to excess and take risks than adults. ***

40%

HAVE HAD A
FULL SERVE OF
ALCOHOL*

LONG TERM

Alcohol (and other drugs) can damage the developing brain.

This affects memory, learning & problem solving. And can cause mental health problems. ***

— **14.8%** HAVE TRIED
** **CANNABIS**

— **2.9%** HAVE TRIED
** **AMPHETAMINES**

— **2%** HAVE TRIED **STEROIDS**
WITHOUT A DOCTOR'S
PRESCRIPTION

— **1.6%** HAVE TRIED
** **HEROIN**

The sex talk is one of the most confronting conversations parents have with their children but there is another topic of conversation that is of equal importance and it often gets overlooked. Drug use is something that parents need to talk about with their children.

Australian website, *The Other Talk* focuses on helping families speak openly about drugs with their children.

But to be able to start the conversation early parents need to know what drugs kids are being introduced to today.

Geoff Munro from the Australian Drug Foundation says parents should focus on the drugs that pose the biggest risk to young people and they are not necessarily the ones that first come to mind.

Munro said: "I think it's really important that parents understand that the drugs kids are faced with today are the traditional ones, alcohol and tobacco and pharmaceutical drugs to a certain degree."

"Cannabis is also certainly available in the community so alcohol tobacco and cannabis are the ones we really think parents should focus on," said the National Policy Manager.

In particular, parents should direct their attention to alcohol and its effects as it is the most accessible.

However, parents need to know the facts and consequences of drug and alcohol use before they can educate their children against it. Here is what you need to know before you have the conversation.

ALCOHOL

In 2011 the Australian secondary school students' surveys revealed around "three out of four Australian secondary students ages between 12 and 17 had tried alcohol.

According to the Drug Info website drinking:

- Increases risk of injury and self-harm - poor decision making, violence, using illicit drugs.

- Effects mental health - young people who drink to cope with problems are more likely to suffer from depression.
- Effects brain development - memory, ability to learn, problem solving skills can all be affected.
- Contributes to the three leading causes of death amongst adolescents - unintentional injuries, homicide and suicide.

TOBACCO

Munro says, "Tobacco is still a substance that young people are often tempted to try but only about 17 – 18 per cent of young people smoke tobacco."

Tobacco is a stimulant drug which speeds up the messages travelling between the brain and the body.

While there are more than 4000 chemicals in tobacco smoke, the three main ones are:

- Nicotine – is what smokers become dependent on.
- Tar – is released when a cigarette burns and coats the lungs and can cause lung and throat cancer.
- Carbon Monoxide – a toxic gas that reduces the amount of oxygen available to the muscles, brain and blood.

There is no safe level of tobacco use. Long-term effects include a higher risk of heart disease, hardening of the arteries and other circulatory problems.

CANNABIS

A spokesperson for the Drug and Alcohol Coordination Unit with the Police Department has said, "Generally speaking it's [cannabis] the one that's most available and most accessible."

Cannabis is a depressant drug, which means unlike cigarettes its use slows down the messages travelling between your brain and body.

Long-term effects may eventually cause memory loss, learning difficulties, mood swings, decreased sex drive and regular colds.

Those with a family history of mental illness are more likely to also

experience anxiety, depression and psychotic symptoms after using cannabis.

But other than alcohol, tobacco, and cannabis, what other drugs should parents be aware of when starting the conversation with school-aged children?

INHALANTS

Inhalants are something that some kids experiment with but it is usually a passing faze. People who inhale products like paint, cleaning fluid and glue to get high may experience an initial rush, confusion, disorientation or drowsiness, but the comedown can last several days.

Side effects from inhalants include: headaches, nausea and dizziness and can also cause permanent damage. Chemicals from the products can build up in your system, irritate the stomach and worst case, cause organ damage.

SYNTHETICS OR NEW PSYCHOACTIVE SUBSTANCES (NPS)

In the past, kids were experimenting with synthetic drugs but that may have been because they were legal.

Also referred to as herbal highs, party pills or bath salts, synthetics come in the form of powders, pills and dried herbs that have been soaked in chemicals and designed to mimic the illicit drugs; banned drugs are replaced with new ones.

Even though these drugs might be legal, this does not mean they are safe. The ever-changing ingredients mean it is difficult to know the effects.

For more information on synthetic drugs visit the Drug Info website.

When it comes to keeping your children away from drugs and alcohol, Geoff Munro says most parents don't realise how influential they are.

"The research shows that if parents make it clear to their children that they don't want them drinking or smoking, their children are less likely to do that."

This article first appeared in Essential Kids on 16th June 2014 and is reproduced with permission. ■

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WHEN DOES
Fun Flip
INTO ADDICTION?

Gaming has come a long way since Space Invaders. Unfortunately with that growth has come an addiction to gaming in some young people. Catherine Gerhardt describes how to spot the signs and what to do about it.

Gaming addiction is a relatively new phenomenon. When I was growing up, video game addiction didn't really exist. Kids played video games when they went to the arcade, and were limited to their pocket money. Then came the invention of home video game systems, and today millions of homes around the globe are equipped with both game consoles and personal computers. Remember Pac-Man and Tetris? My how gaming has changed.

WHEN DOES FUN FLIP INTO ADDICTION?

Gaming gets into our deepest motivational drivers. As human beings we have a great need to be social. Games allow us to connect with others and give us the feeling of control over our own social environment. This can be a key motivator for youth who feel like they have very little control over their daily lives; teachers, parents and others always seem to be controlling them.

We are all driven towards pleasure, and the pleasure component in gaming is about intermittent rewards. The rewards are random, they are not predictable and they keep us waiting and therefore playing. Intermittent rewards are the same foundation that gambling is based on, and researchers are currently looking deeper into a potential correlation between gaming and gambling.

In massive multiplayer games there is often punishment for logging off. Fear and pain are, again, major motivational drivers. Some games, like World of Warcraft, penalise players through loss of progress if they are turned off before a goal or the next level is reached. Now it is the game controlling the player and not the other way around. Once players become involved in a guild then there is the added responsibility to that online community, and when they log off they may be letting other players down.

SIGNS THAT YOUR CHILD MAY BE DEVELOPING A GAMING ADDICTION INCLUDE:

- experiencing withdrawal symptoms – physical and mood related changes such as bad temper, poor focus, or feeling empty, frustrated or angry
- exhibiting defensive behaviour when questioned about use
- making social and recreational sacrifices such as cutting off real life friends and only having online friends
- secrecy and solitude – playing alone and even in secret, sneaking it in when they can
- lying about use – they tell you they spent one hour playing when really it was two.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR PARENTS?

Have you had yelling matches with your child over the amount of time they spend gaming? Have you threatened to take their access away? If you think there might be a problem, then there probably already is.

Many parents feel alone in regards to their child's problematic internet use, but be assured you are not alone. Parenting experts and parents are beginning to find ways to help with this serious behaviour problem.

You can start to help your child by implementing some simple steps:

Set time limits – Only allow a certain number of minutes (not hours) per day. Consider requiring that your child earns game time through responsibilities. Once you set the limits, you must enforce them.

Limit content – Ratings are there for a reason. Exposure to elements such as violence and gambling are a risk if you allow your child access to age inappropriate or adult content. Read reviews or test the game yourself before you give it to your child. Although they may say "everyone else is playing it", we know that is not the case.

Keep gaming out of the bedroom – This follows the basic rule of no media in the bedroom. Monitoring content and usage becomes very difficult behind a closed door. We want kids where they can interact with other people to help limit the solitude and secrecy that can occur. Interaction with other family members, even whilst gaming, is a protective factor.

Gaming is a privilege, not a right – Other activities such as homework and chores must be done first. Having dinner with the family, doing some exercise or doing music practice takes priority over games. Families have found it useful to use behavioural charts to clarify what needs to be done before gaming is permitted, and how much gaming is allowed. Gaming is about balance, and there is room for some negotiation. They want to earn more gaming? Perhaps consider an extra 15 minutes for every extra hour of physical activity they do.

Video games are not a babysitter – Too many parents are relying on technology to keep their children quiet and occupied. Children and youth must learn to socialise and find the 'grit' required to get through social situations. There are other things kids can do to keep themselves busy besides relying on technology.

Search for a therapist – If your child's gaming has already become too far out of control, then you may want to search for a professional therapist or a treatment program that specialises in adolescent addictions. Recovery from video game addiction is possible.

There isn't anything wrong with gaming itself – it's a great way to have fun, to connect with others and to learn. However, when gaming becomes the priority over other areas of life, then an addiction may be brewing. According to www.video-game-addiction.org, "kids who are easily bored, have poor relationships with family members, feel like outcasts at school, or tend towards sensation seeking are more easily drawn into video game addiction because it fills a void and satisfies needs that aren't met elsewhere".

There is some debate as to whether gaming addiction is a diagnosable disorder, however the behaviour undeniably exists. The combination of intentional programming by designers and the predisposition some teens have to addictive behaviour means this is a real issue that parents, teachers, and friends should be aware of and may need to take action towards. ■

Oh so Serious!

WORDS Malcolm Dix

When Malcolm Dix found himself taking life too quickly and too seriously, he decided to take a dose of his own medicine.

Lately I'm noticing an increasing number of parents talking to their younger children as if they are having conversations with a colleague or adult friend, sharing all sorts of personal, political, and social information. Some of what I hear is great, but other parts I'm not sure kids really need to hear.

(Maybe I shouldn't be listening but some parents talk so loud it's impossible not to hear them!).

Parents tell me that having grown-up conversations with their children, "helps develop their language and conceptual thinking" and "prepares them for the adult world".

Well, maybe. But what's wrong with the good old strategy of sharing simple experiences: having a ball to kick around or some coloured chalk to draw with, sitting together reading Dr Seuss books or doing a puzzle? What's wrong with simply eating watermelon in the backyard while studying the 'frantic' movements of a snail or just lying on the trampoline gazing at clouds and letting forth the occasional bottom burp for good measure!

Let me explain where I'm coming from. One of the things I do professionally is teach adults about the importance of using humour in their lives in order to stay sane and keep things in perspective.

Over time, for all sorts of reasons, many adults stop laughing at life. Not only that, they start taking themselves oh so seriously. They view their careers, ideas, status, looks, intelligence, wealth – and their role as parents – as matters of extreme and utmost importance.



Now don't hear this the wrong way. Obviously there are times that we do need to take the issue of raising kids seriously. It's just that I'm noticing some parents taking it all a little toooooo seriously ... and then that seriousness and intensity is often picked up by their kids.

I'm also hearing from parents everywhere I go that they are too busy, too stressed, and have too much to do and not enough time. Many social observers say parents seeing themselves as 'time poor' is at epidemic levels, a belief that is only compounded by technology that enables us to be connected 24/7. So how we do we effectively manage our relentless and seemingly 'serious' lives?

Well buggered if I know, I'm not Oprah. What I do know, however, is that at one point I personally had to take some time to stop and honestly reflect upon my own life and that of my family. It didn't take long for me to see that I too had become caught up in the 'busyness' of life.

It happens so easily (at least it did for me) and I knew that for the sake of my kids and my family, I had to make a change. I could continue along the hectic 24/7 path of existence or take the slower and more scenic route. I couldn't do both. I went with the latter, but quickly discovered that it requires a day-in day-out conscious level of commitment – a commitment to practise joy, fun, patience, forgiveness, silliness, bad dancing and reflection.

Currently I'm doing seven things to calm my life down and that of my family while trying to create more space for my children to simply enjoy their childhood. (Some of the following I'm sure you already do but it's taken me a while to figure them out).

My strategies to slow down and not be so bloody busy are as follows:

1 EAT TOGETHER AS A FAMILY AT THE TABLE AT LEAST 4 NIGHTS A WEEK

There has been more and more written about the importance of families eating together and the positive effect it has on children and adults alike. I have to say I'm enjoying it.

2 AVOID WATCHING THE NIGHTLY NEWS

I've stopped watching the news and to my surprise the sky never collapsed as I had feared. I'm a much happier man not watching the oh-so-depressing' news.

3 TURN OFF THE TV AND SIT AROUND AN OPEN FIRE

I've constructed a simple fire pit in our

inner-city backyard and every second weekend my partner, the kids and I toast marshmallows, listen to funny songs, talk and look up at the stars. Who needs to go camping to enjoy the outdoors! My eldest boy (13 years old) is also learning to set a fire and his younger brothers are learning a lot about flames, hot coals and what happens to marshmallows when they are left in the fire for too long. Meanwhile my 16-year-old daughter will stare at the flames for an hour thinking about who knows what ... but for me this is better than seeing her staring at social media or watching mindless television.

4 DANCE TOGETHER

I've made the conscious decision to start dancing in the kitchen with my kids at least three times a week. I can't dance to save myself, however I have three boys and if they are ever going to learn to dance and be comfortable with moving their bodies, I suddenly realized I have to lead the way. This parenting caper sure can be humiliating at times, but we wouldn't have it any other way.

5 EXERCISE TOGETHER

I exercise with my kids at least four times a week, usually at the local park kicking the footy, throwing a frisbee, running with our dog and so on. I have realised that the best way to get them all moving is by moving myself too.

6 EXPLORE NATURE TOGETHER

I've started spending more time in nature with my kids by taking them to the river, the hills, lakes, nature parks. I keep it local, with the occasional longer drive on weekends. I contacted my local council and found so many fun things to do as a family in my local area that I never knew existed ... who would have thunk it!

7 LIMIT YOUR OWN SOCIAL NETWORKING

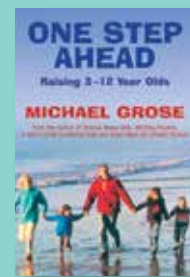
I have severely reduced my time spent on social media such as Facebook, Twitter etc. My personality type could disappear into social media and never come back so I knew I had to significantly change my ways and, once again, it's all about positive role modelling for my kids.

So there you have it, my strategies for simplifying and calming my family life. As a result I'm happier, less stressed and far more 'present' for everyone which, in turn, is having a positive effect on my kids. What do you do in your family to slow things down? I'd love to hear. ■

Is your parenting library up to date?

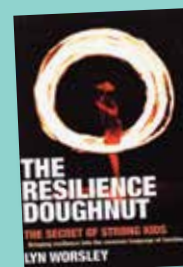
Here's a selection of books that are ideal for parents. New issues are always arising in our fast changing world and, of course, some of the same old parenting issues still need expert advice.

Improve your kids' ability to handle life's downs rather than be weighed down by them. Teach your kids to Shrug! is a highly readable, extremely practical guide to parenting that will improve children's ability to deal with life's challenges.



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WORDS Maggie Dent

Making Memories that matter

The great memories of our childhoods play an important role in our outlook on life. Maggie Dent looks at what we can do to build these memories for our own kids.



MAGGIE DENT

is an author,
educator
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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). www.maggiedent.com

When my sons were at school and we got to the end of one particularly challenging and busy term, I decided to take the four of them to a local café and buy them all hot chocolate sundaes to say, "Well done".

After all, their reports were good, no one had been suspended and there'd been no broken bones or stitches during the term (hallelujah!).

I didn't realise how significant this small act would become. The boys loved it so much they asked if we could do it at the end of each school term.

What was interesting was that rather than getting really tired and crabby in those last weeks at the end of each term, I noticed the boys were counting down the days till the 'end of term treat' with great excitement.

Indeed, when my older son moved away to university, he rang a few weeks before the end of the first school term to ask if we could wait until he came home before we went out for the end-of-school treat.

In creating this accidental family ritual, I gave my boys something special: a memory that mattered.

Building memories that last occurs simply when we repeat significantly positive experiences.

That is why so many families return to the same campsite or holiday spot throughout childhood – it's not just because they can't think of anywhere else to go, but because memories are made from doing the same fun thing year after year.

I'm sure many of us have memories of bike riding around the campsite with a heap of kids that you only ever met at that time each year, swinging off the flying fox into the river, climbing trees, building cubbies, hunting for prawns in the estuary in the dark, playing spotlight or fox holes on the beach with lots of kids (and often quite a few dads), or playing on the swings from dawn till dusk.

Families who like to visit different places on their holidays can still lock in the same strong memories by taking their holiday rituals wherever they go.

My dad had a habit on holidays of waking us up really early so that we could, "get a good day's loafing in!"

Similarly there are so many mini rituals or fun habits that can help create the happy memories you want your child to have from their childhood. Rituals for when we leave, rituals for when we arrive, rituals for family film nights, rituals for play time outside in the garden, and even bath time and bedtime rituals.

These are simple things, aside from the wonderful opportunities for memory

making that come with birthdays, Christmas, Easter, Halloween and any other cultural and religious celebrations that your family enjoys.

Later in life, your children will draw on the positive memories created by these rituals as evidence that they had a fabulous childhood. They will continue to draw on them when they become parents.

In his book *Enriching the Brain* (2006), Eric Jensen writes that memories are anchored much more deeply when there are strong emotions present. That is why powerful, scary memories anchor so deeply in the brain.

Many adults who struggle to remember their childhood sometimes mistakenly think that maybe something awful happened, which the mind has suppressed to protect them.

More likely they have had a bland and quite normal childhood without an abundance of peak moments of suffering or joy.

Technically, in the brain there is a foundation or genetic system for joy but how it develops depends on the interaction of those genes with social experiences.

I know I am not alone in my concern that as our children (especially our young kids) become increasingly engaged in the world of screens – with iPads and tablets, hand-held game consoles, smart phones and computers just about everywhere we go – that these opportunities for visceral experiences of memory making are under threat.

Schools also play an important role in creating memories that matter. Whether it is school assembly items, performances, dress-up days, fetes, sporting events or fun runs.

Different students will remember different things and so offering a wide smorgasbord of positive experiences is incredibly important.

Also important is having exceptional teachers who know how to connect and make learning fun and meaningful. These teachers are gold – we never forget them and how they made us feel. School ceremonies, creeds and school songs are also memory pathways that can stay with us for life. The key is to have more positive memories than the opposite.

My challenge to you is to ponder and consider consciously how to build memories in your kids that are drowned in moments of profound joy and delight, so that your children and grandchildren can remember them when they become boring adults.

Isn't that worth remembering? ■

More Popular Books

Is your parenting library up to date?

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.



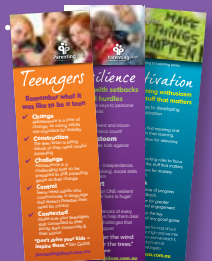
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WORDS Jenny

Why music and kids' brains go hand in hand



DR. JENNY BROCKIS is a brain health specialist. Her focus is on promoting optimal health and function of the brain. She is also an author and speaker, and mum to two young adults. www.drjennybrockis.com



There's more to the saying 'Music makes the world go round' than you might think. Jenny Brockis investigates the wide-ranging benefits promoting a love of music can have on your kids.

In the children's story *The Pied Piper of Hamelin*, the piper uses his flute to entice all the children of the city to follow him. As he does this, he is demonstrating the magical quality that music has always had about it. Music makes us feel good and it enhances the way we think, process information and remember.

We have known about the association between music and child brain development for some time. So it's a great idea to encourage our kids to take an interest in music from an early age, either through creating music by playing an instrument, listening to music, or both.

Whether or not your child shows a natural aptitude for music is less important. What matters more is that they get exposed to music in its various forms.

SOME OF THE REASONS WHY MUSIC AND KIDS GO WELL TOGETHER INCLUDE:

MUSIC MAKES LEARNING EASIER

Little kids usually don't need much encouragement to make music. Banging drums, cymbals, triangles, maracas or saucepan lids is not just a source of delight for the young music makers but it primes their minds to be able to process information more efficiently and make better choices.

Recent studies have shown that musical training, i.e. learning a musical instrument, boosts language skills, working memory and flexible thinking which all help set our kids up to find learning easier and boost academic performance.

MUSIC IMPROVES BEHAVIOUR

Singing and making music have been shown to result in children being more cooperative and helpful towards each other. It also makes them better at problem solving than if they just sat quietly listening to a story. Not that there's anything wrong with that scenario either! But being passive and listening to words, doesn't stimulate the brain in the same way as music does.

It's thought that music helps to promote our social connections. Music is often conducted as a group activity and this can help those kids who feel 'different' because they have emotional difficulties or other learning challenges.

WHY IS MUSIC SO MAGIC?

Scientists are still trying to fully understand why music is such a powerful influence on us.

We know that music can help in the learning of a second language, perhaps because melody provides the brain with associations to help encode the new vocabulary into our memory banks. We also know that music activates many different areas of the brain

including those associated with hearing, movement and emotional regulation.

Overall learning to play a musical instrument is linked to improvements in reading, literacy and general mathematical ability.

IS THERE REALLY A MOZART EFFECT?

Early studies suggested that listening to classical music, especially Mozart, enhanced intelligence. That has since been debunked as a myth. But what is true is that listening to any music, not just classical, can have a positive effect on how well children learn. Just don't expect it to turn your child into a genius.

WHY MUSIC HELPS MEMORY WHEN LEARNING

When we learn new information we predominantly activate the left hemisphere of our brain. Listening to music activates both sides of the brain simultaneously. This makes the learning process easier because we then use whole brain thinking to learn and retain information.

MUSIC HELPS KIDS IN EXERCISE AND COORDINATION

Learning to dance is great cross training for the brain. The music makes the activity even more fun while helping coordination skills. Learning to play piano, clarinet or another instrument that requires finger control helps the development of fine motor skills.

Plus, of course, it's all about keeping kids active which is so important for their overall health and wellbeing. One reason gyms play music while we workout is because it keeps us exercising for longer and persisting through that last tough rep. It's exactly the same for our kids.

Not only that, but exercising outside while listening to upbeat music has been shown to keep brains working faster when working to recognise visual images, letters and numbers. In other words it boosts productivity.

MUSIC HELPS KIDS TO RELAX AND SLEEP BETTER

Listening to quiet or soothing music reduces nervous tension and helps our kids to relax. Because it also helps to reduce the level of stress hormones that can make kids feel anxious, it can also keep them more positive and happy. Plus, happy kids are primed to learn better.

Taking the time to share music with our kids, listening to it on the radio or iTunes together, and going to concerts together are great ways to promote an enduring interest in music. This is something that will stand them in good stead across their lives to enhance academic performance, social skills and happiness. ■

STANDING on their shoulders



The effort and commitment of a great teacher can make a real difference to our lives. Bill Jennings urges us not to forget these contributions.

It happens in schools sometimes. Decisions get made from high up.

Year 7 White, Year 7 Red, Year 7 Blue, Year 7 Gold and Year 7 Green were all meant to get their year level camp in 1979, my first year of high school. Someone decided that for that year it wouldn't happen. The camp had taken place for as long as people in the school could remember, and it would be reinstated in 1980. All the way up to my final year of school, there was a Year 7 camp. Just not in our year.

It has filtered down some 33 years afterwards that my homeroom teacher in that year, Mr. Thompson wasn't happy about the decision. He didn't show his disappointment to his students. I've worked in schools and can tell you that he was utterly professional about the whole thing.

Mr Charles Thompson (we called him Chuck) was a great teacher. If you are of a certain age, you will understand that he could pass as the twin of Gabe Kotter, the star of the hit 1970s TV series about a teacher in Brooklyn, *Welcome Back, Kotter*. He had the afro, the flares. He was in his second year out of teachers' college. Our classroom door was always the first open. There was Chuck at his desk each morning with his cup of coffee, doing corrections. A group of us would just stand around his desk and talk about nothing in particular. He was just great to be around. We could joke with him and when the bell went he would teach using quizzes and stories – Chuck made learning fun.

A few weeks after the camp had been called off, Chuck spoke to the class and said, "If we are going to do this, it's all in or it's not on". And so, student by student, a permission note was signed and returned from home. Camp was on – just for 7 Green. I understand now that Chuck had received permission from the principal to hold a weekend camp for his class ... not in school time and at no cost to the school. Chuck made it happen on his time.

I remember that camp so clearly. Cooking damper in hot coals, walking through the Dandenong ranges and stopping for a swim at the Monbulk pool, sleeping in tents Chuck had somehow got a hold of. As time went

on and I became an adult, I appreciated even more the effort and commitment Chuck had made for us.

'Effort and Commitment' was the theme of a recent presentation I was asked to give at a school I run my Time & Space programs for – Yea High School. They have a special assembly each semester and award the students who have shown, you guessed it, effort and commitment in some aspect of school life. Pennants are given out to the students in the Yea Shire Hall and their parents and grandparents are invited to the celebration.

I told the gathering about Chuck and was delighted to pass on that in the two years I have been working for Yea High School, it has become evident that there are teachers like Chuck in their current staff community.

There's Phil Wischer, the art teacher, who I've got to know. On the day of the presentation, he brought in a painting he had done. It is inspired by Wilson's Promontory – a mountain and seascape. The picture has a rope ladder falling from the sky and in near invisible writing, he has written a verse of Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. I said to the students: "How cool is it that your art teacher is an artist?" Phil is coordinating the school musical production as well. I understand his main motivation is that he wants the kids to experience the feeling of being part of something bigger than them – that's what Phil remembers about the times when he was a student in his school productions.

Then there's Nicole Gillingham. We run the Time & Space sessions in the building she teaches in at Yea High School. Without fail, every time I go in after school to set up, she is there tutoring a student in maths. One-on-one, carefully explaining the problem over and over, in different ways, until the student understands. She is so patient. When I have visited the school during the day, I have seen her at a little makeshift desk outside the staffroom, helping a student during lunchtime.

The 'food tech' teacher Sandy Reddan always arrives before the Time & Space nights with a basket of muffins (always two flavours), scones with

jam and cream and even some Anzac biscuits – all freshly baked. Sandy simply doesn't have to do this but she does. One morning, after I had arrived back in Melbourne late the previous night due to the 90-minute drive from Yea, my wife saw a carton of eggs on our kitchen bench.

"Where did you get those?" she asked.

"Sandy told me her chickens were going crazy and she had stacks of eggs left over, so she gave these to me". Those eggs seemed to have so much more flavour than the ones you get from the supermarket.

Yea High School deceptively contains a humble set of buildings. There are champions of effort and commitment inside those walls, inspiring the kids.

During my presentation, I asked the students and the mums, dads and grandparents to close their eyes and take thirty seconds to consider a person – a teacher – who made a difference in their life.

So here's an invitation to you to do that now. Look away from this story and close your eyes for 30 seconds. Try to picture that teacher whose shoulders you stand on because of their effort and commitment.

Could you picture them? Great, I've got a suggested action for you in just a moment.

With respect to Chuck, I've actually written about him before. I suggested reaching out to that teacher who had an impact on you (if they are still around) and simply saying "Thanks". I wrote Chuck a letter. As it came to pass, I did a session at my old school for the staff late last year. Chuck was in the audience as I told the story of his effort and commitment for 7 Green in 1979. He was beaming. A colleague recently told me he was really chuffed. It took me 33 years to say thank you.

So, you guessed it. If you know your teacher is still around, drop them a line. You might be the person who makes every effort and commitment they made across their career seem completely worthwhile. If the teacher is not around any more, in the next 24 hours tell someone important to you why they teacher inspired you. ■



ABCDEFGHIJ

Letter

A by-the-letter parenting guide

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



CONSEQUENCES

A behavioural consequence is a parent's best friend. When consistently applied, a consequence will improve kids' behaviour and increase personal responsibility.

Too often parents will over-talk or repeat themselves to get cooperation from their kids and avoid the need for them to face any **consequences**. The problem is that too much talk leads most modern kids to tune out.

Other parents protect their kids from the consequences of poor or selfish behaviour. This doesn't do the kids any favours as it robs them of terrific learning opportunities.

Behavioural consequences teach kids to take responsibility for their lives and to make smarter choices. They are a non-punitive discipline measure, enabling kids to keep their dignity and ensuring that learning is maximised.

There are two types of behavioural consequence: logical and natural.

Logical consequences are used more frequently in family situations. They require adult intervention and are used when a child's behaviour disturbs other people. A child who makes a noise in the family room is asked to leave; children who refuse to clean up their toys lose them for a period of time; teenagers who come home late from a party lose the right to go out next time.

Logical consequences often involve the withdrawal of a privilege or a right. For example, a teenager who spends more time than agreed on Facebook may lose access to technology for a day or two.

Restitution, such as making up to someone for unfair treatment or for loss of a possession, is another form of logical consequence. A child

who wilfully breaks his sister's toy may make full or part payment for a replacement. In both these examples the consequences are related to a child's misdemeanours, are **reasonable** and are **respectful** of their dignity.

A **natural consequence** involves no adult interference. For instance, a child who leaves an excursion note at home misses the excursion; a child who spends all his pocket money on the first day has nothing for the weekend; a child who oversleeps and misses the bus has to walk to school. In these examples, children learn from the direct consequences of their own decisions. They are not protected from negative outcomes from their parents. "It's your fault, mum!"

Some kids are experts at manipulating their parents into rescuing them from experiencing the consequences of their poor choice. They'll blame their parents for not getting them out of bed on time, or for not reminding them about their responsibilities. It's best to stand back and let the consequences work their magic!

But do note, you shouldn't use natural consequences when safety is an issue. Act decisively to ensure your child is safe.

CONFIDENCE

Confidence is one area of a child's life that parents have significant influence on, particularly at primary school-age and below. Kids in these years are on a journey to work out what they can do and how they can fit into their various groups. These are the confidence- and esteem-building years.

As a parent, you are in the prime position to mirror back to kids how they should see themselves. You do this through your messages, your expectations and the way you treat your child.

by letter:



Confidence is often confused with extraversion, assertiveness, self-assuredness and cockiness. It's not necessarily so.

You can be quiet, introverted and even full of self-doubt but still feel and act confidently in a given social or learning situation.

Confidence is more about risk-taking and trying new activities. Confident kids are more likely to make the most of their potential as they'll extend themselves both socially and learning-wise. Failure doesn't reflect on them personally. Fears and anxieties, while present, don't stop them from trying new activities.

So how can you develop a real and lasting sense of confidence in your kids?

Confidence-boosting strategies include modelling confident thinking; teaching kids about positive self-talk; encouraging kids' efforts; giving them real responsibility at home; and scaffolding for independence.

CALM

If you want calm, less anxious kids you need to who know how to be calm and relieve your own stresses. Calm is something to practise.

Calmness is **physiological**. Slow your breathing. Drop your shoulders. Settle your muscles. Calmness is also **psychological**. Focus your thinking on what you are doing. Replace panic thoughts with rational thoughts. In an emergency, slow yourself to see what's needed.

To be really effective as a parent you need to practise cognitive control. In other words, you need to think before you act. Having the ability to pause and avoid a habitual or instinctive reaction, replacing it with a more considered response, is very important.

If 'frantic' is your default state then try to replace it with calm, particularly when things go wrong. You and your kids will be

so glad that you did. You'll respond better. You'll feel better. You'll work better too. And you'll parent better.

CHARACTER

Many recent studies (most notably the work of US-based Angela Duckworth) have found that character, not cognitive ability, is the single most reliable determinant of how a person's life will turn out. The traits of character include the inclination to persist at a boring task (grit); the ability to delay gratification (self-control); and the tendency to follow through with a plan (conscientiousness). All these are invaluable traits at school, in the workplace and in life in general.

Character works as an indicator of success when it's seen as set of strengths and personality traits, rather than personal values such as loyalty, tolerance or forgiveness.

Character is forged under difficulty.

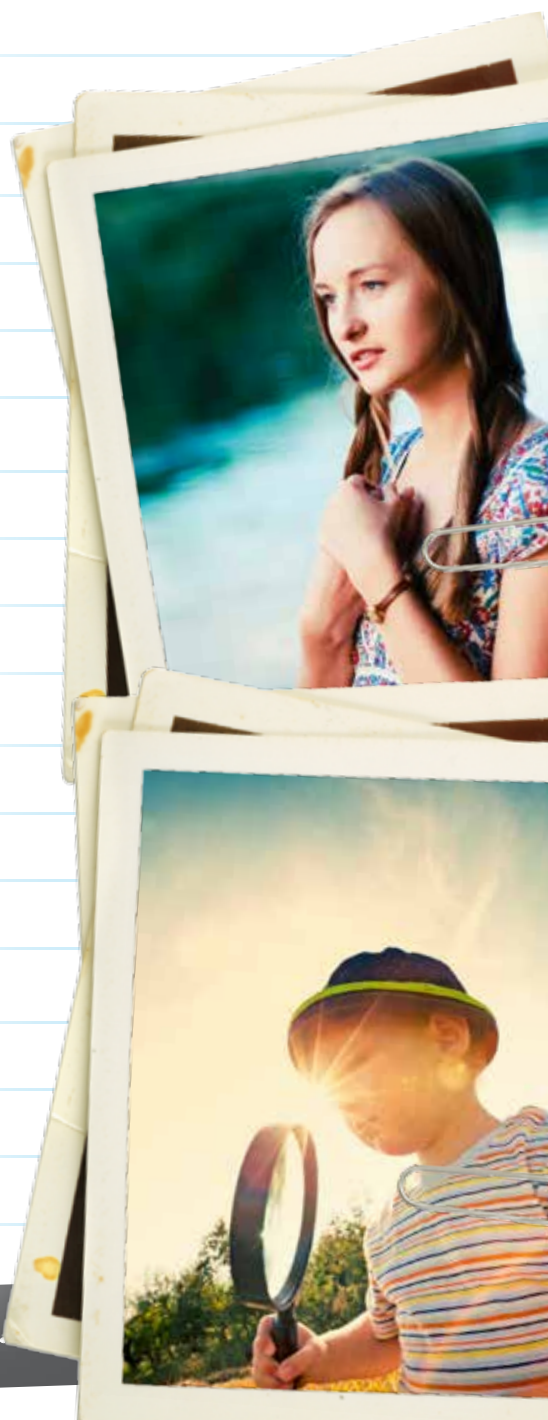
The key character traits of grit, self-control and conscientiousness are forged under hardship and duress. This makes our current propensity to over protect and over indulge kids problematic. When kids continually experience easy success we set them up for failure, because when they finally face up to difficult situations, many lack the capacity to push through the tough times.

Encouraging kids to step out of their comfort zones and take learning and social risks is one of the great challenges for modern parents. It's critical that you challenge your children and young people to attempt activities where failure is a significant option; overcoming setbacks and pushing through difficulties is how character is formed.

Character is malleable. It's not fixed. It's important to establish in your own mind, as a parent, and also in your children's minds,

that character traits such as grit, self-control and conscientiousness can be developed.

To this end, it's important to steer clear of using absolute language when labelling behaviour. Comments such as "You're no good at maths" become a rule that young people learn to live by, and become default thinking that's hard to budge. ■



Next: D – discipline, decisions and dirt.



Beyond their years

WORDS Lakshmi Singh

As TVs, tablets, smart phones and other digital devices become more commonplace, so do the myriad types of content available on them. Lakshmi Singh looks at the important role parents need to play in monitoring and controlling the exposure of early-primary school children to content beyond their years.

The TV left on the latest hit crime drama while you're cooking.

The family iPad unlocked with access to Game of Thrones.

The gaming device on which Dad has been spotted playing Grand Theft Auto.

The drive to school with the radio playing songs full of sexual promise and expletives.

These are just some ways in which young children might interact with content that is beyond their comprehension.

As the saying goes, 'children are not mini-adults' and seven to eight-year-olds in particular do not have the worldly knowledge or mental capacity to set apart events happening a world away from them, nor the maturity to rationally process content beyond their years.

More than just putting parental locks and passwords on devices, experts say it is imperative that parents take a more firsthand approach in guiding their seven to eight-year-olds through the M-rated content maze.

FICTION VS. REALITY

Although most kids between seven and eight years of age know the difference between fiction and reality, the 'type' of reality portrayed in reality TV shows may not be something that they easily grasp, says Lynne Jenkins, author and clinical psychologist.

"If what they are watching is scripted to be more dramatic, then that is how it is for them, unless an adult lets them know otherwise," she says.

The strung-out tensions between contestant teams, fabricated cat-fights and prolonged focus on habits that annoy each other could all come across as normal, unless kids are told otherwise, she says.

"Of course in real life kids will come across bitchiness and things like that, but I don't think shows like these are necessary to teach those lessons," says Nathalie Brown, child behaviourist at Melbourne based consultancy Easy Peasy Kids.

She cites *The Bachelor* as such a show that has settings which are very far from reality.

"It's a reality show but not a real concept. One man and twenty women ... it's not going to happen in real life."

The dramatic statements made on the show can also create false impressions and wrongly influence young minds, she says.

"Do we want little girls thinking that this is the be-all and end-all if you don't have a man in your life?"

CONCEPTS BEYOND THEIR UNDERSTANDING

While children of this age may be exposed at school to some adult concepts like the dangers of smoking, they don't necessarily understand in great detail the information presented in health programs, for example says Jenkins.

"They will need a sensible adult to explain what they are seeing in a way that won't cause them to take on too much information that they aren't really ready for, or don't really need to know about yet. For example, at seven or eight children don't really need to know about drugs leading to death and disease. That can be something to be discussed at least in senior primary."

In a similar vein, rite-of-passage concepts are better passed down from parent to child, says Brown.

"I believe it is okay for children to have knowledge on puberty but that initial talk should be from their parents, not from a movie. It depends on emotional maturity; if it comes up in a movie it may just go right over their heads or scare the living daylights out of them."

The same concept also applies to games and apps, she says.

"Children believe what they see. Parents have to communicate that a movie or game is not real life," she says.

Even if exposure is inadvertent, the impact can be very obvious, she says.

"If a child is constantly playing or watching violence their understanding in handling their own emotions can become aggressive. What a child sees repeatedly is what they learn. It becomes acceptable to be aggressive and they can become desensitised to violence."

CONFLICTING VALUES OF SHOWS/THEMES

Certain themes like revenge may not be ideal to teach your seven to eight-year-old, but they do get portrayed in movies. The important point is that labels need to be given to shows and games that deal with such plots and an explanation given as to what the characters are doing.

"Revenge does occur, this is how the movie plot is dealing with it, it is something the parents have to discuss with their child," says Brown.

Sometimes culture and religious beliefs mean parents limit or screen what their children can watch. Here, an honest explanation as to why parents believe their children shouldn't be viewing or interacting with such programs may be in order, especially if there is a risk that they may go behind your back and source it, says Jenkins.

"If [the reason given] is something like: 'Just because' or 'Because I said so' a child with a certain personality might go looking for it themselves to find out why they can't watch it. If, however, a parent acknowledges that their child would like to watch the show and explains that the reasons have to do with their family values or culture for instance, it might be better received," she says.

MORE HARM THAN GOOD?

The brain of a child who's seven or eight does not have the necessary processes in place to exercise the judgement necessary to make sense of M-rated games, says Brown.



Beyond their years

"Again it depends on the emotional maturity of the child and how much the parents have explained to them. I find that a lot of the parents aren't even aware that the ratings are there for a reason."

At this age, looking for big banks to loot and zombie monsters to kill will not be something a child can do with the strategic mindset or understanding demanded by these games, she says.

However, they might have a more poignant influence psychologically and result in the child having nightmares.

"These graphics at the moment are so realistic, bloody and gory," she laments.

Regular exposure to M-rated content where the language might be peppered with profanities and disrespect may also impact an impressionable seven or eight-year-old's speech, says Jenkins.

"If they are exposed to expletives regularly, whether on a show or in their house, they will absorb them as 'normal'. This 'sponge-like' phenomenon applies more to younger children, but if a seven or eight-year-old has been exposed to such things for most of their life, they will become normal for them. And if they start watching this material at age seven or eight and the adults in their life don't say that they can't watch it, or don't turn it off, or at least don't comment that it is wrong, then the kids won't have the understanding that using expletives is not okay."

Words of wisdom from the experts

- 1 Set boundaries from early on in children's lives. Instill the message that we only watch G or PG material in our family.
- 2 Watch news programs when kids have gone to bed. This is especially important if a child (of any age) is anxious or has a predisposition to anxiety or worry. If they do come across tragic events, reassure them that even though these events are happened in real life, the child, their family and friends are safe.
- 3 Be prepared to keep pace with children as they grow older. Assess whether an M-rated show might be appropriate for a particular child's personality, intelligence and maturity by watching it first. Be available for explanations and fast-forward any questionable parts.
- 4 Always encourage open discussion about content your children interact with, allowing them the confidence to ask questions when confused.
- 5 Don't allow TVs and other devices in kids' bedrooms.
- 6 Use parental locks and passwords but try to invest more in gaining their trust.



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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



Lakshmi Singh



Maggie Dent



Bill Jennings



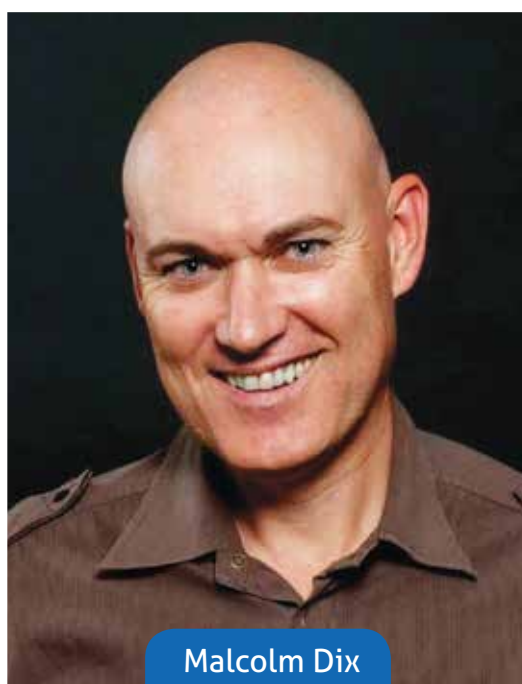
Michael Grose



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Jenny Brockis



Malcolm Dix



Sue McAdam