

Hands up if you are a perfect parent!!!

For those of you with your hands up - how do you know? Please tell?

If only I could do a degree on parenting, then if I pass with honours, I know I'm doing it right. Surely if I get a tick in all the right boxes I must be a good parent. But what are the right boxes?

To me parenting is the most responsible job in the world, yet it's the only one you can't resign from if you feel you can't do it, get bored of it, or find it too stressful. So if it's such a responsible job, how come no-one trains you how to do it properly?

It's all well and good passing parenting skills down from one generation to another, but things change. Culture changes, society's attitudes change, laws change, and what if you don't have a parent? Some people are unlucky and don't even have a parental role model, for others it's even worse, they have abusive parents as role models. So tell me again where do the unlucky ones learn how to be effective parents?

Just as a matter of interest let's test some of our basic parenting knowledge:

1. How often should we bath/shower our children? Who knows the reason for the right answer to that question? Where do we go to find it out?

2. Is cleanliness more important than hugs? What if you live in a country where water is scarce? If you don't bathe your children daily does that mean you are a bad parent?

3. If you hug your child. At what age do you stop, especially if it's a son? If he shirks your hugs, is it because he no longer needs them or is it because he's going through his 'macho' teenage years where he feels he shouldn't need a hug from his Mum? Do you hug him anyway? Is that right or wrong?

4. How do we teach our children right from wrong? Is our opinion of what is right right? Or is their other parents opinion of right more right? Are either parent's opinions of right right? What if you are someone who has grown up with an abusive parent that has taught us that when we make a mistake we get a good beating? When our children make the same mistakes do we beat them? That's what our parents have taught us is the 'right' thing to do. If we have insular lives, that may be all we know. The only conclusion we can come to is that it is 'right' to beat a child when they do something wrong. How are we going to learn any different?

I think the major challenge for me as a parent is to nurture my children's self-esteem. I believe that a healthy self-esteem is the greatest skill we can possess. But what if my self-esteem is less than healthy? How do I know whether I am nurturing my son to develop his own healthy self-esteem or that I'm giving him mine?

I'm lucky, today my self-esteem is healthy, but it used to be non-existent. So what level of self-esteem has my son developed? Who teaches us how to nurture a healthy self-esteem anyway? Never mind developing our children's, developing our own would be pretty useful!

I would love to say that I know I am a good parent because my children are happy and that's what matters. But how do I know they are happy? Would they tell me if they weren't? Are they putting on a brave face? Because that's what I used to do. I was desperately unhappy as a child but the brave face went on all the time. I didn't want people to know how I felt. I didn't want to feel like a misfit.

I think as parents that we can analyse ourselves to death. One of the most important things to me is to know that I do my best by my children. But I wish there was somewhere that I could go, somewhere where people spoke my language, somehow I could get the 'right' knowledge to enable me to be confident that I am a good parent. It's funny at schools that we are taught English, even when we already are English, but we aren't taught something far more

important: how to be totally responsible for another human being.

When I ask myself the question about my parenting skills I find that out of the many answers that come to me from the numerous parenting books I have read, or from daring to ask other parent's opinions. One continually stands out from the others.

If I know who I am and am confident in who I am, I cannot help but be a good role model for my children, not only as a parent, but as a human being.

Does that mean that I have found the answer to my question? Well I think I have. If I know who I am, understand myself, am confident in my beliefs and my behaviour, and my fit within the human race. If I am mentally, physically and spiritually 'well' enough to be open to learning, to teaching, to experiencing. Aren't I a good enough role model? It seems a pretty reasonable answer to me.

So there you are then. It's easy – there's the answer. But how on earth do I achieve that? That's not so easy. However I do know it's possible.

How do I know? Because I've done it.

So end of story then. Not quite. It's just the beginning. Now I have a healthy self-esteem, how do I pass it onto my children? Do I present it to them gift-wrapped? Will my self-esteem be right for them?

I have learn to respect and value myself, to set boundaries, to develop healthy relationships, to nurture and develop myself, to accept myself warts and all, to have the courage to change the bits of my life I wasn't happy with (like walking away from abusive relationships and recovering from an addiction). Is my solution right for my children?

No it's not.

Firstly they are male and I am female. We are different; science and psychology tell me that in no uncertain terms. My boundaries are right for me, but I have had a pretty abusive history and some of my boundaries will have been influenced by that. At least I am aware of that, and that is the gift. My answer (and remember it is only my opinion) is that first I need to have a healthy self-esteem, and then I have to pass on my knowledge to my children, so that they can have enough information available to them for them to develop their own self-esteem. After all we are all unique I am confident in my own self-esteem, my own identity, but I don't want my children to have the same identity as me. Otherwise we all may as well be clones, and the world would be full of same minded, same sexed individuals and would be pretty boring.

So for me, effective parenting is:

Step 1 – Discover who you are.

Step 2 – Know who you are, warts and all.

Step 3 – Change what you are not happy with.

Step 4 – Show your children who are and how you did steps 1, 2, and 3.

Step 5 – Encourage them to take the steps themselves.

Step 6 – By being completely honest, encourage their honesty when demonstrating these steps in turn to their children.

Step 7 – Love your children for who they are.

Step 8 – Most importantly. Love yourself for who you are.

To me a good parent develops their own identity to be an effective role model to their children, so that their children in turn can develop confidence in their own identity.

Simple isn't it !!!

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