

Kids Are Worth It!

Believe nothing merely because you have been told it.... Do not believe what your teacher tells you merely out of respect for the teacher. But whatsoever, after due examination and analysis, you find to be kind, conducive to the good, the benefit, the welfare of all beings -- that doctrine believe and cling to and take it as your guide.

-- Buddhist Aphorism

You have come here to find what you already have.

-- Buddhist Aphorism

There are no quick fixes, easy answers, or recipes for parenting, but I believe most of us have the tools we need to be good parents if only we *could* find them. Our problem is that these tools are often covered over at the bottom of our mental toolboxes. The tools that come first to hand do not serve us well. These tools were given to us, often unintentionally and without malice by our parents, grandparents, siblings, and extended family, as well as by our society. Often, when a hammer would best serve our needs, we reach into the toolbox and come out with a hatchet without realizing it. It is no wonder that some of our parenting carpentry is such a mess.

To get the tools we need, we must first become aware of the inappropriate, ineffective, or destructive tools that we are using. Then we must be willing to let go of the old tools and begin using those that can serve us and our children better.

Some of the ineffective tools you may never have used or even thought of; others you'll swear were at your dinner table last night. Look them over and decide which ones you need to change.

Talk to your kids about them and ask your kids to help you. It's unnerving to be in a crowd at the city park and have my son tell me I'm giving him a minilecture when I am right in the middle of a good one, or to have one of my daughters tell me, rightfully so, that the question I just asked was really dumb. But in both situations the kids were right, and I got the opportunity to stop and start over using more appropriate tools. Are you uncomfortable with the way you handled your teenager last night? Did you "lose it" when your toddler decorated the walls with permanent marker? Are you angry, hurt, or embarrassed? Questioning and exploring are the first steps toward change. It's a two-way street; when you talk to your children about helping you stop using inappropriate tools or doing things that get in the way of their growth, you can also show them that the temper tantrum they are throwing in the grocery store just isn't going to get them the cereal they want.

As you begin to identify the ineffective tools that are a part of your parenting toolbox, you will also realize that you have the opportunity to unpack them and replace them with lighter, more responsible, constructive tools that do not weigh you down.

Before identifying and sorting the tools, it helps to know what kind of mental toolbox we are using to carry them around. The toolbox is defined by the answers to two basic questions:

1. What is my parenting philosophy?
2. What is my goal in parenting -- to influence and empower my children or to control them and make them mind?

What Is My Parenting Philosophy?

Few of us explore our philosophy of parenting *before* we become parents. Then, after we have our children, when we are tired and worn out, we tend to parent the way we were parented. Our mother's words roll off our tongue even though we swore we'd never talk like her. Our hand swings to hit our child just as our father's hand swung to hit us, and yet we swore we'd never hit our children. In a panic we frantically read parenting books and attend every lecture on parenting offered in our community.

Yet a lot of crazy, unproductive, or unhealthy techniques in parenting are advocated by so-called experts. If we haven't looked at our own parenting philosophy, we won't be able to separate the good from the bad; we won't be able to challenge with conviction "the way it has always been done," or to reject such invalid premises as "if it was good enough for me, it's good enough for my children." However, if we know our own philosophy, we can examine various parenting tools including those we are using right now. If a tool doesn't fit, with our philosophy, regardless of who said it or what kind of research is behind it, we can choose not to use it. I have found three tenets to be the most useful in evaluating my own and other people's recommended parenting techniques:

1. **Kids are worth it.** I'm sure you believe this, too, because I know you're not in parenting for the money.
2. **I will not treat a child in a way I myself would not want to be treated.** If I wouldn't want it done to me, I have no business doing it to my child.
3. **If it works and leaves a child's and my own dignity intact, do it. just because it works doesn't make it good; it must work *and* leave the child's and my own dignity intact.**

Kids Are Worth It!

They are worth it *because* they are children and for no other reason. They have dignity and worth simply because they are. They don't need to prove their value as human beings; they don't have to prove their worthiness to us; nor do they need to earn our affection. Our love for them cannot be conditional, although our likes and dislikes can be. We don't have to like their hairdos, the earring in the nose, or their strange -- looking shoes. Our love for them does have to be something they can count on, something they know will always be there, even when they are in trouble and we'd probably rather not be there. Being there when they are resting comfortably in our arms, smiling up at us for the first time, is easy; being there when they are cutting teeth, colicky, and crying through the night is not. Being there when they learn to ride a two-wheeler is easy; being there when they have wrecked the family car is not. Being there when they are performing in the school play is easy; being there when they call from the police station is not.

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