



by Sally and Brian Burgess
Forefront Families LLC

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Nothing prepares us for becoming a parent

It is true. Nothing really prepares us for the road ahead when it comes to parenting. If only kids came with manuals, a warranty and a return policy! Yet, I have never heard a parent say they wanted to trade their child in for a new one. Well, seriously anyway! Even when aliens come and steal their brains between the ages of 13 and 19 years, leaving us with totally unmanageable strangers, we loyally long for the return of the children we once knew. All that time and energy we have put into our kids in their formative years has got to manifest itself positively in the end, right? RIGHT!

We make mistakes!



But for all of that, I know that most parents look back on their parenting efforts with some measure of regret. Perhaps we have been too quick to judge situations, not been fair or consistent, or got out of balance between the negatives and positives. Perhaps we have let work dominate our lives, squeezing out the quality time we wish we had spent with our kids. It might be a marriage breakup, angry words spoken – too

late to retrieve. Maybe we missed the signs when our child needed reassurance or help. There are many reasons why we beat ourselves up as parents, especially when our children point out our shortcomings!

Is there a 'parenting' job description?

Yes! Here it is:

Hours of work: 24 hour service - 7 days a week - for 20 + years.

Qualities: Infinite patience, cheerful disposition and always prompt with excellent service.

Specific skills: Expert at laundry, cleaning, ironing, catering, driving, counseling, nursing, multi-tasking, being a super financial wizard, and granting wishes at a moment's notice.

Financial compensation: Zip, zilch, zero, nada, squat.

Benefits: The amazing opportunity of taking a small life and molding it into a responsible, caring, productive, positive adult member of society who will do the same for his/her own children.

Question: If you had known what the job entailed would you have applied for the position? REALLY?

Bottom line:

1. You are the parent. Therefore, you need to be in charge.
2. You are responsible for your kids' behavior (whether you are with them or not) until they are 18 years old.
3. You are a role model for your kids, one way or the other.
4. You are responsible for providing your kids with the physical, spiritual, emotional, educational and financial stability required so

that they can develop into responsible, caring, law-abiding adults and parents.

What do great families look like?

We believe that successful families are:

- **Parent directed**
- **Family orientated**
- **Outwardly focused**

Parent directed means that you, as parents, are in charge. If you don't take charge, your children will. Your children don't want to be the leader. They want YOU to be in charge. You set the standards, boundaries, values or principles and train your kids to follow them.

Family orientated means that each family member has equal value and you concentrate on promoting one another's good and looking after one another's welfare. You work and play together. Family first!

Outwardly focused means you not only care for one another, but you also have a 'volunteer' spirit. You serve others. Rather than isolating yourselves, you are sensitive to others' needs and share your resources with those around you.



How can I become a great parent?

Think of families you admire, and note the qualities they demonstrate. Go ahead, get some paper and a pen and write down your observations. You might note such attributes as:

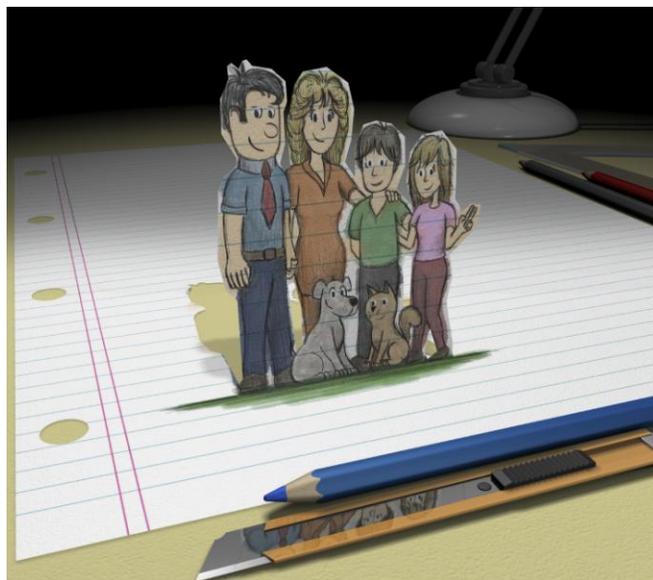
- They are happy together and enjoy each other's company.
- They get along.
- They are successful in their endeavors - work, sports, and school.
- They speak kindly of others – no gossip or putdowns.
- Their kids are always well behaved whether the parents are around or not.
- They are thoughtful and helpful to others. They seem to do things for people without expecting rewards.

Now ask yourself, how did they get that way? If you want the real answers you can even ask them how their family became like that. If pride doesn't get in the way you might even ask them to mentor you.

YOU CAN DO IT

You can begin the following process AT ANY TIME throughout your parenting life. Of course, it is much easier if you have these principles in place from the beginning, but you can still make this plan work when your kids are as old as teenagers. Even if you feel you have made mistakes in your parenting so far, your children will respect you for improving family life no matter how old the kids are. When you include them in the process, your kids feel valued and are usually willing to be part of the change. (See also Appendix A)

1. Create a framework:



Decide together on a set of values, standards or principles you want your family to live by and be known for. Examples of core values are:

- Commitment
- Honesty
- Obedience
- Respectfulness
- Trustworthiness
- Integrity
- Fairness
- Forgiveness

Note: There are also attributes that you may choose for your family e.g. timeliness, excellence, tidiness, but I do not consider these to be 'core' values.

2. Describe what these values will look like in your home

(See Appendix B as a sample)

3. Role model the values you have set

- Practice acting out your core values so that you become a role model for your children.
- Decide on a priority order that you will follow to introduce these values. Concentrate on the ones you feel most strongly about or where the need is currently the greatest e.g. If your child is having an issue with honesty then tackle that one first.

4. Introduce your family values to your children

- Call a family meeting. Make it fun – have a pizza party!
- Explain to your kids that you want to make this a 'great family'.
 - a) Where every member feels respected and valued (their ideas and opinions matter and their contributions are appreciated).

- b) Where they all get on peacefully without fighting and hurtful words.
 - c) Where they learn skills and tasks and share household responsibilities.
 - d) Where they feel safe and secure and are permitted to make mistakes. A place to learn how to deal with failures as well as successes.
 - e) Where they learn to take responsibility for their own actions.
 - f) Where they are loved, appreciated and encouraged for their uniqueness.
- Tell them you have been working on your family legacy. “What?” they may well ask. This means that you are working on what your family is going to be known for and how these qualities can be passed down through the generations.
 - Ask them what they think a ‘cool family’ looks like. Write down all the attributes they come up with. Add your contribution to theirs. Praise everyone for helping to create the list.
 - Obtain their agreement that together as a family you will work on becoming that ‘cool’ family they described above.

5. Explain and train your children to exhibit your values



- Show your children by example.
- Explain that to become a great family, you need rules and guidelines that each person needs to follow. Tell them about your list of values. If one of the items on the list states 'we all care about each other' or 'we don't take each other's stuff without asking' then line that up with the value of 'RESPECT' and tell them what that will look like in your family.
- Explain the benefits of all working together to adopt great family values e.g.
 - a) When we respect one another we don't use hurtful words.
 - b) When we tell the truth people will trust our word.
 - c) When we forgive one another we are not wasting time being angry and grumpy. It is hard to keep friends or have good family harmony when we are angry and negative all the time.

- d) When we do as we are told by those in authority, we don't get into trouble and others think well of us.
- e) When we help other people it makes us feel good because we have made others happy.
 - Let them practice and possibly make mistakes.
 - Praise their efforts at getting it right and create a reward system e.g. that child gets to choose the movie, their favorite dinner, a fun outing. We do not consider money being a reward.

6. Evaluate the progress

- At each 'pizza party' talk about how the introduction of the last value is progressing. Ask the children how they think it is going. Discuss successes and also issues. Finding fault is not productive, so praise the good and tweak the 'not so good'. It may take 2-3 months to change behaviors.
- Reward yourselves for your successes. Make up some great family activity and go do it.
- Once one value is significantly mastered, introduce another one. It is a good idea every now and again to choose one of the lesser priority values because they are often the ones the family already has down. It is always great to feel successful, so plenty of praise for a value already achieved feels like great progress has been made.

Note: It is important to make sure that the values you have previously addressed continue to be observed.

7. Set boundaries



It is very important to set boundaries. It creates a sense of security for children to know exactly what parents expect of them. It also lets children know that their parents care enough about them to want to keep them from harm or emotional hurt. Setting boundaries also helps kids learn how to make wise choices. It is the child who decides whether or not to do the right thing. They already know the results of making a positive or negative move. This process takes the pressure off parents. They are not the big 'ogre' when it comes to discipline. They are merely carrying out the consequence chosen by the child.

8. Create consequences for undesired behaviors

Children need to know exactly what will happen if they cross the boundary line. Write them down and stick them up if necessary. By doing this, you are saving yourself from making impromptu emotional disciplinary decisions in the heat of the moment. This is not fair on the child and you are more likely to over-react and regret it later.

When there is an infraction, take the child to the written consequence and explain to them how they made the wrong choice.

For consequences to work, parents need to:

- AGREE TOGETHER on the consequences for particular behavior issues. Save the strongest consequences for the highest priority values. (See note below)
- BACK ONE ANOTHER UP.
- BE CONSISTENT. Don't go soft on your decisions. You don't want to become the 'weakest link'. There should never be a 'weakest link'! Children feel insecure when parents are inconsistent or disagree on disciplinary measures.



Time out

NOTE: Some consequences work for one child but not for another.

Fit the consequence to the particular child. Your children may think this is unfair, but they need only know that you are applying the appropriate discipline that will change each child's behavior quickly. (See Appendix C)

9. Praise is always more productive than punishment

Even though there is a need to create consequences, it is far better to concentrate on the positives. Children really do want to please you and they are more likely to act well when they feel secure and you are consistent.

10. Create a positive environment

It is very easy for a household to become negative. Parents need to become barometers for how the emotional temperature is in the home. Here are some tips:

- Eat meals at the table with the TV off. This is a time for finding out about the day, about the good things that happened. It is a time for encouragement and NOT a time for negative talk. This is also a perfect time for parents to observe children for changes in mood: sadness, happiness etc.
- Have a clean, ordered home.
- Create a routine where everyone shares chores and there is time for family fun.
- Hold family meetings ('pizza meets') where each child has a turn to share ideas, talk about worries and receive praise from other family members.
- Set goals and achieve them. Reward yourselves.
- Go on family trips, outings etc.
- Ensure all family members are busy. There needs to be a clear balance between physical and sedentary activities.

Our children are with us a very short time. It is our responsibility to equip them with the skills, values, and determination to make their way in life. We need to encourage them to dream, to visualize, and then to realize their potential. For this to happen, a child must have been given a warm, caring, ordered, and disciplined environment.

We all want children we are proud of. Work on the suggestions in this session one by one. Don't let it become a chore. Enjoy your children and love family life.

You can be a great parent
and
you can raise extraordinary kids!



APPENDIX A

WHAT DO OUR KIDS REALLY WANT FROM US?

1. Healthy physical growth and development

- Sufficient food, water, and warmth
Not only do they need food, water and warmth to survive, they need a good quality diet to promote healthy development. Healthy foods are those that are less processed e.g. whole grains, fresh fruits, and vegetables, as well as foods low in sugars and food coloring. Overeating and snacking on junk food should be discouraged. There is an alarming rise in obesity and diabetes in children in western societies.
- Adequate stimulation and activity
Without the stimulation of touch, research has found that a baby or animal can die. In our society it is very easy to miss out on enough stimulation and activity to function at our full potential. With the increasing use of computers and video games many kids are losing the desire to play physical games and enjoy the outdoors. Kids need plenty of physical activity and brain stimulation other than computer games to develop their enquiring minds.

2. To feel physically and emotionally safe

- Physical safety
 - a) The environment is free from hazards where a child could be exposed to electricity, fire, drowning, trauma, chemicals/poisons , smoke inhalation etc.
 - b) Homes are secured by locks and alarms.
 - c) Kids are trained not to open doors to, or to talk to, strangers.
 - d) Pools and yards are fenced securely.
 - e) Children are taught to report inappropriate touch or secrets an adult wants to have with them.
- Emotional protection from:
 - a) Emotional trauma (family disharmony).
 - b) Blackmail (child molesters threatening children if they tell).
 - c) From situations that will emotionally hurt, and create negative memories.

3. To feel secure

To know that:

- a) Someone in the home is providing financial security.
- b) There is structure and routine in the home.
- c) There are clear expectations, values, boundaries, and consequences.

- d) There is consistency and a balance of love, praise, and discipline.
- e) The home is peaceful and harmonious.
- f) Kids have been trained to make sound decisions.
- g) The environment is ordered and uncluttered.

4. To feel a sense of belonging and self-worth

- The child has a sense of identity through their family and given names.
- They are connected by place/position in the family structure.
- They are accepted by family members as an integral part of the family:
 - a) To be given opportunity to express their own opinions and concerns.
 - b) To be trusted with responsibilities such as chores and handling money.
 - c) To be trained and supported to eventually become independent.
- The child develops respect by being:
 - a) Shown love constantly by parents and others.
 - b) Regularly affirmed, praised, and rewarded.
 - c) Trained by parents:
 - to deal with failure.
 - to succeed in tasks.
 - d) Given correction/discipline when necessary.
 - e) Given plenty of time, and receiving one-on-one attention from parents.
 - f) Given parental attention rather than being offered 'stuff'.
 - g) Forgiven and allowed to learn from their mistakes.
- The child needs to be trained to respect themselves:
 - a) By parental role modeling. You need to demonstrate a sense of self-worth and work on building their worth, too.
 - b) On how to care for their health, and their appearance.
 - c) By speaking positively about themselves and others.
- The child should be encouraged to have high expectations with parents:
 - a) Being role models of high achievement.
 - b) Encouraging their kids to dream big.
 - c) Helping their children create and attain goals.
- A child given plenty of opportunity to develop skills and talents.

5. To help bring a child to a point of self-fulfillment

- a) Parents will have adequately trained and encouraged their child to reach their full potential.
- b) Parents need to have guided their child to discover what they were 'born to do or be'. This is helping them find their purpose.

6. Before children leave home parents should have equipped them to:

- Make objective decisions based on sound ethical and moral principles.

- Take responsibility for their actions.
- Acknowledge failure and to learn from those experiences.
- Readily forgive others and not keep the score.
- Avoid being easily offended.
- Not be swayed by popular opinion.
- Applaud others' successes.
- Share their skills, talents, and time with others.
- Set and achieve goals.
- Be at peace with their self and to love life.
- Actively seek others' advice for self-improvement.
- Live by strong personal beliefs, and/or value systems.
- Enjoy the company of others.
- Feel good about their self without having to win.
- Walk out their destiny/purpose.

APPENDIX B

FAMILY VALUES IN ACTION

FAMILY VALUES	DESCRIPTION	FAMILY VALUES IN ACTION
LOYALTY AND COMMITMENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To be committed to a person/s or project to the end. To give a greater value to others and their needs than to your own. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To stand by others unconditionally To believe the best in them To support them when they need it To not speak unkind words about them To complete projects To put others before your own needs at particular times
HONESTY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To be truthful To admit fault To not steal To not cheat 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To tell the truth at all times, no matter what the consequences are To take responsibility for your own actions and not blame others To not take things without asking To not take credit for others' work/ideas To not pilfer or cheat on taxes or tests
RESPECTFULNESS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To show high regard for others To show high regard for yourself 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To be well mannered To speak kindly to others To say positive things about others and not gossip To show regard for authority To accept and value others' differences To accept compliments graciously To not put yourself down
TRUSTWORTHINESS AND RELIABILITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To be known to keep your word 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To keep promises To do a good job To be on time To not waste time
OBEDIENCE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To uphold all rules, laws and requirements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To follow instructions/rules/laws <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - in a timely manner - with a positive attitude Obey all authority figures

FAMILY VALUES	DESCRIPTION	VALUES IN ACTION
FAIRNESS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Just and equal love, care, and treatment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To apportion time to ensure all family members have their needs adequately met • To train a child to abide by all family values so they are able to function responsibly in society To ensure kids know your expectations and the consequences of negative behavior before you issue discipline • To give discipline that is fair and appropriate to the situation
INTEGRITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To have sound moral character • To be true to your word • To not stand for injustice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To stand firm on personal values and beliefs • To do your best • To do the right thing whether others see you or not • To support worthy causes • To not yield to peer pressure • To stick up for those less able * To recognize and act on the needs of others
FORGIVENESS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To pardon others unconditionally • To ask others for forgiveness • To be willing to forgive self 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To readily forgive others • To not hold grudges • To recognize own faults and apologize to others promptly and without reserve • To accept that mistakes and failures do happen • To rectify situations as best you can and move on • To learn to live with the consequences of poor choices
PEACEFULNESS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * To be serene, tranquil, quiet, rested, harmonious 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To speak in a quiet voice inside • To practice not stressing out • To settle disagreements promptly

APPENDIX C

IDEAS FOR REWARDING CHILDREN

Rewards that are free

- A kiss.
- A hug.
- A pat on the back.
- Words of praise e.g. “I’m proud of you”, or, “Well done!” or sending a thank you card that says the same.
- Choosing a fun activity with a friend or a parent e.g. camping in the back yard, or sleeping over with a friend, fishing, kite flying, canoeing, going to the lake, having a picnic.
- Being let off chores for a day.
- Being ‘King’ or ‘Queen’ for an evening meal. The child gets to choose their favorite meal. They sit at the head of the table, have their own decorative plates, and wear a special crown (optional).
- Being able to choose a home movie.
- Baking a cake or making candy.
- Inviting friends around for a popcorn party.

Note: A rewards board is a really good idea to encourage particular behaviors. After so many stars the child is rewarded with some treat/reward. Kids will work for this.

Other reward ideas

- Going to the movies.
- Going out to eat.
- Buying the child a special keepsake.
- Going on an outing to the zoo, a concert or outdoor pools.

Note: We do not consider it productive to pay children as a reward, especially for everyday chores around the house. They need to learn that they have a family responsibility to share in the work around the home.

APPENDIX D

DISCIPLINARY METHODS

- ❖ **Time out::**
Suggestion is 1 minute for each year of life. If the behavior continues, time out for a longer period or until the child is willing to come back, apologize and refrain from that behavior again.

- ❖ **Removal of privileges:**
Not allow the child to watch TV, use computer for pleasure, use the car, or anything else they value or love doing.

- ❖ **Grounding:**
Not allow the child to go out socially or have friends around for a given time.

- ❖ **Unscheduled chores:**
While kids need to do their share of jobs as part of the contribution to family living, a discipline might be that they have to perform unscheduled jobs, like tidying out cupboards/wardrobes/drawers, the garage or picking up rubbish along the roadside.

- ❖ **Physical exercise:**
Run around the house or a field. Push-ups. Star jumps. Raking leaves. Weeding the garden. Washing the car.

- ❖ **A written/verbal apology**
The apology should include what they did, how it hurt the other person, that they are sorry and that they will not do 'it' again.

- ❖ **Fixing the wrong**
Buying a 'new one' with their allowance. Repairing damage. Restoring a relationship that was hurt. Showing by their actions and attitude that they have learned from their mistakes.