

A Guide for Being the "Ultimate" Parent

We all know what a bad parent looks like: intolerant, constantly critical, more interested in their own affairs (in both senses of the word) than in the needs of their children. But what does it take to be a good parent? What does it take to give your children the very best start to life that you possibly can?

John Bowlby intensely studied the effects parents had on their children. This was in the 1960's, and at that time he came up with the term "good-enough parenting". He believed that if you did the best you could and stayed away from "bad" parenting habits your kids would turn out fine. After all they are pretty resilient. So is that it? Or do you want to try for more and become a "super parent", or how about being the "ultimate" parent? Do you believe this is possible or is it just something left over from the feminist movement?

First of all you need to get this through your head: Nobody is perfect. You can do everything humanly possible to be a "perfect" parent but it just isn't going to happen. Try to imagine not making one mistake, ever, while you are raising your children. You won't be able to do it and you wouldn't really need to. Look at Bowlby's idea of a "good enough parent" from that aspect, and you'll see that his concept is true. Making mistakes is normal and your kids WILL survive.

Most of you probably want more than just average for your kids. I feel certain that there are attitudes you can change that will allow you to give your children the very best of lives. You will benefit as well, since your life will be simpler, yet more fulfilling. Following is a list of things that will help you become the "ultimate" parent:

1) Remember that you are a fallible human being. You are not Superman or Wonder Woman, able to be all things to all people. Besides making mistakes along the way, you will have your own dysfunction from your past to deal with. It's attitude, not perfection that matters here.

What is the right attitude? Being humble. Recognising that you have much to learn (we all do) and being willing to be teachable and to learn from your mistakes. A sign of genuine maturity is being able to look back at your past, recognize the mistakes you made, and say "this is what I have learned about myself, and what I need to work on changing in myself".

Going overboard the other way and continually berating yourself is as bad as thinking you already know it all. Forgive your mistakes and celebrate your triumphs. Learn lessons from your past but don't dwell on it. Go forward with your life in the way that you want. If you need help ask for it or if you feel able, just "get over it".

2) Be aware that you're playing a game of percentages. We hear about the kids who were abused and deprived becoming wildly successful in life. Then there are those from the best families who fall into the traps of drugs and crime, while their siblings turn out great.

Unfortunately, the truth is that parents are just one factor in a child's upbringing. Children are also under the influence of peers, other relatives, teachers, media figures, and anyone else they encounter on a daily basis, not to mention their own genetic predisposition. There's nothing you can do to control all of the influences. Even if you are the best, ultimate parent, your kids may still have problems. And you could be the worst parent and have the most successful children. Nothing in life is a sure thing.

So you play the percentages. You know that if you beat your kids, they are more likely to turn out bad than good. So, on average, beating your kids is probably not a good idea. Using fair and consistent discipline probably produces better odds for a successful outcome - so do that instead.

By the way, successful parenting isn't determined by how excellent your children end up being. Success for you and them means that you did the very best that you could with what you knew at the time. Some of those decisions were probably wrong when you look back, but that happens. If you didn't try, and took the easy way every time without trying to determine how your decision would affect the children, then I do believe that you failed. That holds true even if your lazy decision ended up being right.

3) Recognize your children are not the only things in your life. In this day and age we seem to be obsessed with the idea that the interests of the children come first, before anything else. I strongly disagree with that concept. Yes, we must consider the best interests of the child, but there are other things to consider too.

It may be, for instance, that taking a new job in a different city might be the best thing for your family - even if it means taking your child away from his school and friends.

There has to be a balance in our children's lives. By putting them first exclusively you run the danger of teaching your children that their needs and interests matter above anyone else. You are creating a selfish "me first" child. Of course we should consider our families needs when making decisions, but ultimately you have to do what's in the best interest of the entire family.

4) Keep your focus on the long term. Bringing up children can be a long process. Keep in mind your long term goals for your children - how do you want them to turn out as adults? What values, morals and interests do you have in mind? You need to think about what your children need to attain those skills and character traits.

Some times parents are faced with quick results or taking the longer, harder approach. Many times the longer approach, while more difficult short term, bears fruit in the long range. For instance, when kids are getting difficult or rowdy, it's easy to turn to the TV as an easy babysitter, but most often your child wants your attention, the chance to sit with you and work on a puzzle, read a book or build a model.

5) Your children will make mistakes, just like you, but notice the positives. Gently correct and forgive them, then move on. Focus on the right things they did rather than the wrong. They want your attention, so if you respond more strongly to the negatives, they will do more of them. If you praise them for the positives, they will try so much harder to please you all the time.

6) Stick to your guns. Believe in yourself. If you are doing all the above, then you are well on the right track. There will be times when you make decisions and you get challenged on them, either by your children, or by others (such as interfering relatives). Unless there genuinely are new facts that you weren't aware of before, don't be swayed. And don't be afraid to say no - to your children and your relatives - if that is the right thing to say.

Yes, you may turn out to be wrong. We know that can happen. It's so easy to look back and know what the right thing would have been. Better to stick to your guns than be like a flag waving in the wind. Your children watch what you do in both easy and difficult situations. Even if you make a mistake along the way, the fact that you believe in yourself and try your very best, you can't help but impress them with your good example.

About the Author

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