

Parenting: The Big Picture

Parents need practical information, for instance how to remove gum from hair, where to find a toy library and how to monitor Internet use. They also need tips to handle challenging situations, like how to get out of the house on time in the morning and how to motivate children to do homework.

Beyond information and tips, parents can also use some higher level principles that will apply to a broad range of situations, thoughts to guide their interactions with their children through the years. Here are a few such thoughts to meditate on in those quiet moments while you sit waiting for your little child to fall asleep. They'll still be relevant when you're waiting up for your teenager to come in from an evening with friends.

When raising children, it is more important to be helpful than to be accurate.

Where is your focus: on having the "right" answer or on giving children the help they need to move forward now?

Keep track of your child's development and abilities so you don't ask so much that he is set up to fail, or so little that he has nothing to be proud of.

- Penelope Leach

Do you know enough about the stages of behaviour and development that are typical for the ages of your children? Do you know your own children well enough to see their unique abilities, temperament and pattern of development? Where is the right place to set the bar today, this week, this year?

Your children need your presence more than your presents. - Jesse Jackson

Does this statement agree with your values? How are you achieving a balance?

When children are least likeable is often when they most need us to show them our love.

Often, children's behaviour is at its worst when they are under stress or anxious. They need us to draw

them close, not push them away. How easy is it for you to reassure your children that you still love who they are, even if they have done something you don't like? While you react to correct their bad behaviour, can you also help them find a better way to deal with the problems that are bothering them?

Your children's behaviour usually tells you more about what's going on inside them than about what they think of you. They aren't acting this way just to drive you crazy.

Do you tend to take children's bad behaviour personally, as an attack on you? In fact, when children behave badly, it is often because they need to express something about how they're feeling. They may not understand themselves well enough to tell you about it directly. Can you step back and look for the message they are trying to send you?

When you see anger, in yourself or others, look for the fear, disappointment, frustration, or anxiety that is hiding under all that surface noise.

People often express anger when the real problem is that they have encountered obstacles or they feel threatened. While it's important to deal with the yelling and hitting that may come with anger, it is easy to get distracted from the real problem. Can you also look for the underlying emotion so you can find a long-lasting solution?

Sometimes, parents need to take a time-out too.

Nobody makes wise choices in the heat of anger. Do your actions show your children that we all need to take a break when we are likely to say or do something we will regret later?

In the end, as a wise and caring parent, you can listen to all of the advice offered and then choose what you think is best for you and your child. - Barbara Coloroso

by Betsy Mann