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The Educated Parent: Tips for raising YOUR Kid

By Amy V. Haas, BCCE

Parenting is a tough job. It is daunting to be responsible for raising a new human being!

When asked recently for some information on parenting I really had to stop and think about what has worked for me and my kids, and what has not.

If you attend Bradley classes you will receive some basic parenting and breastfeeding information, but that may not be enough. If you haven't attended any sort of childbirth class that includes parenting/breastfeeding information then you may be at a loss as to where to find good information on these issues.

To start with La Leche league is a wonderful source for new parents. If that doesn't work for you try contacting a lactation consultant. In the beginning your baby will need love, breast milk, clean diapers, burping, eye contact, body contact, and more love. Fathers can help by doing everything except the breast feeding – changing diapers, giving baths, cuddling, burping, rocking, helping around the house, making sure Mom is fed and hydrated, etc. A wonderful source for the first year is *The Baby Book* by Dr. William Sears. Just about any book by Dr. Sears is highly recommended.

Just remember that babies under the age of 1 use crying as a means of communication. They can not speak, and under the age of 9 months they can not purposely manipulate you for the fun of it. Any form of communication your baby uses is done for a specific reason or need. They are hungry, wet, lonely, scared, cold, hot, in pain, uncomfortable, etc., and their only way to communicate is by crying. That doesn't mean you have to wait until your baby cries to meet their needs. Many parents who practice on demand breastfeeding and attachment parenting rely on other cues, such as rooting, to determine if their child is hungry. Don't wait until they are angry and screaming before meeting their needs, as it will just make things more difficult. Please note that babies over 6 months can be taught American Sign Language, which may help with communication and prevent frustration.

Don't be surprised if you have mixed feelings about your child. New humans can be exasperating! They are individuals and some of their personality traits will be evident from the moment they are born. Keep in mind the basic common sense safety issues for all children. Never leave babies and small children unattended. If you leave a child in a room alone to sleep make sure they are secured in a proper, safe crib or play pen. If you are using the family

bed you might want to have the mattress on the floor and make sure the covers are not too loose. Baby proofing the rooms you live in is very important. Remove not only unsafe items, but anything you value that would not want broken.

If you find that you cannot deal with a baby or small child, and have tried everything, place them in a safe place and step out of the room for 15 min. Resist the urge to shake or hit your child. You can seriously injure them. Its okay to acknowledge that you feel angry and frustrated – just don't take it out on the child. If necessary call for help or back up.

Be aware that there will be times when you will have no clue as to what to do with your child. That's ok. You will eventually figure out what works. It just may not be at that moment. Buy time for yourself by using a cooling off period for everybody. This may mean isolating the child in a safe place until they calm down, using the rule of one minute per year of age as a guideline. Try to teach your children that there are consequences for their actions, but try not to threaten with specific punishments. That way you can reserve the right to decide later what the consequences will be. Some times children's imaginations supply much worse punishments than you ever could!

My mom always said that the more agitated they got the calmer she had to be. Good advice, Mom! She also always had the rule of not dealing with things in anger. By taking the time to cool off we were later able to discuss the issues logically. It worked, and also prevented all of us from saying things in anger that we might later regret, as well as removing the temptation to strangle us!

One thing I have noticed is that children learn how to behave by how they are treated. If you scream or yell at, or hit them then they will treat other children the same way. It is, however, our job to teach our children how to act. It's been said that if more parents taught their kids how to act there would be less people in prison. Many times parents don't realize that they need to TEACH their children what they consider to be basic common sense behavior or common courtesies. On that note, be sure to establish rules of behavior and stick to them. Be calm and consistent with your discipline, but be realistic. You can have well behaved children without resorting to violence or extreme measures. Expect them to challenge you – it's their job.

Here's a scary thought – We learn our parenting skills from our parents. That means if we were hit or degraded as children we are more likely to do the same thing to our children simply because we don't know what else to do. It is okay to change the way you parent your children. It shows growth. I have found that as my children have grown, so have I, as a parent and a human being. I learn so much from them about human behavior and emotions. It actually helps me understand other people around me and where they may be coming from.

If your child has additional behavioral or emotional problems it is okay to look at simple behaviors, such as control, as life skills to be practiced. Many parents have successfully dealt with problems such as ADD/ADHD, with out drugs, by taking this attitude. What is easy for one child is not necessarily easy for another. Many children who have been diagnosed as ADD/ADHD may actually have a learning disability that needs to be addressed first. You know

what is best for your child, so don't be afraid to advocate for them. A great source of information on this subject is *The Myth of the ADD Child* by Dr. Thomas Armstrong.

Some basic rules could be:

- **Pick your battles** – choose what is really important and enforce that. Ignore what is essentially not important.
- **Be calm and consistent.**
- **Establish house rules and stick to them.**
- **Be flexible** – yes I know that sounds contradictory, but sometimes we find that leeway or changes must be made.
- **Don't be afraid to apologize to a child, or admit that you were wrong.** It teaches them to do the same for others. It does not mean that you aren't going to enforce what you said. Just be sure to outline a plan for proceeding in the future.
- **Using violence on a child only teaches them to be violent.** Use cooling off period, or remove privileges until you figure out a more effective way to influence your child's behavior in a positive manner.
- **It's okay to cry, be angry, and make mistakes.** Just don't take it out on others.
- **Treat children how you would want to be treated.** That doesn't mean you don't discipline them it just means you treat them fairly and kindly.
- **Hug your children and tell them you love them no matter what!** It teaches them to show love and affection to others and gives them a sense of security.
- **Do what is right for YOUR children.** Do not necessarily base your decisions on what others would do.
- **Be your child's advocate!** Children respond well to loving, consistent support. The attitude of “yes, this is a problem, but we will solve it together” goes a long way. After all you know your child better than anyone!
- **Don't sweat the small stuff.** When a child spills the milk, don't yell and degrade them, teach them to clean it up. With small children use a spill proof, or stout unbreakable vessel. Kindly offered as a solution rather than a punishment, the child will feel much better about themselves and you. Teach them how to clean up after themselves.
- **Give your kids solutions that they can implement themselves.** For instance, a child size broom or vacuum cleaner to clean up a mess. Show them specifically how to solve a problem then let them try it. It gives them a sense of control.

- **Remember** – kids are a work in progress! Life time results may not be seen for many years.

One day you will turn around and hear someone say “Wow, Your kids are so well behaved”, or “they are so polite, mature, and helpful”. Beam proudly, and say thanks!

Amy V. Haas, BCCE ©2006-2012