



Beverly H. Rohman

Raising Children.....What's a parent to do?

The National Institute of Mental Health asked the following question of more than 50 parents who had raised their children to become well-adjusted, productive adults:

Based on your personal experiences, what is the best advice you can give new parents about raising children?

Their responses were incredibly thoughtful and some of the most succinct guidelines I have ever seen on this important subject. Children do not come with instruction manuals or a set of directions. Don't we wish they did! While these may not address every specific challenge with each individual child, they provide a basic structure that can be used by all parents --- those just starting out on the journey as well as others long on their way. Found years ago, and now tattered and torn, I think this list is as relevant today as ever. The guidelines were compiled and read:

1. **Love abundantly.** The most important task is to love and really care about your child. This gives him or her a sense of security, belonging, and support. It smoothes out the rough edges of society.
2. **Discipline constructively.** Give clear direction and enforce the limits on your child's behavior. Emphasize "Do this," instead of "Don't do that."
3. Whenever possible, **spend time with your children.** Play with them, talk to them, teach them to develop a family spirit, and give them a sense of belonging.
4. **Give the needs of your mate priority.** One parent put it this way: "A husband and wife are apt to be successful parents when they put their marriage first. Don't worry about the children getting 'second best.' Child-centered households produce neither happy marriages nor happy children."
5. **Teach your children right from wrong.** They need to be taught basic values and manners so that they will get along well in society. Insist that they treat others

with kindness, respect, and honesty. Set personal examples of moral courage and integrity.

6. **Develop mutual respect.** Act in a respectful way toward your children. Say “please” and “thank you,” and apologize when you are wrong. Children who are treated with respect will then know how to treat you and others respectfully.

7. **Listen. Really listen.** This means giving your children undivided attention, putting aside your beliefs and feelings, and trying to understand your children’s point of view.

8. **Offer guidance. Be brief.** Don’t give speeches. And don’t force your opinions on your children.

9. **Foster independence.** Gradually allow children more freedom and control over their lives. One parent said, “Once your children are old enough, phase yourself out of the picture, but always be near when they need you.”

10. **Be realistic, expect to make mistakes.** Be aware that outside influences such as peer pressure will increase as children mature. One parent said, “Don’t expect things to go well all the time. Child rearing has never been easy. It has its sorrows and heartaches, but it also has its rewards and joys. This is what makes it all worthwhile.”

One thought I would add to this list is the importance of nutrition and understanding the way your child learns. Statistics show that healthy nutrition plays a vital role in development – from prenatal to adulthood. As your child grows and develops, so does your understanding of their unique personality, abilities and learning styles. If you are a parent of more than one child, you’ve already discovered that even children growing up in very similar circumstances and environments can be dramatically different.

Following these tried and true guidelines while focusing on nutrition and unique learning styles may not provide all the answers for parenting, but it is a great place to start.

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