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# Cool Mantras to make you a Terrific Par-

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## CONTENTS

### Introduction

1	<b>The act of parenting</b>	1
2	<b>Power of positive parenting</b>	22
3	<b>Parenting pointers</b>	48
4	<b>Conclusion</b>	54

## Introduction

“PERHAPS THE GREATEST social service that can be rendered by anybody to the country and to mankind is to bring up a family.”

--- George Bernard Shaw

Parenting. Good parenting! Talk about being ambitious!

Is there a ‘perfect parent’? Are there universal rules and regulations governing the law of parenting or is it a case of each to his own method? Is parenting a natural process, which begins instinctively with the birth of the child or is it a learned lesson?

Is there a testament to the truths that each parent discovers in the process of bringing up her child? Is there one book in the whole world that can condense, compress and convey to every parent every little thing that she ought to know?

Parenting is so subjective and so unique to every parent, that no book of rules can deal with this issue and claim to have said it all. There is more to parenting than just having a child, looking after her physical needs, sending her to school and getting her married.

This book will not teach you about toilet training your child or how to handle a teenager who talks too much on the phone. Nor can it even hope to cover the multitude of problems facing parents and children today.

But this small book can foster an attitude in parents that will help them become effective parents. This book is not so much about how to bring up a child; rather, it is about effective you are as a parent. It is about your attitude and beliefs.

It is based on a faith that is universal to good parenting – ‘Only when the parent wins first, can the child win.’

Does this sound selfish and contrary to what you believe? Before you start jumping to conclusions, think about this – If you want to save your child from drowning, you must learn how to swim. If you jump into the pool without knowing how to perform the basic task, there will be two cases of drowning instead of one.

This is what successful and effective parenting is all about. Know yourself first, then seek to understand your child.

Here, in a few pages, is an attempt to present in a nutshell, pearls of wisdom gleaned from the experiences of many, the world over. It is an objective guide to good parenting. It aims to make the reader think, be creative in her role and most of all, to enjoy this responsibility that is surely a gift. A divine gift.

## 1. The act of parenting

“TRAIN CHILDREN IN the right way, and when old, they will never stray.”

---Proverbs – 22-6

You become a parent with optimism oozing from every pore. During late night feedings and diaper changes, you feel that you are laying groundwork for a lifelong relationship that will reward you when your hair disappears or turns grey.

You will look forward to times of tenderness and times of love. To words of comfort and soul-filled conversations. You look for inspiration from books, from your parents, from tried and tested theories. You feel with confidence that you are the perfect parent for your child.

### Parenting – a big responsibility

PICTURE THIS – THOROUGH the miracle of birth, you are gifted with a tiny, defenseless babe. A stranger in an alien world, totally dependent on you for every physical need. You have a mere eighteen years at the most – to ready your child for a world that especially today can be challenging, demanding and also cruel and heartless.

As parents, you have only few years to prepare your child for a world that requires responsibility and maturity for survival.

So, what do you do? Hover over your children so they never make mistakes? Drill them so they will remember the important principles when they are on their own? Tear your hair out, wondering if the parent-child relationship is a no-win relationship?

### On being a parent...

TAKE A LOOK at yourself from a distance. One good long look. Are you an adult with whom you would trust your child? Do you possess the knowledge, skills and values that would nurture your child physically and emotionally?

Do you have what it takes to be a good parent?

If you apply for a job, you are expected to have identifiable skills related to the job. Parenting is something, we take on without any previous experience or qualification. Parents have a great desire to ‘get it right’ and do the best for their children.

In many ways, when you first become a parent, you may still feel like a child yourself. It does not seem so long go that you were playing with the kids next door and listening to (or ignoring) the lessons your parents were teaching you.

Then comes the moment you first lay eyes on that precious new human being. The feeling of love and responsibility is overwhelming. Your little child's brain is a blank state. Much of what she will become in life is influenced by what you say and do.

This thought alone is enough to send a shiver of responsibility up the parental spine.

### **The challenge of parenting**

“BIRTH IS MUCH, but nurturing is more.”

--- John Clarke

All loving parents essentially face the same challenge- how do you raise children who will have their heads on straight and will have a good chance to make it in the big world?

How are children handle the intense pressures of life?

What choices will they make?

What will they do when you are no longer pouring wise words into their ears?

But hey, all is not so bleak – there is hope, shining beacon bright at the end of the tunnel of parental frustration. Parenting doesn't have to be drudgery or a terrible responsibility. Parents and children can establish a rewarding relationship built on love and trust. All it needs is a little bit of love and logic to put the fun back in parenting.

What do you want as parents? What are your ultimate expectations? What kind of children do you want to raise? The values and principles that are decided on in the early years will see parents right through their parenting lives.

Parenting can be fun and effective, enjoyable and enriching, successful and satisfying, once we define and are comfortable in the parenting role. The emphasis here is on the world 'role'. Parenting is an act. An act that you have to tailor to suit the needs of yourself and your child.

### **Parenting – the role of a lifetime**

“TO BRING UP a child in the way he should go – travel that way yourself.”

--- Josh Billings

The house lights go down. The curtain goes up. The spotlight comes on. You are about to step on stage to star in the most important role in your life: the role of parent. There is one thing for certain: this is no dress rehearsal. You have to be ready when you step on stage, because your audience will be riveted to every word you say and every move you make. How you act in front of them determines how they will act the rest of their lives.

We have hit the nail on the head when we define parenting as a role. You need to understand it as an act that is played out before an audience - your – children – your critics and your judges.

### **‘Role’-ing with the flow**

THE DIFFERENT ROLES you play in your life are all part of what makes you the unique person you are. As you move through life, new roles are added and others are dropped. For instance, when you are a child you play the role of son or daughter. When you marry, you are adding a new role – that of a spouse. When you have children, you are adding the role of parent to your repertoire. If you divorce, you are dropping the role of a spouse, and shifting to the role of single parent.

### **Parents: Get in on the act!**

THE ROLE OF parent also has many acts continues within it, perhaps more than in any other role you play. You act like a doctor, nurse, entertainer, chauffeur, cook, teacher, co-coordinator, time-management specialist, counselor, disciplinarian, wardrobe consultant, and a myriad of other acts, all related to being a parent. No matter how many acts are contained within the role of parent, it is still a singular role, and should not be confused with any of the other roles you play throughout the day.

### **Tailoring your act**

PARENT GET INTO trouble when they confuse their different roles. When you come home at the end of the day and your children run to greet you, it is time to step into the role of parent. Leave your other roles outside the doors. In order to be an effective parent, you need to keep differentiating the various roles in your life.

Remember the famous movie *Sound of Music*, where the father, who is a military man, treats his seven children as he would his soldiers?

The result – a confused group of children, starved of love and affection, playing pranks on unsuspecting governesses in order to get attention from the father.

### **When in Rome....**

“THERE ARE TWO great injustices that can befall a child. One is to punish him for something he didn’t do. The other is to let him get away with doing something he knows is wrong.”

- Robert Gardener

Knowing what role to use at just the right moment is critical. When you are in the company of your children, be a parent. Now is not a time to be a buddy. When your child is hurt, be a doctor. Now is not a time to be a disciplinarian. When a parent uses a role and an act that is appropriate to the situation, her effectiveness as a parent is determined. All it needs is a little bit of common sense.

When considering an act for a particular situation, consider the following:

**For whom:** When your four-year old cleans his room, you expect him to clean his room with the capability of a four-year old. The bedspread on his bed may be uneven, the drawers may have a few socks peeking out, and the lid to the toy box may not close all the way. But all in all, you can see that he did as well as a four-year old could be expected to do. It would be appropriate to put on your cheerleader act and shout at about what a wonderful job he has done. It certainly would not be appropriate to punish him if you found dust on his table.

Likewise when you inspect your fourteen-year-old's room, and he also has cleaned his room with the capability of a four-year-old, it would be proper to reprimand him and send him back to his room, with orders not to come out until he does the cleaning job you know a boy of his age is capable of doing.

**How specifically:** How specifically do you want to act? Are you over reacting? Are you not reacting strong enough? Are you acting as if you are helpless when the situation warrants leadership? Which act would best fit?

When your child breaks a rule such as "No eating in front of the TV," it would be fitting to punish her by taking away a privilege, or making her do an extra chore. However, it would not be appropriate to inflict a severe punishment or confine her to her room etc...

Likewise, if your child inflicted damage to your car and reported that she did it because, "It just seemed like fun," it would be folly to merely say, "Promise you won't do that again. The next time you are bored, instead of smashing the car. We'll go for ice cream. Does that sound like fun?". A more plausible reaction would be anger or disappointment, and the implementation of a punishment of restriction, depending on the age of the child.

**When:** When do circumstances call for you to play a particular act?

If your sixteen year old daughter sneaks off to a party, drinks something that has been doctored by her so-called friends and returns home sick and ashamed, it would not be appropriate to yell and scream and tell her what a completely impotent moron she is. It would be more suitable to comfort the shaken girl, explain the seriousness of what she has done and prepare her to face these kind of ugly situations.

However, if your sixteen year old boy sneaks the keys out of your purse, goes joy-riding with his friends after drinking a few glasses of beer, and causes an accident while exceeding the speed limit, now is the time to run your drill sergeant act. Your Mother Teresa act will not do in the instance.

The ability to perform many acts while in the parenting role, and possessing the flexibility to change your act when the situation warrants it, is one of the secrets of successful parents.

### **The power to act**

“MY DOCTORS TOLD me I would never walk again. My mother told me I would. I believed my mother.”

- Wilma Rudolph

The entire parent-child relationship rests on trust and love. It rests on the parent's belief in what her child can do and cannot do.

When a parent tells a three year old that she is stupid, it is not true. But the parent is acting as if it were true and the child believes it as if it were true. However, if a parent were to act as if her tone-deaf four year old had the voice of an angel, the child would act as if it were true, and would be free to enjoy singing with the great abandon that only a four year old can unabashedly pull off.

This act of confidence in a child's ability is a powerful parenting tool and its power should not be underestimated. As a parent you have the ultimate control over what happens in your children's lives.

You have the power to act as if anything were possible or impossible.

You have the power to act as if your children are either capable little human beings, or inane, stupid beings.

You have the power to act as if your children are either a joy to behold, or a burden to bear.

You have the power to act as if you are decisive, creative, calm, responsive and in control.

Whether you think you have or don't have any of these qualities, you have the power to act as if it were true.

All human beings are born with the ability to act. When we are children, we call it make-believe or pretend. Children are wonderful actors. They can be whoever they want to be. They can be Peter Pan or Spiderman. They can be fierce soldiers leading their troops in to battle, or beauty queens pirouetting their way into stardom.

When children are very small, they act as if they can be anyone or anything, until someone convinces them they cannot.

In the role of a parent, you too must make your act believable.

It is critical that when you act calmly, your audience (your children) believe you are calm. When you act decisively, your children must believe you are decisive. You do not want to lose your audience because you are not believable.

Children are very perceptive. You must be convincing. Even when you are afraid, when you act as if you are fearless, you will begin to feel as though you really are so. The act then becomes a part of your parenting nature and you need hardly think about it as you glide effortlessly through your lines and actions.

And you know what is the best part of your parenting act – it is your show. You are the writer, the producer, the director. If the outcome you want is to raise up your children to be self sufficient, creative, responsible, joyous, healthy in both mind and spirit, decisive, relaxed and confident; this is the parenting act you need to demonstrate to your children.

### **Ready, steady and .... Action**

ACTION IS THE operative word when you are a parent. Don't sit for an interminable length of time pondering over your children, mulling over them, talking about them, questioning others about them or trying to read meanings into their behaviour. These things are better left to philosophers or child experts.

The real world is a world where children make endless demands, throw tantrums, don't come home on time, fight over clothes or toys or makeup or whose turn it is to clean the table or who started 'it'. The real world is a world where parents have to deal with inane or violent movies and television shows, drug and alcohol problems, and sexually transmitted diseases that cannot be cured with a kiss or antibiotics.

The real world is a world where parents have to take time off work to nurse runny noses and the flu and allergies. The real world is a world where parents have to mend hurt feelings and broken hearts. What parent has time to philosophize over what all this means?

As parent, may be, you cannot change the world to suit yourself or your child. But you can definitely change your world, change yourself and your family. And this can only be through be action.

### **Parenting – a doing model**

“THE MOST IMPORTANT thing that parents can teach their children is how to get along without them.”

- Frank A. Clark

Parenting is a ‘doing’ model. You cannot ask your child to do something if you have not done it yourself or showed him how to do it. You cannot scold your child for using foul words if you use them yourself in his presence. You cannot expect your child to respect elders, if you don’t respect them yourself. Remember, children learn by example – your example. Learn to act sensibly and your children will follow suit.

### **Acting the parenting role**

MANY OF YOU as parents may feel that it is phoney to put on any kind of act in front of the children.

But ask yourself –

Do you feel phoney when you kiss a bruise that is four days old when your child comes to you for attention?

You know that your child is not suffering at the moment, you know that there is no urgency for medical attention, and yet you act concerned because it is important for your child at the moment.

Do you feel like a phoney when your child comes to you with a painstakingly prepared breakfast of burnt toast and cold coffee and you lovingly gag down every morsal, under the watchful eyes of the proud little chef, all the while exclaiming that is the best breakfast you have ever taken?

Sometimes you may even act angry when you really are not, if you think it will teach your child a lesson.

The first time you see your toddler smear her face with make up in an attempt to imitate you, you may act angry in order to teach her that your makeup is off-limits, all the while stifling a laugh at how funny she looks and how sweet it was for her to make the effort.

You are acting when you tell your average first grader that she is the smartest kid in the world, and when you tell your awkward teenager that he is the most handsome person in his class. These are acts that parents should play out on a regular basis.

Far from being phoney, when you step into the parenting role you are performing one of the most genuine acts you will ever perform in your life time. You are essentially performing an act that is designed to model behavior that you want your children to emulate. It is an act designed to demonstrate to your children how to become effective adults. Ideally, you are acting, loving, patient, sensible, strong, in charge, free-spirited full of life and energy, humorous, calm, intelligent and a myriad of other qualities exhibited by successful parents who raise successful children. You are acting like a winner.

### **The ‘winning’ parent act**

IF YOU WANT to be a parent who wants to raise successful , well-adjusted children, you need to know that there are times when you must run an act that may be at odds with the way you truly feel in order to achieve the most positive outcome for your children.

For example, if your child breaks a brand new jar of pickles when she is trying to be helpful unloading the groceries, you may want to scream at her. But knowing that screaming at her wouldn’t bring back the shattered jar of pickles, and would instead, only serve to shatter her self-esteem, you call up your ‘patience’ act.

You tell her to be more careful next time. You show her a better way to hold a jar in her little hands or you suggest she help by unpacking smaller jars the next time. You may suggest to her that the way she can be most helpful to you is by unloading all the canned goods. If the spill does not involve breakage that might be harmful to her, have her help you to clean it up. But most of all, you help her to understand that a broken jar of pickles is not the end of the world, and that mistakes are just lessons meant to teach us a better way of doing things.

### **And the Oscar goes to....**

THERE ARE MANY times when you just want to let go and reveal your inner frustrations and anger at your children. You may feel like screaming – “But I just want to be myself!”

An example of acting when you feel like being ‘your self’ is when your child is driving you crazy in public. In the heat of the moment, you may want to cut loose all safety valves at control central and wallop him a good one, or simply throw a tantrum of your own. But you must act as if you are in charge. You cannot resort to tantrums and histrionics because your child will think that this act is acceptable, and if it’s good enough for mom or dad, then it’s good enough for him

.While there may be times when you feel less than successful when parenting your children, you have to act as if you are the epitome of success. Consider the fact that when you are in the presence of your children, everything you say and do will be absorbed by them; they will take in every piece of information, every action, and incorporate it into their own

reality of the world. There is no denying just how important your actions are, and the dramatic effect they will have in shaping the people your children will become.

### **Am I only a parent?**

THE QUESTION CAN pop into your mind. If you have to put up an act all the time in front of your children, what about your feelings?

Even if you feel insecure, you have to act self-assured in front of your children. Even if you are angry you have to act calm. Even if you are depressed, you need to act joyous.

If you are a parent, do you have to deny your real feelings?

Nobody is asking you to deny what you feel but if your feelings are not healthy and will not cause your children to win, it is best that you express or share your 'real' feelings with your spouse, your best friend, or some other trusted person.

Your children are not your sounding boards. They are not your counselors or confidants. They depend on you to act in a manner that will cause them to flourish.

Your children model their world after the most important person in their lives: you.

If you want your children to be well-adjusted, tenacious, carefree, disciplined, responsible, decisive, creative and excited to embrace each day as if it were a special gift, then you must act that way yourself.

It is a belief, born out of the experiences of successful parents, that when you act in deliberate, calculated ways in front of the children, for the purpose of achieving a positive outcome in them, not only are your actions genuine, they are also effective.

So, when you take the parenting act, when you step into the role of a parent, be the kind parent who has only one goal in mind: raising successful children.

## 2. Power of positive parenting

### Power of flexibility

“IT IS VERY unfair to influence a child’s mind by inculcating any opinions before it has come to years of discretion to choose for itself.”

- Samuel Taylor Coleridge

Most parenting problems occur as a result of getting stuck in a groove. They get stuck in the attitude of “I have always done it this way,” or, “That’s the way my parents always did it, and if it was good enough for me, then it’s good enough for my kids.”

Remember, there are some things that your parents did that you did not like, but in hindsight, you can see how the rules they imposed or the choices they made were in your best interest. However, if you are simply mimicking behaviors that never achieved a positive outcome for you or your parents, then now is the time to re-evaluate your parenting style.

### Rules are meant to be broken

“IF YOU KEEP on doing what you’ve always been doing, you’ll keep on getting what you’ve always been getting.”

A way you can achieve immediate positive results on your family is to eliminate any rules that are not working.

Families can get bogged down in a mire of ineffective rules; especially when there are so many that the truly important rules lose their value.

When you have too many rules, it becomes impossible to enforce them all, and the inconsistency in enforcing rules is confusing to children.

Children are not mind-readers; they really have no way of knowing if a particular rule is more important than another.

Most of you as parents do not usually set rules for the fun of it, just so you can see how miserable you can make your children’s lives.

Hopefully, there is a sound purpose behind the rules you set. Rules are meant to work.

But when you get resistance, that is evidence that the rules you impose are not working. If your rules are not working, then as parents you need to stop doing what doesn’t work and think of doing what works.

Sounds horribly simplistic, doesn't it? If you knew what is going on, right? But if you take a closer look at the rules that don't work, you can find your way to those that do.

The power to change your parenting your parenting style in accordance to the situation is the mark of a good parent.

### **Who made that rule up anyway?**

PARENTS ESTABLISH RULES for their children for a variety of reasons.

A common reason for rules is safety. Probably the first of a thousand rules your child will hear in his life is "Don't touch!" Your toddler depends on you to protect her from a hot stove, a electrical socket, or the biting end of the neighbor's dog.

"Don't touch" is also the first phrase our child will associate with limits. She will learn that it is alright to play with rattle or to pick up a plastic cup, but delicate glassware is strictly off limits.

Other limits may include, "No more chocolate. It will make you sick," or "Stay close to me. If you wander too far you might get lost."

These are limits placed on a child because the parent is concerned about his or her welfare. All of these rules are pretty much universal, and have nothing to do with what culture you were raised in, what your religion is, or any other mitigating factor.

### **Believe me when I say...**

RULES GET MORE complicated when they are made from a model of individual morals, values, and beliefs. When parents create rules based on these, the rules are often peppered with prejudices, conscious or unconscious. Some parents may have a rule that they feel is very important for their children, while the neighbour down the street may think the rule is completely idiotic. Some families insist that their children go to the church, while another family may insist that their children do not. When you start implementing rules based on your morals, values and beliefs, they cannot be right or wrong. They are just your rules.

Morals, values and beliefs are often the glue that holds many families together. You should never compromise on them if you feel they are important to raising successful children. If, however, the rules that stem from them are compromising the relationship between your children and you, it is important to evaluate the motivation behind them and assess the value you have placed up on them.

### **That's the way my parents did it**

IF YOU ARE, a parent who sets the rules for no other reason that “That’s the way my parents did it” then you need to think again.

The reason it is important to categorise your rules to help you spot which of your rules are critically important to you, and which rules can be eliminated. For instance,

#### **Safety**

1. Fasten your seat belt.
2. Do not talk to strangers.
3. Chew your food well before you swallow.
4. Do not play in the street.

Wear a helmet when you ride your bike.

#### **Morals**

1. You must attend religious gatherings
2. You must respect your elders
3. You may not watch ‘R’ rated movies.
4. We do not tolerate stealing.

#### **Beliefs**

1. Do not feel sorry for street people. They’d work if they weren’t so lazy.
2. Hard work and perseverance are the ingredients of success.
3. Avoid associating with people from different castes and communities.
4. Do not wear makeup. It makes girls look cheap.

#### **Arbitrary**

1. You must brush your teeth with Colgate and not with Close-up.
2. You must not put elbows on the table.
3. Children are meant to be seen and not heard.
4. “Do it because I said so, and that’s the rule.”

After reviewing each rule, ask yourself, “What is the underlying motivation behind this rule? What do I want it to achieve? How important is it that this rule be strictly adhered to? Is it realistic? Does it get me what I want? Do my children follow it?”

The questions “Does it get me what I want?” and “Do my children follow it?” are perhaps the most important questions you will ask yourself when evaluating your rules.

Because if a rule doesn't work, it doesn't get you what you want and no one follows it, there is really no point in having it.

Unless you feel a rule is of critical importance to your child's safety or moral character, stop wasting time and energy with rules that don't work.

To try to enforce a rule when you are receiving massive resistance is not only ineffective, but also exhausting. If you feel the rule is vitally important, then try to find a new or different way to achieve your outcome.

Some rules that you regard as important for yourself may not necessarily be rules that are important for your children.

For example – one rule that is a thorn in the side of children everywhere is the “You must have a clean room” rule. You may like to keep your own bedroom clean. Your child, on the other hand, may actually like living in a pigsty. His room is his castle.

If he has a room all to himself, he can shut the door. If however, he has to share his room with a neat sibling, then the messy room affects someone else. When the actions of one person in a household directly affect someone else, then it is time to implement a rule that will cause both parties to win. If they do not affect anyone else, why lose sleep over it? You may say, “His room is a hazard. I can't walk in there without tripping.” Or you can work out a compromise.

You can make a rule that he is responsible for cleaning his room at least once a week. You can make an agreement that he will clean his room if grandma and other guests come to visit. There are several ways of getting around rigid rules that cause more stress than they are worth.

### **Trivial pursuit**

IF SOME OF our rules are pretty trivialities, consider dropping them altogether. If it is your final day on Earth, will you pull your child close to you and, with your last dying breath, whisper the words, “Did you put the toilet seat down?” Probably not. It is more likely that you will be remembering all of the reasons you love her unconditionally, and will want to leave her with the thought of what a gift she has been to your life.

Save the heavy rules for the important things: drugs, alcohol, curfew, sex and education, to name a few.

### Power of control

“THE WORD ‘NO’ carries a lot more meaning when spoken by a parent who knows how to say ‘yes’.”

Joyce Manyard

### Who is running the show

CHILDREN ARE VERY quick and discerning. They learn very early in life that they can run their parent ragged and take control if they want to.

When children learn that they can control their parents by behaving negatively, then the possibilities of troubles are endless.

Picture a five-year old in a store flinging himself on the floor and screaming at the top of his lungs when his mother doesn't give him what he wants. Do you suppose that if Mom does give in to him he will forget how well this technique worked for him, the next time they go to the store? Don't count on it. Do you suppose any younger siblings might notice what a good thing their big brother has going? Count on it.

One of the most common reasons parents have for allowing their children to run their shows is that they are afraid of making them unhappy. They give reasons like:

- “I vowed my children would have a better childhood than my own.”
  - “I can never say ‘no’ to anyone, especially my children.”
  - “I guess all kids throw tantrums, don't they?”
  - “I feel so guilty when I don't give them what they want.”
  - “When my child starts throwing a fit in front of other people, I am so embarrassed. I just want it to stop, no matter what it takes. It usually means giving her what she wants.”
- And last but not the least: “I am afraid that if I say ‘No’ to my children, if I don't give them what they want, they won't love me anymore.”

No matter how bad your children may make you feel when they reject you, act angry, hurt, or are disappointed in you, remember this, children do not stop loving their parents because they do not give them everything they want. Children do not stop loving their parents because their parents do not satisfy their every desire.

Wants and desires are exactly that: wants and desires. They are not needs. Needs are love, attention, nurturing, caring, food, water and shelter. If your child starts throwing a tantrum for one of those needs, perhaps you ought to listen to her. But, when parents acquiesce to all of their children's wants, children will lose confidence in their parent's ability to lead them, guide them and protect them.

Most importantly, when children see that you are too weak and indecisive to take charge, they will lose respect for you, and that is harder to recover from than a tantrum at the shop. The next time your child throws a fit because you will not give him what he wants, think about this: he is not going to stop loving you. Give in to him, and he will stop trusting you. Which way do you want this scene to go?

### **Power of change**

“STOP TRYING TO perfect your child, but keep trying to perfect your relationship with him.”

- Dr. Henker

### **Relax the rigid act**

Rigidity is most ineffective in parenting.

The most logical thing to do when you keep running up against a wall is to go around it, over it, or dig under it. In other words, do something different.

Some of you can say righteously: “Why should I have to change? I am the parent. I’m the adult. My children should be the ones to change.” You dig your well-worn heels into the ground and stand firm in the belief that you are right.

“It is not who is right, but what is right, that is of importance”, said Thomas Huxley. You need to keep this in mind because parenting is a flexible act.

As parents, you need to keep in mind that you are not only responsible for your children’s health, shelter, clothing and education, you are likewise responsible for making the changes that are necessary to cause your whole family to win.

However, when parents refuse to change, refuse to bend, then they are demonstrating to their children that there is only one way to solve a problem, and if that way doesn’t work, the problem will remain unsolved forever.

This will not only affect them in the way they parent their own children but will cut a swath across every area of their lives: their relationships with friends, their education, their effectiveness on the job, and their relationships with their spouses.

When you, like the captain of the Titanic, refuse to man the lifeboats because you are sure the ‘grande dame’ is unshakeable, when you refuse to change because you think you are right, then you must be prepared to go down with your ship. The smartest captains know they should always have an alternative battle plan and the smartest parents know that there is more than one way to get what they want.

### **The power of choice**

SHEER INTIMIDATION, WHICH falls under the category of, “You have to do it because I said so, and incase you haven’t noticed, I ‘m bigger than you” may get short-term results, but will not teach your children problem-solving, reasoning, logic, creativity, power of choice, or self motivation.

For example, if your way of showing affection to your son is by poking him in the ribs, and he responds by snarling at you and giving a dirty scowl, then you have to change your action. You may show your love next time by running your fingers through his hair or gently patting him on his head.

### **Cause and effect parenting**

WHAT YOU DO or don’t will have an effect on the people around you.

Since you are around your children a majority of the time during their formative years, everything you do and say, constructive or destructive, will have a major effect on their lives.

“The drops of rain make a hole in the stone, not by violence, but by oft falling.”

- Lucretius

### **Consider this**

When you were a kid, you were pretty much at the mercy of your parents. If you wanted something from them, you had to ask and just hope for the best.

It probably didn’t take you long to figure out that when you really wanted something, you went to the parent who was in the best mood. If only one parent was available, you waited until you could see that he or she was happy and relaxed. Asking to spend the night at a friend’s house after you received three ‘D’s on your report card would probably be considered bad timing.

The odds of a positive response are much better if you come home with straight ‘A’s and a certificate for perfect attendance. Finding out that your dad just got a pay hike and hired a cook for your mother would also be an opportune time to ask for a favor.

As a child, you learned to read your parents’ body language and then use it to your advantage. Doesn’t it make sense, then, that if you use this same technique with your children, you will get from them a lot more of what you want?

For example, when a child is throwing a tantrum in a store, it is not a good time to discuss good manners. When it is 11:00 PM, it is not a good time to command your weary teenager, “Get out your calculus book! You will learn this stuff if we have to stay up all night!”

You will be more successful if you wait until your child is calm, well rested and relaxed before you discuss important matters with him. He will be more amenable to what you are saying or asking of him.

### **Power of creative parenting**

“DON’T BE AFRAID to go out on a limb. That’s where the fruit is.”

-Anonymous

Successful parents are those parents who bring fun and creativity to their parenting techniques. Children respond to change and difference.

If you can find a new and creative way to get what you want from your children, then go for it! Don’t be afraid to try something new, something different, even something silly. Just keep the outcome in mind and let your imagination take you away.

There is a story of a mother who was being driven crazy by her four year old daughter’s incessant whining. She felt that it was time for her child to start speaking in a normal voice. She had tried everything, including rewards and punishments, but her child was not responding.

One day, she decided to try another tactic. When she woke her daughter up for school, she imitated her child’s whine – “Good morrrnnnnngggg,” she whined. “It’s time to get ouuuut of beeedddd.”

She went on with the whining the entire day. Everything that came out of her mouth, even if it was a positive statement, was said in the most drawn out, pathetic speech she could muster.

The daughter looked at her mother as she was crazy. Finally, at the end of the day she walked to her mother and in the most normal, matter-of-fact, non-whining voice said, “Mommy, I don’t like the way you talk. Talk as you did before.”

This is what creative parenting is all about. Don’t get stuck with certain patterns of behaviour. Learn to do your own thing even if it looks crazy.

### **Variety – The spice of good parenting**

SUCCESSFUL PARENTS ARE parents with choices. They are constantly creating new choices. Because they have unlimited and varied ways of solving problems, it is much easier for them to get what they want.

For example, if you had a child who cried a lot, and you were told that the only way you could stop his crying was to yell at him, you would find yourself in a ‘no win’ situation if he doesn’t respond to your yelling. But if you were told that you may also hold him, or read to him, or play with him, or re-direct his attention in order to stop his crying, the chances are that you would be successful with atleast one of these methods. If one didn’t work, you could always try another until you found one that did work.

### **The power of communication – the relationship builder**

“A BLOW WITH a word strikes deeper than a blow with a sword.”

- Robert Burton

Language has an especially powerful effect on children. Imagine, then the effect on children, who have not yet learned to filter language. They take every word they hear at face value, especially when it comes from their parents. If you tell your children they are stupid or ugly, they will believe it. If you tell them they are brilliant and beautiful, they will believe it. It is almost impossible to fathom the immense power your language has over your children, and how the potency of your words will affect them, either positively or negatively.

### **Make your words count**

MANY PARENTS FIND themselves doing a whole lot of talking without getting a whole lot of positive results. Have you ever caught yourself saying, “How many times do I have to tell you?” or, “If I’ve told you once I’ve told you a thousand times!” your kids probably think it’s more like a zillion.

There is a reason some parents have to repeat themselves. It is because the language they use to communicate with their children is ineffective, and has been repeated so many times that it has become nothing more than background noise.

### Speaker of the house

THINK OF YOUR mouth as an enormous stereo speaker, and your children as your listening audience. The words you broadcast through the speaker will either help you elicit the outcomes you want, hinder your success, or have no impact whatsoever. Most of us, upon hearing a bad song on the radio, will reach for the dial and turn it off or switch to another station. That is essentially what children do to parents. When parents start lecturing in the same ineffective way they have so many times before, they are going to be turned out; their children will be turned off, and the result of their tired lectures will always be the same.

Since you are only human, there may be times when you would like to say something really rotten to your children. That is not unusual; nor is it anything to feel guilty about. There is no law that says you can't think rotten thoughts, but before you say them out loud, you need to remember that what you say will be influencing their future. approval. When you talk baby talk to him, he will start wiggling and nuzzling and wagging his tail. If you yell at him, however, he will tuck his tail between his legs and sulk off to the nearest corner and cower there until he thinks it's safe to come back.

### Saying it with style

YOUR TONE OF voice is very important. If you are using a pattern in a tone of voice commensurate with Cruella De Ville's, you might have a tough time getting the outcome you want with your child. Think of it like this: the family dog is a trusting soul who just wants to be loved and petted and win your approval. When you talk baby talk to him, he will start wiggling and nuzzling and wagging his tail. If you yell at him, however, he will tuck his tail between his legs and sulk off to the nearest corner and cower there until he thinks it's safe to come back.

Since he can't understand language other than a few commands, it really doesn't matter what words you use. It is the tone of voice that he is responding to. The same is true when speaking to your children. When you praise your children with positive words such as, "You did really great!" but your tone of voice is saying, "Anybody could have done that," you are going to be less than believable.

On the other hand, if you are disappointed that your daughter did not do her homework, she will not think you are serious if you say, "You are not allowed to leave the house for a week", while grinning from ear to ear and trying to stifle a giggle.

### **Tell it like it is**

WHEN YOU COMMUNICATE with your children, it is very important that you state what you want in the positive. This is important because, not only do children have difficulty processing negation, but also because smart kids are always looking from an angle. If you say to your child, "Stop sticking your finger in your ear," he might comply and then turn around and stick it in his nose. When you say, "I told you to stop sticking your fingers in places." He will most likely say, "You only said not to stick it in my ear." It would have been much easier and a whole lot less frustrating if you had just said from the beginning, "I want you to place your hands nicely in your lap, now."

Imagine telling your sixteen year old, "I don't want you staying out too late.". When she still isn't home at midnight, you will probably be irate. When she finally saunters in at 12:18, chances are you'll be yelling, "I told you not to stay out too late!" Her truly shocked look of indignation will tell you that she considers 'late' a relative term, especially since she left the party before all of her friends. You can avoid this scene next time by stating clearly, "I want you to be home precisely at 11:30 PM, and if you are one minute late, you will not be going to any parties for the rest of the month." This is a message that is crystal clear.

Half the time, parents are vague in expressing what they want. The number one rule of language is be specific. For example – "Somebody answer the door", should be replaced by "Pinky, go and answer the door."

### **Unrealistic demands? Get real!**

BECAUSE CHILDREN ARE much more likely to be overwhelmed by large goals that are adults, it is critical that you lower your expectations when speaking to them.

For example, if your four year old's toy box has not been organized for two months, it would be unrealistic to expect even a modicum of success when you demand of her, "Go organize your toy box, and don't come out of your room until you are through."

It would be more realistic to say to her "Today, I want you to find all of your Lego pieces and put them in their container. Tomorrow I will help you organize your crayons. Then we can colour a picture together.

You are more likely to achieve success when you make the goal small. Your child will receive the benefit of knowing how rewarding it is to complete a task, instead of the frustration she will feel when faced with a task that is impossible for her to complete.

### **Just a word about words**

WHILE WORDS CAN be quite damaging when used thoughtlessly and carelessly, they can also create a universe of challenge and enjoyment when used thoughtfully and deliberately. Our words are an outward expression of our representation of the world, which we pass on to our children. What we say to our children will be absorbed by them and then incorporated into their representation of the world. They, in turn, will pass it on to their children. Always remember that, though it may seem like they are not listening, your children are hearing every word you say.

### **It's not just words**

IT'S NOT JUST what you say but, what you don't say, that also builds healthy communication with children. A large part of the parent-child bond rests on non-verbal communication. A hug, a kiss, a pat on the back, a ruffling of hair, a smile all serve to send a strong signal to children that they are loved by their parents. Don't neglect this unspoken bonding with your child. It will take you far in your relationship.

### 3. Parenting Pointers

“THERE ARE ONLY two lasting bequests we can hope to give our children. One of these is roots, the other, wings.”

- Hodding Carter

#### Successful parenting

MOST OF YOU as parents start out with the best of intentions. You adore your children and would want to do everything you can to assure they grow up to be healthy, independent, effective and successful, if you only knew how. Nobody can blame you for not knowing how.

There are no training manuals, only memories of your own childhood to go by, and that's hardly adequate.

It's a learn as you go vacation, and the only measure of your success or failure is the results you receive when your children are grown.

But how can we expect our children to do great things if we don't demonstrate to them how it should be done? You owe it to your children to be more than the family crier of worn out maxims. When you teach your children to live full, rewarding lives by the example you set; you will be the most significant teacher they will ever have.

There are three important things you need to do in order to be a good parent

You need to take care of yourself

You cannot expect your children to have a great life if yours isn't great

You need to put the fun back in parenting

#### Care for the caretaker

CHILDREN ARE ENERGY suckers no matter what age they are. It can be a cry, a wet diaper, an empty bottle, a bad haircut, pimple problems, homework, and a host of other things that can drain you of precious energy.

Remember, you cannot perform your best if you are not in top form. Learn to take care of yourself first. Your children will thank you for it.

Because you want your children to want to grow up to be just like you. Because you love them more than anything in the world. And that's probably the best reason for you to take care of yourself first.

### **The fun of parenting**

THERE ARE MANY of you who feel that parenting is a serious business and shouldn't be taken lightly. This is definitely true. You should not take parenting lightly but you should act like you are taking it lightly. The parenting motto should be – “Be serious about what you want; be light-hearted in the way you go about getting it.”

You can be a light-hearted parent without compromising in your values, beliefs, or the respect that your children have for you.

All of us love our children and want the best for them. But in our attempts to set dignified examples, we lose the warmth and spontaneity that foster the environment necessary for smooth communication and trust.

Since most children are bound and determined to enjoy life, with or without their parent's blessings, rigid, serious parents unknowingly set up walls between themselves and their children.

Not all children respond to 'serious' and 'right'.

Most children are more likely to respond positively to parents who are easy to talk to, fun-loving, adventurous and free-spirited; the kind of parents who can say, “Problems? They don't scare me! Send 'em my way!”

When parents are too serious, when they place too much importance on being 'right', they are destined to face a mounting pressure between themselves and their children that will only pick up steam along the way. It may happen at age two or age nine; it might surface at age sixteen or it might remain dormant until age twenty-eight.

Bring the fun back in parenting by setting aside petty trivialities and concentrating on things that are really important – the love and trust you have in your children, learning from mistakes and correcting them, your dreams for the future and the shared memories that bind you together as a family.

Do not let seriousness overshadow the light within you and your children.

Let your children experience all of the joy, laughter, and creativity that you have to offer. Show them that serious matter can be handled lightly and effortlessly. Demonstrate to them that, even when difficulties arise, you are the kind of person who welcomes challenges and can handle them with confidence.

Only you can demonstrate to your children that life is a precious gift that can be easy, rewarding and fun, and should be seized with great gusto. Your children are depending on you to show them how.

### **Roots and wings**

THE DUTY OF the parent begins and ends with instilling values and life skills in children. Once the foundation has been laid, it is quite enough. Anyone can build over it. The child herself, her teachers, friends, family, society and the world at large. Nothing - but nothing can shake the foundation that has been well laid.

A parent gives the child 'roots'. An identity and a homestead to return to at anytime, from anywhere. This is not necessarily a building or a house... it is a sense of belonging. A mental haven. A sanctuary of sorts.

And then, the parents must give 'wings'. Fledglings must fly. It is the law of nature.

Having set them free, with their sense of values, it is but natural to expect them to head in the right direction. To return when they need to.

## 4. Conclusion

### The parenting legacy

“CHILDREN HAVE MORE need of models than of critics.”

- Joseph Joubert

The parenting act is an act of modeling. It all depends on how much time and effort we put into our creation. Some of us are born with a natural talent, and modeling our masterpiece comes easily. Some of us have to work a little harder at it, but as we practice we get better. All of us as parents are Michelangelos, working to mould our masterpieces in order that they take their rightful places in this world.

The magnificent wonder of being a parent is the knowledge that you have the power to model a world of delight, creativity, joy, effectiveness, excellence and success for your children: to mould your children into the kind of human beings that they can be proud of.

You begin by taking care of yourself first, so that you become the kind of person who has the energy, clarity of mind and emotional stability to be a model of excellence to your children, a parent who creates a family to which children want to belong.

This is the power of parenting. This is the parenting legacy that you will leave for your children.

END