

# An Elder's Guide to Parenting

*“At a time when the world seems to be spinning hopeless out of control,  
there's deceivers and believers and old in betweeners that seem to have no place to go.”*

-Willie Nelson, *‘Hands on the Wheel’*

It is so difficult to be a parent today. I'm not sure I want the job or even be up to the task.

Long gone the days of allowing children to play outside without fear of their pictures ending up on the back of a milk carton. The smart phone and social media have made it practically impossible for today's parents to limit their child's access to “tic-tok” type sewage. Authority figures, for generations an aid for parents, are no longer infallible or even trusted. Influencers are everywhere spewing misinformation. Parental authority is questioned by everyone from children to grandparents.

It seems it was easier being a parent in the olden days. Kids could still play in a park unsupervised. The idea of a school shooter was unimaginable. Parental controls on electronic devices were not necessary; there was but one television, in the living room of the home, showing only three channels. Folks did not hesitate to let a parent know if their kid was misbehaving out of their sight. Parents were still trusted to do the right thing.

Times have changed. The old norms seem to not apply. The parenting tactics of previous generations do not seem to work. For today's parents there appears to be nowhere to go, nothing to be trusted.

This parent from the olden days, an elder, would like to help with that. I would like to offer today's parents a place to go. A guide that can be trusted.

I am well aware that some will consider me a curmudgeon, an arrogant, ‘know it all’ who has a lot of nerve offering advice to today's parents. How can a boomer possibly offer a guide to raising a child in today's world? I understand. Many times I don't listen to my own self. I'm wrong about a lot of things, just ask my wife.

However, as an experienced parent to four, grandparent to six, armed with the benefit of having learned from my mistakes, I do feel I have bona fides in the parenting arena.

So, I humbly submit, for today's parents, a parenting guide for a world that seems to be spinning hopelessly out of control.

## **An Elder's Guide to Parenting.**

- 1. Remember that you are in charge.** Not your child. You set the agenda, the bedtime, the time they wake up. You decide what's for dinner, approve whom your child plays with, what they eat and drink, the books they read, the TV shows they watch. You're the boss until they reach the age of reason, which is different for every child. Then loosen the reins.
- 2. Establish the rules and the consequences.** Children need structure and boundaries. Clear rules of behavior must be set, first by example, then by explanation. A family code of conduct should be established that teaches and demands manners. When this code is broken, when unacceptable behavior presents itself (and it will) there should be clear and quick consequences. For example, when a child misbehaves in a restaurant, they should be taken from the table, explained the error of their ways, and not allowed back until they apologize to the group. The phrase "our family [insert name] doesn't act like that" should be a mantra. Explaining to your child that they "made a poor choice" is not enough.
- 3. Teach your child to be self-sufficient.** Each child, at the very youngest age, should have a job around the house that must be completed every day, or else. Never do it for them. By the age of ten, kids should know how to make a bed, get dressed, handle personal hygiene, feed themselves (making a PB&J is not difficult), clean a toilet... all by themselves! Don't be afraid to let your child fail at something; they will gain confidence as they learn from mistakes. Children being told that they are great at everything and can do no wrong, while providing them with everything, creates an unhappy adult whom is never satisfied and lacking in self-esteem.
- 4. Take away the smart phone, and keep your child off social media, until they are sixteen years old.** They will whine that "all the other kids have a phone," or "I need it for school." Ignore them. There is an easy answer parents, just say no. Remember rule #1, you are the boss. Provide a flip phone for emergencies or to keep contact. At sixteen, having earned your trust, reward your child with a smart phone. If you have done your job right, your child will be ready for the phone, use it appropriately, and appreciate it more.
- 5. Have dinner together at least three times per week and discuss world events.** Don't shield your kids from what is going on in the world. Explain what is happening and how it affects the family. Give your opinion on current topics and the reasons why you feel the way you do. Value your child's opinion when they back it up with facts. Your kids don't have to agree with you, they do need to explain the why. Teach world history at the dinner table.
- 6. Explain your family's history.** Tell them about your great-uncle, who landed at Normandy Beach on D-Day. About your grandpa who immigrated thru Ellis Island when he was nine years old. About your mom who was a parent to four before she was 33, then took a part-time job to make ends meet. Take them to the house in the middle of the inner city where your family got its start. Show them the pictures, take them to the reunions, have them meet and interact with their relatives.

7. **Expose children to the arts.** Introduce them to the best art, the best books, the best museums. Have your children listen to all the genres of music, and take them to live concerts. Expose them to a *Monet*, a *Van-Gogh*, a *Rembrandt* at an art museum near you. Make them read books, the real book, not an audio book and not on a tablet. Explore history museums, science museums, space museums, presidential museums.
8. **Show them people less fortunate.** Volunteer with your children at a food pantry. Take them to a poor part of town and just drive around. Have your children attend a Special Olympic event. Explain that the world is not fair, how lucky they are, and that there is always someone with less. Personally, I like the phrase my Dad used, “I complained because I had no shoes until I met the man who had no feet.”
9. **Always be honest.** A parent does not need to tell their children everything, but when they do, they must be honest. If the truth is uncomfortable, so be it; don’t sugar coat it. Admit your mistakes. Kids will forgive and forget mistakes, they will not forget lies.
10. **Have fun with your kids.** Laugh every day. Play games. Be self-deprecating, make fun of yourself. Tell stupid jokes. Watch dumb movies. Laugh at the absurdity of life. Do this every day with your kids. It’s good for you too.

I offer this guide only as an outline. This is not, and there is not, a one size fits all guide to parenting. There are many parenting styles, and seemingly unorthodox parenting has worked for many. Certainly, this guide is not complete. It doesn’t touch on the importance of exercise, handling money, keeping children safe, exposing kids to nature, sportsmanship, and so, so, so much more. The complete list of parental responsibilities is endless and daunting.

Many parents will disagree with all or most of this guide; that is fine by me. That a parent does things differently with their children than did their parents is certain and appropriate. I most assuredly did not raise my children as my parents did and I certainly did not follow much of this guide. I made mistakes that caused my kids plenty of headaches and heartaches. So will you. Mine love me anyway; the odds are so will your’s.

Parenting is hard. It has always been hard. It’s the toughest job you’ll ever have. It will wear you out, bring you incredible joy, make you laugh, make you cry, cause you angst, make you proud. That part of parenting hasn’t changed.

And something else hasn’t changed. Above all else just love your children. Do the best you can with the information you have at the time. Chances are the kids will be all right.

It worked for me.

**That's all I'm sayin'**

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