

Mothers – the heart and soul of parenting by Michael Grose

Around Mother's Day it is good to think about what mothering is about.

Being a parent and a mother are not necessarily the same. Parenting is a gender-neutral term and refers more to the management function (hearing kids read, being a cheerleader, confidante and behaviour management expert) while mothering, like fathering, is something more instinctive, more basic and more close to the bone.

Parenting can be taught but mothering is something to grow into. Mothering, like fathering, is generative in that it develops when you come into contact with children.

Mothering means different things to different people. Mothering is traditionally linked with nurturance and protection of the individual, while fathering is more usually linked with challenge for the individual and protection of the group or family. It has long been my contention that a child needs to be both mothered and fathered for healthy development to occur. That is, he or she needs to experience a mixture of nurturance and challenge. Sole parents need to be both mother and father to a child, which is hard work but millions of sole parents do it successfully.

The instinctive nature of mothering comes to the fore many times throughout a child's life, particularly when it is needed most. Most mothers generally instinctively know what a child needs at any given point in time yet many

women don't listen to, let alone trust, their instincts.

Mothers can be rejected temporarily by their children. For instance, young boys can sometimes turn away from their mothers in early primary school. A five or six year old boy may let his mum know that 'being a big boy' means that you no longer can kiss him goodbye outside the school gate. Or an early adolescent girl may want to spend more time with her father than with her mother because they need affirmation from a rejected male at that time of change. That is the instinctive nature of raising kids and the nature of mothering.

If parenting is about the headspace of raising children then mothering is about the heart and soul of raising kids. As a parent you may work yourself out of a job as your children move into adulthood but as a mother you are never redundant. We grow away from our parents but we never grow away from our mothers and fathers. A mother only has to look at her son or daughter in a certain way to transport them back to childhood in an instant.

It is worth remembering that parenting maybe transient as children grow up and leave home but mothering, like fathering, is something that will never end. It is for life! **OK**

Michael Grose is a leading parent educator, a trained teacher and author. For further ideas about raising confident kids and resilient teenagers visit www.parentingideas.com.au

Limits and boundaries to teach appropriate behaviour by Michael Grose

Children like limits and boundaries. They provide them with a structure and teach them how they should behave. In fact, many studies indicate that families who have very few clearly stated rules or standards are less likely to have children who misbehave.

Children also like to push parental boundaries so parents need to resist pressure that children can exert upon them. This is a normal but irritating expression of a child's push for independence and autonomy.

Effective limits and boundaries:

- ... Are given using clear, direct, concrete, specific terms – "Be home by six o'clock" rather than "Don't be late."
- ... Explain reasons if appropriate.
- ... Involves choices when appropriate

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Our Kids

'Limits and boundaries to teach appropriate behaviour' continued

One of the simplest ways to improve a child's behaviour is to be more consistent.

Children love their parents to be consistent as they are able to predict how they will act. A consistent approach to discipline helps put children in control of their behaviour.

Consistency means as parents we follow-through and do as we say. Consistency means not giving children second and third chances. It means not allowing children to get away with misbehaviour two or three times then coming down hard the fourth time they misbehave.

Consistency also means that both parents in a dual parent family get their act together and respond in similar ways when children are less than perfect. Sole parents need to be consistent with how they react when children misbehave.

Difficult children like consistency. Consistency is a challenge as it is tempting to let children's misbehaviour go when they break a rule or exceed a limit. We become tired and sometimes we doubt our own judgement. It is easy to think, "Maybe I am being a bit tough..."

Consistency prevents misbehaviour from escalating. We help children develop self-discipline, which is our aim, when we are consistent and do as we say we will – every time.

Parents who have difficulty setting some limits and boundaries with children generally have great difficulty raising their adolescents. Those parents who have never insisted that children go to bed at a reasonable time and never resisted a young child's efforts to extend bedtime generally have a hard time insisting that teenagers be home from a party at a reasonable time rather than come home when they please on weekends.

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Michael Grose is a leading parent educator, a trained teacher and author. For further ideas about getting your family flying in the same formation visit www.parentingideas.com.au

What you should know about....making your child's online experience safe by Melissa Norfolk

As a parent you work hard to protect your children. You warn them about stranger danger but keeping them safe online is a little more challenging. Each time your computer is connected to the Internet, danger could come flooding into your home.

The Internet is now an integral part of life so simply banning it is inappropriate. Instead, you can take some steps to minimise the dangers for your children.

1. Keep the computer connected to the Internet in shared family spaces rather than bedrooms so that you can monitor its use and also be available if your child wants to talk about anything they view that makes them feel uncomfortable.

2. Set some guidelines for use such as:

... Never give out personal information or your photo

... Don't open email attachments from strangers of people they have met online

... Never meet in person someone who they have met online

3. While supervision is the best defence against Internet danger it is not possible nor desirable to monitor children 24/7. The use of Internet filtering software allows you to set controls over the information that your child sends or views. Some software even allows you to set time limits on how long your child can surf the Net.

Check that your Internet Service Provider (ISP) is family-friendly and adheres to the Internet Industry Association codes of conduct. Family-friendly ISP's can be recognised by the lady bird logo displayed on their website. These ISP's can offer information and online tools to assist both parents and children to use the Internet in fun, yet safe ways.

Internet expert, Melissa Norfolk, speaks to business, school and community groups about effective use of the internet, finding what you need online and internet safety. For more information visit www.technologypresentations.com.au

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