

The Incredible Shrinking Childhood by Michael Grose

Have you noticed how children are growing up at the speed of light? One minute girls are in fairy dresses and in the blink of an eye they are wearing tight midriff-baring tops and listening to Eminem.

In Australia 95 per cent of girls begin menstruation by their thirteenth birthday, which is two years earlier than a century ago. In the United Kingdom one in six girls begins puberty at the age of eight and one in fourteen boys begin puberty at the same age. A generation ago this was one in 150 for boys.

Experts attribute earlier maturation with better nutrition and improved child health. Whatever the reason earlier maturation of children is catching many parents and teachers unawares. Parents of ten year olds and younger are scratching their heads wondering whatever happened to their cooperative, happy, willing-to-oblige child. The transformation to sullen, morose and moody adolescent is now a primary school event for an increasing number.

This generation of children are bombarded with relentless messages through television, movies and now the Internet about how they should look and how they should behave. They are also exposed to mountains of information about the adult world. This means that they tend to grow away from their parents at an increasingly earlier age. When combined with early maturation, peer influence, which is a

hallmark of early adolescence, has an inordinate impact on children's attitudes and behaviour.

This trend toward earlier physical maturation has two major implications for parents. First, the window of opportunity to form strong relationships and really influence children is only open for a short time so parents have a shorter time span available than previous generations to have maximum influence on their children. In short, children start tuning out to their parents and tuning into to their peers and become influenced by their peers' perceptions at an earlier age.

Second, parents need to be ready to adjust their parenting earlier than they may have expected. Sexuality and relationship education needs to be an ongoing process that begins when children are young. Currently, many adolescents give a huge thumbs-down in terms of the quality of sexuality education they receive from their parents. In one study, around 50 per cent of teenagers gave their parents the lowest score possible on rating scale from one to six in this important area. Relationship education has been one of those difficult areas that many parents are happy to leave to schools to carry out. It seems that is something parents need to get better at, and fast!

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

Tips for understanding children's misbehaviour by Michael Grose

"Is most misbehaviour attention-seeking?" asked a father at a parenting seminar

Good question!

"Yes," I said. "But it is not that simple," I added.

All misbehaviour by its very nature is attention-seeking – it is hard to ignore and usually gains some measure of attention either from parents, siblings or adults.

There four common types of misbehaviour that achieve one of three goals. Your gut reaction is the best guide to understand the goals of misbehaviour. If you are unsure just respond as your feelings indicate and your child's response is a sure indicator. The four types of misbehaviours are:

1. **"Notice Me" behaviours:** These behaviours include clowning, cuteness, some eating problems, interruptions, shyness, showing-off and whining. They are very common in young children who think that the world revolves around them.

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'Tips for understanding children's misbehaviour' continued

2. **"Help Me" behaviours:** These behaviours include incompetence, laziness, forgetfulness and untidiness which are all great ways to keep parents in children's service. When parents respond to "help me" behaviours by reminding, tidying and doing things for them kids soon become helpless! Both behaviour types achieve the goal of **attention**.
4. **"Make Me" behaviours:** These behaviours include defiance, arguing, dawdling, temper tantrums and stubbornness. These behaviours let parents know that they can't make their child do anything they don't want to do. The goal is **power and control**. You know you have a power-seeker on your hands if you feel angry. You actually want to make your child do something. Its not pretty! If you respond by telling them what to do you often get an argument, more defiance or lack of cooperation. These kids don't mind a good scrap!
5. **"I'll hurt you" behaviours:** These hurtful behaviours include hitting, stealing, refusal to cooperate and saying hurtful things. The behaviours vary but the goal is the same – **to retaliate or hurt others** around them. When confronted with these retaliatory behaviours you feel **hurt or even threatened**. "How could she say such awful things to me?" is a typical reaction. You also feel that you want to get even with your children for wanting to hurt you. It can get nasty!!

Goal-related behaviour works because parents tend to be as predictable as a washing machine cycle. As difficult as it may seem you can change your children's behaviours when you stop responding impulsively to their misbehaviour. Ignore 'notice me' behaviours (and place your attention elsewhere), stop being a mule to help me kids, refuse to fight with power-seekers (and implement a consequence) and avoid overtly showing your hurt when confronted with retaliatory behaviours.

Start by avoiding your first instinctive impulse when kids are less than perfect and identify the behaviour's goal. Then change your usual reaction. Experiment a little and expect children's behaviour to get worse before it gets better. Hang in there and you will see results in terms of improved behaviour. OK

Further ideas about understanding and handling kids' behaviour can be found in *One Step Ahead: A Guide to Raising 3-12 year olds* by Michael Grose. It can be ordered at www.parentingideas.com.au

What you should know about talking to kids about sex by Michael Grose

A number of research projects have shown that children and teenagers are quite savvy when it comes to observing the parenting skills of their mothers and fathers. Generally, they rank mothers higher than fathers in most areas concerning communication, which is probably pretty close to the mark.

One area where they say both genders are falling down is in the area of talking to kids about sexuality. It would appear that fathers are poor overall and mothers are not much better. Mothers do talk to children about sexuality but talk with girls more than boys and when they do they stick to plumbing and steer clear of topics such as masturbation and homosexuality. There appears to be five traits

shared by parents who are able to talk openly about sexual issues with their children:

1. Parents give factual, truthful answers to children's questions.
2. Parents listen to children.
3. Children are able to voice their opinions about sexual issues.
4. Parents don't insist that children stick to a rigid codes of behaviour.
5. Parents use real life opportunities to engage children in discussions about sexuality.

Talking to kids about sex is hard work.

Parents need both the processes in place to communicate with kids and the confidence to engage them about personal matters. OK

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