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Avoiding Parenting Mistakes... Ha!



*Even on the best of days, parenting can be overwhelming and stressful. **Jordan D. Brown**, father of two, offers hope and humor for when things don't go right.*

Goofs, Gaffes, Blunders

When I was asked to write a newsletter about common parenting mistakes, my first thought was, "At last! A topic I'm an expert in!" In past newsletters, when I've addressed topics such as handling temper tantrums, or helping children learn to use the potty, I've sometimes felt out of my element. But writing about "getting it wrong"? Now, that's a topic I can sink my teeth into!

Sure, sometimes everything goes smoothly, and being a parent is truly a life-affirming joy. On those days, I think, "This is why I became a dad." But then, just as I'm feeling cocky, I'll stumble upon one of those "terrible, horrible, no good, very bad days"—and I'll think, "What happened?!"

When I am having an "off" day as a parent, I try to prevent things from spiraling downward. For example, I keep in mind that there is no such thing as a "perfect parent." We all have our ups and downs, and one of the keys to happiness and success as a parent is to realize that "[good enough](#)" is often just fine. After all, as Big Bird advises in his classic song, "[Everyone makes mistakes, so why can't you?](#)"

So, without further ado, let me share some of my common parenting mistakes... and some tricks I've learned for turning the tide.

"No TV for a Month!" and Other Bright Ideas

Last week, I was in the kitchen—rushing to make dinner, hoping we'd have time for a semi-leisurely meal together before driving my 5-year-old daughter Olivia to her dance class. In addition, I somehow was thinking we'd also have enough time to finish her homework (yes, homework in kindergarten!) before we left. I had told Olivia and her older brother that they could quietly watch a TV show while I cooked. I figured that might contain the chaos. I figured wrong.

"Daaadddy!!!!" Olivia yells from the living room. "Finian won't give me back my sword!!" (plastic, of course!)

"She's lying!" my son retorts. "She told me I could play with it!"

"It's MY sword!" she replies. Then, a smorgasbord of screaming, tears, and blaming.

I burst out of the kitchen. "What is going on?" Not waiting for an answer, I grab the remote control. "Clearly, you're not interested in this show! I'm turning it off." Click.

this week on the street

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“But you PROMISED...” they whine together

I could smell the dinner starting to burn in the kitchen. I wasn't at wit's end--but I had arrived at the stop just before. “You're both losing your TV privileges!”

“No fair!” they yell. (NOW they're united...)

“I'll tell you what's fair. No more TV for a week.”

“You're a terrible father!” my son says. That got my pulse going.

“Oh, really?” I say. “Well, then, no TV for a month!!”

See that object flying out the window? Yup, that was my sanity.

I sent them to their rooms, and returned to the kitchen, salvaged our dinner, and calmed down. Then, about ten minutes later, I went upstairs to Olivia and Finian's bedrooms and [apologized](#) for losing my temper. I explained that while their behavior could have been a lot better, they weren't the only ones who had misbehaved. I calmly admitted my mistakes, and said I was probably trying to do too much. I gave them hugs, told them I loved them deeply even when they drive me crazy, and asked them to come down to dinner. Oh, as for my grand ban on TV? I told them that we could watch a short show together later that evening. There are definitely times when caving into demands is a bad idea—but there are also times when admitting mistakes and moving forward is more important.

Now WHERE Did I Put My Sense of Humor? Oh, the Closet!

In our ongoing quest to encourage our children's manners, my wife Ellen and I remind them to say “thank you” especially at mealtime. Of course, Olivia and Finian often forget. I might go to the trouble to make one of their favorite meals, and the first thing they say when their plate is set on the table is, “You forgot my milk!” When this happened recently, I made the parenting mistake of pushing and pushing them to be polite. I forgot that the best lessons often happen in a playful context. While my intentions started off good, eventually I became frustrated and angry. In my head, I wondered how they could be so ungrateful.

I began another lecture about why they should show their appreciation and respect and then, I thought, “If I were a kid, how would I like to be told to be polite?” I stumbled on a more fun way to handle this situation. I put the rest of the meal on the table, and waited for some token of gratitude. Nothing. I then got their attention, and said, “You're not going to believe this! But I think your thank-you magically escaped from your mouths and got TRAPPED in this closet.” Both children smiled, as I walked over to the closet. They knew where I was going with this approach. I dramatically opened the closet, and heard them both shout, “THANK YOU!”

“See, I thought that was the problem,” I calmly said with a smile, as I closed the door and returned to the table.

Is the Mess Worth the Stress?

My kids, like most children, have a special super power--the power to turn a well-organized, clean home into a homage to clutter in a matter of minutes. Toys, costumes, and games get spread out on various surfaces. Paint, glue, and glitter have a way of scattering to the far corners of any room. Juice and other snacks end up spilled. When my children announce that they want to cook or do “science experiments,” Ellen and I realize that order is over-rated. Yes, it's nice to have stain-free furniture, and going

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through the day not feeling the pain of stepping on a runaway Lego piece—but we've found that that's the price of admission. We want to convey to our children that we love them more than any possessions.

Not long ago, I read a great story in the book *The Last Lecture* by Randy Pausch. The author had just bought a new convertible, and was showing it off to his niece and nephew. His sister warned the kids, "Be careful in Uncle Randy's new car... Don't mess up anything. Don't get it dirty." Knowing that the car would eventually get dirty, the author did something surprising. He opened a can of soda and deliberately poured it on the car's cloth seats. Everyone was shocked. Then they laughed. They understood what he was doing. Later that weekend, one of the kids came down with the flu and threw up all over the backseat. The child was relieved because his uncle had made it clear that sometimes accidents happen, and when they do, you have to accept them with a sense of humor.

Good luck avoiding some of these common parenting mistakes, but don't be too hard on yourself when they happen. Enjoy the ride...

Jordan D. Brown

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