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FAMILY LIFE

A "Perfect" Parent

Is there such a thing as a "perfect" parent?

Many people believe in the myth of the perfect parents - the ideal mother and father who raise happy, well-adjusted problem-free children. In truth, there is no such person as a perfect parent - or a perfect child.

Problem behavior is common among school-age children and takes up a significant portion of a parent's time. At any one time, on average, school-age children have about five or six traits or behaviors that their parents find difficult. These might include not complying with simple requests, avoiding chores, spending too much time watching TV or playing videos, engaging in sibling rivalry or having difficulty completing homework. Other common problems for parents are dealing with a temperamentally difficult child, or coping with a child who either wants too much independence or hasn't achieved enough autonomy. Parents also sometimes encounter the dilemma of a child who prefers friends or activities not approved of by his mother or father.

Mistakes are OK

As a parent, you need to recognize that it is normal to feel worried, confused, angry, guilty, overwhelmed and inadequate because of your child's behavior. That is part of being a parent. It is futile and self-defeating to try to be perfect or to raise perfect children.

Think back to how you behaved, or misbehaved, as a child, about how your parents dealt with your behavior, and how you felt about their disciplinary techniques. They were not perfect, but neither was anyone else. Do not try to overcompensate for their shortcomings by trying to be perfect yourself, and by getting caught up in statements like "I'm not going to make the same mistakes my parents made."

All parents and all children make mistakes in their attempts to communicate and deal with one another and in trying to solve problems. Parents need to trust themselves and their instincts. Mothers and fathers tend to have good intuition and knowledge of their own children. They often know more than they think they do, and they should not be afraid of making mistakes. Children are resilient and forgiving and usually learn and grow through their mistakes. Parents tend to be just as resilient and forgiving.

Flexible Parenting

However, parents who "live for their children" are putting themselves in a very vulnerable position, setting themselves up for possible disappointment, frustration and resentment. They are also being unfair to their family. Parents should not expect to receive all their personal fulfillment from their children or from the parenting role. Parents need other activities to fulfill their self-images, and other sources of love and nurturing. They need time to be adults and time for themselves - and a break from children and parenting responsibilities.

As a parent, you need to develop your own philosophy - one with which you feel comfortable - within a flexible and adaptable framework. Take into account your own expectations, parenting style, and temperament, and how they fit with each of your children and your spouse, and their own unique preferences and temperaments. Your approach and philosophy will vary from youngster to youngster, mainly because of their own particular attributes.

Along the way, remember that professional help is available if problems ever become too intense, exceed your own coping capabilities, or cause secondary difficulties such as a decline in school performance, increased family stress or serious emotional problems.

You should take comfort in the fact that in the vast majority of cases, children do turn out well. But along the way, keep your sense of humor, trust your instincts and seek help and advice early rather than late. While parenting is a great challenge, it can also be one of the most rewarding and enjoyable experiences of your life.

Points To Keep In Mind

1. Even among children of the same age, there is a range of what is normal in the way they develop socially, emotionally, intellectually and physically.
2. A child's maturity level may be different for the various qualities he is developing, including social skills, athletic abilities and learning capabilities. He might be strong in math but weak in writing (or vice versa), or good at basketball but not at golf.
3. The variations described above may be permanent, forming a child's own unique profile; or they could be evolving and thus be subject to change.
4. The way a child develops can influence his behavior, and vice versa.
5. The particular parenting style of a mother and father, as well as the child's environment, will affect the youngster's behavior and development.

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