



How to Mess Up Your Children

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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So often adults use the adage "Do as I say - not as I do" and then wonder why their children have problems while growing up and when they become adults. Your bad habits and theirs can continue on for decades and even down to the fourth and fifth generation. It is therefore important to look in the mirror, do a self-inventory and make changes before you create a monstrous situation.

Here are some things to consider:

1. Never make promises that you won't or can't fulfill. Often I see disappointment in youngsters who wait by the window for a parent who fails to pick them up or has a birthday "forgotten" by a busy schedule. As adults they may expect their parents to pay for their university tuition, give them the farm or buy them a house "just because". Unfortunately, trust evaporates quickly and can be difficult or impossible to restore.
2. Do not allow or encourage illegal activities. Buying alcohol or drugs for a minor is against the law - no matter how much they beg or "deserve" a celebration. Driving a vehicle without a license not only plants a seed but raises risk that cannot be reversed. When a child gets permission from a parent to break the law, s/he will have problems understanding how to live with respect as an adult and then will likely model this for the next generation.
3. Praising a child for being "special" can blunt his motivation to try new things. It is better to compliment a child for making a good effort so that s/he can practice a new task without fear of failing than to let him/her think that nothing can or should be tried if there is a chance of losing the "special" status. So many adults lack skills and abilities because they were never challenged to try doing things.
4. Ignoring or bad-mouthing leaders in society breeds disrespect. Viewing politicians as all "bad" or all "good" can prevent children from researching and forming their own opinion about issues. Criticizing teachers without gathering adequate information can block a child's major source for learning. Targeting ethnic groups causes division and rebellion rather than understanding. If you want to be respected, show respect towards others.
5. Expecting a child to be like an adult can leave life-long scars. Children are placed in families to learn how to mature and become healthy individuals. As a parent your job is to work yourself out of a job by teaching independence. The child is not your friend, therapist or unpaid help. Do not expect a child to make good choices without practice, mentoring and monitoring.
6. Remember that you are a powerful example. Will your son or daughter need to attend adult child of an alcoholic groups? Will family occasions and memories be ruined by addictions? Will unpaid bills be or unfiled Income Tax be part of your families' "normal"? How many wives, husbands or partners will you invite into your life and the lives of your extended family? How will your children treat you as you age if you have treated your parents poorly?
7. Know where you stop and the child begins. Make sure that you show up in your child's life as a support but don't do the work for him or her. You are responsible to know what the child is expected to do in school but the child is responsible to do what is expected. Having a child live in your house or treat you like an ATM when s/he is an adult is not wise and it certainly doesn't encourage independence or maturity. It is very dangerous to feel sorry for another person as it causes you to do things that will likely not be helpful over the long-term.
8. Do not think that your child "owes" you because you raised him/her. Have a plan in place that allows you to be self-sufficient throughout your lifetime.
9. Live and let live. You are not always right and your child will likely have different opinions and interests that you have.

10. Love without needing to "fix" There are few heroes in the world and not many "safe" places where people can know that they are loved and cared about. Let your child know that s/he is valued and important but, at the same time, that you are not a crisis service. A good formula for handling trouble is to empathize and then ask "What are you going to do about it?"

Oh and if you offspring mess up, you do not need to take the blame and beat yourself up all the time. Each of us has free will and that allows each of us to make our own mistakes!