

Five Parenting “Don’ts”

I’m a dad. Have been for over 13 years. I have three wonderful, intelligent, funny, thoughtful, and loving boys.[1. I have also had the great opportunity to be a foster parent and a host father for an international student.] They have blessed my life in ways I could not have imagined prior to their births. Each of them has taught me new truths about God and living. Personally, I would love to take all the credit for how great they are. I wish their big hearts and amazing personalities had everything to do with all the great parenting decisions I have made throughout their lives. I can’t. The truth is, I have done really well in the parenting department at times and have failed spectacularly at other times. I figured I would pull the curtain back a bit on my own life and share five things you should probably do, or not do, in raising your children.

1. Don’t parent from the couch.

I know you have probably heard this one a million times. Too bad. You probably need to hear it a million and one times. After a long, hard day at work, the “easiest” thing to do is to sit on the couch, put something on TV that will serve as a distraction to you and just tell the kids to give you some space. What you might not realize is that your kids hear those words and they interpret them as “Please come in here every five minutes with some new argument, fight, disruption, or complaint.” They see your tired face and decide this is the exact moment in their life when they will need you most. In fact, they have never nor will they ever need you more than they do right now. Trust me on this: Engaging and interacting with your kids, even if you are tired, will help you get more rest in the long run. You will not get any more rest by trying to avoid your parenting responsibilities. You will go to bed

exhausted and frustrated and feeling like a failure as a parent.

2. Don't be condescending.

As your kids get older, they will begin to test boundaries. Sometimes, that is as simple as using a tone of voice that could be perceived, if heard in the exact right way, in the exact right time, as being slightly disrespectful. I know! Your little angel might actually be snarky or dismissive when they speak to you. The horror! You know what makes them reevaluate their attitudes and instantly ask forgiveness for their impertinence? Being snarky and rude back to them. It's as if you poured a healing balm on their bristly and unhappy souls. Back here in the real world, it's more like you poured gasoline on a fire. They will learn that it's okay to speak in a rude and disrespectful manner if it accomplishes their goal. Don't go down to their level. Bring them up to yours.

3. Don't attempt to teach them by mimicking their poor behavior.

I tried this recently. It might have been the biggest failure of my parenting life. Here's the story: My family was playing tennis. One of my boys responded to a few plays with a negative attitude. He was asked to correct it. He chose not to but instead continued to mutter under his breath and act in a way that was not acceptable. Instead of pulling him aside and having a calm and mature conversation with him, I chose to do the next best thing: Imitate his behavior in an effort to show him how ridiculous he looked. I began to respond with angry mutterings. I hit the ball in an angry manner; at times so hard I nearly knocked it out of the court. It got so bad, that my boys said they did not want to play anymore but I wasn't finished with my little performance. I told them, in as loud

and as boorish of a voice as I could, that they were going to play until I said we were done. I brought my son to tears. I almost broke him. I had made a complete fool of myself. No matter what my rationale had been, my actions were more motivated by my temper and my need to be in charge. I apologized to all my boys and my wife when we got back home. I hope I never see that side of myself again.

4. Don't over-schedule.

I realize this one might be a point of contention for some but I truly believe that many parents sign their children up for as much as they can, afraid that they will miss out on something they might love. I get that. I understand where that thinking comes from. Hear me out, though. Spending time at home with family is vastly more important than one more soccer league. Or one more piano practice. Or one more...you get the point. I'm not disparaging sports or other activities. They are beneficial to your child's development. But do not be so busy with those things that you have no time at home. Your kids will learn much more by being with you, doing things with you, spending time with you than they will from any league, event, or activity.

5. Don't neglect reading the Bible together.

Full confession here: I am still struggling with this one. We (my wife and I) have done well at times. When the boys were young, we read the Bible to them almost every night. We have done family devotions sporadically in the past few years. I am trying to get us back on track in this regard. And as soon as I restarted our Bible study, it was apparent how much my boys wanted it. My seven-year-old asked for a real Bible so he could follow along. (We have used different Kid's Bibles for him in the past, but none of them had the entire Bible in it.)

I gave him his new Bible last night and I don't think he put it down until he went to bed. He asked if he could read it before he went to sleep. Your kids are receptive and eager to learn about God. Don't assume they are getting enough from church or simply from seeing the way you live. Feed them the Word.

I hope this helps. I am not an expert. I have no degree in parenting or childrearing. What I do have though, is 13 years of trying, failing, trying again, falling on my face, and occasionally succeeding. Maybe you can learn from my mistakes and be better off for it. If you have some advice, some things to avoid, or questions, feel free to post them in the comment section below.