



Kids Don't Come with an Instruction Manual

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One day you have a baby and the next day you're bringing him or her home. Okay . . . Now what?

Sure, we've all been kids and vaguely remember our childhood, but that's not a very good rehearsal for the real thing — parenthood. Becoming a parent is a little scary. No, . . . it's VERY scary. On one hand, you feel like you've been thrown into the pool without first learning how to swim. On the other hand, being put to the test is a small price to pay for parenthood — one of the most exhilarating and rewarding experiences of a lifetime.

As parents, we want the very best for our kids: to lead happy, healthy, and productive lives. We want our kids to live up to their potential, to grow up to be decent human beings, and to contribute back to society. And, although these goals are very admirable, getting across the finish line isn't always easy. For instance, when our kids fall down, we feel their pain; when our kids lose, we lose with them; and when our kids get rejected, we feel their disappointment.

As loving parents, we make every effort to guide our kids to the Promised Land and shield them from dangers lurking around the bend. Unfortunately, sometimes our well-intentioned actions set us on a collision course with our kids. For example, we “coach” our kids not to make the same mistakes that we've made; we scrutinize our kids' activities to ensure that they're trying their best; and of course, we flip out when they really step out of bounds. Some people may say we're meddling; others call it hovering; our kids would probably say we're driving them crazy. The truth is, even though everything we do is out of our love for them, we can be our kids' worst nightmare.

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Nag . . . Nag . . . Nag

Work hard. Although our kids aren't always willing participants, we try to instill a strong work ethic in them at an early age. “I know Johnny's parents don't make him clean up his room, but Johnny's not our child.”

Do your best. We want our kids to understand that their work isn't finished until it's done “properly.” So, we send them back to the drawing board and ask them to raise their game. That doesn't always please them — especially when there's something good on TV.

Share your toys. Sharing is a very difficult concept for little children to learn. Come to think of it, it's a difficult concept for many adults to grasp also. Well, that doesn't stop us from trying to teach our kids right from wrong.

Reach for the stars. We want our kids to set stretch goals for themselves in life. So, just when our kids reach their comfort zone, we drive them crazy by suggesting that they have the potential to achieve more.

Values matter. I'm sure our kids get tired of hearing, “Always tell the truth,” “Sit up straight,” “Save for a rainy day,” and “Don't talk with your mouth full” — but ask yourself, would you like to eat across from yourself?

Learn by your mistakes. It really hurts to watch our kids hit a wall after making a mistake. So it's tempting to overcompensate by trying to raise them in a bubble. I know, I know. Our kids won't be independent if we force them to ride through life with training wheels. Experience is a good teacher — we just hope they appreciate that when they get older.

You're judged by the company you keep. When our kids are young, we have total control over their environment. When they get older, however, their friends have a major influence on their lives. As the adage goes, "You're judged by the company you keep." We cross our fingers, hoping they choose wisely.

Eat your vegetables. Good luck trying to "preach" healthy living habits to a teenager who thinks French fries are a health food, who could be a gold-medal winner if video games were an Olympic sport, or who could be the poster child for "couch potato." The habits they grow up with may "shape" them for life. Sometimes that's a tough thing to swallow.

No One's Perfect (Not Even Parents)

A note to our kids:

Although we aim to do our best, we aren't perfect. So please try to understand. As your parents, it's our goal to never have a second agenda, an ulterior motive, or expect to be paid back — all we want is what's best for you. Period. That means that although we're not "cool" anymore, embedded in those recollections of the five-mile walks to school (uphill both ways), there are occasional lessons to be learned. Listen to us every once in a while — we may still know a thing or two about life, and we desperately want to share it with you.

We may not have all the answers, but I'm sure we can figure it out together. And since we've made our share of mistakes in life, learn from our missteps. Why run into the wall and get hurt when we've already "been there, done that"? And, if we're pushing you to live up to your potential or to be a better person, why put up a fight? Would you rather have parents who don't care?

We know that we get on your nerves sometimes. We know that it's your life to live. But we wouldn't be doing our "job" if we didn't get under your skin every once in a while. That's what parents do. One thing we can promise. We will ALWAYS be in your corner rooting for you. We will ALWAYS put your needs before our own. And we will ALWAYS be there to pick up the pieces if things head south. Remember, no one will ever love you more than we do.

Being a parent is a tough job. We're not complaining. We wouldn't have it any other way. We are so blessed and honored to be your parents. But unfortunately, parents aren't issued an instruction manual. By the time we really figure out this parenting thing, you'll be all grown up having children of your own. . . . now it's your turn.

Frank Sonnenberg, a marketing strategist, has written four books and published over 300 articles. • *IndustryWeek* named the first edition of *Managing with a Conscience* one of the Top Ten Business Books of the Year. The second edition of *Managing with a Conscience* is now available. • Salon.com named Sonnenberg's blog among the top 100 in 2009 • Trust Across America named Sonnenberg one of the Top 100 Thought Leaders of 2010 • In 2011, *Social Media Marketing Magazine* (SMM) selected Sonnenberg as one of the top marketing authors in the world on Twitter. www.franksonnenbergonline.com © 2012 Frank Sonnenberg. All rights reserved. If you want to re-post or republish this post, please email frank@franksonnenbergonline.com. Thank you for respecting intellectual capital.