

7 Tips to Raise Your Kids in the Way They Should Go

Sometimes we are bombarded by news of incredibly sad tragedies. Whether it's a school shooting, a mother in Utah who killed six of her infants, or teens who stab a peer to please a fictional Internet character, a common theme in many of these heart-wrenching stories is a troubled childhood.

As parents, our dream for our children is a happy and fulfilled life. After they are born, our biggest worry quickly emerges: Do I really know what I'm doing as a parent? Common anxieties include breast-feeding, sleeping, crying, spanking, eating, finances and on and on. And it gets much more complicated as our kids become teenagers.

Our society does a good job of testing the qualifications for someone to drive a car, go to college or join the military. But we get no formal training and take no exams for our two most important and difficult roles—being a spouse and a parent.

As a psychiatrist, a husband of 23 years, a father who has raised three great daughters, and as someone who has made mistakes, too, let me share some vital tips to equip you for parenting success.

1. Grow your relationship with God. Being empowered by Him and using His instruction manual—the **Best Instruction Book for Living Everyday** (.)—to guide our development and management skills in order to enhance the quality of our marriages and parenting is the foundational key to good parenting.

2. Choose the right and best spouse. He or she will be your most important teammate and ministry partner in this all-important mission. Put God in the center of your marriage, because divorce is such a damaging blow to everyone involved

and produces fertile ground for Satan to establish a foothold in the battle for your kids' souls.

3. Relationship is more important than obedience. As parents, we want our kids to learn to obey us so they don't get hurt, so they develop healthy habits, so they learn to respect authority, and so they humble themselves before God and obey Him. In our zest to prioritize obedience, we often sacrifice a relationship with our kids.

If God could have one or the other—obedience or relationship—He definitely desires the relationship, just like the father of the prodigal son. I have seen many parents who focus so much on chores, grades, curfews and rules that the child feels like an employee rather than a family member. When we make this comparison, we realize that it's easy to fall into the trap of sending the wrong message that obedience is more important than relationship.

4. Shower them with truthful words of affirmation. Kids need to hear they are loved, cared for, valued and connected. We assume they know how much we love them, but they need to hear it. So we must verbalize our love and follow it up with hugs, kisses and pats on the back. They never get tired of hearing, "I love you" or "You are special." Do you?

5. The *quantity* of time will produce *quality* relationships. We get tricked into believing that quality moments can make up for the lack of time we spend with our children. But quality relationships come with familiarity, trust and true connection. These are by-products of lots of healthy time together. Just as with God, a two-hour connection on Sundays won't produce a great relationship. But regular and rather ordinary connections with God during the week builds a powerful relationship with depth.

6. Be a role model, and teach decision-making skills. Decision-making is crucial, but we rarely teach the mechanics

of it. Six components make up every decision, every time. In this order, they spell SPEARS, and as parents, we should teach our children how to use this process. It's important that they see good, healthy decision-making processes in us as well.

- **Stimulus:** A situation or event occurs.
- **Perception:** We view it based on our thoughts and lenses.
- **Emotions:** Based on our viewpoint, emotions well up.
- **Assessment:** We weigh our options.
- **Response:** We take action, implementing our decision.
- **Summary Thought:** We review whether our decision worked or we need to try something else.

7. Show them how to handle negative emotions and adversity.

Emotions are a key component of the decision-making process, but they shouldn't determine our decisions. Unfortunately, because we don't properly process our negative emotions, they prompt most of our poor decisions.

Our negative feelings are really our God-given warning system, letting us know of potential dangers or problems. When a red light flashes on the dashboard, the light is not the problem; it is only the warning. Our emotions serve the same purpose, but we often mistakenly teach our kids that the negative emotion is the problem.

By implementing these tips, we can raise our kids in the way they should go, and they never will depart from it, the Bible says. God doesn't solely instruct us to take them to church but also help them become doers of the Word and godly decision-makers. When we teach our children biblical principles by example, they will understand how God designed them and how to express their free will to be shining lighthouses.

Remember, the decisions you make determine your life—and your children's lives. So choose well!

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