

# A Spirit-Led Dad's 15 Tips for Successful Parenting

Kathy and I have raised four children in our 40 years of marriage. We have had our share of tough seasons. We know what it's like to pace the floor at night in dread, crying out to God for a fever to break in our tiny baby. We understand the grief of disappointment, and the heartbreak of teenagers who fail. We have experienced the joy of first dates and the anguish of first rejections.

Raising children is exhilarating and challenging, clarifying and confusing, frustrating and freeing, but I wouldn't trade the experience for anything. Although I don't think there is any magic formula to raising kids, I do believe there are principles that really help a lot. Here are 15 keys I hope will assist you in parenting:

1. **Be consistent.** Parenting shouldn't depend on your mood. Make sure your kids can count on the same outcomes no matter how you feel. For instance, if your kid is screaming for candy in the store, and one day you are tired, so you give it to them, you just taught your child that if they throw a fit, they will eventually get their way.
2. **Don't yell.** If your voice has to escalate before you finally act, you are teaching your kids that you don't mean what you say until the volume of your voice reaches a certain pitch. Your delayed response also sends a message that they should listen to you because you are angry, not because you have their best in mind.
3. **Teach your kids how to think by giving them choices.** For example, if they are making noise in the living room and you want them out of your way, say something like, "Do you want to play in your room, or would you rather play

in the backyard?”

4. **Correct attitudes before they become an action.** All behavior begins with a thought, which manifests in an attitude, that finally becomes an action. Therefore, bad actions begin with wrong thoughts. When you correct an attitude, you are teaching your kids how to manage their inner-world so that they don't make a mess of their outer world.
5. **Have an understanding for the ways their minds are developing.** The frontal cortex of the brain is our “cause and effect thinking center,” but the frontal cortex doesn't fully develop until we are 18-20 years old. Therefore, kids are actually incapable of thinking through the ramifications of their actions. For instance, have you ever asked your son, “Why did you jump off the dresser?” To which he responds, “I don't know.” The truth is, he really doesn't know, because the cause and effect center of his brain isn't developed yet. Trying to punish him into cause and effect thinking is a waste of time. It will only frustrate the heck out of your kids and result in them feeling like failures.
6. **Be the first one to inform your kids about any important subject.** The principle of first mention says that the first time we hear something about any subject, we receive it as the truth. Everything else we receive on that same subject (after our first exposure) will be weighed against our first experience, and embraced or rejected accordingly. For example, if you wait until your kids are 15 years old to tell them about sex, and therefore, their friends tell them first, they will compare what you taught them to what their friends have told them. If what you shared was opposite of their friends' counsel, they are likely to reject your input and embrace theirs. On the other hand, if you tell them first, they are most likely to view their friend's

counsel as wrong.

7. **Don't be a helicopter mom or dad.** Let children learn from their own experiences whenever possible. When you see them doing something wrong, and it doesn't have severe consequences, let them experiment. They learn more from their mistakes than they do from their successes.
8. **Don't compare your children to one another.** If you do, you will teach them to live a competitive life, constantly measuring themselves against each other. The goal is for each of our children to be fully actualized. In other words, we want each one of them to be who God created them to be. We don't want them to become an imitation of someone else.
9. **Speak positively into your children's lives.** When you say, "You are so smart, gifted, honest, talented and so on," it actually releases those qualities into your kids. Don't call your kids names, or curse them with titles. You are the most powerful person in their lives. What you think of them and what you say to them, they will become. Remember, they are not their behavior. Saying things like, "Johnny, you are a bad boy," teaches Johnny that he does bad things because he is bad. Never connect your children's bad behavior to their identity.
10. **Never stop believing in your children.** Let them know that they can become anything they want in life. Be their biggest fan, their cheerleader and their catalyst to greatness.
11. **Teach your kids how to solve conflicts by allowing them to watch you solve yours.** Don't shelter them from watching you and your spouse work through your issues (unless of course, you guys don't behave honorably). You have to use wisdom on this one, but your kids need to understand that every healthy relationship has it

struggles. They need great tools to solve conflicts, not avoid them.

12. **Let your home be full of affection for them and for your spouse.** Be affectionate with your spouse in front of them so that they learn what love looks like. Hug and kiss them often, even in their teen years.
13. **Teach your children how to honor others, especially authority.** Don't talk negatively about teachers, pastors, bosses, police officers, politicians, elders and so on. The fact is, your kids will not be able to live successfully in society without a healthy respect for authority. How will they keep their job if they can't do what is asked of them?
14. **Let your children "catch you" loving on Jesus.** Walking in on their father or mother kneeling at their bed praying is 10 times more powerful than telling your kids to pray. Reading your Bible every day on the couch in the living room sends a powerful visual statement to your kids that you value spiritual things. Remember, people are changed through observation, not by argument.
15. **Teach your kids how to handle money.** They should learn how to be generous, how to trust God with their money, how to steward finances and how to create wealth. Giving should be a family secret, not a secret from the family. Teach your children that they have two choices: They can serve God, or they can serve money. One of them will be their master.

What are some parenting keys you have used with your children? Let me know in the comments below. {eoa}

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*This article originally appeared at .*