

# Being a Parent in the Real World

A Supportive Guide to Being Clear,  
Staying Calm and Remaining Confident



Written by Laverne Antrobus  
in association with

**Gingerbread**  
Single parents, equal families

 **netnoms.com**

 **One Space**  
The parenting skills for single parents

**DAD TALK**  
...talking it through

 **Parentlineplus**  
Advice, support and information  
0800 800 2222  
www.parentlineplus.org.uk

 **gotateenager**  
www.gotateenager.org.uk  
**Parentlineplus**  
0808 800 2222

**the couple connection**  
get  
where parents work it out

 **YoungMinds**  
for children's mental health

**relate**  
the relationship people

 **Family Rights Group**  
www.frg.org.uk

## MUMS AND DADS REQUIRED

Emotional rollercoaster  
24 hours, seven  
days a week

### ROLE REQUIRES:

- Love
- Patience
- Flexibility
- Fun
- Energy
- Intelligence
- Help with homework
- Physical strength



Laverne  
Antrobus

Caring for a child, whether you are a mum, dad or anyone else in a parenting role is the greatest job in the world. But it can be the toughest too. Sometimes you'll feel there is no time to think, let alone time for yourself. But no one else can do the job for you either – and that's the beauty of it.

Helping your child grow into an amazing human being is incredibly rewarding. I work with all kinds of parents and the one thing I have learned is there is no magical formula to being a good parent. But there are some golden rules that can help get the best from our children whatever their age.

That's why I have written this booklet with some national parenting support organisations. These pages are full of advice and practical tips which I have found can make the world of difference to families.



Laverne Antrobus is a psychologist, consultant, lecturer and TV presenter with 14 years experience working with children and adolescents. Laverne also helps parents and carers to manage their children's needs, through family work, individual work and with groups of parents. As well as presenting 'Little Angels' and 'Teen Terrors to Teen Angels', Laverne also gives presentations at specialist conferences and is a guest speaker at public meetings on a variety of issues such as Helping your Child to Learn and Engaging with Black and Minority Ethnic Families. Laverne lives with her partner, two daughters and son.

## Contents

### Page 4

**Being Clear** – How to set realistic expectations of your kids and how you want them to behave.

### Page 5 – 7

**Staying Calm** – Occasionally, even the calmest of people will feel like they could explode. This chapter gives tips and advice for controlling your feelings in these situations.

### Page 8 – 9

**Smacking: It's Not The Answer**

### Page 10 – 11

**Remaining Confident & Helpful National Contact Details** – Give yourself a break. Tips and advice to remind you of what a great job you're doing.

For information about other help available in your local area you can contact your Families Information Service by calling 0800 2346346. Some Families Information Services can provide details of parenting programmes.

## How Old is Your Child?

Follow the appropriate symbol to find specific advice for you throughout this booklet:



Babies/toddlers



Children



Teens



# Being Clear

If your boss didn't tell you what was expected, you'd have a pretty hard time doing your job. We all benefit from being given clear, short and precise instructions and children are the same.

Children adore praise and will do anything to get it. Sometimes it can be easy to take children's good behaviour for granted, but we all know that a little praise goes a long way to boosting self-confidence.

Imagine how pleased your child would be if you praised them every time they listened to you? Praising children helps them learn to see themselves as individuals who can succeed and ensures they know their parents are proud of them and their achievements.

When talking to your children, ask yourself whether you would speak to your friends in the same way. Think about these three areas:

- Tone of voice: think calm, think quiet.
- Body language: think open, hands low, palms open.
- Language: think less "bossy", think more co-operative.

For ideas on the sorts of language to use, why not speak to one of the counsellors at [www.relateforparents.org.uk](http://www.relateforparents.org.uk)

relate  
the relationship people



# Staying Calm

Being a parent is a bit like being a swan – above the water it's all calm, but below there can be a lot of frantic activity.

Everyone gets frustrated and can lose their cool from time to time, but thankfully adults know there are ways of expressing this. As children develop, they watch their mums and dads and pick up on their every move. If you swear, shout and scream, your children will behave in the same way, but if you are polite and calm, even when you have to be firm, the chances are your children will repeat your positive behaviour.

Discussing how to express their feelings may help your child deal with those moments of frustration that can so easily become the full-blown tantrum. Talk to them about how you feel when you get angry and how you calm yourself down.

This will give them clear messages – it's good to take time out to cool off and ask for help if they are feeling out of control. By allowing anger to be expressed positively, we allow our children to bring the things that are distressing them to our attention which will help them solve problems and manage these strong feelings.



## Trust Your Instincts

Behavioural problems at school may be a symptom of being upset or frustrated about something – it's not always attention-seeking or naughtiness.

You as a parent will know what's 'normal' for your child. If you feel something's not right and hasn't been for a while, go with your instincts and seek help. Try and talk to your child directly or speak to the school or your GP. Why not contact the **YoungMinds** Parents helpline on **0808 802 5544**

Some of the reasons for a change in behaviour may be:

- Bullying – this can often be a reason for a change in children's behaviour.

- Learning difficulties – these could be causing them to get frustrated or, they could be misbehaving to divert attention from their difficulties as they feel embarrassed. Keep in touch with the school. Mention to the teacher that you're worried so they can keep an eye on your child and ask if they've had any difficulties there.
- Problems at home – are you often arguing with your partner or has there been a trauma in the family that could be causing your child anxiety?

Remember, **YoungMinds** are there to help if you're worried at all.

YoungMinds  
for children's mental health

# Staying Calm



## Teenage Troubles



Parent-teenager conflict may seem par for the course. After all your relationship is changing as they become more independent. But there is no reason why this cannot be a special and positive time too. The following tips may help you keep the upper hand, as well as maintaining a good relationship with your child:

- Although it seems a cliché, if you can treat and speak to your children as young adults, they'll respond to your trust and start to act more responsibly.
- Really listen to what your teenager has to say and actively acknowledge their feelings. Make sure that if you disagree with them, you clearly and calmly explain why. This will help them understand your point of view better.

- Keep things in perspective and be prepared to compromise. Decide what's important and what's less important and expect to be challenged.
- Avoid teasing your child. Being a teenager is a confusing time and even names you think are harmless can be very damaging to their self-esteem. Talk to your child how you would like to be spoken to.

Remember, you're not alone – all mums and dads go through the odd challenge with their teenager, so why not talk through any worries or frustrations with an expert at [www.gotateenager.org.uk](http://www.gotateenager.org.uk) or call **Parentline Plus** on 0808 800 2222



## Peaceful Bedtimes



If you're struggling to get your child to sleep, try establishing a fixed time for lights-out and a comforting ritual leading up to it. Many parents find the following tips eventually calm a baby and settle them ready for sleep – plus it's a great chance for dad to bond with baby too:

- A nice warm bath relaxes baby.
- Milk – a full baby sleeps better.
- Nursery rhymes and songs – the rhythm soothes babies.

The most important thing for a pre-bed routine is that you aim to do exactly the same calming things at the same time every night, so baby knows it's nearly time for sleep and settles down more quickly.

Talking to someone who's going through the same thing can be a real help. Why not chat online with other parents in your area? To find out more information, log onto [www.netmums.com](http://www.netmums.com)



## Tire Out The Tantrums

Not only will exercise keep children healthy, it gives them an outlet for their energy. Exercise helps prevent the grumpiness and frustration, which leads to tantrums. If your children can get an hour of exercise a day, it will really help. And remember, you can get involved too. Children love the opportunity to play and be active with their parents, which in turn can really benefit their development.

### Child's play suggestions:

- Bring back your childhood memories and play hide and seek around the house or in the garden.
- For football fans, why not kick a ball around the local park?
- Walk home instead of taking the bus or car and divert any grumble with a game of 'I Spy' on the way.
- Why not fit physical exercise into your daily routine – walk, bike or jog to see friends or get the shopping.
- Be adventurous as a family – try new sports, games and activities. Children love a new challenge!

To speak to an expert, call the **Parentline Plus Helpline** on 0808 800 2222



# Smacking: It's Not The Answer

I know some people think it's okay to smack a child but being physically punished can leave a child feeling hurt, lonely and unloved. Will a child look at their parent thinking that this is a person who loves me? I think their only thought will be that when my parents get angry, they lose control and I get hit.

When it comes to behaviour and discipline, I have always tried to put myself in my child's shoes. What does it really feel like when someone larger, more powerful and angry closes in on you – shouting or getting ready to smack? Very frightening. Parents don't usually set out to smack their children. In my experience it often happens in a flash at a moment of frustration, anger or tiredness. And parents don't really feel good about themselves afterwards.

If you have a temper that can spill over it's better to take a deep breath, cool off and then come back to your child when you're ready to deal with the problem more calmly by talking. Isn't it better to tackle your child's behaviour together, building your relationship on trust, not aggression, and on what really works? And isn't it better to be sure your child remembers what they did wrong, so they learn from it, rather than only remembering the pain of being hit?

If you feel like you're getting to the end of your tether it can really help to talk things through with someone or seek out some helpful information, so why not contact one of the support organisations listed on page 11?



## The Government strengthened the law in 2004 to protect children from harm.

Since then the defence of “reasonable punishment” cannot be used in criminal proceedings for assaults causing actual bodily harm, grievous bodily harm, or child cruelty.

It is important you know that this means that, although a mild smack is not unlawful, parents who smack their children and cause injuries including grazes, scratches, abrasions, bruising, swellings and superficial cuts may be charged with assault causing actual bodily harm for which the penalty is a fine of up to £5,000 or a maximum of five years in prison.

It is also important to be aware that even if a parent causes no actual injury to a child, some acts such as shaking a child, dragging a child by their hair, using a belt, cane, slipper or other implement may not be accepted by the courts as “reasonable punishment.”

**The law is there to protect children from physical punishment which causes injury. Although a mild smack is not unlawful, you should avoid smacking your child at any time – it's not the answer.**

# Remaining Confident

Picture-book images of family life often depict two extremes: total harmony or complete disarray. The most likely scenario is somewhere in between.


As parents we can feel vulnerable or under pressure. Everyone's an expert with ideas about how to do things differently. But each relationship is unique and built up over time. I believe that mums and dads should have the confidence to be a parent in a way that feels right for them.

Words like 'comfortable' don't describe parenting because there are always new challenges. Feeling confident takes time – good friends and a supportive family can be a real help.

It's different for all of us. Don't try to be perfect, but being a 'good enough parent' relies on an inner strength that will provide the steadiness you need when the going gets tough.

## Children's Services Involvement

**Family Rights Group** advises families who need help from the local authority to parent better. Advisers can give you legal advice and information if social workers are worried about the safety of your child. Talk through your situation in confidence on **0808 801 0366**



### Dads' Tools for Staying Confident

- Get out of the "school showers" mentality and stop comparing yourself with others.
- Know your limits – don't be put off from getting advice and support – it doesn't make you less of a man.
- You're not your father – in Star Wars did Luke Skywalker turn into Darth Vader?'
- Be confident in your discipline and pick your battles, it's a marathon not a sprint.
- Give yourself regular YOU time – all work and no play makes daddy Mr Grumpy!
- Check out the Toolbox at [www.dadtalk.co.uk](http://www.dadtalk.co.uk), or sign the **Dad:Pledge** and get daily tips, ideas, thoughts and challenges to help you be the dad you want to be.



### On Your Own?

As a single parent, there are many demands on you and dealing with troubling behaviour from your children – as well as trying to build in a bit of time for your own needs – can be particularly difficult. Try the following:

- Call the Gingerbread Single Parent Helpline on 0800 018 5026 and ask about their FamilySafe project – they can arrange calls with an expert or send you a free booklet.
- Plan ahead and think how to make stressful parts of the day less difficult – being prepared helps with even the most testing situations!
- Join a network on [www.onespace.org.uk](http://www.onespace.org.uk) to talk to other single mums and dads in your area.



More support, advice and information from national parenting support organisations is only a phone call or website away:

#### Advisory Centre for Education (ACE)

ACE is a national charity that provides advice and information to parents and carers on a wide range of school-based issues.

**Tel: 0808 800 5793**

Lines open Monday - Friday: 10am - 5pm

#### Netmums

A locally based social networking site connecting parents with each other.

[www.netmums.com](http://www.netmums.com)

#### thecoupleconnection

An interactive service where couples can find out how to manage their relationship more positively.

[www.thecoupleconnection.net](http://www.thecoupleconnection.net)

#### Dad Talk

An online community where you can share ideas, find information and talk about the nitty-gritty issues of being a dad.

[www.dadtalk.co.uk](http://www.dadtalk.co.uk)

#### Dads' Space & The 121 Space

No nonsense info and advice for dads, and a safe and secure environment for parents to keep in touch with separated children.

[www.dads-space.com](http://www.dads-space.com)

[www.the121space.com](http://www.the121space.com)

#### Parentline Plus

A free and confidential helpline run by professionally-trained call takers – also parents – operating 24/7.

**Tel: 0808 800 2222**

#### Gotateenager

A social networking site, run by Parentline Plus, giving help and advice to the parents of teenagers.

[www.gotateenager.org.uk](http://www.gotateenager.org.uk)

#### One Space

Interactive parenting resources, support and a lively online community for single parents from Single Parent Action Network.

[www.onespace.org.uk](http://www.onespace.org.uk)

#### Gingerbread

Provides support services, training and learning opportunities, and a campaigning voice for single parents.

**Single Parent Helpline: 0800 018 5026**

Lines open Monday – Friday: 9am – 5pm  
Open until 8pm on Wednesdays

#### Children's Legal Centre

The Child Law Advice Line ensures children, parents, carers and professionals have access to free legal advice from qualified solicitors and to services which they are entitled to.

**Tel: 0808 802 0008**

Lines open Monday – Friday: 9am – 6.30pm

#### Contact A Family

Provides advice, information and support to parents of all disabled children.

**Tel: 0808 808 3555**

Lines open Monday – Friday: 10am – 4pm  
Monday evening 5.30pm – 7.30pm

[www.cafamily.org.uk](http://www.cafamily.org.uk)

#### YoungMinds Parents Helpline

Free and confidential support for anyone worried about the emotional problems or behaviour of a child or young person up to the age of 25.

**Tel: 0808 802 5544**

Lines open Monday – Friday: 10am – 4pm  
Wednesday evenings 6pm – 8pm

#### Relate

Aims to strengthen and maintain family relationships by providing counselling and support.

[www.relateforparents.org.uk](http://www.relateforparents.org.uk)

#### Family Rights Group

An advice service that supports parents and family members whose children are involved with, or need, social care services.

**Tel: 0808 801 0366**

Lines open Monday – Friday: 10am – 3:30pm

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