

parenting *ideas insights



Consistency is the key

By Michael Grose

Evidence suggests that parents of young children need to adopt a real-life approach to discipline that is heavy on teaching rather than the punitive stuff.

My own work with Generation X-lead families suggests that those parents who base their discipline on the principle of consistency generally raise well-behaved kids and enjoy positive relationships as well, which is nirvana for all parents regardless of their generation!

Children need parental consistency as it gives them a sense of security and control. Consistency means parents dealing with the little misbehaviours and not letting them grow into bigger behaviours. It means parents following through and allowing children to experience a consequence when they misbehave. It also means that both parents in a dual-parent relationship have a similar approach to behaviours. Children learn from a young age to play one parent off against the other when the standards differ.

Consistency, like routines, is often sacrificed by busy parents and put in the 'too hard basket'. When parents are tired, stretched and overworked the last thing they want to do is engage in a battle with children over what are sometimes petty issues.

Besides consistency can make a well-meaning parent who values relationships feel downright awful.

But giving in rather than being consistent and holding ground is not a smart long-term strategy. Kids learn quickly how far they can push a parent before they give in. If parents give in occasionally children will learn that if they push hard enough and long enough they will eventually cave in. Consistency is about being strong and holding your ground. That is hard work as the average child will push parental boundaries about 30 per cent of the time and more difficult kids push their boundaries twice that much.

Consistent parents do the following:

1. Say what they mean and mean what they say

Knowing the difference between a threat and a warning is important for parents of children of all ages. 'If you keep messing around we will cancel our next holiday' is the type of threat that few Generation Z kids would fall for. 'Throw toys one more time in this store and we go home immediately' is a well-timed warning that can be followed through.

2. Don't allow moods to dictate their response to children's misbehaviour

Sometimes we are lenient when we're in a good mood and come down hard on the same behaviour because

we've had a bad day and our mood is awful. As hard as it seems, we need to be immune to our moods when we discipline. Sticking to known rules helps you take the emotion and your bad moods out of the equation. So as much as possible be guided by the notion of family rules and common sense limits to teach kids to behave.

3. Do not cave in when children push the boundaries

When children ask for a treat and parents say no they need to keep saying no and don't change their mind if a child is persistent.

4. Confer with the other parent if possible

When both parents are giving kids the same message and showing similar resolve over issues they send the message that they are working together.

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