

Practical Parenting Top Ten

Loretta Cody, M.D.

Parents come to me for advice about their children all the time. When it comes to straight medical guidance about a condition or medication, I rely on my professional training and three decades of experience. For most everything else, my recommendations come from my professional knowledge and my experience as a mother of two sons, who are now thriving adults.

Raising kids can be challenging. Just as no two children are the same, advice for one child may not necessarily work with the other. What follows is a “Top Ten” list of common-sense advice that has well-served the parents of my patients.

10 Don't Overschedule

Most children are committed to too many extracurricular activities – sometimes more than one in a single day. Of course, it is wonderful to be involved in one or two after-school activities per week, but spending every afternoon racing to different classes and sports can be too stressful for your child—and for you, too.

In my experience, over-scheduled children become overwhelmed and unhappy but don't always know how to express their feelings. They may even feel pressured to keep up with their peers or concerned that they'll be letting you—or themselves—down if they quit.

In this overscheduled world, it's important to remember that doing nothing is not a waste of time. Children of all ages need time to “chill.” It's the time they get to recharge their batteries and process everything that has happened during their day. Check-in with your children to see what they can handle and help them create the right balance between time devoted to school, friends, and activities.

9 Listen to Your Gut

Parents are the best at knowing if something is wrong with their children. Trust your instincts—they are usually spot on. If you know your child is not quite acting like themselves, try to get to the bottom of the issue. Children and teens cannot always articulate what is wrong, so it's vital to pay attention to the cues that something may be amiss and ask questions in a gentle, loving way.

8 Sleep and Proper Diet Do Matter

Never underestimate the importance of a well-balanced diet and a good night's sleep. Healthy habits that include proper nutrition and plenty of rest give your children the physical and mental stamina to reach their full potential.

If your child is a picky eater, offer healthy snacks and a variety of vegetables and fruits at every meal. Avoiding sugary fruit juices, processed foods, and high-fat treats will go a long way to helping children develop a healthy approach to eating now and for the rest of their lives. Be careful not to go overboard, however. Remember to enjoy some special treats, too!

When it comes to sleep, every parent knows how difficult it is to function without enough rest. Sleep needs vary according to a child's age. As a rule, infants need between 14-15 hours of sleep, toddlers/preschoolers need 12-14 hours, and kids from 5-10 years generally need at least 10-11 hours. Despite homework and extracurricular activities, teens should get at least 8 ½- 9 ½ hours of sleep to perform at their peak.



7 Wash Your Hands!

The key to preventing the spread of many illnesses is as simple as washing your hands with soap and water. Let your child see how often you wash your hands and do it with them, so they learn. Always get both hands good and sudsy with soap and warm water, with attention to fingernails. Do this for twenty seconds—about the time it takes you to sing one round of “Happy Birthday”—before rinsing. Hand sanitizers may help in a pinch. Use them liberally and let the hands air dry. But the best bet is good hand washing, especially before meals and after using the bathroom.



6 Remember, Generations of People have been Parents

Bringing your first baby home from the hospital may feel a bit awkward and uncertain, and that’s normal. Just remember that generations of parents have been caring for their babies, most without all the conveniences we have today, and they managed just fine, as did their children. There are many books, experts, and theories about parenting. Yet sometimes, all they do is make you feel stressed or uncertain about being a “perfect” parent. The most important key to parenthood is to stop worrying if you’re doing it right. You are doing just fine.

5 Follow Through

When parents tell their children there will be consequences to a specific action, they need to follow through. This is especially true during the teenage years. For example, if your teen ignores a curfew you set, and there are consequences, enforce them. Don’t be persuaded to change your mind. Children need rules from their parents. It is a sign to them that they are cared for. Even if your child doesn’t express it, they feel your concern and will appreciate it in time.

4 Let your Child Be Who They Want To Be

Embrace your child’s individuality. Don’t try to mold your child into what you want them to be or what you think they should be to fit in and get ahead. Instead, give them the room to discover themselves and explore their interests. If you are lucky enough to have a child who has a true passion and pursues it in some form, you are giving them the gift of fulfillment for their lifetime.

3 Be Nice To Everyone--Your Child is Watching

Bullying is still a sad reality, so the best thing we can teach our children is to be kind to and respectful of one another. Children learn by example, so when parents are respectful and polite, children will emulate those qualities.

2 Enjoy The Journey

Many parents are so focused on wanting their children to succeed—at school, at sports, at extracurricular activities—that they overlook the chance to savor each new stage of their child’s development. Life is not a competition. You and your children need time to slow down and enjoy the journey.

1 Make “Special” Moments Happen

Childhood passes quickly, and the most cherished moments with your children are usually the simple ones you share. Building a snowman, running through fallen leaves together on a crisp autumn day, playing games together—these are the moments that bring the most joy and are ones you’ll never forget. So strive to create memorable moments together. You’ll have them forever, long after your child is all grown.



Loretta Cody, M.D. is a Board-Certified pediatrician and child health expert.
www.drlorettacody.com

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