

Over the course of many years practicing pediatrics, studying child development, observing families and growing humble as a father, I have learned a number of lessons about the very fine art of parenting. I have distilled the wisdom I have been taught by children and their families into ten basic principles, practices and guidelines that seem useful for all families. I hope you will find them meaningful. Please add your own insights to the list. Life experience is the greatest teacher and the best gift to share. Thank you for your devotion to the children in your life.

TEN PARENTING RESOLUTIONS FOR THE NEW YEAR

Follow your heart.

Children sense when adults are being sincere or not. Besides, you can usually trust your emotions to lead you in the right direction. And you'll model for your children how to communicate honestly.

Appreciate each child's strengths and respect their limits.

All children have intrinsic worth and special qualities that help them relate, persevere and shine an inner light. Similarly, each child has abilities in some areas and challenges in others. Our job is to encourage them to stretch within safe and acceptable boundaries.

Honor individual differences that distinguish each child as a unique person.

Even within the same family, children have their own personalities from the start. Since we can't take for granted that one child will respond like another, we have to get to know and understand the nature of each individually.

Care to set consistent, secure boundaries.

Children feel courageous enough to explore their limits when they also feel comfortable that they won't hurt or embarrass themselves. And after all, if you didn't care, you wouldn't bother to teach them how to balance self-control and self-will.

Know and respect your own emotional thresholds and physical limits.

All of us reach a point when our mind, body or spirit become exhausted and unable to act rationally or react quickly. Children need their parents to offer them their best attention and decisions. So taking care of yourself is also in the best interest of your children.

Make and keep your own friends and support systems.

Life outside of parenting restores energy for the job and takes some of the pressure off of you and your children. Relationships, work and recreational activities can add pleasure and vigor to you while teaching your children the value of being connected.

Ask for help – interdependence is healthier than independence.

Modern life is somehow both noisy and isolating. Loneliness is depressing and depression is paralyzing. So do the world a favor – teach children the advantages of relationships and support.

Spend time with a child when you can't be interrupted – time matters as much as quality.

Children want and need our company. They also know when our attention is divided between them and telephone calls, chores, or thoughts. Protect some time each day when you can devote yourself to the child's interests.

Teach and learn from disappointments.

Truth is, we always learn more from our mistakes than from our successes, especially if we remember that our intrinsic worth is not linked to a bad decision.

Value your parental love and guidance as the greatest contribution to our nation's security, prosperity and civility.

Children who grow up caring to succeed and to contribute guarantee a healthier, better educated, wealthier, stronger and more humane society. We teach most effectively by example – children observe and follow how we treat neighbors, co-workers, customers and strangers. In many ways, the child is father to the man.