

FamilyEXPO²⁰⁰²

STRENGTHENING MARRIAGE & FAMILY A one-day parenting seminar full of effective and practical ideas and strategies

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An Edited Transcript of the Presentation by
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on
The Power of Positive Parenting
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It's indeed a privilege and an honor to be here today to address such a massive group of people. The topic I'm going to be discussing with you today, is something that is very dear to my heart in a lot of ways. It is about being positive in the way in which we raise our children, our next generation. In this talk I'm going to begin where we start, our hopes and dreams and aspirations. I'm then going to move on to the idea of what is the modern reality for many parents in raising their children; what are the day-to-day practical kinds of issues and concerns that so many of us confront. We're going to look at what the tough part of parenting is about and what it is that people find so difficult in terms of the day-to-day parenting role. And we are going to be zeroing in on children's behavior. Children's behavior is going to be something that we focus a lot of attention on today because it's elusive, it's difficult to fathom at times and sometimes solutions are a little counter-intuitive and so a little bit of information about what has been known to work, what does work and with what kind of kids and under what kind of circumstances is a helpful thing. We're also going to look at 10 key ideas about raising children and adopting parenting practices that promote youngsters' development and well-being.

Our hopes and dreams. We would like to think in a lot of ways that if we were able to achieve these sorts of things, to raise healthy well-adjusted children who have the kinds of skills and knowledge that they need to communicate their needs appropriately to get on with others and were able to achieve their potential, we'd probably been doing a pretty good job. If our youngsters also could manage their emotions and their feelings and develop good self-esteem, feel good about themselves and we as parents could create a safe, secure, loving and relatively low-conflict environment, that this would be helpful for youngsters in their journey through life.

But most of us did not apply for this job: **One couple to procreate and raise a child. No experience necessary. Applicants must be available 24 hours per day, 7 days a week, and must provide food, shelter, clothing, and supervision. No training provided. No salary; applicants pay \$180,000 over the next 18 years. Accidental applications accepted. Single people may apply, but should be prepared for twice the work.**

The prospect of raising children today with the kinds of issues and concerns that are out there in the community fills the task with a certain amount of apprehension and some of this apprehension is justified. If we look at what we know about children and their development in our country, we can see that about 1 in 5 kids between the age of 4 and 16 develop significant behavioral and emotional problems. That is a lot of children and we ask ourselves, how does this happen?. A state-wide survey we conducted in our own state with Queensland Health, first back in 1996 and then again in 1999, showed that any one moment in time, if you're a parent of a child under the age of 12, about 28% of you have a significant concern about your child's behavior or their emotional difficulties. About 3.6% of children in this country are at risk of being harmed by their parents. When we look

at problems with youth and teenagers it doesn't require a lot of imagination to know that large numbers of our kids are engaged in behaviors that cause concern to the adult community, ranging from drinking to drug-taking and other kinds of problems. And of course we have one of the highest youth suicide rates in the western world.

Have we ever stopped to think that parenting could actually harm your health? Now, it's an interesting idea because we've always talked about the positive side of raising kids, this whole notion that being a parent is a wonderful thing, that we need to cherish it and value it. But there's some evidence to suggest that being a parent is actually pretty tricky job. For example 1 in 10 mums become seriously depressed after giving birth to a child. About 15% of parents in our state-wide survey reported the parenting role was a bit depressing to them. The majority of parents state that it's a demanding role and a significant number report it being very stressful. And even having children actually contributes to marital breakdown rate if you've already experienced a divorce and your repartnering. Now that's a kind of an interesting idea and the challenge for many of us in a lot of ways is this juggling of competing demands and responsibilities. The balancing of work, childcare and family work and responsibilities, I think, is a tricky one for many of us.

In our survey, when we were looking at the numbers of parents who are reporting parenting being a demanding and difficult job, we see that over a quarter are seeing it as extremely demanding and a significant few are seeing it as extremely stressful. But amongst those folk who are reporting parenting as tough, stressful and demanding, there is a large number who have difficulties with their children's behavior and adjustment, with their coping at school. We need to ask ourselves, "How is this so?" Why are things becoming so unstuck for so many parents and families in the community? We live in a complex world and things are changing, not all these things are for the good. If we think that about 43% of marriages end up in divorce in Australia that's a large number of children, who are experiencing some breakdown of their family.

If we think about the earlier and earlier return to work of women into the paid workforce, it means that the parenting job is frequently shared from an earlier and earlier age with multiple carers. So the issue of childcare and the role of other adults in raising children is something that we need to be very mindful of because the parenting responsibility is increasingly not just a task that is undertaken by biological parents.

Families are living in environments of increasing uncertainty. The uncertainty of contract labor, the uncertainty of short-term employment where people find it more and more difficult to plan with predictability things that are going to happen in the future, creates a scenario where for many of us the raising of our families is experienced in a world of unpredictability. We know that the mobility of families when families are on the move and their shifting a lot; increases the risk that their children and the adults involved experience difficulty with adjusting with the new circumstances. And of course there are many families in our community who have experienced the breakdown of extended family networks. So trusted friends and reliable folk to help them learn the task of parenting are just not accessible to them, to the same degree that perhaps they were in the past. The good news, despite all this doom and gloom, is that the majority of parents in our country are positive in their parenting role and they're confident that they can undertake the job. They do find it rewarding and they find it fulfilling and the majority of families in our country produce healthy well-adjusted kids. Isn't it just as well that's the case!

Now, when we ask about aspects of the parenting role that people find tricky, it's almost universal that people will report that managing children's behavior is one of the most difficult responsibilities. And in recognising this, it's important to recognise that some misbehavior, some behavioral difficulties with children is normal and predictable and discipline hassles with children is something that all of us have to confront at some point in raising our children. Every one of us,

every one of us in this room, needs to develop our own style of relating to children, of providing a loving, caring, nurturing kind of environment for them. There's no magic formula that will work for all kids, for all parents under all circumstances. So in a way the importance of crafting our own approach to how we wish to deal with the issues to do with our youngsters and their development is a fundamental responsibility that we have. We may even think of it as an opportunity, an opportunity to craft a way of relating to our family and our children that will work for us.

Now, the other point I would like to make at this stage is that management of common everyday problems, problems of, for example, getting children dressed in the morning, breakfasted, in the car, supervising their homework, getting them into bed - the day-to-day tasks that are related to just the running of a home - if you manage those tasks well, we could often prevent more serious problems developing. And it is true that behavior difficulties can rise and surface early and if they're dealt with effectively, we can avoid some of the most serious problems developing. But one thing we need to be aware of is that there are certain types of behavior difficulties in children that are much harder to shift and much more stable over time.

Let me just give you one example. If you think of a 3 or 4 year old, who's very aggressive, he hits pushes, kicks, demands and he does this not only at home but he does it out of home, he does it in the community, he does it in the shopping centre. A youngster who's showing very highly persistent or frequent aggressive behavior difficulties, is at much greater risk of that behavioral problem continuing as that youngster moves into the late pre-school, and then into primary school and then into adolescence, than a child who doesn't have that kind of problem earlier on. And so there really is an important imperative to deal with early problems effectively so that they don't turn into larger, bigger ones later on.

Now one of the things we can ask in informing our judgment as parents about how best to raise our kids; we can ask what style of parenting is associated with the fewest problems. What I would like to draw to your attention to is that **parents who raise their youngsters in unpredictable environments where there's a lot of permissiveness and it's unpredictable from day to day, tend to produce youngsters with a higher level of behavioral difficulties.** The authoritarian parenting style is sort of saying, "You will do it because I say so, and that's it" where there's this supreme expression of adult authority and the child's role is basically to do what they're told and to continue to do so, as long as they're living in a particular family. That is also associated with a significant increase in the chances that you're going to have problems with a youngster.

It's interesting that the style of parenting that is least likely to produce difficulties is what's described as the **authoritative** parenting role. This is a kind of parenting that's occurring in a highly nurturing environment, there are limits and boundaries, the parents attempt to be consistent and predictable, but the children are under no misapprehension that they're loved and valued.

Authoritative parents experience fewer problems with their kids. Research shows that they feel more confident and competent in their parenting role. They're less depressed, they're less stressed and they have less conflict with their marital partners which is very important. Their kids do better at school, academically and socially, and they're less likely to get involved in later problems with drugs, delinquency, or to develop severe emotional problems. This is a survey that was conducted in Queensland of parents of kids who are 13, grade 8 kids.

When we think about the concerns of parents of teenagers you might think there's a great deal of concern about drugs and the involvement of early sex and a whole lot of things like this. It's actually interesting that some of the most common problems that parents are actually concerned about, have to do with the day-to-day issues of living with kids, fighting and arguing, talking back and answering back, kids spending too much time watching TV, lack of physical activity and so on.

But also in the top or amongst the top 3 is this moody irritability of young teenagers, or kids going through adolescence. One of the issues we need to deal with, is what are appropriate ways of responding to children, teenagers, young people who are being moody, irritable and cranky? And what our survey says is that what parents want their kids to do is to actually be more helpful, to participate with the smooth running of the household, to share some of the responsibilities.

Now let me now turn to **10 key ideas**. These ideas don't just come from straight out of my head, these are ideas that are put together because they are based on some pretty solid foundations of research on children's development and research on family functioning that can prevent significant problems developing. What I would like to do is just briefly touch base with these so that you can reflect upon them and ask yourself, "To what extent does my parenting style encapsulate these ideas, to what extent do I agree with them, to what extent would I prefer to do things a little differently?" Because ultimately it's you who will decide how you wish to raise your children and this is absolutely the way it should be.

The first one is **Focus on the Positive**. In doing this, we need to **keep children busy**. Now this is an interesting idea because what it has to do with is thinking about a child's waking day and thinking about environments that we can create that will keep youngsters interested, involved and connected. Now we can apply this principle to whether we're talking about toddlers or teenagers. The reality is that youngsters are significantly less likely to be showing any kind of behavioral or emotional difficulties if they're spending significant amounts of their waking day involved in age-appropriate activities that are adequately supervised by adults who are aware of what children are doing. So for example, **teenagers who are connected to sporting teams or who are involved in extension activities with a school are provided with a kind of connectedness that decreases the chances that they are going to be on the street, that they're going to be in trouble**; and similarly a toddler who is engaged in safe, supervised activities that the youngster can freely explore and spend a lot of time with just enjoying, is much less likely to be drowned in a swimming pool, or to be hit by a car running across the road.

Secondly, **talking to children**, talking, listening, communicating with children, however we like to describe it. This one thing that is quite fundamental in the development of competence in children, social confidence in children. The kids who are developing well and are showing good social skills and intellectual competence in getting ready for school, have frequent chats with their parents.

Showing affection, the cornerstone for youngsters feeling comfortable with the giving and receiving of affection. **The foundation stones for intimacy exist within the family**. Children who are growing up, who are doing well frequently will receive plenty of attention for the things they do well; we know that **praising** children is a double-edged sword. Youngsters can become praise-dependant, can hang out for it so much that their sense of who they are and whether they feel good about themselves is so reliant on whether or not they think someone else thinks they're good. Nevertheless, we know that in the study of early development in children particularly when we're looking at children who are developing well, they frequently would have received plenty of **attention** and positive feedback from carers in their world about the things that their doing now that are positive, that are appropriate.

So praise, attention and so on, is great when youngsters are learning new skills and they're having to learn to use the potty and they're having to learn to dress themselves and they're doing things independently for the first time and so you need a lot of it then; but to maintain a skill, to keep it going once it's learnt, you don't need nor should you use the same amount of attention and praise that was required to teach the skill in the first place. What we actually need to do is give less rather than more and to make it more unpredictable.

Incidental teaching is a particularly important parenting skill. Now, I'll try to encapsulate what this idea of incidental teaching is about very briefly. It refers to a parenting situation where children initiate a contact. They approach us, they want to show us something, they want to share something with us. Now adults need to get used to briefly interrupting what they're doing whether it's cooking, whether it's doing some work at home, whether it's preparing papers or working on the computer, in order to pay attention to a youngster who has approached and is behaving civilly, appropriately and reasonably seeking an audience. The parent shouldn't simply say "Wait a minute will you?" - that being a sort of like a mantra that comes out every time a child approaches the parent. The parent who is using incidental teaching makes themselves accessible. They respond to the youngster's initiation for an audience, but they don't just simply give the youngster what the child is seeking. What I'm meaning in this situation is that if a child is requesting help for something, a parent using incidental teaching will give the youngster a clue. They'll give them a suggestion about how they may solve the problem for themselves and let the youngster continue to do so.

The fundamental idea is **receptiveness when children approach** and they're behaving in an appropriate way, because what happens when we're not receptive when they approach in that way is that the children will learn to escalate in order to get the audience, and then sometimes they force us to pay attention to them. Basically, the noise level crosses the threshold. It's got to that point where in a sense the adult cannot stop ignoring.

The second idea is **Talk to your child**. One of the things I've been struck by in research on the development of sociability and social competence in children is that when we look at the parent-child relationship, the parents of these kids that do become socially skilled, are pleasant and **nice** to their kids. They speak to them respectfully, they **chat** with them frequently, briefly but frequently. The idea of having conversations that last between 30 seconds and a couple of minutes is not a figure that's just pulled out of the air. These are the kind of average lengths of conversations that have been identified by research that has studied the development of social competence in children. Brief and frequent. The kids get used to receiving an audience and letting it go. They get practised at being able to have a bit of attention and then let it go. There are a lot of parents who worry that if they give their kids attention when they're doing the right thing and they're busy, that they're not going to stop, they won't let them go and that their going to be caught up in this encounter, that in a sense the parent would prefer to just leave the kids alone so that they don't have to deal with that. The problem is that the youngster doesn't become skilled at letting an audience go.

So the other side of this strategy of course is **listening and sharing our experiences** with children. Now if you think about kids developing skills of sharing their ideas, of making observations of what they've done, what they've seen, what they've noticed, what they're excited about, what they wish could happen in the future. It's very well for youngsters to become skilled at the sharing side of doing this when you're the center of the universe. You're getting attention and someone is listening to you, but you live in a family. You've got a brother or a sister and there might be a few other skills that are involved in communicating that involve things like, turn-taking, waiting your turn, having a say and letting someone else have a say. Not only that there are skills that children need to learn that have to do with showing interest in another person's perspective.

Now think about that, so many adults become so skilled at asking kids about how school was today and how did it go when you stayed over at Suzie's place, how did it go and what did you do, and it's all in terms that the adult prompting the youngster to tell the adult what it is, the child has done. The reciprocal of that is children becoming skilled at listening themselves. At asking questions about someone else's experience, what another person has noticed or done. There's one way to promote this and it's to do with telling stories, that the adult shares with the youngster, then children can spark an interest in and then get used to not only asking their parents about, but listening to the answers. Now aren't these the foundation stones of the development of a capacity for empathy - the

ability to see things through someone else's eyes? Can't we promote these kind of skills in our early interactions with children? Yes, we can.

There's also the skill of providing a running **commentary on children's play** activities, just moving to within conversational range and commenting on what they're doing. Not by controlling or manipulating their play or telling them exactly how the block tower should be built or exactly how they should be doing a particular thing, but just making an interested observation about what the youngster is doing. This is a way in which children can receive an audience and be busy at the same time. One of the important things is that youngsters in the process of conversations with adults become skilled at making sensible **choices** by weighing up the options, not by just gravitating to the most immediately available option, not just to impulsively do something because someone else says it's a good idea to do it.

The third step: **Promoting independence** in kids. Now this is a very, very mixed kind of issue for a lot of parents; it's fraught with some uncertainty about how early we should encourage kids to be doing certain things. Now, let me just give you an example of where choice making and independence really has its limits. You're thinking about 13-year-old kids, 13-year-old kids who want to do something like going into the city on their own with a group of peers, with no adult contact or supervision and get the late bus home on their own on a Friday night. Now the issue you ask yourself is, is this a thing you as a parent wish your child to do, is it something you're going to give your youngster a choice about or not. I would argue one of the things that are tricky for a lot of kids is just too much uncertainty about what the limits are, what is reasonable, what is appropriate and what is fair. And so when we come down to the whole idea of kids becoming skilled at making good choices and becoming sensibly and responsibly independent, we need to start this right from the beginning.

So **teaching children the skills they need as soon as they're ready**. So, the youngster who's being fed in a high chair who's dipping his hands in the bowl is obviously signaling to us, hey, put a spoon in my hand -so he's got a chance to practise some self-feeding skills. Watch for signs of readiness and then **avoid accidentally rewarding youngsters for dependency**. Now the dependency scenario comes up very quickly, very easily and it's, "No, Mummy do it", and it's that kind of "No, Daddy is here to do it", "No, Mummy do it". It's the sort of notion that it actually requires a higher level of competence and sophistication to put these pants on the child, and Dad's clearly not capable of doing this, so that the child learns to rely on someone else to do things that he is actually capable of doing. So how often does it happen when we're getting ready to go out and there's time pressure on our parenting, that our kids kind of manipulate the situation so that they require us to do the dressing because it's quicker. We don't need to spend the time teaching them how to do it and therefore the problem is avoided, but it's not avoided, it's actually compounded. And so there are some children I've seen professionally over the years who are still very, very reliant on their parents. I can remember a 7-year-old that I worked with who is still spoon-fed pureed slop. This is how this child had the meals at home. He hadn't learnt to chew independently, hadn't learnt to swallow, had an early feeding difficulty and the mum with a 7 year old was still spoon feeding him.

Now we are moving on to the idea of **problem solving and helping kids learn to manage their emotions**. Now problem solving is kind of a life skill, that we need to think about children's ability to solve problems for themselves as something that we can help them learn and we can help them learn it by providing youngsters with opportunity to see how it's done, in an environment where there's some motivation to want to be paying attention to it. Now the strategy involved is **avoiding simply stepping in and solving a child's problem**. Let me give you an example. A child comes home from school, she's had a tough day, and there's been a bit of teasing, bit of excluding of her from her peer group. Now the child is obviously upset and the parent in that situation, says, "Well

what's wrong, what happened?" and the child tells the story about someone being mean at school and that parent then jumps immediately on their high horse saying, "She shouldn't be able to do that, you've got to go up and tell the teacher about this." In other words the parent then tries to step in to solve the child's problem. Taking over the responsibility of the solution of it doesn't give the kids a chance to have a go themselves. And then the parents wonder why, later on, their child doesn't want to talk to them about problems at school anymore. Now you think about that and what's happened is that the adult has said, "Look this is terrible, I'm going to take over the control of the solution of this problem and your job is to do what I tell you to do and that is if I were you, in this situation this is what I would do and you know you push them back or you go and tell the teacher or I'm going up to the school to speak about this, this is absolutely disgraceful"... and the parent gets on their high horse.

Now the alternative, the parents who are coaching and problem solving will not do that quite so readily, they won't come to the kid's rescue straight away, they'll give the kid a chance to reflect on what she did. So what they'll do is prompt the youngster to tell them about what happened and how they dealt with that situation. "Okay if this sort of thing happens tomorrow, how do you think you might handle it? Have you got any ideas of how you might deal with this differently?" "No, I don't know." "Well, maybe one thing you could do is" and then give the child an example but not the solution. "Can you think of anything else that might work for you? So what have you decided to do? Well, let's have a chat about that tomorrow and see how you went with that." The solution is the child's, the solution is something that the child can own and **the parents' job here has been to provide some scaffolding for the youngster to learn how to own a problem, how to define it, how to generate a solution to it, how to implement the plan and how to check it out and how to review it, to see whether it worked.** Now we might say, kids learn these skills by observing them, by observing in their own families, their mums and dads manage conflict, deal with problems, compromise.

So in a sense, **problem solving is a skill we can model**, we can encourage and we can listen to children's attempts to solve problems and then we can take the sensible approach. Is this bullying, exclusion, is it decreasing, does the child feel they've got better control of it or is it something we actually do need to advocate for our kid and actually go up to the school and speak to the relevant people involved? But a too quick a resort to that kind of solution, prevents the youngster from becoming responsible in their problem solving.

Now one of the things a lot of us parents have difficulty with is, basically **how to deal with children's distress, their emotions.** And sometimes when kids are upset about things they will approach an adult in a way that makes it feel as though it's your problem. The child is dumping upon you, complaining about something unjust, unfair, something that hasn't worked for them. And this is the kind of strategy we found helpful in enabling parents to learn to deal with this. For example, **stopping what you're doing and paying attention** to the youngster who's upset about something, **listening** to what it is that they're actually telling us and trying to be clear about what they're referring to, underlying what they're actually saying. A child who comes home from school in a grumpy frame of mind and sort of goes off straight away, because there's not something they want to eat that's in the fridge and you pick up that there's something wrong, that something else is going on and so what you're doing is creating an audience for them into be specific, to share what it is their worried about, then you **repeat what they're telling you**, check that you've got it, you **acknowledge the emotion they are experiencing**, and state the words to describe emotion.

One of the things we need to do as parents is to help children learn some ways of describing some of the things they are experiencing, ranging from happiness, sadness, excitement, disappointment, feelings of frustration, letdown, feelings of though someone did not care. Youngsters need to learn ways of describing so that they become better skilled at talking through an issue.

Now **there are people in our society who are emotionally constipated. They really don't have a language for talking about their feelings.** They find it extremely difficult when conflict develops within their relationship latter on and need to talk it through. So this is the kind of conversational context where kids are learning some of these skills, and so in some ways it's fine to provide an audience for them, it's fine to try to clarify what it is they are stressed about, but to jump in and take over and solve the problem is just the wrong thing to do. What we need in this situation is to coach and prompt our kids to think about the situation that led them to feeling upset and wanting to dump on you and then try to work out a game plan for avoiding that tomorrow or later on, and if the kid is still upset and still angry with us we do not have to put up with being yelled at and screamed at. So with the withdrawal of the audience with an offer to **talk about it when they have calmed down** is a very appropriate thing to do.

Be consistent and predictable.

Now if you think about it, the discipline of small children, involves helping youngsters **accept limits, consider other people, develop control over their emotions** and it's actually in the discipline situation that many children are learning to cope with feelings of frustration, disappointment, not getting what they want, having to wait until someone else has had a turn before they can have a say. It's also the context where children learn **express emotions in ways that don't harm others.** It's absolutely fine to be angry. It is not fine to bite your mother on the leg in the supermarket. That is not an acceptable way of expressing anger. So **taking responsibility for their actions** is also an environment where the discipline encounter contributes.

Now **disciplining children works best when kids feel secure, when they live in a predictable world and when they are receiving plenty of attention for the things they are doing that are appropriate.** The loving side of the relationship, where parents are providing an audience and attention when youngsters are doing things that are appropriate and that the parents like, actually influences the likelihood that children will respond to adult attempts to set some limits on their behaviour. This works best when the **expectations of parents are fair and reasonable, when Mum and Dad support each other** and back each other up **and are consistent** from one day until the next.

The discipline practices that are really associated very commonly with behaviour difficulties are these: **Being irritable and cranky:** Isn't it so easy to say this? It's so difficult to have a life where your not engaging in these behaviours at least occasionally, and its actually quite normal for this to be happening. The problem is where it happens on a very frequent basis or on a daily basis. Being irritable and cranky, **yelling and shouting, blaming and accusing, name calling, empty threats.**

I can recall a few years ago doing some research once again with a youngster with a feeding problem, where the parent came in with the child to have a meal. In this particular situation I can recall the child basically living once again on puréed food, not having any kind of independent self-feeding kind of skills. The parent's lead off line was: "You're not going to eat today, are you?" and it was followed by: "Now I want you to show Dr Sanders how you can feed yourself. You're not going to do that, are you?" I thought, "What's going on here?". Anyway, there was this escalative kind of process in which the parents were asked to handle the situation the way in which they usually would. This Mum actually bought out a stick to hit the child. Now not only that, there was a range of things that started to happen that included: "I'll leave you here if you don't eat that. I'll put you in your cot." Now this was actually a public hospital and there wasn't a cot and the parent could not leave the child there, and these were absolutely unenforceable kind of threats. The frosty withdrawal, the silent treatment, Mum and Dad going off in a huff, "Oh have it then." That kind of

irritative, frustrated kind of withdrawal of the parents, kids hate this. Kids will often engage in pursuit and pleading behaviour to get the audience back.

Comparing children is another sure fire way of making kids feel they're not valued and that the parent's expectations are too high.

One of the things about basic discipline, **anticipation is the name of the game**. In a lot of ways you can predict pretty well the sorts of situations that kids find tricky or parents find difficult to deal with. **The classic arsenic hour at the end of the day. That one-hour after the arrival home of the last person is another high-risk time for things like conflict within the family.** I'll just give you a couple of examples of how getting through that time of the day and what a difference it makes.

So the principles of discipline include things like: **Ensuring kids have plenty of things to do, ground rules that you lay down before a kid gets into a situation.**

If a visiting scenario is a problem and the kids got up to mischief when you were visiting in-laws or relatives, neighbors or friends or that kind of thing, laying down the ground rules and discussing them in advance is a very helpful thing to do, but what you have to be careful of is that you don't just simply lecture. "You will do so and so" is not what I am talking about. What I'm talking about is "What do we have to remember about going shopping today? So what are the good shopper's rules?" And a little reminder just before you leave the car as you get into the supermarket, and this is in an environment where you've got kids who have gone wandering, and they've thrown wobblers because you haven't bought them an ice cream. You're trying to establish some simple ideas: "Stay close, don't ask for anything, don't touch anything unless I say. Use a pleasant voice. If you want to say something, speak nicely." You get those ground rules established, you don't have any problems with children on shopping trips or very few.

Attention for when they are doing very well, such as "I really like you staying close to mummy today." **Supervision** of what they are doing. Discussion, we call it **directed discussion**. This is the idea that when kids have broken the rule; get them to practise the correct alternative way of the thing. So the youngster who comes in and throws his bag on the ground immediately inside the door so everyone is going to fall over it. Directed discussion is saying "Okay, lets try it again, pick it up., go outside, come in and put it where it needs to go," **using one's voice effectively**. We were talking about the escalation idea earlier on or the first bit was raising this as a problem. The most fundamental strategies to do in a discipline situation that makes it so much easier to handle is to avoid the escalation trap.

The escalation trap begins when the parents get into the broken record of repeating what it is they're saying with a raised voice, and so what happens is that right at the end when the parents are really angry the children co-operate and what is actually happening is our children are training us to yell at them, because they reward us right at the point when we have escalated right to our worst. So we are much more likely to raise our voice quickly in anticipation of needing to the next time they are being difficult.

The message is basically this, if you want something to happen you need to follow through consistently.

There are a number of little routines that can be made to be effective that if used consistently, the idea is that there is a specific consequences for things done appropriately. This is for younger children who we are primarily talking about. Sometimes simply withdrawing the audience and not

reacting to something is a particularly powerful way of conveying to youngsters that this is not going to work.

If the idea is that you are pushing my button to get me upset, “Hey, this is not going to work. I’m simply going to walk away, turn away, look away. Thank you for stopping; now what what’s it that you wanted?” So you actually pay attention to the stopping of the behaviour with a prompt, “What the correct thing is to do?”.

Step 6: **Balance home and work responsibilities**

Now this is an issue at the moment at home and work, people under stress, the idea that our families can influence how effectively we function at work. This is probably illustrated by some new really interesting data that shows that **family conflict is associated with poorer work performance**. Accidents at work, people don’t concentrate when they are in conflict with their family, and there’s high levels of absenteeism. People don’t attend work and they’re under more occupational stress. So in a lot of ways the ability to deal with this has to do with quite specifically developing some strategies for balancing home and work. Now Elle on the set of Friends collapsing, toddler on the set. Classic example of trying to combine work and family in the same environment. Exhaustion, feeling of distress.

This graph is a good illustration of what I am talking about. These are Volvo managers in Sweden. It’s men and women, and what you’ve got going up the vertical side, is really a stress response. How people feel stress as a function of the time of the day. From 9 o’clock in the morning to 9 o’clock at night. Notice that during the day, men and women are pretty similar; these admittedly are same job, same pay, same responsibility and both parents. But look what happens when women leave work say compared to men. This is getting ready to start the second shift and rolling up the sleeves and getting stuck in. The level of daily stress experienced by women tends not to decline until children are in bed, but increasingly for men at least in this study the “unwind and relax” things would happen straight away.

So when we say balancing work and family we’re talking about **teamwork**. Teamwork is about thinking about how to work together as a couple recognising the impact of conflict on children is not just the type of arguments that children hear. Look, we are not doing our children any favors to think if we could raise them in a completely conflict-free environment we would be helping them, because children actually need to learn to manage conflict and realise that Mum and Dad can have disagreements but they’re resolvable. It creates the sense of future, a sense of optimism a sense of capacity to solve problems.

But there is one thing I would just like to draw to your attention that children are particularly sensitive to in terms of adults’ arguments. **If kids hear arguing and the topic of the conversation is about them personally they’re much more stressed about it**. So in a lot of ways if adults are arguing about the children it probably better to not have too much within earshot.

The other thing they are particularly sensitive to is the ending of arguments. Children can hear all sorts of rows going on in the home and not be stressed by it providing it’s a good ending, But if kids see the frosty withdrawal of one parent going off in a huff and the other one screaming and the other one throwing objects around, what the sense is this is an unsafe place, it’s an insecure and “I can’t feel good about here because I don’t even know if there is going to be a house here tomorrow or a home for me to be in”.

So the idea is to **talk to our partners daily about our experience with the kids. Share the workload, concentrate on getting through the tough times**. There are some interesting studies

that show **if you can get through that first one hour after the arrival home of the last incoming person without any friction with your spouse, you will reduce the amount of weekly marital conflict by half. One hour amounts to a 50% reduction in the amount of weekly conflict that might be in the family. Now that's a kind of an interesting idea. Most people can see themselves getting through an hour.**

Share the workload, roll up the sleeves for the second shift and **don't unwind in ways that add to the stress of your partner.** Think about this. How many people do health-promoting things that actually coincide with the peak period of work within the family? Leave work, go to the gym, go for a run, what's happening at home? The work. Preparing kids homework, supervision that kind of thing.

Discuss our values with each other, with our marital partners, so we can **reach agreements about methods of discipline.** We can **model problem-solving skills** and back each other up and avoid contradicting each other in front of the children., and avoid coming to the rescue. "Leave it to me, will you" is kind of like a message of incompetence is being conveyed to the partner who has not been dealing with the situation properly.

One thing as a psychologist I been very aware of is how much our thought processes influence how we react. **We need to change our negative thinking.**

When you're in the line of fire, the basic idea is that kids don't upset us; it's what we think about what they do that upsets us. If you think about when children are doing things such as breaking a terracotta pot, spilling a glass of milk, and you think about the spontaneous thoughts that pop into our mind. "He knew I was tired. She did that deliberately to upset me. He's just like his father. He's a brat." Now those kinds of thought add to negative emotion, but increase the chances that we will raise our voice and actually hit our kids. There has been research done on this.

What about some more positive encounter, "No we were both tired. No, maybe he's board when I'm on the phone. No, he only looks like his father. He's not a brat, his behaviour is annoying." So when it comes down to it, identify what you're saying to yourself, counter these negative thoughts and you will feel much better.

Parent traps. I've just got a couple of others to add; escalation traps we've talked about. Being a super parent trap is about feeling you have to be perfect to be adequate, and this is not a good state of affairs. **Parenting is about making mistakes and learning from them and not repeating them in the same way that got you into trouble.** The leave them alone trap is "They're busy there playing, let's just leave them alone", when in fact that's the time where at least occasionally we need to be paying attention while they're behaving well.

The last step is to **value being a parent.** My kids are now 25 and 23 and it seems like only yesterday they were only pre-schoolers. When we think about the critical importance of giving our kids the best shot in life they can have, to do this we need to make children and our families a priority in a way that we can learn enough about parenting that we can actually enjoy our children. We can enjoy being with them, and we can enjoy growing with them. Because if you see parenting as an opportunity, not as a burdensome responsibility, the opportunity is to actually grow and learn from our kids and for our family to evolve together that leaves us as individual people much stronger for the experience.

Parenting is about making life worth living for children. If we think about the fundamental importance of this idea, **if we promote healthy families within our community, we're going to**

have healthy children, and if we have healthy families we will have stronger communities, that are much more robust, much more resilient, more supportive of each other.

What I would just say in concluding is that the parenting responsibility is one of the most important and challenging tasks we could ever undertake in our life and it is extremely important; at the same time it is not so stressful, burdensome and difficult that it is something we can't praise and value and really encourage people to get involved in.

Thank you very much.