

Don't try to be the perfect parent

How can we make sure that we always get the parenting thing right? The short answer is that you can't, and whoever stumbles upon the formula that creates a perfect parent will make a fortune.

But there's no such thing as a parent who always gets everything right, so blundering along trying to do our best is a pretty universal parenting experience.

One reason there's no universal manual on How To Be The Perfect Parent is that the things making parenting hard for one person are quite easy for another – personalities and skills differ.

So solutions may work brilliantly for one set of parents and children, but be completely useless for their neighbours.

The best guide is to have faith in the solutions that seem to work for you, rather than slavishly following what some guru says, or what everybody else in the playgroup swears is the only way to go.

Of course, being able to share experiences and difficulties can give you some great clues. The biggest problem in learning to be a parent is isolation, so knowing that other parents also strike difficulties is very reassuring.

The most important guiding light for a parent is the confidence that being a good enough parent is all that any of us can do.

Being consistently reliable and responsible in our kids' eyes is what helps us earn our "I Am A Good Enough Parent" badge.

This consistency becomes an important protective factor for our kids as they grow up. Children find it incredibly hard if a parent isn't consistently responsible and reliable, because they become more self-reliant in a way that can lead to risk-taking behaviour.

If a parent hasn't tuned into the importance of being consistent in their children's lives, the first time they might hear about some risky behaviour is when there's a crisis.

It doesn't matter whether you are a parent who is shy about giving your children advice, or one who loves to talk about philosophies of life, as long as you are consistent with them so they know exactly where they stand.

If you have a quick temper and are completely unreasonable sometimes, that's fine as long as the kids understand that it is just the way you are made.

It's okay to get angry – and who doesn't – as long as we don't hurt our kids when we're full of rage.

So give yourself a break as a parent. Just try to be consistent and your kids are likely to be fine.

But if you do strike problems you can't solve on your own, don't put them in the "too hard" basket. The welfare of your kids is too important for you to throw up your hands in horror and despair.

There's no shame in getting help, but sometimes it's hard to give ourselves permission to get help because we feel we should be able to do it on our own.

But we can't always be in control of what is happening, and getting help will provide some answers and a way through the difficulty.

Somebody will have some strategies and getting access to strategies to deal with a particular problem can make a huge difference – you just have to get past the barrier between yourself and getting help.

Sometimes that's easier said than done, because for many people it means breaking through a barrier of shame, but the first step is to make a simple phone call.

Just taking some action and reaching out for help when you can't solve something yourself can be a huge boost.

Don't feel you need to be isolated and overwhelmed by problems with your children or teenagers. Seek out a sympathetic counsellor to get some strategies to help you out of the mire.

Remember, there isn't a roadmap to being a good enough parent, just lots of signposts along the way.

Survival tips

- Abolish the myth of the perfect parent – aim to be a good enough parent
- Being a good enough parent means being consistently reliable and responsible
- Don't suffer alone if it's all too much – seek some help.