

LOVING WITH LIMITS

Raising Children That Other People Like To be Around

By Richard E. Greenberg

Dr. Spock meets Dave Barry!

A father of four offers highly practical, anecdotal advice, tested and proven in his own family, on how to raise children so that they respect others while understand their own roles and responsibilities inside and out of the home.

Loving With Limits is a non-clinical guide offering parents techniques they need to create loving and comfortable relationships with their children—from infancy to college age. Richard Greenberg has translated the lessons of his own experience into a series of common sense conclusions, each of which simplifies an important portion of the parenting process. This easy-to-read and humorously written manual gives parents the confidence they need to minimize their children's anxiety and maximize comfort in their homes.

A keen observer, and a parent for over half of his life, Richard Greenberg has changed more than 6,000 diapers, packed over 200 school lunches, discussed in excess of 100 report cards, attended at least 300 parent conferences, hosted 60 birthday parties, and given at least 9,000 goodnight kisses. An experienced entertainment industry veteran and college educator, Mr. Greenberg knows how to keep it simple, while getting his message across.

According to the National Center for Health Statistics, over 3.9 million children were born in the United States in 1996. Half of the nation's 70 million families have children, of which more than 63 million are under the age of eighteen (*World Almanac*, 1998). Clearly, the subject of child rearing is of tremendous interest to everyone - parents, grandparents, siblings, caregivers and educators. The good news is that the market just keeps growing.

Parenting books abound in the marketplace but most are written by 'experts' using third-party case studies to illustrate their points. Many books in the genre deal with the day-to-day care of young children but rarely address the broader issues of parental responsibility, social expectation, and concern about relationships outside the family. The few that focus on a father's point of view usually explain the new father's role in pregnancy and childbirth.

Loving With Limits will:

- Explain that raising children is a process that comfortably includes success and failure.
- Encourage parenting self-respect – giving readers the strength to say NO to their children.
- Prepare parents to accept responsibility for their children's behavior.
- Encourage parents to teach gratitude and make children responsible citizens.
- Provide examples of concrete solutions to common parenting problems.
- Encourage parents to develop respectful and loving relationships with their children.
- Provide mothers with a window into the mind and logic of a father.
- Offer relief and comfort to unsure parents.

“Rules are the arms with which your children can embrace themselves”
R. Greenberg

WHAT THE AUTHOR'S CHILDREN SAY



In response to letters written to each of his sons during their eighteenth year, the Greenbergs received the following: (wording and grammar have not been changed)

Excerpted from a note written by Aaron (on the right in photo) at UC Berkeley:

“The more time I spend in the world, and the more I learn from other people, the more I learn to appreciate how special our family is. You and Dad created a near perfect world for me. I couldn’t ask for anything more in life. No matter what shit I’m dealing with in my own life, I know that something is constant --my home.

You and Dad created something for me that is so close to perfection that it may in fact become a burden. In a good way of course. I don’t know how I am ever going to live without creating a life for myself, and my kin, that lives up to that which you have given me. I think it is too good. I think that it sets an example that is unattainable in its happiness. I have yet to see a group of people so happy and content, and full of love and joy, and this makes me wonder if it exists anywhere else. If only it did, the world would be a better place.”

In an email from the University of Oregon, son Benjamin (left in photo) writes:

“Let me start out by saying thank you. Thanks for everything...I mean thank you for being the parents that you are. I know that things haven’t always been easy, I’ve given you guys a fair amount of challenges, but it always amazes me to see how quickly and naturally you can deal with them. I watch my friend’s families, and now my dorm-mates families, and realize that ours is not a typical household. Aside from the people always running around in it, there is so much love there it is amazing. There are kids here who genuinely don’t like their parents, they don’t feel loved, they feel like they have to be something they aren’t to get approval; never once in my life have I felt that I needed to be anything but me to be loved.

I look at the life I am leading and am amazed. Not at the situation (my new college experience) that I am in, but rather at the way that you guys still play such a role in my life. Mom, I talk about you so much, my friends make fun of me and tell me what a mamas boy I am, but the reality is that just about everything in my life relates back to you, every story I tell starts with the words "one time" and "my mommy". Dad, I hear you everyday. Anytime I speak, it is Richard Greenberg coming out of Benjamin’s mouth, its amazing, and it makes me so proud to be your son. My computer is full of MP3’s, but not the new rock that I listen to, rather, its full of Stevie Wonder, Steely Dan, Frank Sinatra, and Nat King Cole. Almost every song by those people brings back a memory of some time, whether it be riding to a Feeney game in dad’s car listening to straighten up and fly right, or sitting at Nanas listening to Just The Way You Look Tonight. Every one of these memories is embedded in my head, and always will be. Thanks for giving me those memories. Thanks for giving me this life. Thanks for my brothers who I cherish like none other, and my sister who is the center of my universe. I love you guys more than words can say. I can’t wait to be home, talk to you soon.”

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Richard Greenberg believes that confident parents build their families on a strong foundation of love, discipline and respect, while encouraging their children's individual strengths and talents. When asked by one of his children what he wanted to be when he grew up, Richard replied, "The only thing I always knew I wanted to be was someone's Dad." Now, 4 children, 3 Bar Mitzvahs, 2 high school, 2 middle school, 3 elementary school and 4 pre-school graduations later, Mr. Greenberg has candidly documented the lessons of his experience in *"Loving With Limits"*.

In the first grade Mr. Greenberg met The Lovely JoAnn, whom he married 17 years later and with whom he currently enjoys almost 25 years of marriage and 4 wonderful children, Aaron (22), Benjamin (19), Coby (13) & Emily (7). The children are named alphabetically (in order of appearance) with Dusty the family dog holding the "D" space. This is further explained in a chapter called "Simple Tricks" in Mr. Greenberg's manuscript.

Mr. Greenberg attended Verde Valley School, a unique, anthropologically based secondary school in Sedona, Arizona where he was taught tolerance and the value of an open mind. Following graduation, he returned to Los Angeles and earned his bachelors degree in English from UCLA in the class of 1976. Sometime during that period Mr. Greenberg's mother said "Don't be so open minded that your brains fall out", which he considered valuable advice for life in the city.

After graduating from UCLA, Mr. Greenberg entered the entertainment industry where he has held various positions ranging from Art Garfunkel's personal assistant, to writer-producer of promotional and marketing materials for The Disney Channel, Fox Broadcasting, The Family Channel, and DirecTV. He is a highly regarded professional in the field of electronic post-production and currently makes his living at the cutting edge of new technology. Mr. Greenberg is a popular professor at the UCLA Extension where he teaches "Electronic Post-Production for Film and Television". Greenberg is a published songwriter and patented inventor, holding the US Patent for the "What? Button", a device that allows a common radio or cell phone to repeat information that may have just been missed. Mr. Greenberg is rarely described as "shy", performs publicly as a singer, and will, with just the slightest provocation, launch into loving anecdotes about his children.

Mr. Greenberg is actively involved in his local community and has coached various children and their teammates in baseball, basketball, and soccer. Despite win/loss records that might indicate otherwise, every season has been a winning season for Mr. Greenberg and his athletes. His coaching techniques have earned him high praise, sportsmanship awards and numerous clip boards, tee-shirts, plaques and hugs from players and parents over the years.

Ultimately, what Mr. Greenberg loves most is being a husband and father. He takes great pride in his children and enjoys sharing the smiles, trials and tribulations of family life with The Lovely JoAnn. The Greenberg family currently lives in Pacific Palisades, California.

COMPETITION / OTHER PARENTING BOOKS

The competitive landscape in Parenting is quite crowded. "Loving With Limits" distinguishes itself for its easy access, popular style, and non-academic approach. Additionally, because Greenberg is not a psychologist or MD, most parents can relate to his non-clinical language and everyman approach. By using himself and his own family as the case study, Greenberg brings warmth and loving surrender to his explanations and analysis. Greenberg's book addresses general issues of parental responsibility and the importance of establishing open communication with one's children, however, it cannot solve all the problems that parents may encounter, and, as a result, a number of the books listed below would serve as wonderful supplements for Greenberg's audience. (More competitive analysis is available upon request.)

Setting Limits: How to Raise Responsible, Independent Children by Providing Clear Boundaries

Robert J. MacKenzie, Ed.D.

Rocklin, CA: Prima Publishing, 1998, Paperback, 368 pages.

This book explores the teaching of responsibility and gives examples based on the author's experiences while counseling and leading seminars.

Smart Parenting: An Easy Approach to Raising Happy, Well-Adjusted Kids

Dr. Peter J. Favaro

Lincolnwood, IL: NTC/Contemporary, 1995, Paperback, 278 pages.

A useful book from a child psychologist that uses clinical case studies rather than an individual family as examples of a sensitive and sensible approach to parenting.

The Gift of Fatherhood: How Men's Lives are Transformed by Their Children

Dr. Aaron Hass

New York: Fireside / Simon & Shuster, 1994, Paperback, 203 pages

A doctor uses case studies to describe the role of a father in a sweet, sensitive and loving way. Dr. Hass approaches the social and psychological pre-conditioning that father's have to deal with in order to embrace their job as a parent.

Happiest Baby on the Block

Dr. Harvey Karp

Bantam Doubleday Dell Pub, 2002, 256 pages

A very useful book for dealing with sleep problems and other issues typical in the first year of baby's life. I really like this book and would refer it to people who need more day to day practical problem solving.

Your Child's Self-Esteem

Dorothy Corkille Briggs

Rocklin, CA: Prima Publishing, 1970, Paperback, 341 pages.

This book, written by an educator, links parental self-esteem with the parent-child relationship. Although written over thirty years ago, this book still offers sage advice to parents.

The New Father: A Dad's Guide to the First Year

Armin A. Brott

Abbeville Press, April 1997, 240 pages (Paperback)

A comprehensive and informative guide to baby and father development in the first year of the baby's life. This book previews many specific events of childhood (trips to the pediatrician, diaper changing, bonding, etc.).

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PREPARATION

While there is no single correct way to raise children, as parents we must proceed with the hope that we will give our children the tools they will need to successfully meet the challenges of their lifetimes. To that end, I have sought in this book to simplify the parenting process by breaking down my own experience and observations into a series of common-sense guidelines. After all, life is imperfect. We are unable to completely control so many things; like our health, the behavior of others, and natural phenomenon, to name a few. One part of life we can control, however, are the choices we make in raising our children.

Rather than mapping a specific route for the journey of parenting, this book is designed to help keep you pointed in a general direction. The values I have called “common sense” are derived from many years of observation as well as my own continuing experience as both a child and a parent. Unavoidably, these conclusions are a compilation of opinions and solutions culled from our parents, our children, and our friends. However, it is my hope that they will prove useful as you head down your parenting path.

As I sat down to write this book, a number of basic principles evolved. I have chosen to call these the “Twelve Basic Principles of Parenting.” These principles can serve as a foundation for you, as they have for me, as you work toward a loving and mutually respectful relationship with your child.

I cannot continue without this important confession. In the twenty-five plus years of our marriage, my wife, the Lovely JoAnn has taught me a great deal - most of which I will repeat (and often claim as my own) as you read through this book. JoAnn and I have four children, spanning sixteen years from oldest to youngest. Each child is incredibly different and each is evolving daily toward an adulthood that will continually challenge them as ours does us. As we’ve tried to guide them, JoAnn has tempered my typically male tendency for anger with her

motherly compassion, unending ability to love, and a master's degree in education. We truly enjoy our children and, as regularly as we brag about their character, we receive compliments about them as well.

The reward is that they seem to feel the same way about us.

This book is my attempt to explain a journey that for us has not yet reached its destination. It's really six journeys I suppose - our two and the four of our children. The children's journeys all start on similar paths and, with our guidance, stay fairly similar until they grow old enough to start making their own big decisions - where to go to college or whether to leave a terrible relationship or job. Our journeys as parents keeps us side by side, double-teaming the responsibilities of adulthood - like parenting, finances, and careers.

In parenting, as in Life, the journey is as important as the destination.

Ideally, the destination is a strong, loving, and respectful relationship between you and your responsible adult child. The getting there is where the groundwork for that evolving adult is laid. Along the way the challenge can be to keep that destination in sight. Parenting is a lot like surfing. Some days the waves are calm and others the sea is wild and choppy. But no matter what, you're out there, on your board, and the only way back into shore is to ride those waves.

“A hundred years from now it will not matter what my bank account was, the sort of house I lived in, or the kind of car I drove. But the world may be different because I was important in the life of a child.”

Unattributed quote from a letter to the LA Times

(from Lew Riley in Yorba Linda)

Principle 1: KNOW YOUR GOAL - Raise Children That You Like to Be Around

“Insanity is hereditary. You get it from your children.”

Erma Bombeck

Keeping your eyes on the “big picture” is a good way to avoid getting bogged down in the “crisis du jour”.

What’s the big picture?

It is the objective, the goal of any enterprise. And what is the primary objective in parenting? It’s to raise children that you and other people like to be around.

Having children that other people like being around is a fairly simple objective. It is one that each of us is capable of achieving if we are honest about measuring the reactions of others. Often, this is as easy as simply looking around, being aware of how we as parents would react if that little noisemaker weren’t our own adorable offspring.

Children who are appreciated and enjoyed by the adults around them receive positive feedback and feel good about their place in the world. Being disciplined or scorned by strangers gets children attention, but not the love they crave. Behaving responsibly and knowing the rules also gives children the foundation they need to become valued friends, spouses, co-workers, and neighbors in their adult life.

Part of your children’s “goodness” has to be measured by their ultimate ability to accept responsibility for their behavior. By teaching them right from wrong and by showing them how to behave, you are taking the first step in teaching them (in the words of my friend Warren Spaeth) to be “good ancestors.” In other words, both we and the children we create should strive

to be remembered positively by all those who follow. This doesn't mean we should strive to be conformists or to have our statues in the park, but a sense of our accountability should moderate all of our behavior.

Your accountability as a parent starts with the birth of your child and becomes significantly more apparent when you decide to venture out to a public place like a restaurant. Having toted in your baby bag, asked for a high chair, and gone through all of the advance procedures required for a restaurant meal with a one-year-old, you settle in for a regular dining experience.

Well, not really.

Unfortunately, your baby is not particularly impressed that you're in a restaurant or that it is your desire to have him sit there quietly holding the spoon you gave him as a distraction. Suddenly, your baby starts pounding the spoon on the table and screaming quite loudly about absolutely nothing. Before you know it, you're surrounded by scowling people who try in vain to smile at you as you apologize for the noise, mess, and interruptions being caused by your now wailing child.

If you're not happy with the way your child is behaving, you can be sure that those around you aren't either. If you're lucky, they're suffering in silence. If not, they'll leave you with no doubt about how your child ruined their meal, their morning, and their lives.

There you are, entirely responsible for your child's bad behavior and frankly, that's how it should be. The best you can do is apologize; keeping in mind that you need to start creating consequences in your child's mind, no matter how old he or she might be, for behavior that is unacceptable. In addition, the next time you see a disaster waiting to happen - such as a child who didn't nap and has been cranky all morning - you might consider avoiding a crowded

restaurant and choosing instead to eat somewhere a little more “kid friendly”. (*A more specific set of procedures is offered in the next section of the book for dealing with these types of behaviors in children under three years old.*)

Recently, a friend asked, “Why do you care what other people think of your children? Isn’t what you think more important?”

Of course it is. But the goal of raising children is to create citizens - people who will ultimately leave your home and live in the “real world.” When that time comes, your children’s success or failure will be measured by how well they perform in the world, not necessarily by how well they fit into your family. That’s one reason why what other people think is an important measure. Besides, we as parents have a tendency to be blinded sometimes by the love we feel for our children. The way others react to them may be one of the clearest litmus tests available to us.

A NOTE ABOUT THE TITLE

I’ve encountered various reactions to the title of this book. One of the most interesting was from a mother who expressed concern over the fact that “other people” always spoke highly of her child. She was the one who had difficulty liking her own offspring. This book is based on the assumption that you do like, in fact, love your child. In loving them, you have to be the boss. After all, why would you possibly put up with being in the company of a child you didn’t like?

You can make the difference - and you should.

In the case of the mother mentioned above, and probably in others, the kind words being spoken about her child seem confusing because this is not consistent with her parenting

experience. Why would these people be complimenting her little “monster”? There are a number of possible answers to this question:

First, maybe those people are just being courteous. This mom will find out whether or not that is the case when it comes time to schedule another playdate (or not).

The second possibility is that when her child is under the firm guidance of another parent, the child responds well and behaves according to the substitute parent’s expectations. This response is important because it indicates that children often behave the way you expect them to behave. If Mom thinks her child is going to behave like a monster, then the child will behave according to expectation - badly. If Mom has demonstrated (through previous acts of encouragement and reinforcement) that behaving properly is wonderful and expected, then chances are that the child will respond accordingly. When a child rises to the behavioral expectations of the “substitute” mother it proves that when applied lovingly, your children appreciate limits and respond quite positively.

A third possibility is that this mother has defined proper behavior for her child, and the child chooses to be on her “best behavior” when put in the company of others. This would indicate to me that the mom has been doing a good job of letting her child know what her expectations are. However, she’s also allowed her child to “push her buttons” and get away with bad behavior or not listening.

HAVING YOUR BUTTONS PUSHED

If you reveal weaknesses to your children - like losing composure when they start to cry or misbehave for example - they will work their hardest to put you off balance just because they can. In this case, mom’s expectation of a monster child is really the reaction the child is eliciting from her parent. The child knows how to behave properly, but she also knows her

mother has a weakness (lack of parenting confidence, perhaps) and the child is exploiting it. Why would a kid choose to exploit a parent's weakness? Perhaps to feel in control or to create a distraction from some other issues floating around the family (arguing between mom and dad, for instance.) If you are like this mom or dad, you need to try to understand why your child would choose to misbehave. If you can't figure it out, don't hesitate to seek professional counsel – many parents blame the child, but in these cases it's equally, and perhaps more productive to look inward.

Children who behave well for strangers may also misbehave with their parents because they are secure in their parents' love and comfortable enough to want to test their parents' limits. As a result, such parents are often exposed to behavior from their children that others don't get to see. I think this is more the norm than any other situation. As well behaved as any children may be, I suspect they most often melt down in the privacy of their own homes (and parental relationships).

Children test us regularly. Only yesterday I was driving my four-year-old daughter, Emily, to school. Emily had decided that she wanted to hear her favorite compact disc, James Taylor's "Hourglass." In fact, she wanted to hear cut number three on the CD. Complying with her initial request, we went to the CD and I selected cut three. We listened and sang along until she suddenly proclaimed that she now wanted to hear cut number twelve. "But we're still in the middle of number three!" I protested (I like number three). She got very bossy with me and said, "I want number twelve now!"

Her tone was totally inappropriate (she'd picked it up from a neighbor child who has a tendency toward foot stomping). We were at a stoplight so I turned around and said; "Don't speak to me in that tone. If you want number twelve you can ask nicely." After letting my words sink in a little, I changed the CD to number twelve. When I looked back to her car seat she had pulled her jacket up over her head. She had gotten the point. I started singing song

number twelve, the jacket came down, and she joined in. By the time we got to school, everything was back to normal, but Emily had learned what tone of voice she couldn't use with her dad. I don't think Emily would have dared to be quite that insistent if she was a guest in someone else's car, but, with me, she gave her big personality a try. Take comfort in the fact that your child is secure enough to test you, but try your best not to fail the test.

Finally, children who act out with their parents are sometimes expressing hostility because their parents are not setting limits. Rules are the arms in which your children can embrace themselves. A lack of limits often causes children to be uncomfortable and anxious. It keeps them from feeling secure - as if they were physically held tight by the rules and expectations that we as parents create.

Some people argue that, well-behaved children are "repressed" and unable to express themselves because they've been hammered into conformity, but discipline is not about uniforms, salutes, and clicking heels. It's about courtesy, kindness and respects for the feelings of others - including you, the parent. Emily knows what the rules are. She knows when it's time for bed. She knows not to feed the dog from the table and she still manages to make up songs, play princess, and spend hours living in her own fantasies.

If you find yourself in a situation where you dislike your own children, don't blame it on them or their strong personalities, or their genetic pre-disposition. Blame it on yourself and look at the reactions your child is pulling out of you - this will be your link to the weakness that your child has so clearly revealed for you. If you feel as though you've exhausted all of your patience, seek professional help - an external perspective is always helpful.

Principle 2: BELIEVE IN YOURSELF - The Truth Floats

*“Children today are tyrants. They contradict their parent,
gobble their food, and tyrannize their teachers.”*

SOCRATES

Children were bossy even in the time of Socrates. There is no such thing as a perfect parent, so don't waste your time thinking you are one, or lamenting that you may make or have made a parenting mistake.

Parenting mistakes happen and, as the quote above proves, they have happened for thousands of years.

The key is to keep your focus on the big picture and your long-term goals for your child. Decisions that you make will be tested on a regular basis and you must make them with the understanding that, regardless of the short-term result - whether tears or immediate gratification - the long-term goal will always prevail.

Is what you decided truthfully in the best interest of your child? Was it honestly the best decision you could make at that time? If you answer yes to those questions, then you will be able to deal with reality when the truth floats.

Do you remember a time in high school when someone cheated on a test, or lied to a teacher, parent, or friend, and you knew the truth but no one else did? Do you remember secretly hoping that the truth would come out somehow, that the liar would get caught or exposed? Didn't the situation ultimately turn out all right?

In my life, justice has almost always seemed to prevail: the girlfriend found out the cad was lying, and the teacher learned (based on oral performance or subsequent test scores) that the student had cheated on his exam. The truth always seemed to float to the surface. Some people say “what goes around comes around,” but I like to think that the truth, like a bubble of air in a body of water, floats. And like that bubble floating upward, no matter what you put above the truth, it finds a seam, works its way around the edges, and manages to eventually get to the top.

Do you ever find yourself mistrusting someone you thought everyone else respected, only to find out weeks later that everyone else felt the way you did? It is in these ways that the truth floats.

What does this have to do with parenting?

What we do as parents in the name of love, no matter how foolish it may sometimes be, is motivated by our desire to do what is in the best interest of our children. If we carry the confidence of this knowledge and the understanding that, sooner or later, the truth will float, we decrease our vulnerability to second-guessing and challenges to our parenting. Consider this example:

We were recently vacationing in Palm Springs where we encountered an old acquaintance whose child attends high school with our son. We were discussing our children and she posed the following question to me: “What do you say when your child accuses you, regularly, of not loving her?” I thought for a moment and then I asked, “Do you love her?” Our friend immediately replied, “Of course I do!” So I asked her why she was letting her daughter’s question rattle her. After all, if she truly loves her daughter her daughter’s ability to understand what that love is is more important than the mother’s ability to prove it to her daughter? The mother clearly loves her daughter; the daughter has just found one of her mother’s buttons. Our objective is to eliminate that button.

Timing being crucial in parenting, I suggested that, on the next occasion when the daughter made the no-love accusation, that the mother explain quite calmly to her daughter that there is no question that she loves her, and if the daughter needs concrete proof of that love, she should consider the food she eats, the home she lives in, the clothes she wears, and, the private school she attends to be mere tokens of her mother's devotion. In this case, the truth from Mom's point of view should have been very apparent; it just needed to be floated before the child. And, more importantly, that mother needed to recognize the button, step back, and look at the "big picture".

On the other hand, it may be that the child truly didn't feel loved. By ignoring the truth and accepting her daughter's accusation as a possibility, our friend found herself having to defend her parenting – instead of saying to her daughter "It really troubles me that you don't feel loved, let's discuss that." Of course our friend loves her daughter deeply, but by recognizing that her daughter was looking for some other kind of measure, she could now pursue what her daughter really sought. Is her daughter afraid her mother's love is temporary? Did the daughter do something wrong? Is a sibling getting more attention? Questions about our intent as parents are really good conversation openers - and conversations with your children are very very important ways of making the truth apparent.

Understanding our own motives and keeping them as pure as possible allows us as parents to be confident about our parenting decisions. I can remember my parents saying "Someday you'll thank me for this" as they were dropping me off at Sunday school or forcing me to go to a dance lesson. They were doing what they thought was best for me and, the fact is these lessons didn't hurt (though I still can't read Hebrew or dance).

Sometimes, as a parent, you may believe that your child may have misunderstood your motive or your statement may have been taken the wrong way. In those moments - when your

child may question the reason you have taken away a toy or imposed some harsh restriction - you have to be confident about your own motives. You have to know that the truth will float - regardless of what your child may say.

If your intentions are good - they will be proven so.

Another example of knowing the truth and acting upon it occurred when our son Benjamin was placed in a class with many of his friends but the wrong teacher. It's not that the teacher was n't "good enough." We had just learned from experience with Aaron, our older son, that this particular teacher was not going to impose the sort of discipline that we felt Benjy required. After much lobbying with the school, and a tearful conversation with Ben, his class was changed. Despite his protestations that we were ruining his life, we held firm to our belief that we had made the right decision. What later occurred confirmed that fact: First, none of Benjy's friends abandoned him and, next, he began to flourish in his new, more structured, class environment. Two years later, the teacher we had helped Ben to avoid was not rehired by the school district. We weren't necessarily happy about the teacher losing his job, but we had known the truth, we had made a decision, and in time, the truth floated.

Another very simple example of this principle occurs when you accidentally call your child by the wrong name. Sigmund Freud would have us believe that this "slip of the tongue" expresses very deep hidden feelings. Although being called by the wrong name could be a blow to a child's self-esteem, we all know that it happens once in a while. Despite what Freud might have said, for the sake of parenting progress I prefer to believe that this mistake is usually just an accident. After all, sometimes a cigar is just a cigar.

If you give the "slip" too much credibility, you actually act as if it might have been more than an accident. If you agonize over the idea that you actually forgot who your child was or wished he were his sibling (or the mailman), you are headed for deep trouble. Obviously, the

truth lies in the fact that your brain is so addled from your hard work as a parent that you can't possibly be expected to keep everyone in the family - spouse and dog included - in a separate and organized place in your mind. In this circumstance, it is clearly better to keep moving forward, acknowledging the error ("I'm sorry, Coby; I know you're not Benjy.") and continuing on as quickly and confidently as possible. You see, the truth is that you didn't forget who your child was; you just made a simple, human mistake. The floating truth is the overriding reality in this situation. (By the way, this principle also applies when you forget the name of a friend, business associate, or brother-in-law.)

Parenting requires this type of inner strength and confidence because your children will challenge your logic, they will make your decisions seem unfair or arbitrary, and they may even try to convince you that you are Satan himself.

Don't believe it.

Ultimately, it is your obligation to raise your children to be people that you like - and when you do so, the truth of your wisdom and good intentions will float right before your eyes!

Of course, it's possible that you may have made a mistake. When the truth floats and it reveals a mistake on your part, you have to be willing to look at what you did in context and deal with it in the best way that you can. Sometimes the best way that you can deal with something is to say, "That happened in the distant past. I have learned from it. Let's move on."

Remember, every decision you make is not always going to prove itself as having been the right one.

Believing that the truth floats allows you to be a long-term parent. Carrying the confidence that is defined by real decision-making helps you to avoid minor skirmishes with

your child. A friend of mine recently told me that her husband has a tendency to argue with their seven-year-old daughter and to really get into it. All I could do was tell her the story of the Gorillas.

GORILLA LOGIC

There is always a dominant male gorilla in a pack of gorillas. He is the strongest, oldest, and most powerful of all the males in the pride. With some regularity, younger gorillas physically challenge his sovereignty. They usually swipe at him with their arms, growl, and show their teeth with menacing ferocity. The bull gorilla growls back and generally tolerates their attacks until, the fun having worn off; he tires of the challenge. At that moment he puts his large and powerful hand on the shoulder of the younger gorilla and he looks him in the eye. In that instant he communicates one simple thought - "I can kill you, but I won't". The younger gorilla understands that the "game" is over and respectfully resumes his position in the pack.

A boss to whom I was complaining told this story to me about a lower ranked coworker. "Why even bother to engage?" he asked, "You are the boss." The truth of parenting is that we are the older gorillas. It is our duty to avoid engaging with our children on issues where they have the weaker position. Does it make sense for an adult to argue with a seven-year-old? I don't think so.

Know your position and make your decisions with confidence. Decisions that we as parents make in the best interests of our children will almost always be able to stand the test of time.