Helping today’s parents raise exceptional kids

BLENDED FAMILIES
MALCOLM DIX SHARES SEVEN LESSONS

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VIP SATURDAY
Join Michael Grose and Bruce Sullivan for the Parenting Event of 2013!
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Join Michael Grose and Bruce Sullivan for the Parenting Event of 2013.

VIP (Very Important Parenting) Saturday is a morning of fun, learning and inspiration for parents. Book your tickets now.
Welcome to the ninth edition of Parentingideas magazine,
designed to give you up-to-date advice and
to make your parenting easier.

The feedback about the last edition of Parentingideas magazine was fantastic. Readers were intrigued to find a picture of Gotye on the cover. If you missed it, you can still get a copy on the Parentingideas website

This issue is a beauty with some very topical articles.

If your son has been bitten by the Minecraft craze then you’ll know that the computer game has a magnetic attraction for kids. Writer and speaker Dr. Jason Fox explains the attraction, outlines the benefits and provides very practical guidelines for parents.

Maggie Dent is one of Australia’s wisest parenting educators and she’s shown her smarts once more. She writes passionately about the current aversion we have to children taking risks. She believes that children should get down and dirty more than they do. Her thoughts about the value of play are both insightful and invaluable for parents of young children.

If you’ve ever been in the situation where your child is struggling and you don’t know how to respond, then you’ll find my article about the language of resilience very useful. I give you 12 resilience phrases that you can add to your vocabulary so you’ll never be stuck for words again. Well, not for a while anyway!

In this edition we welcome Bruce Sullivan, my fellow presenter at this year’s VIP Saturday national tour. His article about developing the curiosity of a four year old is a real thought-provoker for dads as well as mums.

Anyone in a stepfamily will know full well the huge learning curve that stepparents are on. Western Australia’s Malcolm Dix provides some short cuts as he shares seven lessons he’s learned in his journey as a step-dad. As usual Malcolm will bring a smile to your dial!

We welcome another contributor, New Zealand’s premier educator Karen Boyes, to our writing team. Karen’s first contribution focuses on the importance of developing your children as lifelong learners. She’s got some great tips to get you started.

Parent coach and author Dr. Justin Coulson has great advice for any parent who wants to help their children become good problem-solvers. He shows you how to coach your kids through their difficulties and develop their emotional literacy as well.

Sometimes we can over-complicate things as parents, trying to be the best we can be. Parentingideas favourite Bill Jennings has written a personal story that’s a great reminder that sometimes great parenting is about simply ‘turning up’ for your kids. You’ll love the message.

Yes, there’s a lot to love about this issue of Parentingideas magazine.

Enjoy!

About Michael Grose

Michael is widely regarded as Australia’s No. 1 parenting educator. The author of eight books for parents his latest Thriving! has been described “as the new roadmap for raising 3-12 year olds with confidence, character and resilience.” He supports over 1,000 Australian schools and hundreds and thousands of parents with his practical, easy-to-read resources. An in-demand speaker Michael is one of fewer than 100 Certified Speaking Professionals (CSP’s) in Australia. Contact 1800 004 484 to find out how to have Michael liven up your next conference or event.

Join thousands of parents and follow MichaelGroseParenting on Facebook.
Families develop their own language that has meaning for them. “This is non-negotiable” has significant meaning in my tribe, going way beyond displaying an unwillingness to argue or negotiate.

It was a term that found its way into the family lexicon when I was parenting adolescents. It usually accompanied a parent request or expectation.

“You need to come to your grandma’s place this Sunday. It’s her birthday so it’s non-negotiable.”

End of story! No arguments entered into!

This is such a strong part of our family’s proprietary language that my adult daughter’s partner now uses it when establishing the limits of his familial obligations. When testing the waters to see if he’s expected at a family function he’ll invariably ask, “Is next Friday night’s dinner a non-negotiable?”

The term has withstood the test of time.

Families develop their own language around what’s important to them and around how they function.

Similarly, families develop their own words and phrases to help each other get through the inevitable tough times that each person experiences. The language of resilience generally refers to coping strategies such as empathy, humour and acceptance.

As a rule of thumb, in resilient families children and adults tune into the needs of each other, choosing situation-specific language, rather than simply regurgitating generalised ‘feel-good’ or ‘get-on-with-it’ platitudes.

Following are 12 examples of the language of resilience, the coping skills each reflects and the types of situations where they are applicable.

Humour is a great coping strategy and a powerful tool for resilience as it heightens feelings of control. Some children and young people will naturally crack jokes or make fun of seemingly serious situations. This is a fantastic way to release stress and handle feelings of helplessness. As a parent you may need to lighten up tense situations by introducing humour of your own, which is something that many dads do really well.


The ability to compartmentalise bad events and keep them from affecting all areas of life is a powerful coping skill. Sportspeople, politicians and others who work in the public arena need to be adept at it. When something unpleasant happens during recess, for example, kids need to park their thinking about that event so they can get on with the rest of the day. The ability to compartmentalise thinking is a fantastic life skill kids can learn within their family.


When kids are troubled by events or spend too much time brooding it helps to do something to get their minds off things for a time. Playing games, spending time together, watching some TV, going out – are all good distracters for worried, anxious or stressed kids. Self-distraction is healthy, providing some welcome perspective. It also prevents kids from replaying awful experiences in their heads, blowing them out of proportion.

4. “Who have you spoken to about this?”

Strategy: seeking help Good for: kids who experience bullying and social problems; handling all types of personal worries.

Resilient people seek solace in the company of others when they experience difficulty. That’s why social connection is such a strong preventative strategy for young people. The promotion of help-seeking behaviours is one of the best coping strategies of all. Even if kids don’t overtly talk about what’s bothering them, it can be immensely reassuring to spend time around others who are empathetic, understanding and willing to listen and help.


It’s human nature to think that we are the only people who have experienced certain situations. However the human condition suggests that this is rarely the case. Let kids know that they are not alone in their experiences and, just as others have discovered, “this difficult situation too will pass”. They need to hang in there (another piece of resilience language)!

6. “I know it looks bad now but you will get through this.” Strategy: offering hope Good for: kids experiencing loss, bullying, change or extreme disappointment.

There are times when parents can do nothing else but keep their children’s chins up and encourage them when life doesn’t go their way. Being the ‘hope’ person can be hard work, that’s why parents need to be supported by resilient people and workplaces too. It helps to be mindful that a child or young person’s resilience is nurtured by the presence of at least one supportive adult. You may have to be that person!

7. “What can you learn from this so it doesn’t happen next time?” Strategy: positive reframing Good for: kids who make mistakes, let others down or experience personal disappointment.

One of the common attributes of optimistic people is their ability to find a learning, or look for a message, in difficult or negative situations. Parents can help kids reframe events to help them see things differently. For instance, rather than regarding a public speaking opportunity as problematic and a chance to look foolish it’s better to reframe it as a challenge and a chance to shine. It also helps when parents model reframing so kids see you changing how you view seemingly negative or worrying situations.
8. “You didn’t make this happen.” Strategy: realistic attribution (Blame fairly) Good for: kids who blame themselves; take things too personally.

Self-blame is one of the enemies of resilience. Kids who blame themselves for negative events often think irrationally and can experience loss of hope. Parents can help kids see that most things that happen, whether good or bad, occur due to a mixture of luck, other people’s actions and their own actions. Any sportsperson who has missed the winning goal or dropped an important catch needs to be reminded that luck and other people’s inaction were also factors in their team not getting over the line.


If you’ve ever been driving to an important event only to be stuck in traffic then you would know that there are some situations you just can’t control. The only way to cope is to accept what’s happening because worrying and fretting won’t get you anywhere. Similarly, parents with a resilience mindset can help kids understand what’s worth worrying about and what’s not, and that some things won’t change no matter how much kids fret or beat themselves up!

10. “This isn’t the end of the world” Strategy: maintaining perspective Good for: kids who catastrophise or blow things out of proportion.

While most of us catastrophise at times, jumping to the worst possible conclusion, it is a habit that only exaggerates anxiety. When kids constantly think the worst case scenario, challenge their views. “Yes, you could end up not knowing anyone at camp but you won’t be the only one. Besides you’ll probably end up making new friends like you generally do.”

11. “You could be right. But have you thought about …” Strategy: flexible thinking Good for: kids who catastrophise; experience extreme feelings; who exaggerate.

Many children and young people talk in extremes – ‘awesome’, ‘the best’, ‘the worst’ and ‘gross’ roll off their tongues easily these days. Unfortunately, their extreme language leads to extreme emotional responses. Develop the habit of winding back their language by introducing shades of grey, rather than black and white. Replace “I’m furious” with “I’m annoyed”. “It’s an absolute disaster” with “It’s a pain”. “I can’t stand it” with “I don’t like it”. Realistic language leads to realistic thinking, which helps kids handle many ordinary situations that they have blown out of proportion.

12. “What can we do about this?” Strategy: taking action Good for: kids who mope; who experience disappointment; who feel inadequate.

Kids can sometimes feel overwhelmed by events such as constant failure, constant rejection or always narrowly missing being picked for a team. They can be overwhelmed by feelings of inadequacy and helplessness. Action is often the best remedy. Help them take the first step forward. Set some goals. Make some plans. Identify the first step and hold their hand while they take it. Taking action is a quality shared by resilient communities, organisations and individuals.

Bring resilience into your every day language

Resilient parents focus on building children’s and young people’s strengths for the future, while helping them cope with the present difficulties and challenges they experience.

The key to promoting resilience lies in the language that parents use. My challenge for parents is to make resilience an integral part of your family’s proprietary language. You’ll know you have succeeded if your children as adults remind you, when they hear any complaints or whinges from you in your dotage, to ‘hang in there’, ‘this too will pass’ and ‘find the funny side’. Granted they may be phrases you don’t want to hear, but at least you know that you’ve drummed into your kids some important core messages that have stayed for life.

Michael Grose, Parentingideas

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I think there is something missing from the average modern childhood. It just isn’t dangerous or dirty enough.

As a society, we’ve become risk averse and while we worry about public liability and litigation, our children are missing out.

One definition of risk is a situation carrying a possibility that something unpleasant, unwelcome or negative may occur. However, risk also carries the possibility of opportunity and benefit.

Tim Gill, UK nature-play advocate and author of No Fear: Growing up in a risk averse society, has found modern playgrounds have diminished our children’s capacity to take risks.

The wooden seesaw, long metal monkey bars, maypoles and a metal slide that got hot in the sun … these things may look boring compared to the colourful tempered plastic and soft-fall creations of today, but they were fantastic teachers.

The deadly seesaw

We only had to get hit in the chin by a seesaw once (okay, some kids twice) to learn to stand clear when someone approached the other end. We checked the slide with our hand before subjecting our thighs to its potentially blistering surface.

We assessed the risks, and worked out that this equipment needed to be treated with respect.

Ironically, Gill’s research has found today’s children are being hurt at a higher rate in the modern ‘safe’ playground than children of previous generations were in the old risky one.

Unless we allow children to stretch themselves and potentially have an accident, we’re not letting them develop competence in judging risk.

This is so important later in life – risk is what we do when we launch into a new relationship, leave home to go on a holiday, take on a new job or stand up in front of a group to speak.

Modern living sees a heavy reliance on safe, supervised indoor activities often involving screens. With this comes the loss of autonomous adventuring among children.

Play rules

Play not only helps children learn about risk and decision-making. Children learn nearly everything from play and it is essential for their physical, social and emotional development.

We now have children with poor eyesight, weak shoulder girdles, weak wrists and poor grip for lack of climbing. I have also seen many children with depression-like symptoms from endlessly sitting in front of screens.

Vigorous, rough-and-tumble play helps children, especially boys, diffuse their excess emotional energy and brings them into a calm state. Research has shown a strong link between lack of rough-and-tumble play and violence once boys reach adolescence.

Children also need play for brain development – the cerebellum is stimulated by tumbling, rolling, balancing and spinning. These are all activities that a group of children playing in a natural environment or well-designed playground will do, without
Nature play

More councils and schools worldwide are switching on to the fact that we need to go back to nature to create play environments that are highly interactive, physically engaging, and mentally and socially stimulating.

Not only do interesting, nature-based playgrounds engage children more than the modern plastic playgrounds, they encourage children to play with other children for longer periods of time and in more creative ways.

Free play stimulates children’s curiosity, absorbed interest and sustained motivation to achieve goals – it builds the ‘seeking’ mechanism that helps us find our way through challenges.

Children need opportunities for creative, exploratory play in stress-free environments, without restrictions on time or freedom.

I worry that the federal government’s education ‘revolution’ is stealing this away from our children, with the National Curriculum’s firm focus on formal learning for four-year-olds. This means instead of spending valuable time doing all of the things described above, these children are learning to read and write. (Oh well, I guess the most important thing is doing well on the NAPLAN, right? Wrong!)

As parents, we need to steal back a few things for our children that most of us were allowed in our childhoods – a little danger, a lot of dirt and plenty of time to play like their lives depend on it.

Maggie Dent

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needing guidance.

So much of this is about letting our children be, letting them get dirty and suffer the odd splinter, letting them explore and connect with nature. Disconnection from our natural world and from other children comes at a great price.

I am convinced the increasing violence and bullying in our schools is because we have not valued play enough. One study in the US on the adolescent boys who perpetrated mass shootings in high schools in the early 1990s identified “they all had been ignored as children and had very little play”.

Maggie Dent
Curious or critical... what’s your default position?

What are the unintended effects of either strategy?

What would others say... are you safe to work with?

Can I trust you... or not?

In a world where everyone is craving real... authentic... genuine... what do people experience when they have a relationship with you?

How prepared would you be to increase curiosity, decrease criticism and enjoy greater levels of intellectual and emotional intimacy with the people you work and live with?

In opening up this conversation, I invite you to consider and compare your level of curiosity to that of a typical four year old?

Why Mum? How come? What happens with that? Where does that come from?

This may sound familiar if you currently have a four-year-old living with you. If you don’t, reflect back to when you did. Or if you’ve never had kids, try to remember what it must have been like when you were four.

A four-year-old’s curiosity is fuelled by the fact that they don’t know everything yet. The world is still opening up to them. Everything is brand new. There is so much to learn and understand.

Curiosity certainly serves the four-year-old well. They learn an incredible amount in those early years. Their curiosity fuels a continual search for meaning and relevance.

However, somewhere in the ensuing 11 years a miracle occurs. By the time a child is 15, he or she knows everything there is to possibly know!

What also happens in that aging process is a growing tendency towards criticism and cynicism as opposed to curiosity and gratefulness. This tendency can seriously affect us by restricting our willingness, ability and capacity to learn and grow.

When it comes to others, the impact of criticism and cynicism diminishes genuine intellectual and emotional intimacy, leaving relationships empty and isolated for both parties.

So how can we do better?

Firstly, we need to acknowledge that people do dumb things. We take turns at it. Rarely would anyone go through a whole week without doing something dumb, making a mistake, getting it wrong. Welcome to being human! What we can do differently is avoid criticism and cynicism in our reactions.

By way of example, my son was playing hide-and-seek with his mate from next door. Their game continued for some time and my attention to it phased in and out, depending on the volume of ‘noise’ it produced.

Then it happened... It sounded like the door to the downstairs bedroom. There was an unusually dull thud as if the door had been caught on something, and then silence. This was the two seconds of silence where my son Declan was making a noise that only dogs can hear as he drew breath. Right on queue came the agonising scream and then the sobbing.
When I arrived at the scene, Declan was lying on the floor holding his hand while his friend Tommy stood watching and waiting to see what would happen next. Fear gripped Tommy’s face as he imagined the consequences. I suspect that Tommy was fully expecting a barrage of criticism.

What did happen next could of course have gone one of two ways. I could have chosen curiosity or I could have chosen criticism.

If criticism had been my default position then:

“You idiots! What were you thinking? If I’ve told you boys once, I’ve told you a thousand times! No running in the house and no playing with doors, for goodness’ sake! Now look what’s happened. I told you someone would get hurt ... See? See? See? This was bound to happen. I just knew this would happen. I’ll give you something to cry about, now get up stairs!”

If curiosity had been my default position (as it was) then:

I ask, “What happened Declan?”

Through the sobbing: “I was trying to get into the spare room ... and shut the door as quickly as I could ... and then I jammed my fingers in the door.”

I could see he was hurt and maybe even embarrassed.

“Where is it hurting, mate?”

“Just here ... right on this part here ... see?” as his sobbing begins to recede.

“Yow ... that looks sore. Sit here, mate, and I’ll go and get some ice and a bandage.”

What would your default position have been? Curiosity or criticism?

What are the unintended effects of either strategy?

Usually when criticism is offered it is a one-way street. The unintended consequence is that the person being criticised – essentially just for taking their turn to make a mistake – learns that you are not safe to live with. They will learn to never risk the truth with you and to avoid any emotional or intellectual intimacy with you for fear of more criticism. Nobody wants to be made to feel like an idiot, particularly in front of others.

By contrast, curiosity is a two-way street. It invites exploration and learning. There is a desire to share information safely. Curiosity positively assumes that there must have been good intentions and something simply went wrong. The people involved both learn that this is a safe place to be. That when things don’t
go to plan, which is inevitable occasionally, curiosity will serve them both in helping to solve any problems that may arise.

I have used a personal example because I believe that if you can get this right at home, it’s a piece of cake at work!

**Scenario 1:** At work, someone is 20 minutes late for a meeting. Assuming curiosity as your default position you remember they have had to travel across town and would have had a challenge finding a car park. You then check your diary to see if you have scope to extend the meeting and then you jump on the phone to confirm that they are still coming and that everything is okay. When they do arrive you focus on progressing the relationship and the meeting task: “Hey, no apology required, I have already checked my diary and can add some time at the end of it if this suits you. Did you get a car park? How about a water, or tea or coffee?”

**Impact:** Your relationship grows because the person is not made to feel like an idiot. Intellectual and emotional intimacy is advanced and the actual meeting objectives progress. Put simply, the task and the relationship are advanced.

**Scenario 2:** Your life partner is 20 minutes late for a ‘meeting’. Assuming criticism as your default position your anger builds as you recall how many other times they have been late. As they enter the room there is no, “Great to see you … is everything okay? … Can I get you a cup of tea?” Sadly it’s more like, “Where the heck have you been? Isn’t your phone working? Why didn’t you ring? You know we are supposed to be there at 7pm. How hard is it to pick up the stinking phone and call me? Now we’re late … AGAIN!”

**Impact:** All of a sudden the people your partner works with seem more attractive to hang out with! Future decisions in the relationship at home may tend to be directed towards avoiding criticism at all costs. Your partner doesn’t make any decision in case it’s the wrong one and they get criticised for it – that if they do something dumb then they will be criticised as opposed to supported and helped. Intimacy decreases to a point where the sharing of life experience is no longer taking place. Here begins the quiet unseen death of that relationship!

There are only two questions to remember if you want to genuinely increase the chances of healthy intellectual and emotional intimacy in any relationship at work or at home:

1. **What happened?**
2. **How can I help?**

Where and with whom can you practice these two questions in the next three hours?

And remember what we all find out eventually: that the older we get the more we realise just how much we don’t know.

**Enjoy the increase in intimacy…**

**Enjoy the journey…**

> I have no special talent. I am only passionately curious.

Albert Einstein

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**Bruce Sullivan**

Bruce is a relationship specialist and a proven performer in achieving results for people for over 26 years. Learn more about Bruce at

- www.brucesullivan.com
Parenting is an endless ride of excitement, challenge, joy, adventure, frustration and so much more. Step-parenting and negotiating the tricky world of blended families is another ride altogether.

Six years ago, I unexpectedly found myself being a part-time single dad to my two kids (aged 8 and 6 at the time), sharing 50/50 custody with my ex.

It was tough being a single dad during my ‘on’ weeks but that was somewhat balanced by the freedom of my most mighty and awesome ‘bachelor’ weeks.

Just months later, I met and fell in love with my current partner at a pub two weeks before Christmas, and I thought to myself, “Surely she won’t find step-parenting that challenging?” Doh! I had no idea what a rollercoaster ride we were all about to embark on, complete with high ‘highs’ and some pretty trying lows.

Things got even trickier when we had our two boys a couple of years later (now aged 4 and 2) and again I thought to myself, “How hard can raising a blended family be?” Doh!

At various times over the years I’ve felt torn between my role as a dad and a partner. I often find myself caught in the middle of family issues (debates/conflicts/discussions/negotiations) between my older kids (among themselves), my older kids with their (much younger) half-brothers, all four of my kids and my partner (and myself)! All the while also trying to resolve ongoing issues with my ex-wife. Crikey!

What I have discovered out of all this is that step-parenting and raising a blended family is a slow and steady process. Sometimes we all move forward in leaps and bounds and other times at a snail’s pace.

It is very much a case of ‘three steps forward, two steps back’.

So what have I learnt from my experience of living as a blended family?

1. Find what works best for your new family. Be patient as that process of discovery takes time – often years. Note: As with any parenting, what works is subject to change at any given time as kids mature and their needs and interests change.

2. Develop new traditions and rituals and make sure the older children are a big part of these. It gives them a sense of ownership and belonging. In our house, we use our Friday family meetings (the day my older kids arrive at our house) to catch up on each other’s news, discuss any issues or concerns (and come up with potential solutions) as well as plan the week ahead.

3. Don’t expect to be a modern-day “Brady Bunch”. There will be times your partner won’t be overly fond of your kids – and vice versa – but that’s life. Let go of unrealistic expectations about playing instant ‘happy families’ and you’re more likely to make it out the other end. Don’t expect or force your kids to accept your new partner (or their new siblings) straight away with open arms, but do make it clear from the outset that your expectation is for mutual respect and appreciation.

4. No matter how angry or frustrated you may get with your ex, never ‘trash talk’ them in front of your kids (and never to the kids directly) as this creates anxiety and makes you look bad. Save those conversations for your partner, trusted friend … or the dog!

5. Never use your kids to relay messages to your ex. Wherever possible, go go direct to the source.

THE STEP-PARENTING RIDE OF MY LIFE

Being in a blended family is a huge learning curve. Writer Malcolm Dix shares seven lessons he’s learned in his journey as a step dad.
A communication book is a good tool to keep both parties up to date with things like school notes, behavioural issues, after school activities, party invitations, expenses, etc.)

Emailing is great as it avoids the stress and discomfort of face-to-face communication and leaves a trail of correspondence so that if anything is ever questioned, both parties can refer to past emails for clarification (and then respectively do a celebratory jig or repeatedly say the word ‘bugger’).

6. Talk, talk and talk again with your partner (which is not always a natural thing for us guys) and always provide a united front when parenting, particularly around issues of discipline. Don’t undermine each other in front of the kids or things will unravel quickly. Even if you don’t agree with something your partner says in the ‘heat of battle’, talk about it later when the children have gone to sleep – or have been locked in the shed!

7. Never lose your sense of humour or romance. Never.

So if you find yourself on a similar journey then hold on tight, smile and enjoy the ride. It really is the best ride I’ve ever been on, even if I have felt sick a few times on the odd twist and turn.

P.S. Big thanks to my amazing partner, Bron, for her invaluable input into this article and for allowing me permission to talk to her dog at length.

Malcolm Dix (AKA Ninja Dad)

Malcolm is a father of four, Speaker, MC and Corporate Comedian. Read his weekly Ninja Dad blog

» www.malcolmdix.com
DON’T BE DAFT ABOUT MINECRAFT

Minecraft may be the best trend to hit boy world in years. Writer Jason Fox explains the attraction and outlines the benefits for kids.

If you have a young child or teenager, chances are you’ve heard about Minecraft. It’s a video game that’s kind of like digital LEGO, except that you’re in an ever-evolving world with seemingly limitless possibilities. It’s a game that inspires deep exploration, collaboration and creativity. It has been the subject of international conventions. Some schools and universities have even incorporated Minecraft into their curriculum, where students learn about city planning, environmental issues, getting things done, and even how to plan for the future, as well as things like maths and problem solving.

The open sandbox nature of Minecraft makes it one of the most exciting games on the market – and not because of its flash graphics or blood and gore (there are none of those). The gameplay experience design just works. And on top of all that, it’s rated one of the safest video games for kids ever.

But parents are worried.

And rightfully so, to a degree. Too much of a good thing can be a bad thing.

But some parents are freaking out about the amount of time their kids are investing in the game, and are imposing blanket bans of it without first understanding its magic.

So, let’s have a look at what makes Minecraft so engaging, why blanket bans aren’t a good idea, and how to manage your child’s play.

Minecraft is an infinite, non-winnable game

Unlike a book, a game of chess, or a football match, a Minecraft game doesn’t end. There’s always more that can be explored, and more that can be done. The projects you undertake in Minecraft are self-initiated: no one is telling you what to do. And the process of making progress within Minecraft is completely autonomous – no one is telling you how to execute your projects and achieve your goals. It’s self-regulated learning at its finest.

So, when a parent bans Minecraft it’s a lot different to banning other games. You’re not simply cutting your child out from a source of entertainment. You’re preventing them from accessing a world where it’s safe to fail, learn, explore, build and share. In essence: it can be pretty devastating – particularly when we put things back into the context of the future of work.

Why? Because your child’s ability to participate in and contribute to unprecedented, self-driven creative and collaborative work is going to be one of the key employable talents in the future. Your child could already be building a digital portfolio of project work, without you even knowing it.
But being able to ‘unplug’ and manage time and energy are essential skills your child needs to learn too. So, here are three ways you can help them manage Minecraft in your house:

1. **Show genuine interest (this should be your first step)**

If your child plays Minecraft, ask them to take you on a tour. Show an interest in their passion, and ask them questions like: what are you trying to build? What are your goals? What are the steps you need to take? What’s the coolest thing you’ve found? Set aside at least an hour for this. It’s highly likely they’d love the chance to share this with you, which will help you to open up a new level of connection with them.

2. **Encourage interactivity correctly**

Minecraft’s multiplayer mode allows your child to play and build in the same online world as their friends.

But remember: there are a lot of idiots on the internet, so do the following two things:

a) Create your own server or ‘whitelist’ – it’s like having an invite-only friend list.

b) Use a family-friendly server – you can Google these to find the right one to play in.

3. **Don’t ban – bracket**

Banning something like Minecraft should be the very last resort, as it usually only serves to enhance the craving for it. Instead, make it part of their daily ‘free time’. Try not to have this at the end of the day or make it contingent on homework being completed, as this may only create angst, rushed homework and late nights. After school is best, especially if it’s bracketed by dinner time (where all phones and computers are turned off).

My true hope is that you give option #1 a very good go first. And if #1, #2, #3 don’t work, I’m hoping you’ve found them an even better game to play.

**Here’s a few resources for you:**

Check out the Minecraft review at *The Parent’s Guide to Video Games*:


And this wonderful article from Penny Flanagan of *Kidspot*:


And finally, check out the brilliant work of Dean Groom and Massively Minecraft (a place for both kids and parents to play):

http://massively.jokaydia.com/

**Dr. Jason Fox**

keeps savvy people up to date with the latest in motivation design. Learn more at

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DEVELOPING LIFELONG LEARNERS

Today’s world requires kids to be learners for life. Educator Karen Boyes shares some tips to develop the learning habit in your child.

Developing lifelong learners is a goal for modern day education. With the twenty-first century changing so fast it is essential that students, teachers and parents remain open to continuous learning.

Current statistics show that your child, on average, will have many different careers before they are 35 years old – not jobs, careers.

Speaker and author Ian Jukes points out that it takes four years to train at university to become an engineer. He goes on to say that by the time an engineer has been in the workforce for two years, up to 60% of what was learnt at university is obsolete. In the field of biotechnology, it takes only one year for half of what a graduate learnt to be outdated. And recent statistics show that in the medical field, 50% of information has changed every 10 months.

Learning doesn’t stop at three o’clock or when your child leaves school – it is lifelong. The ability to learn is a sustainable skill, which people take into the future and is paramount for success.

A famous quote attributed to Albert Einstein is a definition of insanity: “Doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results”. Does your child make the same mistakes over and over again without learning the lesson? Are they blasé about learning and improvement? Do they look at their test papers and think ‘I passed’ and put them in a drawer?

Here are some of the ways you can encourage children to remain open to new learning, self-development and personal growth.

- Encourage children to seize problems and opportunities to learn. Give them real life problems and make sure the opportunities you provide are
relevant and can be applied to real life. Cooking together, going shopping and allowing your child to handle the money are great life lessons. Asking your child to help solve problems when they occur or encouraging them to pack their own gear for the sports day are ways to help them learn.

- Develop a family culture where it is acceptable for children to make mistakes and learn from them. Celebrate mistakes as ‘learning experiences’ – it is how we all learn, so focus on the learning opportunity rather than the mistake. When your child drops a cup on the floor, rather than focus on the mess, focus on the learning to move slowly or not fill the cup up so full.
- Allow children time to reflect on what they have learned. Many times when children (and adults) have time after an event to ‘cool down’ or distance themselves from the event, it is easier to think about what happened rationally.
- Develop a family culture where children are excited about learning and improvement and do more than ‘enough to pass the test’. Talk about striving to be the best you can be, rather than a ‘she’ll do’ attitude.
- Ask your child “What did you learn today?” and “What would you change to make it better?” This is a great dinner table question. Of course parents must share what they have learned today as well.
- Encourage your child to journal or write a daily diary with their own personal reflections and learning. This is a great way to follow progress. Create a scrapbook for them to write, draw, colour and create new lessons.
- Read books about and study successful people to see how they have been continuous learners. There are many junior novels and picture books as well as autobiographies that are suitable for children.

One of the best ways to help your child become a lifelong learner is to model continuous learning yourself. Ralph Waldo Emerson said, “What you are speaks so loud I cannot hear what you say”. Children take your lead. If they see you hesitate when confronted with a learning opportunity they will often do the same. Approach new learning with wonderment and excitement.

Karen Boyes, CSP
Karen has been described as Australasia’s “Mrs Education.” As the Founder of Spectrum Education, an author, publisher of the Teachers Matter magazine and an Affiliate Director of the International Institute for the Habits of Mind, Karen is a dynamic presenter, and inspires people around the world.

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What do you do when your child has an outburst? Whether it’s anger and aggression, frustration, or even disgust? Sometimes, rather than an outburst it may be sadness and despondency. Other times it could be anxiety and nerves.

John Gottman, author of *Raising an Emotionally Intelligent Child*, states that parents typically go for one of four reactions to their children’s (and even other adults’) negative emotions.

1. Disapproval

Our most common response to negative emotion is *disapproval*. This occurs when we become annoyed with our child and make aggressive statements like,

“Cut it out. Stop behaving like that. Grow up and act your age.”

Disapproval is associated with parents judging their children negatively for feeling a certain way. There is a feeling in such parents that negative emotions need to be controlled and put away – they don’t serve a productive purpose. In fact, negative emotions are a nuisance – an inconvenience, disrupting our otherwise well-ordered life.

**Outcomes:** Kids whose parents disapprove of their negative emotions learn that their feelings are wrong. They feel that something must be wrong with them if they feel the way they do. Over time, such children struggle to regulate their emotions, ironically, because they’re consistently being told to do so and they’re not doing a good enough job.

2. Dismissal

The next most common response to negative emotion is *dismissal*. While not quite as negative as
disapproval, dismissal is exemplified by statements such as

“You’ll be right. Would you just get over it? It’s not that big a deal.”

Perhaps more insidious, parents often tell their children to ‘look on the bright side of life, see the silver lining or focus on the positive.’ While well intentioned, this response is just as dismissing as the shrug of the shoulders and the ‘get over it’ attitude. While it is couched in having a positive attitude, the child’s emotions are still being dismissed.

Outcomes: Children whose parents dismiss their emotions feel invalidated. They may wonder why their emotions are always wrong and have similar difficulties as those whose parents are disapproving.

3. Laissez-faire

Some parents tend to swing to the other side of the spectrum – rather than responding to their child’s emotions, they essentially roll with it in a laissez-faire kind of way. That is, they accept that their child is having an emotion. They sit with them and say,

“Oh, it feels awful doesn’t it.”

And they simply wait until the emotion has moved on.

Outcomes: Research indicates that such a response has a negative impact on kids’ abilities to regulate their emotions. They can also have difficulties socially because of this emotion-regulation challenge.

4. Emotion coaching

Emotion coaching parents respond to their children’s negative emotions in a patient, teaching way. Importantly, they are OK with their child feeling negative, and see their child’s frustrations, sadness, or anger as an opportunity for becoming closer.

When a child is upset, parents like this respond by:

- Being aware of what our child is feeling – even when it’s subtle
- Recognising an opportunity to connect and teach
- Offering empathy and compassion – while not necessarily condoning behaviour or attitudes that are out of line
- Labelling emotions
- Working with their children on setting limits around emotions and around the issues that may have caused the emotions.

Outcomes: Children who have emotion-coaching parents recognise their emotions and become comfortable with them. As such, they regulate them better than other children. This allows them to think more clearly when stressed, develop strategies and solutions to difficulties, and work more effectively with other people. They do better in school and in relationships, and are more attuned to their wellbeing.

Which parent are you?

Most of us are a bit of all of these parents, depending on the day and time, our availability, and just how needy the kids are at that particular moment. However, we typically fall into one category in a pervasive way. And it is the pervasiveness that matters.

Our children’s negativity does not have to threaten us. And it doesn’t need ‘fixing’. By taking a coaching mindset to our children’s challenges, we move from being the know-it-all sage who undermines their thinking and learning, to being a kind guide who models empathy, understanding, and emotional attunement. And this approach does all of the fixing by helping our children discover answers within themselves.

Dr Justin Coulson

Justin is a parenting coach and author. You can get Chapter 1 of Justin’s book, What Your Child Needs From You: Creating a Connected Family FREE by signing up to his parenting newsletter. Find Justin at

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Circumstances found me coaching my son’s soccer team for the last part of the 2011 season. As a result I have now coached five more games of soccer than I have ever played. You can do the algebra to work out how many games I have played when I tell you I’ve only ever coached five games of soccer.

As a kid I played Aussie Rules. Therefore, logically, I thought I could coach soccer because:

1. Aussie Rules is a football sport, as is soccer.
2. My career has evolved to a point where one of the main things I do is facilitate groups.
3. My company, Time & Space, offers team-building programs.

So, when the responsibility to coach my boy’s team was sort of volunteered upon me, I thought, “How hard can this be?”

In fact I relished the opportunity. New ideas were implemented as soon as they popped up in my brain. The first match the team had with me as their new coach was against the bottom side. We were mid-table and travelling okay but I couldn’t have asked for a better time to sell my ideas. These included an intricate team buddy system and surveys to find out the players’ favourite positions. I was drawing heavily on my people-management skills and hadn’t worried about crash courses in actual soccer skills or game plans. The players were the experts – I was already empowering them at training.

On the day of the game against the bottom side, I had the players in the rooms early. There were all sorts of positive statements splashed in bright Texta colours across some flip-chart sheets. These had been prepared to build the team into a frenzy of commitment where they would die for each other out on the pitch. The speech crescendo-ed with an old fashioned “Get out there and tear the turf up with your speed and intent; do it for the pride of our club shirt; do it for each other.”

As each player left the room, I felt like they couldn’t be more ready, more motivated. My son is the goalkeeper and he usually is one of the first ones out but he waited until it was just us together.

“What the hell are you doing?”

Has your perception ever been met head on with the totally opposite view? It is a scary discovery.

My son was probably mortified and embarrassed but the overriding feeling I saw in his eyes was complete bewilderment.

“I have made him proud and he is waiting back to share how inspired he is.”

Slowly and deliberately my son looked straight at me and asked, “Dad?”

“Yes Jack?” I answered. Moments like these are the stuff of lifetime memories.

“Dad, what the hell are you doing?”

Has your perception ever been met head on with the totally opposite view? It is a scary discovery.

My son went out and joined his team and they
Bill Jennings, Time & Space

Bill Jennings is Australia’s leading parent-child program facilitator. As director of Time & Space, Bill offers your community exactly that... ‘time & space’ for young people and their parents to share important memories and, in doing that, create a new one.

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EACH OF US HAS THE CAPACITY TO CHOOSE TO ‘TURN UP’ IN OUR KIDS’ LIVES.

proceeded to lose to the bottom side 3-nil! We proceeded to lose the remaining four games for the year.

So what was I doing? As I told Jack, I didn’t know. I was drawing on a memory from around the time I was Jack’s age.

Sorry to go all reality TV show on you, but you will have to read about that memory in the next edition ...

But what is the take-away at this point of the story?

My short coaching career is a metaphor for the parenting job that every mum and dad in the world takes on with their kids. It was not perfect. No parent is perfect. I like to describe myself as a role model... of imperfection. Just ask my son and daughter – they could have a field day listing their dad’s imperfections.

However, we have a power within us that, refreshingly, is within our grasp. It is not a super-human power. It can layer our kids’ memories with so much resilience despite the imperfections they see in us along the way (especially when they become teenagers).

What is this power? The capacity each of us has to choose to ‘turn up’ in our kids’ lives.

Do you get it wrong sometimes? As I’ve demonstrated, I muck things up a bit sometimes with my kids. Well, be liberated by the ordinary, un-superpower that you have within you. Just turn up. We can all do that.