ISSUE 18

Parenting Ideas Magazine

Becoming better parents

Social Media Scripts

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ENCOURAGING a growth mindset

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CHILDREN | TWEENS | TEENS
publisher’s note

This magazine maybe new, but Parentingideas already has a strong track record of supporting and educating parents. In fact, it’s over two decades since we conducted our first parenting course and contributed our first column to a major daily newspaper.

We’ve always believed that if we are to have better kids we need to have better parents. And, of course, better parents are informed parents. Parenting education is for all.

Parentingideas helps parents stay up to date through our presentations, seminars, blogs and Parentingideas TV. This magazine is the natural extension of our educational work.

Most of our hand-picked team of writers are parenting educators or professionals who work with children and their parents. Their work is knowledgeable, heartfelt and supportive of kids and parents. These experts also feature on our website so head over to Parentingideasclub.com.au for more of their professional insights.

Enjoy this issue of Parentingideas magazine!

Michael and Sue

contact us

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Michael Grose, Australia’s leading parenting educator, is conducting practical online courses that will help build your parenting skills and knowledge in four vital areas:

**Term 1 - Cracking the Confidence Code**
A must-do course for parents where low risk-taking and fear of failure is a constant companion for their kids. This course will put the skills and know-how at your fingertips to develop a real sense of confidence, competence and mastery in your kids.

**Term 2 - Raising Well-behaved Kids**
Learn communication techniques that will increase your children’s cooperation levels and decrease your stress levels. Know how to manage your kids visually, what to do when they ignore you and how to get more cooperation, without telling your kids what to do.

**Term 3 - Mood Meter for Parents**
Want to help your children be the best they can be? Then you need to build their emotional intelligence. Michael draws on research from the team at the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence to help you give your kids the tools they need to recognise, manage and regulate their emotions.

**Term 4 - Raising Mighty Boys**
Don’t be fooled by the title, even parents of girls need to know how boys tick. Unlock the secrets of raising boys of any age so that they become more confident, achieve more at school, talk about what’s on their minds, better manage anger and other strong emotions, and make the most of their natural strengths.

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Parenting ideas Club
Becoming Better Parents
Developing your child’s social media scripts

“We need to have direct conversations and start them early”
started:
around. Here are some ideas to get you
them to be savvy users when we’re not
conversations and lessons will prepare
when we’re not around.
Parents of every generation have
always found ways to frame messages of
safety and success for their children to
remember. Parents of past generations
who only had to contend with the offline
or real world intuitively knew that they
needed to teach children important
lessons about safety and manners rather
than assume they’ll be understood.

The same maxim holds true for the
world of social media that children now
inhabit from an increasingly young age.
Even though our children are growing
up with technology as a part of their
every day lives, they will still make
plenty of mistakes. This means we need
to have direct conversations with our
kids about the comments and posts that
they make on social media.

As parents we teach our kids to talk
politely so that they know how to speak
to others when we’re not around. There’s
no guarantee they’ll look an adult in
the eye when they speak to them, but
our discussions, reminders and lessons
about manners will hopefully hold up
when we’re not around.

The same applies to social media. Our
conversations and lessons will prepare
them to be savvy users when we’re not
around. Here are some ideas to get you
started:

1
2

Is this worth posting?"

The relatively impersonal nature
of social media means that we can
post information and pictures with
relative immunity. Also it’s immediacy
means that we can do so without
much thought. This means that kids
need to be very critical about what
they see online. ‘Is this accurate?’
and ‘is this worth posting?’ are two valid
questions children can ask when they
read posts placed by others.

Have you taken a big breath?”
A child who says the first thing that
comes to mind is sure to put plenty
of people offside. ‘Think before you
speak’ is the type of message that
every child should have rattling
around in his head. The same principle
applies to social media. Just because a
child or young person think something
doesn’t mean they post it. ‘Take a big
breath’ may just about be the most
important message to give your kids
about social media.

So you want the principal
to see this!”
An invitation to a teenage birthday
party posted on social media is one
way to get more attendees than you
bargained for! The viral nature of
social media means that kids should
only post messages and photos that
they want to be spread and read by a
large audience.

“How does this post
make you feel?”
We need to teach kids that not every
post needs to be commented upon
and not every thought needs to be
shared, particularly when they are
angry. Teaching them to walk away
and then to step back when they’ve
calmed down is perhaps the most
important communication lesson of
all. It is very relevant to social media
as emotions are often the last thing
on many people’s minds when they
haphazardly post a message.

“How will you fix this?”
Social media, just like any social space,
requires kids to behave ethically and
with kindness. When kids overstep the
mark and post hurtful things then it’s
fair that they fix their mistakes, and
apologise. It’s reasonable that we teach
our children to act with tolerance and
with empathy online, and if hurtful
messages or images are posted on
social media then they should try to
repair relationships, just as they should
offline.

I agree with Galit Breen author of
Kindness Wins who says that parents
should have conversations with children
around social media before they reach
the teenage years. Starting these
conversations when they are younger
means that they are more open to our
parenting opinions, as well as being a
little more amenable to the messages of
tolerance, kindness and empathy that we
need to encourage.
Dealing with a potty-mouth

MAGGIE DENT is an author, educator and speaker dedicated to quietly changing lives through common-sense wisdom. She has four adult sons and is the author of eight books including her latest release, her first children’s picture book *My Cool Plastics Cupboard*. Check out her blogs, newsletter and other resources at: www.maggiedent.com www.facebook.com/maggiedentauthor www.twitter.com/queenofcommonse
Recently a mum was telling me how her 5-year-old daughter, in a casual kitchen setting, called her a Mothef@% when she refused her another strawberry as she still had some on her plate.

Needless to say, this mum was gobsmacked. This word had never been used in their house and she wanted to know where her daughter had learnt it and what to do about it (as falling on the ground in hysterics was probably not her best parenting choice).

Social norms have shifted so much in the last 20 to 30 years. Some words that were considered really bad are widely accepted today – ‘bugger’ was used in a TV ad campaign a few years ago, something that would have been unheard of in the past.

In days gone by women never swore and now women of all ages are much more relaxed around swearing. I am far too relaxed and swear a lot and partially blame my ‘part bloke’ identity. Profanities and expletives are very much a part of modern society and the healthy boundaries around workplaces, social settings and online are often blurry so it’s unrealistic for us to expect our kids to NEVER swear.

There are more and more formerly inappropriate words in children’s films and cartoons – so this is why we really need to have a game plan ready before the first F-bomb is dropped!

You can raise kids who don’t swear – they are often lambs, or our more gentle sensitive children. For others working out and how to swear in a way that offends as few people as possible is a goal we can aim for.

‘Potty’ mouthed kids who swear are not born, sadly. Language acquisition is a normal process that evolves throughout childhood and so often a child will merely copy the words grown-ups use – or other potty-mouthed kids - without any understanding.

The best strategies with this innocent swearing, no matter how bad the words are, is to avoid laughing out loud, as it can be quite funny in the moment!

The same goes with going in too hard with growling or expressing your shock. Possibly the best option is a quiet request to avoid using that word or term as it’s a bad word because it can upset people.

Be very clear about the WHERE – and NEVER use swear words at school, in front of people you don’t know, or at the shops or at grandma’s.

Be careful you haven’t exploded when your son struggled with pronouncing a similar word. One of my lads had knocked out a front tooth very early and had terrible problems with saying ‘truck’ – yep he simply couldn’t say ‘t’ or ‘r’ however he could say ‘f’. I am sure there were adults who thought I was lax when he would ask for his truck!

Using potty terms like ‘bum head’, ‘poo face’, ‘arse hole’ are considered normal as children get used to their body parts and often they grow through this if you mostly ignore it and keep gently reminding them they are not OK words especially when name-calling.

Helping our children learn about context around swearing is also helpful. Many people swear more when they are angry, frustrated or shocked.

So what do we do when our kids keep swearing and dropping what are considered to be seriously bad swear words?

I had my mouth washed out with soap in preschool when a boy ran me down with a 3-wheeler bike deliberately. I had older brothers and the word I used in response was in perfect context – for a grown up! Sadly this technique seldom improves the problem as it’s more about using punitive punishment than teaching other ways to express ourselves in big ugly moments.

A swear jar has limited success too, however it makes all family members more mindful of swearing and that’s not a bad thing.

Some more useful strategies can be modelling expressive words when you are angry, frustrated and have been surprised. Words like ‘Freak!’, ‘Flip’, ‘OMG’, ‘Yikes!’ ‘Shivers!’ ‘Bugger!’ ‘Damnit’ can be good. Perhaps avoid using words like Jesus – even though it is heard a lot it can be very offensive for some.

If you use a swear word that you are not OK with apologise immediately, so that your kids can also see they can apologise when they muck up.

Don’t tell fibs that you don’t swear if you do – as that encourages them to tell fibs about swearing and other things.

Acknowledge and encourage them when they use words that show big feelings that are appropriate.

Give them 3 warnings – as so often swearing is unplanned – and then if it persists they lose something significant that they value – so you create a consequence that shows that continued swearing will see them lose that privilege.

For the consistently, deliberate potty-mouthed child, who is often a spirited child, I suggest you instigate an immediate loss of privileges.

The deprivation needs to be something they really LOVE and it needs to be IMMEDIATE. This is called tough love. Some gentle reminders while they are in the zone of consequences can also help – especially if they are boys.

It’s a classic parenting dilemma raising your kids to know when and where they can use language that helps us be expressive and, heck let’s be honest, much bloody funnier.
Is handwriting DEAD
The shift to keyboard skills in our schools seems a natural move in this technology age. However, are we overlooking important cognitive benefits of kids learning handwriting?

There was a time, not that long ago when it was considered that learning the three “R’s”, reading, writing and ‘rithmetic, were the most important elements of going to school.

Today, our kids read, but are more likely to read online than from a book and learning cursive writing is seen in some quarters as being totally unnecessary because the kids go straight to keyboard early in junior school. Handwriting if taught at all, is more likely to be as print, not cursive.

In Finnish schools it has been decided to drop teaching cursive altogether from next year because keyboard skills are seen as being more relevant to the modern world.

Here in Australia the NAPLAN test will be online from next year, meaning no more written tests.

Does this matter? From a sentimental point of view keeping our children’s first attempts at writing can be a poignant reminder of their early development. Will we really want to store that first email?

**SHOULD WE CARE IF HANDWRITING DIES OUT?**

It depends which camp you fall into, but from the brain’s perspective there are some arguments suggesting retaining handwriting, but not necessarily beautiful copperplate, is highly relevant to a child’s brain development. The simple act of holding a pen and writing freeform on paper activates the brain to a far higher level than typing on a keyboard.

Learning to write helps our kids to learn and to read more quickly. Writing stimulates the production of more words compared to typing, extends vocabulary and composition and creativity through generating more ideas more quickly.

For older kids the advantage shows up in how well they remember and recall learned information. Studies have shown that taking notes by longhand rather than on a keyboard is more effective for embedding the information and being able to recall it more accurately at a later date because of the mental processing required for summarising those written notes.

**WILL HANDWRITING DIE OUT COMPLETELY?**

The writing does appear to be on the wall (pardon the pun!) Fewer adults now write in cursive. Many younger adults are unable to read cursive writing.

While the evidence supports the cognitive benefits to brain development the other advantages and ease of keyboards are likely to win out. But in a world crying out for more imagination and greater critical thinking skills, knowing how to write whether in print or some form of cursive does appear to be a useful skill to retain.
Talking to children about sex: when and how?

Many of us can struggle with these conversations. Here are practical tips by age range for when, how and what to say when talking to children about sex.
We teach our kids every aspect of health and wellbeing. For example: healthy eating, road safety, water play and safety, enjoying nature and outdoors, good hygiene, oral care etc. But when it comes to human sexuality and preparing our kids for their sexual journey throughout life, many of us struggle. Some of us wish it wasn’t, but it is our role to ensure children have enough accurate information about Human Sexuality.

**What age should parents start talking with children about sexuality?**

Sexuality starts at birth, your conversations have actually already started!

**From 0 - 3 years**

Children have learned (hopefully) the correct names for body parts; they have an awareness of their own gender and some idea of the gender ‘roles’ that are shaped in our society. They have a natural curiosity about their own and others’ bodies. They enjoy nudity, touch and cuddles as a pleasurable experience. They are taking notice of relationships around them and how people speak to each other and speak to them. This is an important time for parents to encourage and develop positive messages about touch with no sense of shame.

Key early developmental factors in childhood sexuality include children’s sense of self and ownership over their bodies. Respect and privacy discussions should start at this age.

Kids playing ‘mummies and daddies’ and ‘I’ll show you mine you show me yours’ are usually just displaying normal body curiosity and role-playing their observations. They are exploring sexuality and developing social skills through play. Don’t let your adult thoughts and perceptions of sexuality get in the way of the simple talks you must have with your kids.

If you have concerns about children’s sexual behaviour, this is an excellent app: www.true.org.au/resources/resources-overview/traffic-lights-app

**School age**

Most children are interested in how babies are made even if they have never spoken to you about it. They want to know where they came from. It is a perfect time to start discussions about how the egg and sperm get together, pregnancy and birth. Many children will be aware of some connection between sex, pleasure, secrecy and privacy. They will have overheard stories, talked about it in the playground and many will have received sexuality messages from advertising and TV. Your child should have a healthy understanding of conception & pregnancy by age 9 (at the latest!). Some more tips on how to have these discussions can be found here: www.talkingthetalksexed.com.au/advice-and-tips

**8 years onwards**

Children need to know about the changes ahead for them as they transform from child to adult. Sex is not for children, so discussions around changing to an adult can eventually include when and how adults might engage in intimate experiences. These discussions are a good time to discuss the role of intimate connections, i.e. sexual intercourse, respect, consent, decision-making and pleasure are all important themes you should cover during some of your conversations.

**Tips for sexuality conversations with children**

- Take time to think about your vision for your child’s sexual journey throughout their adult life, what role will you play in guiding this outcome? Hopefully words like these come to mind: fun, safe, happy, joyful, healthy, resilient, empowered, fulfilling, respectful, informed, able to experience shared intimacy and pleasure.
- Don’t avoid the topic, look for and use teachable moments:
  - “Oh seeing that pregnant woman reminds me that I want to talk to you about the amazing way that babies are made, what do you know about this already?”
  - “They just mentioned rape on the news – do you know what that means? Rape is about power over another person, forcing some one to do something sexual, it is illegal…”
- Think PRAISE when put on the spot with difficult questions:
  - **POSITIVE:** always try to respond positively. Buy yourself some time: “That’s a great question. I’m glad you asked me about it…Where did you hear about that?”
  - **RESPECTFUL RELATIONSHIPS:** Speak with respect about human sexuality and encourage respect within relationships. Encourage respectful conversations about sexual orientation, practices and lifestyles.
  - **ACCURATE:** The information you give needs to be age-appropriate and accurate. Use the correct anatomical terms for body parts (penis, vulva, vagina). Teach parts of the body, behaviours, and privacy without shame or negativity.

**INFORMATION:** We know from research that young people who grow up informed about sex have better sexual outcomes such as: first sexual intercourse at a later age, less teen pregnancies, and less STIs. Also add in extra information that is relevant to your family’s beliefs and values if needed.

**SIMPLE:** Shape answers to the age group and don’t over-complicate things. Answer only what is asked, and allow the child to ask for more information. The same question might pop up again over time, and you can give further information as they mature.

**EMPOWERMENT:** Empower them with strategies to avoid negative situations and provide alternative behaviour options. Explain that there are many things on the Internet that are not for children. Sometimes you can accidentally see something that gives you a yucky feeling in your tummy, or is scary. Teach them how to press the ‘back’ key, close the laptop or turn over the tablet, immediately, before coming to tell mum or dad, who will not be angry. Technology safety has never been more important.
HELPING AT HOME

There's one compelling reason why your kids should help at home - competency built up through helping promotes greater confidence in children.

In short, confident kids are competent kids. Past experience has taught them that they can be successful. One way to help develop a sense of competency is to give kids opportunities to help out at home. It's best to expect children and young people to help without being paid. By all means provide them with pocket money, but avoid linking it to chores. Helping out in exchange for money develops in children a notion of 'What's in it for me?', which is a self-centred view of life.

Here are some ideas to encourage your children to help out at home:

1. Keep jobs real. Kids can sense it when parents give them jobs to keep them busy. Make sure the jobs you apportion make a real contribution to their own the family’s well-being.

2. Balance the personal chores with family jobs. Chores are generally divided into two areas. Jobs such as keeping a bedroom tidy benefits a child and jobs such as setting the table benefit the family. By doing this kids learn to contribute positively to family-life.

3. Place the more arduous or difficult tasks on a roster. The children can refer to it when needed, which takes the load off you and removes the need to remind them. Rotate the unpleasant tasks frequently.

4. Show your appreciation for their help. Make a fuss when they help so they know that their contribution to the family is valued. If you do it often enough they may even show their appreciation for all you do for them!

HOMEWORK

There is good homework and bad homework. Bad homework is anything that can be seen as time-filler or that is not understood by children. Sometimes a task is not understood because your child just hasn’t picked it up yet. It maybe useful in these cases to write a note back to your child’s teacher letting him or her know that your child is struggling with the concepts or skills. That’s good communication and the teacher should appreciate that.

Homework is good when it:
• consolidates and supports in-school learning
• accounts for different learning rates
• increases children’s confidence and enjoyment in learning
• is interesting and engaging (although some learning tasks despite best intentions will be boring)
• develops productive long-term habits of organisation and planning
• is followed up by the teacher.

Here are 3 tips to help you handle homework in a relatively sane way:

1. Establish homework time and stick to it each day. If children tell you that they don’t have any formal homework then they can read, revise or organise their work.

2. Put the onus back on your children to take responsibility for their work. Ask children at the start of a homework session to state how much homework they will do. At the end of the session check it to see if it matches with their intentions as well as yours. If you are more concerned about homework than them then it is you not your children who is responsible for homework.
Homework is as much a time management issue as anything else. Encourage students to work reasonably quickly and efficiently. Have a set time limit, which they should stick to. There is generally little point slogging away once they become frustrated or tired. Give them an egg-timer or use a clock and get them to work hard for small chunks of time. A little work each night is more productive than packing it into one weekly session.

HANDS-OFF POLICY
It’s easy to start but sometimes hard to stick to. If your boys resolve conflict in boisterous ways sit down and discuss with them the rules of fighting fairly. Number 1 rule: “No hitting. Talk out your problems.”

This is smart parenting, as boys tend to be more tactile with their conflict resolution than girls.

They also respond better to very concrete, visual terms rather than a vague ‘don’t hit your brother.’

Your long-term aim as a parent is to get kids to talk about issues, use give-and-take or simply don’t enter arguments, rather than hit or hurt each other.

This takes patience, and modelling good conflict resolution, from parents.

A great deal of conflict between kids is wrapped in emotion. Jealousy, competitiveness and hurt feelings often play out as anger.

Kids who can’t find the words, or haven’t the vocabulary to express themselves generally lash out, or bottle stuff up. Better to get kids to talk rather than act on their negative feelings.

The best policy to adopt that is: There’s nothing so bad in our family that we can’t talk about it, but there are behaviours that we just don’t engage in.

Be realistic about how this will apply. Old habits die hard. But when children do use their hands to hit or hurt assertively remind them of the Hands-off Policy you have in your family. Consider implementing a consequence as a reminder of better behaviour. Alternatively, take a restorative justice approach asking, “What will you do to mend the fences with your brother?”

HOT BUTTONS
We all have ‘hot buttons’ that kids will press to make us feel guilty or to get a little control back. One of my children was expert at making their mother feel guilty... because guilt was quite a hot button for her. She’d only have to say “but you don’t really love me...” to have her mother second-guessing a decision she made.

Sometimes our ‘hot buttons’ will reflect long held views about parenting, and we simply overreact when kids misbehave. Some parents have strong views about parenting and will over react when even the mildest of words is uttered by a child.

These types of hot buttons can make family-life hard work as everyone tends to walk on eggshells to avoid pressing that person’s hot buttons.

Here are some ideas to help you respond when kids ‘press your hot buttons’:

1 Recognise what gets you upset or gets a response that kids want. ‘Hot buttons’ always get a strong emotional response, including annoyance, anger and feelings of hurt.

2 Avoid the first impulsive reaction when kids misbehave. As a great deal of children’s behaviour is purposeful don’t react impulsively when kids behave poorly. Stop and think what may be going on. Think, “Is this behaviour for my benefit?”

3 Respond differently. If the behaviour is for your benefit, try something different. Perhaps take the wind from the sails of a child who squeezes your guilt gland. Respond to “You don’t love me.......” with “You know you could well be right.”

Alternatively, smile and give a child a kiss saying “I love you though” and show that the comments have not impact.

4 Get a reality check. Sometimes we over react to kids or have extreme views that kids will take advantage of, or that make family life hard work. Check with a partner or a friend to see if your views are healthy. I know I had an unrealistic view of bedroom tidiness for a time, which my wife reminded me wasn’t really in line with my child who was messy by nature.

If a child continually presses your ‘hot buttons’, then recognise that you may not be able to change your child, but at least you can alter your response to their button-pressing. Kids don’t act in a vacuum so they are less likely to behave in ways that get the response they want.

Next Issue: I - Internet, Independence, Inspiration
7 steps to help kids with loss

WORDS Renee Klaassen
Loss is a painful, unavoidable part of life – but would we want to avoid it? Follow these 7 steps to help with the realities of a loss in your child’s life. In doing so, you can encourage your child to develop resilience, self-awareness and self-regulation.

1. **Be open about the impending loss (if you have warning)**

   Children are sensitive to behaviour between adults and whereas divorce is often regarded as a single life event it is in fact often long and drawn out so be open about what is happening. Research shows that discord preceding divorce may do more damage than the event itself. Equally, if Grandpa visits less, or if your trips to the hospital are increasing – the child senses that life is not as it was – be as open as possible as soon as possible.

2. **Talk to children**

   With any loss, telling the children is a difficult step and they are not likely to ask many questions since asking sometimes evokes tears and more sadness. Don’t be fooled into thinking they don’t want to know – they do and sitting down together to discuss the loss is vital. Provide as many facts as you can about the situation and diminish fears surrounding it. Reassure them and repeat the facts if necessary as once may not be enough with smaller children. Maintain the ‘parent’ role by being a resource and support. Ensure you also have support.

3. **Notice changes**

   Children, while appearing to cope remain deeply shocked after a loss. Unlike adults they don’t have the maturity to cope with the myriad emotions. Studies show it may take up to 5 years or more to achieve complete acceptance and understanding of the loss of a parent. Grandparents or friends will be less impacting but nonetheless painful. Notice changes in their habits, their moods and give it time. Seek counselling and comfort from outside the family. If it is a divorce explain gently that although it’s very difficult and upsetting it does happen to other families as well.

4. **Remain connected**

   Remaining connected to the departed is important if the child is to integrate the loss into their lives. I had a young client who would carry a little miniature doll with him at all times after his mother’s death. This little boy instinctively knew that remaining connected to the ‘feminine’ was important for his journey towards accepting the loss. Let your children guide the process, if it is a difficult separation research shows that some contact is still better than none, be vigilant and always try to allay fears.

5. **Don’t share the burden**

   Even in bitter separations you remain a ‘parent’ and you’re still expected to model appropriate behaviour. In fact, children become more resilient through seeing you model coping strategies despite the difficulties. Give them more responsibilities around the home to build up their self-esteem, ask them ‘what will we have for dinner?’. With the loss of other relationships ‘burden’ may not figure, but this step is worth noting since divorces are an area in which we are often guilty of burdening our children with ‘parent’ troubles.

6. **Make the future bright**

   Once the actual loss has occurred and the initial shock has passed, it’s time to begin actively modeling a positive attitude. If the experience was a divorce recognise it took two to make a marriage and a split and focus on becoming a better parent and partner. Maintain familiar routines but discuss new and mutually interesting things to experience together, despite the loved one not being present. Play, escape, self-care and avoid seeming too frail as much as you can.

7. **Manage ‘acting out’**

   There will come a time when things look like they’re finally settling down but your child suddenly ‘acts out’ (usually a sign there’s something else going on). You can use this emotion coaching technique to teach self-regulation:

   1. **Encourage your child to tell what happened.** “I kicked the soccer ball hard at the window”.
   2. **Listen, focusing mainly on the child’s emotions.** (His tone is frustrated, angry maybe).
   3. **Name the emotion for them “you’re feeling frustrated about something? Is it because normally Granddad would take you to soccer but he can’t”**.
   4. **Allow the child to confirm the emotion (did you get it right?) “no, I just feel sad …”**
   5. **Affirm the emotion, model that it is ok to have difficult feelings, “Yes, I would feel sad too”**.
   6. **Then without solving the problem, ask them what they think they could do about their feeling/the problem. “What do you think you could do instead of having Granddad take you?”**
   7. **Wait for a response and guide towards a solution within limits (bringing Granddad back is not possible but asking Uncle Pete might be)”**

Loss is a painful, unavoidable part of life – but would we want to avoid it? The truth is we can’t learn resilience without loss or self-awareness without reflection. By modeling coping strategies to our children we help them to manage better in life, and if we want our children to grow into happy adults then building resilience through loss may be a good place to start.
Encouraging a growth mindset at home

“If parents want to give their children a gift, the best thing they can do is to teach their children to love challenges, be intrigued by mistakes, enjoy effort, and keep on learning. That way, their children don’t have to be slaves of praise. They will have a lifelong way to build and repair their own confidence,” Carol S. Dweck, author and motivation researcher.

TIPS FROM THE EXPERTS

- Some European cultures don’t have an equivalent phrase for “good girl” or “good boy”. Take a leaf out of their book and use rich language to praise the process kids employed or the effort they put in, instead of blanket, short compliments.
- Never compare your child with others, each child has their own rate of growth.
- Avoid judging what children can and can’t do themselves. Let them have a go at household tasks such as a grocery list. Even if there are lots of spelling mistakes or pictures instead of words, it will help them develop their growth mindset.
- Learning about a growth mindset can begin at any time, the trick is to start with where they’re at – even if it means with a computer game!
- Use the dinner table as an opportunity to learn and discuss events in your family’s daily life.
Repetition, patience and practice aren’t the only techniques teachers employ to teach children new and old concepts at school. They aim to instil a growth mindset or an ability to learn from mistakes, display resilience and develop an appetite for learning.

There is no reason for parents not to employ the same method teaching important life skills at home.

**BLACK AND WHITE VS SHADES OF GREY**

Anne McKeown, a qualified coach and author of the upcoming book Trust, Torment, Truth, says that a person with a fixed mindset sees life as black or white, right or wrong and that their brain is not malleable.

“Growth mindset means the person is open to learning, personal growth, life is made up of shades of grey,” she says.

Parents can encourage the development of such an attitude by using everyday situations as learning opportunities to see a range of options.

Assign tasks that are a bit challenging (e.g. if they have never attempted it before) and encourage them to work it out themselves, she says. A common reaction to household tasks like hanging up laundry or putting away the shopping or the dishes is that young children are too small to reach. Instead of giving in to this restriction, adopting a growth mindset would involve finding solutions to such problems. Ask children how they think could reach up to where they are at.

Taking action like this signifies to them that they themselves have the capacity to address problems and they begin to enjoy tackling issues because they made that choice themselves, she says.

**LEARNING AT HOME**

The difference between being taught life skills at school versus at home is that the latter can offer a relaxed environment which can be more beneficial, says McKeown.

“At school being taught, ‘told theory’ and in a group setting has less impact and more distraction. If the child does not respect the teacher then he/she is less likely to listen and take on board what is being presented. If the teacher does not like the child then they are less likely to be complimentary,” she says.

While schools usually rely on a few teachers teaching how to have a growth mindset through academic situations, parents can utilise an almost endless array of contexts in which to show the impact of such attitudes.

Learning from extended family, cultural groups and even watching parents, brothers and sisters apply such skills in everyday life will offer great learning opportunities. Furthermore, the whole family can practise adopting a growth mindset at the same time, says McKeown.

“Set little challenges that you will all complete, for example, a crossword - different levels of difficulty for different ages including parents.”

It is important for parents to be a role model and show what it means to have a growth mindset, she says.

“If a parent judges the behaviour of others as right or wrong, black or white (rather than just different) then often their children will form the same opinions, partly for parental approval and partly because they don’t know anything different,” she says.

**REFLECT AND GROW**

As with the idea behind homework, practising and reflecting on lessons learnt can also apply to learning about opening up the mind to allow for growth.

“Parents should find a time each day to talk to their child about what happened at school,” says McKeown.

“What was the most FUN thing you LEARNED today?” and “what FUN thing are you looking forward to learning at school tomorrow” was something McKeown would ask her own kids. Talking to them about their personal bests – be it at sport, attitude, board games or even baking would help set the scene for continuous improvement and raise confidence, she says.

As openly discussing the child’s thinking around situations will strengthen relationships with parents, it is important that such conversations are kept honest, she says.

“Don’t tell them they are really smart, if they are not because they will feel the pressure to measure up to that expectancy,” she says.

**WATCH THE LANGUAGE**

Every language probably has words to describe the concept “not yet”. Use it, says McKeown.

“Add the word ‘yet’ at the end of a child’s negative statement about themselves i.e.: ‘I’m not good at reading (yet!’)”

Reframing a child’s assessment of themselves and encouraging more open-ended conversations is the key, she says. A question along the lines of, “what can you try instead” is likely to trigger the realisation that there are other options and all’s not lost.

“Be conscious of the words you use, replace negative words like obstacle, difficult, criticism, failure with positive words like achievement, accomplish, feedback, good effort,” she says.

Endings or beginnings?

Supporting the transition to high school
As Term 4 draws to an end more than half a million children across Australia will complete their primary school years. The shift from one style of schooling to another is a major milestone in the life of your child and for your family. Sarah Wayland explores the practical and emotional ways we can refocus those endings in to new beginnings.

Parenting and childhood are marked by milestones - first steps, first words, first days at school – yet the lesser spoken milestones like the ending of primary school can be a time of great change for children and their families.

Kate’s twins, one boy, one girl, finished up their primary school years last year. She’s had a year to watch them settle in to their new lives as secondary school students with her motto being to embrace the next chapter of life rather than dwell on the sadness of what is ending. Kate describes her twins differently – one being pragmatic and the other more cautious making the meaning of this milestone different for each of them. ‘We began the last year of primary school by having a whole family discussion’ she explains, where she and her husband and their 4 children (aged between 13 and 4) sat down to talk about how they all might rise to the challenge as the older kids embarked upon on a new adventure.

For one child she arranged a tour of the school as a way to reassure him that he didn’t need to know exactly where to go or what to do on the first day whereas her daughter, who was attending a different high school to her brother, needed help in navigating the new relationships that would come in to your child’s life.

The activities that accompany milestones can make children feel anxious – end of year activities, dances, dinners, graduation masses or speech nights send the message to our children that this milestone is important. Yet for those children who might be apprehensive about moving on the tempering of focus on ‘endings’ to ‘beginnings’ can help remind them that the next chapter isn’t to be feared.

So how can parents and families support their children in this transition? School Counsellor and co-director of Camden Lowe Counselling, Cath Lowe, suggests:

• Be realistic. It will take almost all of the first year of high school to adjust to the new routine, new school, new travel arrangements and the new people that come in to your child’s life.
• Adjustment differs between children. Remind your children that the beginning of primary school or prep was an adjustment and that secondary school is no different.
• Get prepared. Use the end of primary school as a time to establish new routines. This will help them adjust to the use of timetables, multiple sets of homework, earlier waking times. Teach them to have everything ready the night before so they can wake and leave without being flustered.
• Embrace change. High school is a great environment for engaging in many extra curricular activities. Take some time to explore with your child what is on offer to help them navigate spaces or groups that align with their personalities.

Kate echoes those suggestions. Having survived the first year of her twins’ secondary school life (and with another child soon to join them) she is philosophical about the ways we can prepare our children practically and emotionally. She had to learn to let her children navigate this new independence in their own way and not step in to reassure them that everything would be fine. ‘My son carried his timetable with him, in his hand, for the whole of first term. It was his way, he said he couldn’t think what was happening next if it was in his bag’. She had to step away and let them work out what was best.

The ending of primary school is another one of the many milestones we observe in the long, ever-changing pathways our children traverse. A moment of reflection for families, both parents and children, to embrace what is yet to come, and more importantly what new experiences they can experience, can help.

If your child or family need additional support:

Kids Helpline – kidshelpline.com.au
Headspace – headspace.org.au

WORDS Sarah Wayland

YOUNG PEOPLE MIGHT REACT IN CERTAIN WAYS WHEN FACED WITH THE CHANGES THAT COME WITH THE END OF PRIMARY SCHOOL. THESE MIGHT INCLUDE:

• Distraction – a sense of not being able to be on task
• Anger/sadness at the anticipation of change
• Excitement/apprehension about what is to come
• Resolution/pragmatism about the necessary moving on
• Fear about the loss of friendships when moving to different schools than their peers
• Uncertainty about the school environment and the expectations of learning.
Blurred LINES

So it’s all going along okay until the blurred lines of a 14 year old sleepover party comes onto the scene...
We seem to have gotten to a good place in the area of social media rules and expectations in our family home. For the most part, our children understand and follow the house rules and expectations around technology. Of course no child is perfect and occasionally rules have to be reinforced. Then their friends come into the equation…

This is the digital dilemma of many responsible parents. We know and practice our own set of guidelines, but we may find ourselves confronted by the technology when other children bring their personal internet enabled devices into our homes and our children’s lives. There are as many different rules and beliefs around online behaviour as there are families, but what does this mean for you?

**YOUR HOUSE, YOUR RULES.** Your home is a private building, and as such you have the right to request that others follow your rules. It is crucial that we not let the technology overtake our parenting. Stick to the rules that you feel comfortable with, and enforce them.

**ADULTS ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE WELLBEING OF CHILDREN.** We are of course, responsible for our own children, and we are also responsible for other’s children when they are in our care. We cannot enforce or control how other parents manage their children’s social media accounts or online behaviour, but we can be explicit around the behaviour we expect in our own homes as well as how we expect our children to behave while they are in others.

**RULES, GUIDELINES AND CONSEQUENCES.** Know what you are comfortable with, perhaps allowing them to use their devices in the lounge room until midnight only. As the adult in charge you need to be in control of the decisions that are made around technology when it is being used in your home. For example, you can be fined if a child is exposed to an R18+ rated video game whilst under your care. Enforce the pre-determined consequences if the rules are broken. Your child will have to be your ally on this one, respecting the rules and insisting their peers to conform to your house rules.

**KEEP CALM.** If an incident has occurred in your home whilst children were in your care. It is easy to over react and say something hurtful when you are feeling upset. Instead take some time to think it through and include those involved to problem solve the solution with you. We need to work together – they know and understand the technology better than we do, however we have the advantage of wisdom and experience to understand the consequences of potential choices.

**ASK THE PERSON TO DELETE IT.** If a photo or video has been sent from your home that could damage a child’s reputation, ask all those involved to delete it from their devices immediately. If it is posted online then un-tag them and report it so it can be removed. They can also ask their friends to delete and report the images in order to minimise the impact.

**THINK TWICE.** Encourage them to think twice before posting. We know that in many cases, if children just take even a couple of minutes to think about the content and its potential outcomes before posting, they would consider not posting it at all. Urge them to think about the feelings of others when taking photos and distributing any content by mobile phone or online. Sure it’s just a photo of your friend in her bathers hanging out at the beach, but would she like that?

**REPUTATION MANAGEMENT.** It may seem harmless posting photos on private social media pages that only friends can see. How many ‘friends’ does your child have online, and how about their friends? We will often find that children are sharing their photos with hundreds of ‘friends’ they don’t really know. What sort of information would your child want to see about themselves online at a later date?

**HOUSEKEEPING SERVICES.** Occasionally we all make mistakes, posting an embarrassing photo or an angry comment, and children are no different. In fact they are still developing their critical thinking skills and more likely to fall into the trap of not being able to clearly understand the consequences of their online behaviour. Help your child attend to their online housekeeping duties, so they can clean up any stains and spills that are made along the way.

**USING IT SAFER.** Sharing photos and videos with friends is fun and it does help to create an emotional bond. It is also a vital way to keep up with social currency. One way of using the technology in a safer way is to ensure children have not used their real name in social media accounts or posts, and do not tag others. Setting up a pseudonym and un-tagging themselves in photos and videos does provide a greater degree of safety and anonymity. Be cautious nonetheless, as nothing online is ever private!

In this new age of social media and digital culture parents can often feel that they have no control over their child’s digital reputation. Youth these days seem to be tracking and documenting themselves from “cradle to grave”, and it is our responsibility to ensure they are making an informed choice about how they participate in that.

Even with privacy settings set on lock down, it doesn’t stop others from uploading pictures of your child. In reality there are lots of other people posting information about us without our control and it is difficult if not impossible to police the social media circles of everyone we know.

A conscious use of the internet is our ideal goal. We want our children and their friends to be using it in a way that is effective and positive for their life. We need to continue to give them the skills and the support to help them navigate and understand what can be unseen and unclear.

The technology will forever be evolving, but the rules and expectations that we teach our children is what sticks.

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**Catherine Gerhardt** is a dedicated advocate of developing resilience and critical thinking skills in children and young people. Catherine has more than 20 years of expertise in Community Services, Health and Welfare and a background in Social Psychology. As a parent of school aged children, she understands the commitment and challenges parents face ensuring they provide the right information to young people in a way that empowers them to develop their personal and social capabilities.