

Strategies for perfect parenting

Maintaining a healthy relationship with your children is not as difficult as you might think. Author of *Tricky Kids* **ANDREW FULLER** provides a few useful pointers.

LOTS of the ideas in my book come from the shifty, cunning strategies parents have used to help their children. Some of the examples are for parenting teenagers, but many are for younger children. I'm sure that as you read these ideas you will come up with even more creative ways to handle situations.

They will always outdo you for energy

Tricky children have turbo-charged batteries! Any child or teenager has a lot more energy to put into any argument than any adult. Therefore, wise parents limit the number of areas they want to have a positive effect on. Don't try to do too much. It's generally a good idea to decide on one behaviour you'd like to promote so you can see more of it, and one behaviour that you want to try to lessen. Then stick to those two behaviours for a minimum of six weeks.

Two crocodile brains equals a lot of snapping

The two parts of children's brains that are really active in conflict situations are the brain stem, which is really about activation, and the amygdala, which is the "do I fight you or run away from you?" part. That's pretty much it!

This means that in the middle of an argument, these kids are about as reasonable as your average crocodile. Rationalising, discussing, explaining and reasoning with them in the middle of an argument is often a waste of time. If possible, walk away, cool off, calm down, then intervene.

Don't mud-wrestle with pigs!

Tricky kids love intensity. They like drama, soap operas, grunge, gore, horror and action. I always say to parents that arguing with a tricky child is a lot like mud-wrestling a pig; you both end up dirty but only the pig is happy.

What you do is more important than what you say

In recent decades there seems to have been a tendency for parents to feel they need to explain everything to their children. While some explanations can be useful, parents have fallen into the trap of believing if they just give their child the right explanation, then all will be well. With tricky children, what you do is more important than what you say.

There is very good research that tells us that the small rituals that we put into family life are a powerful positive force. A ritual is something you do regularly as a family that does not depend on how children are behaving.

Build resilience in your child

Resilience is the happy knack of being able to bungy-jump through the pitfalls of life. When tough times come, resilience helps you to rise above adversity and hardship.

Resilience is developed in children and adolescents when they have:

- a sense of being loved by their family
- a diverse group of friends, and
- an adult outside their family who likes them.

Mind what you do with them just before they go to sleep

What happens just before going to sleep gets processed into long-term dreams. What you say to your child just before she goes to sleep is what she will remember most. Find time to make some peace before she goes to sleep.

Know their friends (and feed them)

Any parent who knows their child's friendship group is in a powerful position. Parents of tricky children need to make sure they know their child's friends and, wherever possible, their child's friends'

parents. The barbecue may be your most powerful ally in your attempts to do this. Never ask your own child for permission to contact his friends' parents. Phone them. Introduce yourself. Every chance you get, keep introducing yourself.

Look out for conversation fuel

Some tricky kids can be too easy to talk to when they are angry and incredibly difficult to talk to when they are calm. Look around for conversation fuel. If you can't find much, check in with your child's teacher(s), sports coaches or friends' parents. One of the easiest ways to gain fuel for conversation is to notice what television show your child especially likes and to sit down and watch it with her.

Timing is everything!

Catch them at the right moment. It's important to realise that if you see your child in the crashed-out position on the couch, it is probably not the best time to ask him to take out the rubbish. Wait for those rare moments of verticality, when they are upright and ideally on the move, and then try. Also, realise that it takes them time to process your requests. It might take a few minutes for an idea to convert into action.

They need you!

In your darker moments, this might be hard to believe. But they do need you. Tricky children probably need more time from their parents than other kids. They need time to feel loved, they need time to learn to curb their more erratic impulses, and they need time to feel they can give something back as well.


■ This is an edited extract from *Tricky Kids: Transforming conflict and freeing their potential*. By Andrew Fuller. Finch Publishing. \$24.95. www.finch.com.au



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