

DEAR GOOD PARENT

by

John Purugganan

I am what you would call a bad parent, the absolute worst. I abandoned my children. I went to prison. What I'm writing for you is a compilation of what I learned from my own children before I went away, combined with, and in relation to, feelings I remember having as a child and opinions I formed after reading some good and not so good (although well-intended) parenting books.

When I was a kid, my world was relatively small. I had school, my friends, and my home life, where everything revolved around my parents, my mother in particular. My mother was the center of my universe. My beloved hard-working mother did

the very best she could. Oftentimes parents are trapped in a cycle of good - yet uninformed - intentions. The reality is that most parents don't have the time to learn about effective parenting. They are simply too busy, ironically, being a parent.

From one day to the next a person becomes a parent. One day, not a parent--Next day, baby born: you are a parent. You do your best to figure it out as go, hoping everything works out okay. Raising your child the way your parents raised you - with good intentions - or else vowing to not raise your child the way your parents raised you - with a higher intention - usually makes little difference. Ultimately, you will end up making the same mistakes your parents made. At best, this could mean countless missed opportunities for more positive outcomes, in the short and long term. I'll come back to the "at worst" case scenario in just a moment.

Every good parent loves their children and wants what is best for them. What's best for a child is a parent who is willing to commit to learning some formal parenting skills. We don't know everything there is to know about life, how could we possibly be aware of everything we need to know about parenting?

Fortunately, we can learn how to become better parents, if we wish. This might mean reading a book, such as "Raising A Responsible Child" (a personal favorite), or enrolling in a parenting class. Yes, it takes time to read a book or go to a class.

Without exception, the most important thing you can give to your child is your time.

The majority of your time is spent providing food, shelter, and clothing for your children. Going to work, working overtime, holding down two jobs to make ends meet leaves precious little time for yourself. Yet, while the financial aspect of parenting is enormous, it's not what sustains your child's psychological and emotional stability. On top of everything else, your child needs your willingness to share your personal time. "Personal time?" you might ask. "Who the heck has time for personal time?" Admittedly, your personal time is a rare commodity, if not completely nonexistent. It's not easy to part with, even for - or especially for - your children, considering your whole life is devoted to taking care of them.

You get tib bits, mere moments to yourself, and invariably it is in those moments your child will be in need of your time. The way in which you handle those impromptu interactions have a profound effect on a child's overall psychological well-being, or lack thereof. Your patience demonstrates your awareness of your child's need for respect. The universal sign of respect - for people of all ages - is in how we speak to one another.

Everyone, including children, recognize the tone being used when they are spoken to. Impatience and attitude are easily detected and equally resented by children and adults alike. It is absolutely imperative that we speak to our children in the same manner we expect them to speak to us - with respect. This is what is meant by your time being the most important thing you can give to your child. Patient and respectful communication requires the inconvenience of your full attention.

Good parents will want to remember that with each unkind word and tone of disrespect, you push your child away, and are effectively pushing them toward something and/or someone else. That something could be unprotected sex, or drugs, or both. That someone could be a gang member, a pedophile, or even - the aforementioned worst case scenario - a serial killer.

You never know where your child might end up. If you don't take the time to give your children the love and respect they deserve - all of which requires your time - then you are literally forcing them to go out and find it elsewhere.

Yes, children can seriously try your patience, to put it mildly. If they seem like they're always after you for your attention, it's because they are. You truly are the center of their universe. Rue the day they stop vying for your attention, it could mean they've given up.

If an emotional wall has already been erected between you and your child, you can still ease them back. There will be resistance. The harder you try, the more they will resist. If you find yourself taking it personally, try to remember that the motivating factor behind their resistance is fear. The fear might be masked by resentment, and the resentment is real, but the underlining cause is a fear of being vulnerable.

It may take perseverance and patience like you've never imagined, to gain back their trust. Do not be offended when they test your sincerity. The unconditional trust they were once able to give you must be restored, one step at a time. Nevertheless, if you don't give up, your child won't give up either. Here's a

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secret: deep down your child wants to trust you again.

So make it easier for yourself and for your child, go ahead and read that book on parenting, enroll in a parenting class, join a support group. You are worth it; your child is worth it.

Finally, good parent, be sure to tell your children you love them. Do not assume they already know. Use the words. Take the time to slow down, look your child in the eye and say, "I love you."

Peace, Love & Light

John