

Dr. Wendy Mogel's

OVERPARENTING ANONYMOUS

A 27-step program for good parents gone bad

I've written these steps to provide encouragement to well-intentioned, loving parents who feel powerless to stop themselves from overindulging, overprotecting, and overscheduling their children; parents who get jittery if their offspring aren't performing at a high level in every area; parents who have unwittingly allowed traits like self-reliance, resilience, and accountability to slip to the bottom of their parenting agenda.

1. Don't mistake a snapshot taken today with the epic movie of your child's life. Kids go through phases. Glorious ones and alarming ones.
2. Don't fret over or try to fix what's not broken. Accept your child's nature even if he's shy, stubborn, moody, or not great at math.
3. Look at anything up close and you'll see the flaws. Consider it perfectly normal if you like your child's friends better than you like your child.
4. Work up the courage to say a simple "no." Don't try to reach consensus every time.
5. Encourage your child to play or spend time outside using all five senses in the three-dimensional world. How come only troubled rich kids get to go to the wilderness these days? Sign them up for scouts or send them to camp for the longest stretch you can afford. Enjoy nature together as a family.
6. Don't confuse children's wants with their needs. Don't fall for the smooth talking fourth grader's line about the urgent need for a smartphone "in case of an emergency, Mom!" or a teen's claim that a new car "is so much safer than your old van." Privileges are not entitlements.
7. Remember that kids are hardy perennials, not hothouse flowers. Let them be cold, wet, or hungry for more than a second and they'll appreciate the chance to be warm, dry, and fed.
8. Abstain from taking the role of sherpa, butler, concierge, secret police or short order cook. Your child is hard-wired for competence. Let them do for themselves.
9. Before you nag, remind, criticize, advise, chime in, preach, or over-explain, say to yourself "W.A.I.T." or "Why Am I Talking?" Listen four times more than you talk.

10. Remember that disappointments are necessary preparation for adult life. When your child doesn't make the team, get invited to a friend's birthday party, or get a big part in the play, stay calm. Without these experiences, she'll be ill-equipped for the real world.

11. Be alert but not automatically alarmed. Question yourself. Stop and reflect: is this situation unsafe, or just uncomfortable for my child? Is it an emergency or a new challenge?

12. Learn to love the words "trial" and "error." Let your child make mistakes *before* going off to college. Grant freedom based on demonstrated responsibility and accountability, not what all the other kids are doing.

13. Don't be surprised or discouraged when your big kid has a babyish tantrum or meltdown. Don't confuse sophistication with maturity. Naturally occurring setbacks cause normal regression. Home is the soft landing after their taxing day.

14. Allow your child to do things that scare you. Don't mistake vulnerability for fragility. You have to let her take steps on her own, without holding your hand, if you want her to grow increasingly independent and self-confident. Let her get her learner's permit when she comes of age.

15. Don't offer a nuanced critique of her best friend or crush. Your friends in school weren't an all star line-up.

16. Don't take it personally if your teenager treats you like crap. Judge his character not on the consistency of in-house politeness, clarity of speech, or degree of eye contact but on what teachers say, whether he's welcomed by his friends' parents, and his manners towards his grandparents, the neighbors, salespeople, and servers in restaurants.

17. Don't automatically allow your child to quit. When she lobbies passionately against continuing an activity or program that "isn't how I thought it would be!" it's tempting to exhaust yourself selling her on the benefits. Instead remind *yourself* that first impressions are not always enduring; that a commitment to a team or group is honorable; and that your investment (of time and/or money) is not to be taken for granted. But do take her reasoned preferences into account when making the next agenda.

18. Just because your parents weren't as attuned to your emotional needs as you might have wished, refrain from trying to be popular with your children. Watch out for the common parental pattern of "nice, nice, nice...furious!"

19. Avoid the hordes of humble-brag parents lest you begin to believe that your child is already losing the race. Remind yourself that grades, popularity, or varsity ranking are

not a measure of your worth as a parent. Recognize that those other parents are lying.

20. Wait at least 24 hours before shooting off an indignant email to a teacher, coach, or the parent of a mean classmate. Don't be a "drunk texter." Sleep on it.

21. Consider the long-term consequences of finding work-arounds for the "no-candy-in-the-camp-care-package" rule. If you demonstrate that rules are made to be broken and shortcuts can always be found, you have given your child license to plagiarize or cheat on tests.

22. Maintain perspective about school and college choices. Parents caught up in the admissions arms race forget that the best predictor of a good outcome are the qualities the student brings to campus rather than the perceived status of the school.

23. Treat teachers like the experts and allies they are. Give your child the chance to learn respect; it's a more important subject than Algebra 2. Remember how life-changing a good relationship with a teacher can be.

24. Praise the process, not the product. Appreciating your child's persistence and hard work reinforces the skills and habits that lead to success far more than applauding everyday achievements or grades.

25. If you want your child to be prepared to manage his future college workload and responsibilities, take care before you hire a tutor, a private coach, or a college application consultant. You can't fit them all in a dorm room.

26. Practice sensible stewardship of your child's online activities by evaluating her level of maturity, accountability and judgment in other areas. Rather than lurking, snooping, sniping or giving up... educate yourself about the ever changing cyber-landscape.

27. Treat ordinary household chores and paid jobs as richer learning opportunities rather than jazzy extracurriculars. With real world experience, your child will develop into an employable (and employed) adult. That said, accept that older children will get chores done on AST (Adolescent Standard Time).