



DR. MIKE BRADLEY'S TEN COMMANDMENTS OF PARENTING

I: Thou shalt be as the dispassionate cop unto thine own child

All kids are nuts to some extent, so don't take their craziness personally. Like the dispassionate cop who politely gives you tickets, stay calm during crises so that your kid thinks more about *her* behavior than *your* anger. Show your kid love and strength that she can't tear down even with provocation.

II: Thou shalt listen even as thine own child shouts

Kids often say too little and shout too much, but the shouting may be another form of communication. Become tough enough to withstand non-abusive yelling and wait it out without interrupting and screaming back. If you can hang on, your kid will finally become calmer and say what really has him upset. Over time, he'll learn to speak with more control by watching you speak with more control.

III: Thou shalt not shout; speak thou wisely

You know how crazy and out-of-control your kid looks when she's screaming? You, as the parent, look a lot worse. Losing emotional control means losing respect in the eyes of your child, something you can't afford. Speak calmly and quietly in short, non-repetitious sentences, or don't talk until you've regained control. Your yelling back is destructive and only creates a costly diversion from the real issues. Screaming at a screaming child is like putting out small fires with gasoline.

IV: Thou shalt add 5 minutes to every interaction involving thy child

Your job is *not to control your kid*, but *to teach your kid how to control herself*. Locking yourself into rigid schedules whenever difficult kids are involved is asking for trouble. Much of what they do can become complex, maddening and schedule-defying. Provide bumpers or reaction/thinking time for yourself so that your responses are more controlled. Always look for ways to hand off decision-making power to your child.

V: Thou shalt remain loving and connected...even while being "hated" and avoided

Parenting a child is a loving *and* conflict-based relationship. It's your job to "ruin" his life at times. In the proper dose, rage-free conflict with parents can be very therapeutic for kids. Don't let the "business" of parenting ruin the "personal" of caring. Find ways of lovingly connecting with your kids each day *especially* when times are tough.

VI: Thou shalt not kill (thou mayest entertain thoughts of killing, but...)

No hitting. Ever. Hitting children to make them behave not only teaches them that might makes right, it makes you look weak to them and costs dearly in respect currency.

Besides, whacking a child is like whacking a stick of dynamite. It might not explode right away. But when it finally does it will demolish everything nearby. Getting physical with a child is playing in their stadium—you're giving them the "home field advantage" of accepting rage as a way of solving problems. Don't go there.

VII: Thou shalt apologize at every opportunity

To children, adult apology is strength, not weakness. It is a marvelous tool for teaching humility, self-control, responsibility, compassion, respect, and self-acceptance. It does all these things like a Trojan horse that disables your kid's built-in lecture deflector. If you preach at your child, he closes down. But he'll sit and listen carefully to messages hidden in the robes of your own admissions of failure. You'll never look bigger to your child than when you make yourself smaller.

VIII: Thou shalt honor thy child's identity (even though it maketh you ill)

Green hair, metallic tongues, and pants with crotches so low that they need skid plates are all windows into that wonderful, horrible, laughable, and frightening childhood struggle called identity exploration. She's just trying to figure out who the heck she is. As a rule of thumb, the less you fight these things, the shorter they last. Pick your battles wisely and save your ammo for the life-threatening explorations (like drugs). Try and remember how weird you looked to your parents, and what your weirdness meant to you.

IX: To thine own self be true

Your kid has enough problems. The last thing he needs is "cool" parents. He needs you to be an unchangingly corny, unhip, and out-of-date dinosaur who holds fast to a strong set of values and ethics in a morally free-falling society. Be like the constant beacon of the lighthouse that stands unchanged above the dangerous seas of the world to guide your child home to safe waters. Be a parent first, not a friend. He's got friends. He needs parents. Hold onto your values, calmly but firmly. Tell him that you love him too much to allow things that could hurt him.

X: Know thou, this too shall pass

In the rough phases, parenting a child feels overwhelming and terrifying. But like raging summer storms, these bad chapters all end and mostly everyone survives just fine. Ironically your kid won't even remember how scary the tough times were. But you'll have your paybacks. In not too many years she'll start to dream of having kids of her own. Then one day you'll have to sit her down, make her a cup of strong tea and quietly say, "Honey, I don't want you to get upset, but there are a few things you should know now that you're pregnant..."

Good luck!

Courtesy of Michael Bradley, Ed.D.

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