Say What You Mean and Mean What You Say
Judge Glenda Hatchett

The Big Idea

Who else is better suited to write a book on how to raise children correctly than Judge Glenda Hatchett? Aside from being a single mother of two boys, the judge also presides before one of the largest juvenile court systems in the United States. Her experiences as a judge has given her insights on how good children turn bad, and what parents can do to prevent this from happening. In this book, she shares her views on how to raise children and gear them towards success.

Judge Hatchett illustrates how positive involvement in your child’s life can make a major difference. The judge also provides true-to-life courtroom anecdotes and gut-wrenching stories of what may befall your child should you choose to do otherwise. To make things easier, Judge Hatchett outlines seven simple strategies that you as a parent can utilize to help your child cross the path to purpose and possibility.

Simple Strategy # 1 - Expect Greatness

As a parent, you should always believe that your child is capable of greatness. Even more important than believing, you should expect this to happen. By demanding the very best, you can be sure that you will be getting nothing less in return. Of course, you need to start by setting the same standards for yourself. You can’t expect your child to aspire for greatness if you don’t strive for the same.

Dream Big

Always encourage your child to harbor big dreams and to do all they can to attain them. Teach your child that the world is there to conquer and that anything is possible. Don’t make the mistake of thinking, though, that your child’s dreams are the same as your own.

What happens if things don’t work out as planned? Always remember that the means is more important than the end results. A child who is doing what it takes to realize a dream is filled with hope, dedication and purpose. A child who has been pushed to achieve knows that someone cares enough to believe.

Expect Nothing, Get Nothing

Parents who set low expectations for their children should not be surprised if they get less in return than parents who do otherwise. If you require nothing from your child, then your child will return nothing as well.

This does not mean that such a child is unloved and neglected. Sometimes, no matter how much a child is taken care of, parents are still hesitant to set high expectations. Some may feel that by doing so, they are in fact protecting the child from undue pressure. They fail to realize though that a child may need a reason to excel, and that by setting low standards, the parents are failing to provide one.

Your child needs direction and encouragement. Your child needs to know that there are dreams to attain, and that you will be there as a main source of support.
Simple Strategy # 2 - Say What You Mean and Mean What You Say

Your words may have a greater effect on children than you think. Furthermore, words can be misunderstood and this can result in unnecessary conflict. As both a parent and an adult, you must learn to choose words that would not be misinterpreted by children. You must also practice consistency and mean everything you say. A good application of this strategy would be setting house rules for your child. Always make sure that the rules are set in clear, simple terms; and that they are strictly enforced.

The Importance of Clarity

Small details can cause miscommunication. Always talk to your children in ways they can understand. A lot of things may have changed since you were younger, but if you look hard enough, you will be able to find the exact words you can use to get the message across - even if it means using football metaphors.

Be Consistent

It is hard to stay consistent in a world that is filled with inconsistency. However, it is important for your child to know that you mean everything you say. If you do not call your child's attention for sneaking in ten minutes or half an hour after curfew, you can expect trouble when you try to call his attention for being two hours late the next time around.

This does not mean however that everything said must be cast in stone. As a parent, you must listen to your child and allow yourself to be flexible at times, particularly when your child does have a point. You must learn to achieve the right balance between being fluid and remaining firm.

Simple Strategy # 3 - Listen Carefully

It is so easy to forget something as basic as listening. Parents are usually exhausted and distracted from work, or too busy thinking about money matters and household chores that they sometimes fail to hear what their children are saying.

As a parent, it is vital that you take time to listen carefully to your child. Your child should be comfortable enough to share with you anything and everything, without fear of reprisals. Openness is key. You must listen with an open mind, open eyes and open ears. Do not interrupt the child with questions of your own, or you might miss out on something even more important. Be prepared to provide insights should you be asked for advice.

Decompress Before Listening

After a hard day's work, listening might be the last thing you want to do. The pressure, exhaustion and the pure emotion that you go through day after day may be overwhelming enough as it is. Before going inside the house and facing your child, you may opt to do relaxation rituals that will help you unwind. This way, your mind will be ready to face your task as a parent.

Read The Signs

Your child may not always communicate their needs verbally. In fact, if you are not observant, you may fail to read the signs completely. The sign may be as subtle as a dismal report card, or it may be as big as a car theft. Your child may call out for help in different ways and it is important that you are aware of it.
Make Yourself Available

Your duty as a parent is not merely to provide for your child's material needs. Parents sometimes try to compensate for their unavailability by showering their child with new clothes, or enrolling them in extracurricular activities. You should take the time to sit back and communicate with your child. Otherwise, you might find yourself face to face with a desperate cry for attention.

Simple Strategy # 4 - Keep Your Word

What can be more basic than keeping your word? Unfortunately, as a parent, you may sometimes fail to follow through with your promises. Particularly when it means something you might consider petty, such as a football game or a school play.

As a parent, you are committed to be there for your child at all times. You should be ready to shower your child with the proper attention and support. In effect, you are responsible for building the foundation of your child's future, and the values to be taken along.

Do What You Say You Will Do

Never make a promise if you are not sure you that you can keep it. No matter how small or insignificant you feel the promise is, always remember that your child may view it differently. Once your child realizes that you are a stickler for your word, you will come off as a parent that can be relied on. You are giving your child the gift of security.

Furthermore, you should remember that breaking your promises might give your child the license to do the same. Equally important, your child may view your broken promises as a breach of trust. Either way, you are instilling your child with the wrong set of values. The last thing you want is for your kid to grow up into an unreliable adult who no one can trust.

Keep Things In Balance

Sometimes, it may seem impossible to keep your word. You might find yourself stuck at work buried under mountains of paper, or maybe there is just something else you’d rather do such as catch up on sleep or play a round of golf with your friend. The key is to keep things in balance and to always keep the proper perspective.

If you are faced with that kind of choice, and it is inevitable that such a day will come, always set your priorities straight. You must make your best effort to keep your word, and if for some reason you failed to do so, make sure it is a valid reason and not some excuse you made up because something better came along. It would also be wrong to sweet-talk your kid into forgetting about a broken promise. A broken promise is a broken promise, even if you promise to buy your child pizza or toys to make up for it.

Simple Strategy # 5 - Cheer

Your child needs love and support, and one of the best ways to manifest this is to cheer at every success and to applaud displays of outstanding character. This might mean being the number one cheerleader during ball games, or to express admiration during one-on-one discussions.

A child who feels unloved and unsupported might seek the same kind of affection and recognition from other people. Unfortunately, that person might not always be a priest, a teacher, a relative or a family friend. Your child might choose to seek approval and nurturing from street gangs and other dangerous elements that have long ago learned that it was easy to prey on troubled kids hungry to be acknowledged.
"I'm Pulling For You"

Your child needs to hear and feel that you are not only rooting for his success, but also supportive during screw-ups. Always remember that a healthy, nurturing environment is one way to nudge your child towards the right path. You should find reason to praise your child at every opportunity. Nothing is too small to generate a hug and a pat on the back for a job well done. If you would look carefully for things to cheer about, you will find that there are many.

Finding Moments to Cheer

Try to set a time of the day where you can spend some quality moments with your child. This will allow your child to unfold the day’s events, and more often than not, find an opportunity for you to congratulate and applaud.

Your child may seem reluctant at first to do this. Should that happen, don’t despair and instead allow your child to choose the time and place. Maybe this would be during breakfast, or maybe even inside the car during the ride home from school. It really doesn’t matter when or where. What is important is that you are able to find the time to communicate your love, affection and support.

Simple Strategy # 6 - Make Money Matter

Money does matter and it matters a lot. Although this is not really an idealistic way of looking at things, your child will soon find out that a price tag matters a lot in this world. It is now up to you to teach your child the value of money and how to manage it properly. Through proper training, your child will also learn to set realistic goals and take on more responsibility to attain them.

The Hands-On Approach

You may consider giving your child a lesson on how to handle finances at an early age. One way to do this is by providing a strict budget for less important items, and allowing your child to handle the money. Remind your child that if the money has all been spent, there would be no more cash forthcoming. By doing this, you will have provided your child with a valuable lesson on making ends meet. This is one lesson your child will never forget.

Your child should also be taught the value of investing money. After all, you wouldn’t want your child to spend every cent all at once without saving for the future. There are many ways to do this but the simplest would be is to open your kid a savings account. This way, your child will come to realize that not only is money saved, money earned - the interest accumulated will spark him to look for other ways to make money grow.

Easy Money Does Not Exist

It is your job to educate your child that the concept of easy money or quick wealth does not exist. You should teach your child the value of hard work, and the importance of earning an honest living. If you fail to do so, the consequences may be staggering. After all, the thought of making a quick thousand dollars on the streets - even if the means to attain this goes against the law, is a lot more tempting than earning pittance from serving milkshakes and fries.

It will be hard to convince your child that 10 dollars for a day's honest work may be better than 300 dollars earned in less than an hour. Still, you have no choice but to keep trying until you get the message across. Find ways to make your child understand, and use examples that appeal to the present generation, such as stories of basketball stars and matinee idols that strayed and found themselves left with nothing.
Never Substitute Money For Your Time

There are times when you might feel guilty about not being there for your child. Always remember that it would not do your child any good if you use cash to make up for your unavailability. Parents sometimes take this even further by drooping their kids in malls with a credit card in hand. If you do this, your child will never learn the value of money and proper finance management.

Simple Strategy #7 - Reach, Teach, and Preach

Having faith is not limited to the concept of an omnipotent, all-knowing God. Faith governs anyone who firmly believes that there is something greater than the self - whether it is a scientific force, the family, or the community. What is important is that you are accountable, and in the same way, your child learns that there is something to be accountable for.

Provide your child with a venue where they can learn respect and responsibility towards a higher being. It can be through church, or some other forum where your child can be made to understand that there is something bigger and more important than the here and now. Teach your child to use faith as a source of inspiration, comfort and guidance.

Provide a Moral Compass

Your child should be able to distinguish between right and wrong, and know the difference of good versus evil. By providing a moral compass, your child knows to accept when mistakes are made, and the possibility of redemption is possible. Redemption is only made possible through remorse. Without remorse and acceptance of wrongdoing, there can be no growth.

It is not enough that your child chooses to tread the right path because it will please you. Rather, it is more important that good is done because it is also what your child wants. The belief that there is something greater out there will inspire your child to do what is right.

Final Word

Judge Hatchett ends the book by relating the story of an old man who offered his two cents worth on what had gone wrong in the way society treats its children. The man spoke of how as a boy; the older members of his community called him "son" as away of signifying mutual respect.

The concept of a family that extends biological ties is virtually non-existent in modern times. Nowadays, it is more common for people to look the other way rather than be accused of meddling into the business of others. People are no longer expected to look out for one another, and partly for this reason, the welfare of children suffered dramatically over the years.

Even in the immediate family, the concept of children as sons and daughters has dissipated. Thanks to increasingly busy lifestyles, it is now easy to take kids for granted and even easier to forget your responsibility as a parent.

You can use the seven simple strategies to build healthier and stronger relationships with your children. Sometimes, bringing up your children correctly is as easy as going back to the basics and by merely setting an example.