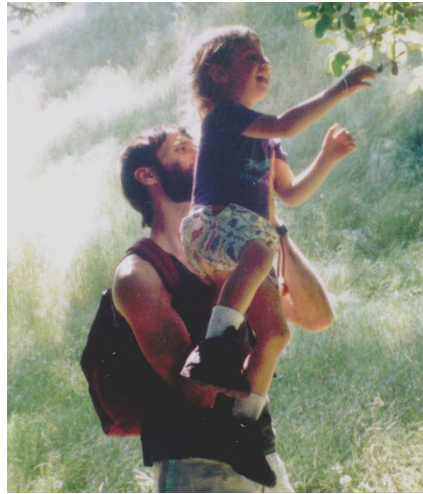


Parenting Half a Step Behind

Basic Rules For Raising Children



Ofer Erez

**I want to make sure
that my children
can take care
of their own needs,
because without this ability,
I will always have
to take care of them.**

When I set out to do things, I like to be clear in my mind about how to do them right. I talk to people with experience, I read books and articles, and I spend time observing people doing what I want to do. I notice what works and what doesn't.

I look at the results these people get.

If I want the same results, I follow in their footsteps, and if I want something else, I do something different.

I get a lot of information this way, and I usually double and triple-check everything I come across, to make sure that it is true for more than one parent, more than one family, more than one society. This way I get the deepest insights.

I have found over time that this kind of research is very useful, because it gives me something solid to start with. It takes a lot of work and a lot of time, but it saves me from making a lot of costly mistakes. I can learn what works for other people, and what will work for me, and more importantly, I learn the basic rules that hide quietly behind the actions, intentions and attitudes.

When my son was born, I wanted to raise him right so I did a lot of studying, thinking, reading and talking about it. I know a lot of parents, and each parent has his or her own ideas about the right way to raise children, so it can be very confusing.

I took my time to think about what I had learned in the past, and to see how the different ways of raising children affected the children themselves. Do they know what they want in life? Are they happy? Can they take care of themselves? Are they friendly? Can they think for themselves? Can they solve their own problems? And so on.

When I was in my early twenties I worked with young children as an assistant to more experienced teachers. I learned a lot at that time also, but I realized that this wasn't enough because I didn't know what the basic rules were. I found out that different teachers have different ideas about how to teach children, what is important to teach them, the right timing and the right order for teaching, etc. It became even more confusing than before, because all these teachers were knowledgeable and had a lot of conviction about their ways.

The best I could do without knowledge of the basic rules was to imitate what others had done, or to follow the procedures they've set, and hope that they were right.

But, I worried, what if they are not?

For my own peace of mind I needed to know the basic rules so that I could judge for myself if other people's ideas made sense or not. This way I could make my own decisions about raising my son, and be sure that I was doing it the right way.

To my way of thinking, if I found out that I was right, I could raise my child properly, and if I found out that I was wrong, and made some mistakes, I would be able to correct them without having to waste time blaming someone else for giving me bad advice.

I find this way of thinking extremely useful as a parent. It saves me a lot of time and aggravation. If I do the right things, I can feel good about the way I raised my son. If I make a mistake, I can correct it immediately, and be done with it. As you will read later on, making mistakes and correcting them is a great example to set to your children.

My parents, who raised 4 successful children, gave me this advice:

1. Try not to get in the way of their growing up.
2. Every child is different so there are no hard and fast rules. You have to adjust yourself to each child's personality.

Despite the fact that these answers don't actually tell you what to do, they are excellent guidelines for figuring out what to do.

So I took the time to figure it out!!!

In my profession I work individually with children who have developmental problems, usually Cerebral Palsy. As a result, I know a lot about how the brain works and how children learn, and I know a lot about what makes it more difficult to learn and to succeed.

After 15 years in this profession, I am familiar with the rules for creating successful learning environments and what parents need to know about getting children to develop in a healthy and successful way. This knowledge is very helpful to me.

What my parents told me fits smoothly with what I know professionally, and together the two areas of knowledge provide me with the basics of parenting. This is knowledge that every parent should have.

What I found out, over the last 15 years (my son is now 15 and taking college level classes) is that without these rules, parenting can be quite a nerve-wracking mess, full of uncertainties and second-guessing, regrets and guilt, confusion and anger.

Knowing these rules can make parenting a relatively simple and enjoyable task. This is because there are actually very few basic rules to follow and they provide clear guidelines for knowing what to do.

The rest of this booklet explains these rules, and I hope that they will make sense to you and that you will find them beneficial to follow.

I want to let you know that some of these basic rules, though simple and sensible, will contradict what you have been told so far. It is my opinion that if you follow the rules I

wrote down, your parenting will be easier and both you and your children will have a happier life.

Naturally, you have to make your own decisions about raising your own children.

There are only **Seven Basic Rules to know:**

- 1. The influence of genetics**
- 2. The importance of independence**
- 3. Making mistakes and decisions**
- 4. The driving force of efficiency**
- 5. The importance of setting boundaries**
- 6. Interactions and social influences**
- 7. Parenting "Half a step behind"**

Lets look at them, so we can understand their importance and how to use them in daily life.

1. Genetics is a huge subject, but luckily for us we need to know only a little bit of it. What is important for us to know about genetics is that each child is different genetically. What this means is that each child will develop at a personal rate, have personal timing and a personal sequence of developments.

It is necessary to understand that no one can read, interpret and predict from a genetic map what your child will grow up to be like, and even if they could, they'd still have to take into account the many social influences that will affect your child as well.

What is really important to know is that the sequence and timing for the development of the different aspects of your child may be at odds with what the experts, other parents and our society think is right.

It is also important to know that it is not wise to argue with nature on such a basic level, especially when your child is young.

Let genetics be the deciding factor. You can definitely have a lot of influence about what happens, but not control.

What this means in everyday life:

The physical, emotional, social and intellectual development of your child should not be forced. Instead allow each area to evolve at a rate and order dictated by nature.

To make it clear and simple: do not make your child sit and learn when he or she needs to explore and play. No matter how subtle you think you are in manipulating your children to 'play with the right things' you can't do it without damaging their delicate psyche.

Naturally there is a challenge for parents here:

The experts, the books, society, other parents and your own habits will tell you to do one thing, and your new understanding will tell you to do other things. I strongly encourage you to follow your new knowledge and understanding and find others who follow the same principles.

2. The importance of independence is the next essential thing to understand. Your child has an innate desire to become independent, and this is as it should be. Your child's independence will increase along with an increase in skills and the ability to do things on his or her own. This is especially true for the things they are interested in. Encouraging independence in your child is beneficial for many reasons.

What this means in everyday life:

Give your child responsibility, independence and the time to learn skills in a safe place and time, where there is little or no danger of serious injury. Children usually do this through play, so you will do well to provide them with a lot of time to play. This is far more important than learning additional academic skills.

Naturally there is a challenge for parents here:

You cannot wait for your children to become skilled before you give them independence and responsibility because they will not be able to develop the skills needed.

In order to assist your children to develop independence and responsibility you will do well to require both before their skills are fully developed.

3. When it comes to making mistakes and decisions, you may find it interesting to know that in order for your children to make the right and smart decisions in life they have to make a lot of wrong decisions first. They have to make many mistakes because they have to learn two things: They have to learn that it is necessary to try new things, and they have to learn what doesn't work.

Basically speaking, this is what we normally call "trial and error". It is an extremely important part of growing up. If your child keeps trying again and again, discarding all the ways that don't work, she or he will find the ways that work. These are ways that work for your child, and may be even better than the ways that work for you.

If you always teach your children "the right way to do things", they will not know what doesn't work and will not know that trial and error are necessary for progress and success. Your children will be afraid of making mistakes, and of trying new things, and as a result will also be limited in their success in life.

What this means in everyday life:

Even if you know "the right way to do things", you should let your children try, make mistakes and fail. And keep on trying until successful. As I mentioned before, it is part of your job as a parent to make sure they are in a safe environment to go through this process.

Naturally there is a challenge for parents here:

Watching your child fail at something is not pleasant or easy, but needs to be done anyway. Most children handle failure much better than their parents, so you have an opportunity to learn from them.

A note about helping children:

Do not confuse ***helping your child*** with ***doing for your child***. They are not the same!!

When you *do* for your child, he or she learns very little from the experience (see the next point). When you *help* your child it means that *both* of you are doing, and your child learns cooperation as well as new skills.

For reasons too long to get into in such a short booklet, every normal healthy child has a very **strong innate drive towards efficiency**.

4. Efficiency basically means that your children will try to get the most by doing the least, so if they can get you to do something for them, they will. This is especially true for the things they don't want to do. From the parent's perspective we call it "being manipulative".

What this means in everyday life:

Your children will try to get you to do all the things that they don't want to do, and you will have to insist that they do them anyway. They need to develop the skills, so they can become more independent.

It is clear that the most beneficial way of doing this is to be practical rather than emotional.

As an example: Everyone is doing chores, including the children. I can almost guarantee that it will be easier if you share the chores and do them at the same time, rather than having your child do chores while you are watching TV.

Naturally there is a challenge for parents here:

You will have to teach by example, rather than by force. You will have to eat right if you want your kids to eat right, and keep the house clean if you want their room to be clean, etc.

This is where **setting boundaries** comes in.

Setting boundaries is very important and should be practiced regularly and with great care.

5. Setting boundaries means that you keep a clear set of rules that are practical and sensible. As much as possible, these rules should apply equally to everyone in the family.

As an example: as a parent you must have some time to take care of yourself and your things, and your child needs to know that, and respect that. So you will need to place a boundary around a small amount of time that is for you only, even when you are home.

It will take time for your children to understand this, because as far as they are concerned, the world revolves around them, so their needs are the most urgent and the most important.

As a parent it is important to get your children to understand that your needs have equal importance to their needs. They are neither more nor less important.

This could take several years.

What this means in everyday life:

First you will need to be clear about what your needs are. And I am talking about *needs*, and not whims or wishes. You need to know how much time off you need in a day in order to be a good parent, and how much sleep, and what food is healthy for you to eat, etc. When you are clear about what you need, you can start setting boundaries for your child. These boundaries are set in place so that you can get what you need.

You are not likely to get everything on your list, but you can begin to take steps to improve the situation you are in. Each improvement, no matter how small, will improve your situation as a whole, and will make the next improvement in your life easier to make.

Naturally there is a challenge for parents here:

Remember that your children are not as capable as you are, and it is your responsibility to take care of them. Remember that they will get more of what they need than you will get of what you need, until they are competent enough to take care of themselves without needing you.

6. Social influences of all kinds and in all places have a huge effect on your child and must be taken into account. It is your responsibility as a parent to place your child in the most beneficial social situations. These are situations that are generally free of physical, verbal and emotional violence.

Be extra careful in this, because it is likely to have a long-term effect on you and your children. It will affect their self-confidence, their perspective on life, their abilities and their relationship with you. This is where most of the big problems begin, and where most of the mistakes are made, so pay close attention.

It is very unfortunate that our society gives such a high priority to academic learning at the earliest possible age. Most schools are set up for that. This is a basic mistake that brings a lot of unpleasantness in its wake.

This schooling set-up is unfortunate because it is in direct conflict to the genetic code your child was born with, and must follow. The result of this mistake is a massive conflict that develops inside your child, and is likely to mess up everything else. Here is basically what happens:

On one side there are the genetic instructions that your child must follow, by nature. And on the other side are the social ideas and habits that are often in conflict with the genetic instructions.

Both forces are extremely strong; they operate at the same time and in opposite directions. As a result they cause an extremely strong confusion in your child's psyche.

For your own experience, and as an example, try this: imagine that you are in a situation where you have almost no knowledge about what to do, but there are two experts that you trust completely. When you ask for their advice they give you completely opposing answers, and both try with all their might to convince you to follow what they say. Both promise you great success if you follow them, while threatening you that if you don't follow them you'll suffer for the rest of your life.

If you can imagine this situation, and feel the emotions of being in it, you will get a glimpse of the situation your child is in, day in and day out, when there is a conflict between society and genetics. Naturally, the bigger the conflict between society and genetics, the bigger the conflict within your children, and the more uncertain and confused they will be.

It may seem at this point that there is no way out from the conflict between nature (genetics) and nurture (society), but this is not so. The solution is quite simple.

The timing of instructions from the genes is set in your child's genetic material. The timing of the social requirements is not set so strongly and is therefore far easier to change. It is up to you, as a parent, to time the social requirements in ways that fit more closely with the genetic instructions.

If you do this, your child will grow up with much less confusion and anxiety. Anyone who ever had to raise a teenager will appreciate this very much. During the teenage years the conflict between nature and nurture is usually very big, and so are the problems created.

What this means in everyday life:

The things children are really interested in doing are dictated by their genetic material. You must not allow anyone, including yourself, to force your child to do things that are in opposition to what he or she is truly interested in doing because it will affect the development of their brain. This is especially true when they are young.

Naturally there is a challenge for parents here:

You will find yourself at odds with all the people who don't know what you just learned, and they will do their best to tell you that you are making a mistake you will pay for, for

the rest of your life. Ignore them if you need to, explain to them if you can, or give them a copy of this booklet, but don't give up.

You need to remember at this point the difference between controlling (dictating) and influencing.

I am not asking you to let your children do whatever they want, whenever they want to, and in any way they choose.

Parenting in the "free for all" style will be in conflict with boundary setting. Non-violent behavior is still important to teach and your own needs are still important as well.

What is most important to remember is that the timing of their educational activities should be determined by them, and not by society!!

What this means practically:

Your child will learn to use computers, read, write, do math, geography, history, languages, and so on, when he or she gets interested in the topic, and not when you, society or the experts think they should be doing it.

For those who are afraid or concerned that their children will choose to learn nothing, please read again the section on independence. From your children's perspective, all the topics previously mentioned are tools for increasing independence, and they will pursue these tools to a high level of effectiveness when the timing is right for them.

The best way I know of to be successful in parenting, and to make sure that your children have good self-confidence and self-esteem, have the tools to be successful in life, are appreciative of you as a parent and as a person, and therefore respectful towards you, is to do your parenting following the basic rule of **Parenting a half step behind**.

7. Parenting half a step behind gives you the best guidelines for parenting, and takes into account all six previous points on genetics, the drive towards independence, efficiency, social influences, boundary setting and making mistakes and decisions. **Parenting half a step behind** is extremely simple, but not always easy to do.

Here are the practical basics:

Follow the timing of **genetics** in everyday life and take the time to observe your children's interests. Allow them the time and the safety to engage in these interests until they are satisfied with the results.

Follow the importance of **independence**, and give them the time and the opportunities to develop the skills necessary to become more independent, even when you can do for them.

Follow the driving force of **efficiency**, and let them spend time building efficient ways of doing things they are interested in.

Follow your knowledge about **making mistakes and decisions**, and let them make a lot of mistakes in a safe environment.

Follow your knowledge about **interactions and social influences**, and put them in a school, preschool or kindergarten that will follow the same basic rules I outlined here.

Follow the **importance of setting boundaries**, and set smart, practical and sensible boundaries at home.

All these things together make up the style of parenting of **half a step behind**.

Parenting half a step behind makes sure that you let your children develop according to their nature, you are available for supporting your them when they need it, catching them if they are in danger, but not damaging them by forcing, coercing or manipulating them.

I know, from experience, that changing your parenting style is a great challenge, and I believe you are up to it. I also know that help with the process, support, and practical examples can be very useful, and often essential for success.

If you would like assistance in making the "Half a Step Behind" parenting a reality, if you are interested in a presentation or a workshop for your club or group please contact me:

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Wishing you success, peace and health,

Ofer Erez