

Be a Happier Parent... Or Laugh Trying

There is no doubt that parents today face tremendous challenges. Sometimes these challenges are overwhelming and stressful. Parents of young children and teens will appreciate Betsy Kerekes' wisdom and comic relief in her newly released book, [Be a Happier Parent or Laugh Trying](#). In this interview, she shares with Mary Cooney some advice on how to be a happier parent.

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Early in your book you write, "Parenting is hard, but it doesn't have to be a burden." What is your advice for dealing with the burdens of parenting? How can we be happier despite the stresses and challenges of parenting?

I find myself taking deep breaths. A lot. It does help, like when all your children are talking to you at once or when, instead of napping, you find your toddler stripped to the skin, diaper on floor, and suspicious looking wet spots on the carpet.

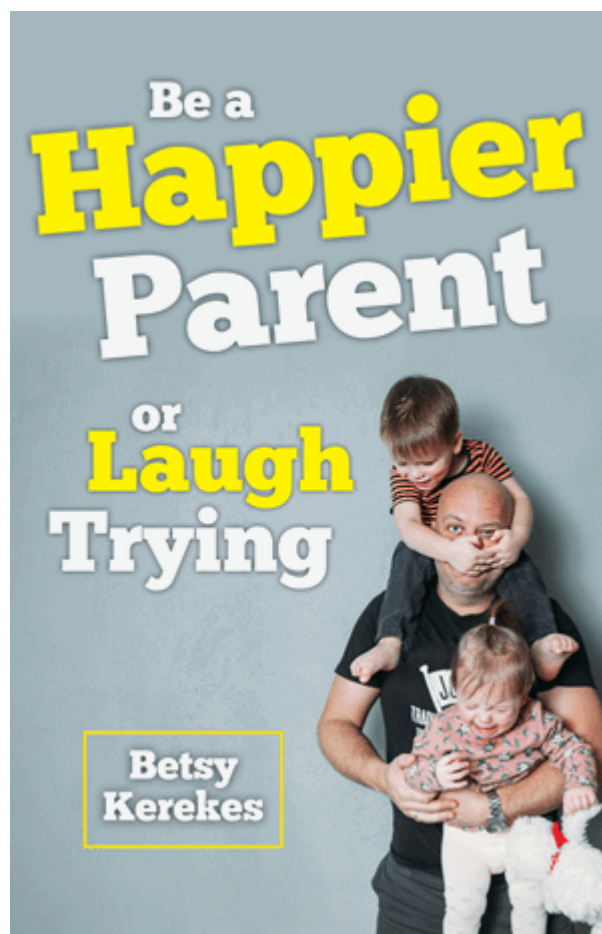
That's when I shake my head and sigh while looking forward to telling my husband about it when he gets home. Stuff like that happens all the time. Parents need to expect it so it's not so devastating when it occurs. We learn quickly that the rules of civilized society go out the window once you introduce an infant into your home. I've found that the most important thing to learn is letting go. Relax your expectations for a clean home, perfect nutrition for your children at every meal, and all bodily fluids remaining on the inside or at least, going where they are meant to go.

It's also about perspective. The crazy stories will be remembered fondly, and the child in question will love hearing

them when he or she is older. (Mine do, anyway.) There are both difficulties and delights at every age. Focusing on the delights and finding humor in the difficulties is how to make it through virtually unscathed.

Furthermore, look for the silver lining. When your kids splash water all over the floor while bathing, wipe it up with a towel, and voila! You've just cleaned your bathroom floor. The day I cleaned the bathroom mirror, it was splattered with water marks from top to bottom two hours later. The girls had cleaned their little brother's hands and feet in the sink and merriment naturally ensued. My first thought was the clean mirror was nice while it lasted, but then I realized the watermarks were a reminder that my children washed their brother themselves and while doing so, he had a blast. I left the spots and the bathroom with a smile. The water marks served as a reminder that my daughters are helpful and love their brother. That makes me happy.

What about discipline? How do you get your kids to do what they're supposed to do and how do you avoid bad behavior?



This would be an article all itself. I devote a chapter each to discipline and dealing with temper tantrums. I'll share with you a couple of bonus tricks that aren't in the book because they happened too recently. The first is to become a magician, whose success lies in misdirection. Here's what happened: My darling nearly-two-year old Joe wanted to eat peanut butter while sitting in my chair. This meant peanut butter smears on my chair, the table, and the wall were a distinct possibility. Joe didn't want to get in his high chair. I put him in anyway, despite his loud protests. Here's where the misdirection comes in: I gave him the back-up bib when his favorite bib is in the wash. Suddenly his attention and tears were focused on this odious flap of fabric intent on strangling him if he didn't immediately yank it off. I removed the offensive shirt-protector and replaced it with his beloved bib. Suddenly, he was no longer crying. Having forgotten the indignity of being forced into his high chair, he was happy to have "won" the Great Bib Debacle of 2019. All was right in his world, and his high chair tray was much easier to clean.

Another trick is what I call "Ending a hissy fit with a kissy fit." My youngest daughter was moping about having to do her math worksheet. I sat beside her to lend a hand. Knowing intrinsically, it seems, of my less than stellar math skills, this gesture didn't bolster her confidence. Mid-whine, I smothered her with kisses. At first, she tried to block me, but was soon laughing so hard I had to give her breathing breaks. Then, when she thought the onslaught was over, I started the tirade of affection all over again. Finally, we began: "Okay, question one says..." and I was all over her again, just for good measure. Her mood was improved, and my limited abilities somehow sustained us through third grade mathematics.

When all else fails, be a ridiculous goof ball. Another one of my daughters was sighing heavily over her schoolwork. I called from the other room, "I hear a child in distress! Supermom to

the rescue!” and “flew” to her, arms out like Superman. Then I repeated my entrance holding my hair back like it was flapping in the wind, and again with the back of my shirt flapping. She said, “Moooo-oom,” in mock-disapproval, wearing a broad smile. I didn’t even need to help her after that. She got to work without further complaint.

You also write, “To be a good parent, we must set the right example by our attitude and demeanor.” What is the attitude we should take? And how do we keep a calm demeanor when our kids are acting up?

Again, deep breaths. And when necessary, send the child out of hearing range for your sanity and everyone else’s. My friend turns on loud music to drown out a whining child, and to steal his thunder. It’s not much fun to throw a fit and be ignored, so do your best to ignore him/her. Don’t torture yourself by getting brought down by a crabby kid.

One reason we need to set the right example and remain calm as much as possible is that we may inadvertently teach our children to lie when we lose our temper. Here’s an example from the book:

Imagine you’re potty training your child. (Did you just shudder? My apologies.) Now imagine you take your child to the potty, but she doesn’t want to go. You try again later and still nothing. You ask her if she needs to go. She insists she doesn’t. Next thing you know, her pants are wet. You, frustrated by the whole experience, kind of lose it. “Look what you did! Now I have to wash you up and find clean clothes and...” Unbeknownst to you, this reaction is teaching your child to lie in order to avoid seeing you angry or be yelled at. You can express disappointment, sure, but remain calm and patient. You want your child to feel safe coming to you with the truth when she ran a purple marker across the back of the white couch or when he threw a ball indoors and knocked over a lamp.

Why are fun and humor so important in raising children?

Recently my sister said to me, "How do parents without a sense of humor survive?" I didn't know how to answer her. It would be so difficult not knowing how to crack up at calamities. Facebook is helpful for parents in that we can share with one another the chaos that occurs in our homes. The thumbs up or "haha" face, plus the commiseration, are like virtual therapy.

I've frequently thought, after witnessing something insane, "There's something for the blog, at least." This is why I started parentingisfunny.wordpress.com—not only for my own outlet, but for other parents to read each other's hilarious stories or unfortunate incidents and get a good laugh. They say if you fake smile enough, you'll end up smiling for real.

There was a study done that found happy parents have happy kids. That seems logical. Miserable, unhappy parents are likely to make their kids miserable and unhappy. My kids being unhappy would make me even more unhappy; thus, the cycle would continue. This is why there's an entire chapter on having fun with kids, even your own!

What advice would you give to parents of teenagers?

Hang in there. It's almost over. I've been having success with my teen by leaving her alone more. For instance, she does not appreciate when I ask her if she needs to take a last-minute trip to the bathroom before we leave the house like I do with her little sisters. It's tough to find that transition from treating your teenagers like kids to something closer to adults.

The chapter on teens somehow wound up being longer than all the rest. I pulled heavily from my memory of my own teen years. This included phrases my parents would often use on me, like, "It wasn't meant to be," in the case of disappointments, or "Who's going to remember this in a week, two weeks, a month, a year?" for instances of embarrassment. There was

also, “No matter how bad you think you have it, there’s always some one who has it worse,” for those days when I thought my life was so miserably horrible, no one could have things as bad as me—probably because I wore the same shirt as some other girl, or something.

But, for all the bad rap teens get, since they’re nearing full maturity, they can be quite helpful around the house. Plus, you can play more grown-up games like Hearts and Clue rather than endless rounds of Candyland and Chutes and Ladders.

What was the inspiration for the book?

The writing of this book stems from having co-authored (with Dr. Jennifer Roback Morse of the Ruth Institute) [101 Tips for Marrying the Right Person](#) and [101 Tips for a Happier Marriage](#). A book on parenting seemed like the logical next step. I had a lot of ideas and “tricks” I had learned from reading, observing, remembering, and against all odds, figuring out on my own that I thought worthy of sharing. There’s good advice in the book, but also laughter because we can all use more laughter in our lives.

With the plethora of parenting books available on the market, what sets your book apart from others?

Many parenting books focus on babies and all say the same thing: Sleep when the baby sleeps. Fold laundry when the baby folds laundry. My book focuses on a range of ages, as do others, but they generally don’t include tips on helping your children keep their faith or on how to wrangle a toddler in church. There are other humorous parenting books, but a quick view of “funny parenting books” on Amazon comes up with a slew of titles containing cuss words. No swearing was involved in the writing of my book.

Why is this book important today?

Making parenting easier and more fun for parents, who will

then be happier, ought to help strengthen their relationship with one another, too. Happy parents stay together, which is pretty much the number one crucial factor for raising happy, healthy kids. Stay married, folks. (See also [101 Tips for a Happier Marriage](#).)

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