



How to be told by your children that you are so *not cool* in 12 easy steps

Having 18+ years of hands on real world experience being a child, I live in the awareness of the challenges my own parents experienced in raising me and my sister. With my own experience in hand and with a number of requests from young families in the community, I have set out for these next three months to offer some suggestions for parenting today's child. I have gleaned this information from various practical and clinical resources. One is a valuable resource called **Parent Talk**, a quarterly publication produced by Health Resource Center in partnership with Spartanburg Regional Hospital System here in town. The other resource is the American Association of Marriage and Family Therapy, of which I am a clinical member in practice. In this three part series, I would like to offer 12 practical and clinically effective suggestions for parents and family members in raising, nurturing, and caring for your children. All of these suggestions agree with the Structural Family Therapy model that I teach and propose in my work in helping parents and families. So, without further ado, let's get started:

- 1. Accept your role of parent as YOUR responsibility.** You are the only parent(s) that your children have, though others can make it seem as if they could do a better job. Those "others" can't do a better job because they are not you. God entrusted your children to no one else. Please accept this important role as your responsibility. Though society may expect school, church, clubs, and sports to parent your children, only you can really do it.
- 2. Make parenting a priority.** Whether a surprise gift from God or a planned decision, make your parenting a priority. Stick to consistent and effective parenting even when it is inconvenient and difficult. Seek help when it is needed. God did not intend for you to go about parenting alone. Extended family, the Body of Christ, and wise counsel are available to aid you and support you but you have to ask.
- 3. Educate yourself about the problems facing today's children – those problems are different from the problems you faced.** There are similarities to your era but be aware of the differences. There are pressures that come to your children from many different sources compared to those that came in your time. From media sources to peer relationships, your children are constantly being bombarded with information demanding them to respond in various ways. Learn what they are experiencing as best you can. Learn first, then judge. Remember that **knowledge is power!**
- 4. Give clear messages about your expectations – Be specific about how you expect your children to behave.** Parental inconsistency is the root of all evil! Parental inconsistency is the primary reason for family difficulties in children. Parents threaten and do not follow through. If you are not consistent in your parenting, it is difficult for your children to be consistent in their following. Define what you mean by "You must clean up your room!" Set measurable expectations that are not vague but clear for your children. Clarity helps your children know the boundaries of how far they can wander on their own. Clarity also help you as parents know where the boundaries are in the family.



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5. Be aware that many in the community put children's buying power above children's well-being. Don't expect the community to reinforce (your) family values. Though you may have Christian friends with similar values, the community-at-large is not in agreement with how you may raise your children. From cell phones, to clothes, to gadgets, your children will always want for what the community tells them they should want for. As the parents, you both can set limits and direct your child's understanding of money, tithing, giving, management, and monetary power.

6. Clearly state consequences of failure to follow family rules. Consequences are not negotiable. Failure to be crystal clear with your children leads them to begin ASSUMING what you mean. Though the wages of sin is death and the consequences of family disobedience is NOT death, make your children aware of what the consequences are to their disobedience to the family rules. Do not feel sorry for your children or give in when you are compared to other parents that are "way less strict." The grass is not always greener on the other side. Those "less strict" parents may be struggling too.

7. Enforce stated consequences when family rules are broken. Children who don't follow family rules today may break society's laws tomorrow. *Many of the post baby-boomer generation wanted to make sure they fixed everything in their children that their parents did wrong in them (Please read this line again!).* Yet I bet that most of the parents reading this remember well the corrections their parents made in their behavior. How else does a child learn unless consequences are enforced? Be willing to be the Bad Guy/Gal. Seek support from other parents when you feel you are being attacked/punished by your children for requiring your children to honor/follow the family rules. Also remember that your local family therapist/pastoral counselor (me!) loves to help with these issues as well.

8. Don't assume that the parents of all your children's friends have the same family rules you do. Some have different rules, some have none. This is why one important part of your job as parent is to screen your children's friends and their families. Just because little Mary likes a friend at school doesn't mean that the friend can come over and disrespect you and your parental authority. I encourage parents to directly speak with the parents of the friends that your child chooses to hang with. There may come a time when you will need to confer with the other parents for some reason. Also, keeping good communication with the other parents may allow you to encourage them in your rules.

9. Believe that children want rules to guide them. Allow children to paint you as the "bad guy." Rule number 1 in parenting is to be consistent in love, nurture, and discipline. Rule number 2 is **not** to set out to create your child into your best friend. Your child's job is to learn, grow, have fun, and follow the rules and (hopefully) mature. Your job is to foster a healthy family environment for love to nurture one another. Your job is to maintain a loving and healthy relationship with your spouse that helps maintain that healthy family environment for love to nurture one another. In order to have all this "healthiness" you have to have a game plan, some sort of guiding map to help navigate your way. Your parents may have taught you their "way" to a working family. Regardless of what "way" you will lead your family, it is vital to have some guiding rules, principles, and values from the beginning until they leave they home. So, for them to make it to age 18 I suggest that you adopt the position that your children want and need rules to guide them.



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10 Remember that teenagers need parental supervision as much as toddlers do. It's just a different kind.

The theme here is that teenagers need direction, guidance, structure and supervision to understand how to be an adult. Toddlers have to have supervision in order to protect them from harming themselves unknowingly, to help feed them and nurture them to healthiness, and to aid them in understanding life as they grow. Same is true for older children. In reality, even adults need supervision at times! Be careful not to skirt your supervisory role in your child or teenagers life!

11. If necessary, love your children enough to let them hate you – for a while. When you child tells you in frustration that they “hate” you it actually can be a healthy coping mechanism for their frustrations because in doing so they are expressing deepened emotions. Also, as a parent, you know that those emotions change ever so quickly and the next moment your “parent hater” child is asking for money to go to the movies!

12. Know that children are never too big for a hug – even when they are grown. I strongly encourage spouses to show PDA around their children often. Of course, be sensitive to your child's age and experience level but please do let them see you showing love and affection to one another. Hug your children and help them understand what important role affection plays in relationships. Hug them when they are young and hug them when they are old. Isn't it a meaningful experience when your parents hug you now?

And now for some wise advice from Scripture:

Proverbs 4 (NIV)

¹Listen, my sons, to a father's instruction; pay attention and gain understanding. ²I give you sound learning, so do not forsake my teaching. ³When I was a boy in my father's house, still tender, and an only child of my mother, ⁴he taught me and said, "Lay hold of my words with all your heart; keep my commands and you will live. ⁵Get wisdom, get understanding; do not forget my words or swerve from them. ⁶ Do not forsake wisdom, and she will protect you; love her, and she will watch over you. ⁷Wisdom is supreme; therefore get wisdom. Though it cost all you have, get understanding. ⁸Esteem her, and she will exalt you; embrace her, and she will honor you. ⁹ She will set a garland of grace on your head and present you with a crown of splendor." ¹⁰Listen, my son, accept what I say, and the years of your life will be many. ¹¹I guide you in the way of wisdom and lead you along straight paths. ¹²When you walk, your steps will not be hampered; when you run, you will not stumble. ¹³Hold on to instruction, do not let it go; guard it well, for it is your life.

Grace and Peace,
Dr. Trey