

“The Two Greatest Secrets of Parenting”

There is no one “right” way to parent. Terrific parents can be as different as terrific children. There are so many books, workshops and “techniques” out there, and parents can get confused and overwhelmed. Just as our children will learn about who they are from us, we learned about who we are from our parents. And most of us were raised traditionally.

Traditional parenting does not do a very good job of encouraging us to trust ourselves, and instead teaches us that we are either right or wrong, good or bad. If we please parents and other adults we learn we’ll get rewarded, praised and loved and if we displease parents and other adults we learn we’ll get punished, ignored or have love withdrawn. We are always being judged, and we grow up judging ourselves, often quite harshly.

As adults, parenting is one of the most important aspects of our lives, we are especially critical in our self-judgments about our parenting. We feel a strong need to do the best we can, but we don’t know what “the best” is, and then we hear so many conflicting messages. Parents are much more ready to accept blame if there’s a problem with their child than they are to accept the praise if their child does something positive. If I can share one wish for parents, that wish would be: Believe in yourself. I don’t know you personally, but I know you’re taking the time to read this handout, and to me that means you are committed to being the best parent you can be. What a blessing that is for your child! So please start off with celebrating yourself and all the beautiful gifts you give your child every day. Don’t think of these parenting “secrets” as techniques, and please don’t think of them as a test. They are simply ideas, ideas for you to think about and incorporate in whatever way is right for you and for your child. When parents trust and believe in themselves it makes parenting so much easier and joyful.

I have found, after working with parents and children for over 30 years, that there are two amazing and powerful ideas that can form the foundation for raising well adjusted, happy and peaceful children. So often parents get frustrated trying to get their children to do something, even though we know that we actually can’t “make” another person do anything. The great news about these “secrets” is that you don’t have to “do” anything to your children. These are things that are 100% within the parent’s control.

1. Role Modelling

Envision the person you want your child to be, and then be that person yourself. This can be quite confronting, but can also turn out to be immensely rewarding. If we want our children to not yell, we can speak softly, regardless of what is happening at home. If we want our children to be honest, we can reflect on our own life to ensure we are as honest as we can be. Years ago I worked with a family where the child was lying, and the parents were sure they were extremely honest. But they did intense self-reflection and realized that when their child answered the phone and they didn’t want to talk they would tell him to “say we’re not home”. So they talked with their child, told him they slipped up and asked him to tell the truth when someone calls and they don’t want to speak to the caller. They didn’t say a word about the child’s lying but he very quickly stopped.

Maleny Office
2/11 Coral Street
Maleny QLD 4552

Caloundra Office
58A Queen Street
Caloundra QLD 4551

Lawnton Office
865 Gympie Road
Lawnton QLD 4501

Children believe in their parents, and they believe what we do far more than what we say. What an awesome opportunity role modelling presents to parent powerfully just by the way we live our own lives!

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2. Love

This may seem like something that sounds nice but isn't really a "tool" of parenting. I don't agree. Our children are incredibly expert at knowing how we are feeling. When we are stressed, or anxious, or sad or happy, our children are the first to know. There is a developmental reason for this: babies are completely dependent on their caregivers for survival so they learn to be hyper-vigilant to how their caregivers are feeling. When we are in touch with how much we love our children; in touch with the awesome, unique miracle that every child is, our children cannot help but feel it. And nothing feels better for them in terms of their development and self-esteem than knowing how they fill their parents with a sense of love.

This isn't just about "spending time" with our children. That's great in itself, but this is about being around them when they can see in our eyes how awesome we know they are; how much we truly and deeply love and esteem them. Every day I get the amazing opportunity to work with parents and children and can see "that look" when parents are just completely engulfed in the love they feel for their child. The child feels that too, even when no words are spoken, so anything we as parents can do to get in touch with how much we love our children feels good to us and is magical for them.

Parenting is the most important job in the world, and changing the way we parent can truly change the world. These powerful tools can help parents as well as children and can go a long way in fostering joyful and peaceful families.

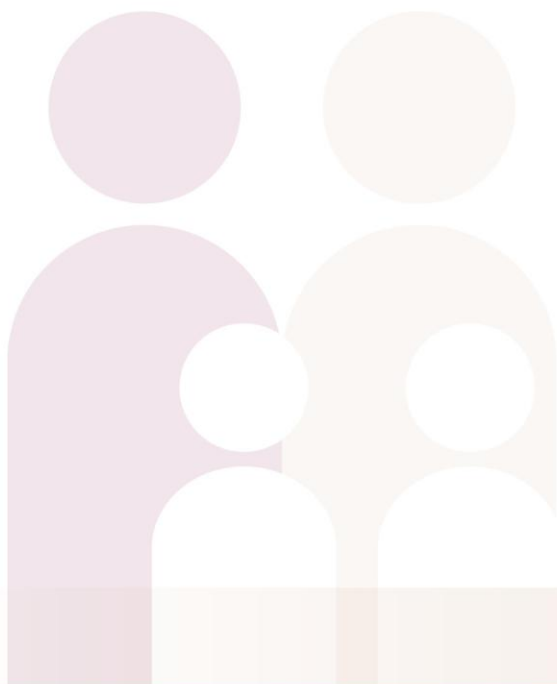
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Maleny Office
2/11 Coral Street
Maleny QLD 4552

Caloundra Office
58A Queen Street
Caloundra QLD 4551

Lawnton Office
865 Gympie Road
Lawnton QLD 4501



po: PO Box 829
Maleny Q 4552
e: info@theparentingcentre.com.au

p: 07 5435 2504
f: 07 5435 2530