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Parenting With a Purpose

Let's face it, kids are a challenge and so is the job of being a parent – and it can catch you by surprise when it doesn't all go according to plan. Being a parent can be truly wonderful, but it can also be very stressful.

Before we begin on our journey together I want you to imagine that you've hired me to be your very own personal Parent Coach. And, just like when I work with parents, I really want to make sure that you get the best out of our time together. I want you to enjoy doing the exercises in this book and learning about new and different ways to parent. I want to offer you new ideas and ways of looking at things, and practical solutions to everyday problems that we all face as parents.

Successful parents stretch themselves, and they are curious to see how great they can become. They keep their eyes firmly fixed on the destination of their parenting, which is to bring up their kids to become well-balanced, independent adults and they work out what values and principles are important to them, so that they can pass these on to their children.

I believe that you can tap into your own intuition as a parent as well as feeling confident to pick up a book for advice from time to time. There really is no shame or embarrassment in holding up your hands and saying that you need a bit of help or inspiration now and again.

I find it amazing that a new washing machine comes with an instruction book in five different languages, but as you walk out of the hospital with the most important bundle of your life in your arms, there are no manuals or handouts to help you. But I want you to know that no book has all the answers and that there really is no perfect parent – they only exist in Hollywood films – and it's not true that 'one size fits all', like those socks you buy at Christmas from the £1 shop.

I believe that we are all different and have our own way of bringing up our kids and no one way is necessarily better than another, but there are some basic values that we all share and this book will ask you unusual questions to get you reflecting and pondering on the bigger picture of your parenting, offering you fresh and new strategies, techniques and practical ideas to empower you with the confidence you need to raise happy, healthy and hopeful children ready to fulfil their true unlimited potential.

Let's start with an exercise that highlights the enormous amount of different things you do as a parent and how important your job really is. This exercise helps you to appreciate just how many different roles you play, and how wide the amount of different skills you need to raise a happy, confident child – emotionally, physically, socially, spiritually and practically.

Write a job description for being a parent

- What are the hours?
- How many days per week?
- How many years?
- What is the pay?
- What training do you get?
- What jobs do you have to do?
- What skills do you need?

Take some time to write down the answers to these questions. Then, consider what your job description for your role as a parent would be in one sentence.

What have you learnt or discovered about your role as a parent from doing this exercise?

Were you surprised by the different roles you play? Perhaps you were surprised by the different skills you need to master as a parent. You're the managing director of the most important company in the world – your family. You are juggling and dealing with everything that raising a family throws at you, from negotiating, organising, budgeting and crisis-management, to meeting deadlines, instilling discipline, nurturing self-esteem and multi-tasking.

As parents, we are generally very good at talking ourselves down and we tend to focus on what we get 'wrong' rather than what we get 'right'. Most parents I work with beat themselves up about what they 'can't do', 'haven't done', 'should do' or 'could do better' but the exercise is designed to help you focus on the enormously wide range of skills you need to learn as a parent, and most of which you probably already practise without even knowing it.

On the day my son left home to start university, I wrote this rather tongue-in-cheek blog post, to show that most parents underestimate the wide-ranging tasks a parent has to learn as they go along.

The Toughest Job in the World

Job Description

A long-term player needed for challenging, permanent work in an often exhausting, tiring and overwhelming environment. Candidates must possess excellent communication and organisational skills and be

willing to work all day from very early morning, evenings, weekends and frequent 24-hour shifts or late into the night with interrupted sleep. You will need negotiation skills, excellent time-management skills as well as the ability to knock up a model out of papier mâché and an electric battery at very short notice, to say nothing of baking cakes for the school fête, managing a budget, painting rainbows, singing songs late into the night to get your offspring to sleep, and playing endless rounds of Snakes and Ladders. There are often countless sports matches to attend on Sunday mornings in the freezing cold, music recitals and swimming galas. Unfortunately travel expenses are not reimbursed.

Responsibilities

You must realise that you will keep this job for the rest of your life and have the enormous responsibility for bringing up happy, confident, well-balanced, independent, well-rounded and emotionally balanced adults. You will also have to be prepared to be hated, at least temporarily, for saying 'no' to too many sweets before dinner, for insisting that they go to bed on time, for getting them off the computer before they've finished their very important game and for insisting they come home from parties at a reasonable hour!

You must be willing to bite your tongue repeatedly as well as accept that you will be indispensable one minute and an embarrassment the next.

Advancement and Promotion

There is no possibility of either. Your job is to remain in the same position for years, without complaining, constantly retraining and updating your skills so that your offspring can ultimately surpass you and leave you to fly the nest without so much as a 'thank you' at the end of the adventure.

Previous Experience

None required, but on-the-job training is offered on a continually exhausting basis where you make it up most of the time and hope that it'll all turn out all right in the end!

Wages

None, as this is a labour of love. In fact, you must pay your offspring, offering frequent raises and bonuses, incentives and rewards both emotionally and financially. A balloon payment is due when they turn 18 and attend college, and when they marry you usually contribute an enormous amount of your savings to their 'special day'. When you die, you give them whatever income you have left.

Benefits

There is no pension, no tuition reimbursement, no paid holidays and no stock options. However, the job offers limitless opportunities for personal growth and free hugs, cuddles, laughter, joy and memories that will last your whole life and the adventure will be the most rewarding and fulfilling job of your entire life.

How You Rate Yourself as a Parent

In order to be the best parent you can be, you need to pat yourself on the back from time to time. You need to recognise what you do well because what you say about yourself has tremendous power and influence on your confidence. If you are upbeat, positive and value your role as a parent, then you will be providing a positive model for your children. Let's focus on your qualities and strengths as proof that you have what it takes to be a great parent.

Take your time and really ponder and reflect on these questions, writing down your answers if it helps:

- What are your three most significant achievements as a parent?
- What is the greatest challenge that you have overcome as a parent?
- What are the three things you love most about being a parent?
- What personal qualities and skills make you a good parent? (For example being good at problem-solving, being patient and being a good listener.)
- What things do you love most about your children?
- How has having children changed your life for the better?

The challenge in the questions above is to focus on what you've come through, or learnt, and to nurture yourself by recognising and celebrating the wonderfully diverse roles you play throughout the lifetime of your children.

The Principles of Good Parenting

It's true that the basic principles of good parenting apply to all children and stay the same throughout childhood and adolescence, but the way these principles are put into practice must be tailored to fit your child's age, personality, interests and circumstances. As your child grows and matures, their abilities, concerns and needs change too. Good parenting is flexible, so while you shouldn't change any of the fundamentals, you must adapt them to fit your child's character and stage of development, and your family style.

The important thing to remember is that your role as a parent changes as your child grows. It's that simple.

What worked well when your child was in nursery won't necessarily work when they reach junior school, nor will it likely work when they enter adolescence. You can't talk to your 11-year-old the same way as you spoke to your 4-year-old. This may seem obvious, but you'd be surprised at how many parents refuse to change their ways as their children develop and then find themselves wondering why they are having so much difficulty using techniques that always seemed to work before.

I think it is helpful to understand what developments are taking place and what they mean to you as a parent. There are four very important points to bear in mind.

Inner growth

When your child develops from one stage to the next, they are changing on the inside as well as on the outside. Your child is not just growing in shoe size but is changing in the way they think and feel: what they think about themselves, what they are capable of and how they relate to other people, including you.

Stages of development

The psychological stages of development that children go through are reasonably predictable, which makes it easier to anticipate. The strange thing is that most parents make a special effort to learn how to parent during infancy, but they don't expend as much energy on the pre-school, pre-teen or adolescent stages and just hope that problems will go away.

Don't make that mistake. Learn about each stage of development before your child gets there so that you can remain prepared and flexible to the changes (see the boxed text for more

information). This is a key skill in being a good parent and building self-confident, well-balanced children.

Every child is unique

Remember that children are all individuals and develop at their own pace and speed and you can't rush them through a particular phase. Sometimes they take two steps forward and three steps back!

Grow together

Your children are developing and changing, therefore so are you! Enjoy the opportunities being presented to you and don't see them as a negative experience. Grow, develop and discover together. Just bear in mind that the drive and independence that is making your three-year-old say 'no' all the time is actually the same process that makes your thirteen-year-old daughter argumentative at the dinner table. It is also what makes her more inquisitive in the classroom.

Child Development

All parents worry about how well their children are developing. Are they talking enough? Should they be reading more? Are they growing? Are they learning new concepts at the appropriate time for their age?

Areas of Development

Children develop skills in five main areas:

1. Cognitive Development

This is the child's ability to learn and solve problems. For example, this includes a two-month-old baby learning to explore the environment with their hands or eyes or a five-year-old learning how to read.

2. Social and Emotional Development

This is your child's ability to interact socially with others, doing some things for themselves and learning self-control. Examples of this type of development would include: a six-week-old baby smiling, a ten-month-old baby waving goodbye, or a six-year-old knowing how to take turns in games at school.

3. Speech and Language Development

This is your child's ability to both understand and use language. For example, this includes a twelve-month-old baby saying their first words, a two-year-old naming parts of their body, or a four-year-old learning to say 'feet' instead of 'foots'.

4. Fine Motor Skill Development

This is your child's ability to use their small muscles, specifically their hands and fingers to pick up small objects, hold a knife and fork, turn pages in a book, use a pencil to draw, learn to sew, manipulate their school tie, do up their shoelaces, or throw and catch a ball. It's about developing their dexterity.

5. Gross Motor Skill Development

This is your child's ability to use their larger muscles. For example, a six-month-old baby learns how to sit up with some support, a twelve-month-old baby learns to pull up to standing by holding on to furniture, and a seven-year-old learns to skip or swim.

Stages of Development

Age 1

Most parents see their child's first birthday as an important milestone as it marks the transition from baby to toddler. Your child will go through a period of rapid development in the 12 months between their first and second birthdays – and parents usually can't wait for their little one to learn to walk and talk. But remember that children develop at their own pace, and it's not a race or a competition, so try not to compare your child with others.

Age 2

Most parents dread the 'terrible twos' and worry about how they will deal with the tantrums that often begin before their child's second birthday. It can be hard to adjust to your child's dramatic mood swings, so they need you to relax and stay centred and positive, as they strive for independence. They are going through a period of physical and emotional change.

Age 3

After their third birthday, you will notice that your child is becoming increasingly independent. As they try to make sense of the world around them you will be asked lots of questions that usually start with 'Why?' They will also begin to develop a sense of right and wrong, and will be keen to gain your praise and approval.

Age 4

Many children start school when they are four, which is an important milestone for them and for you. Some children are very excited about going to school, whereas some are rather nervous. Just give your child lots of reassurance and focus on how much fun they will have and

perhaps begin the basics of reading and writing before they start, to give them confidence.

Age 5

At the age of five, children become much more confident in all areas of their social, emotional and physical development and your child will be keen to show off their achievements – so it's important to show interest in their schoolwork and find a place to display their artwork, swimming certificates, stickers and rewards from school.

Ages 6–8

Between the ages of six and eight, you will notice that your child becomes noticeably more independent and their friends become very important to them. They respond well to simple, clear guidelines, rules and expectations that apply to everyone in your house.

Ages 9–12

Many parents are unprepared for the changes their child will face between the ages of nine and twelve. So don't be surprised if your nine-year-old becomes curious about their body or may even begin puberty. Most children change schools at the age of eleven or twelve, which can be another milestone in their development, as they leave the familiar comfort zone of their junior school and enter the bigger, more unfamiliar environment of secondary school, where they begin to mix with older pupils and will experience more demands on them to become independent by their new teachers.

The Destination of Your Parenting

I believe that the key to successful parenting is having a sense of direction and a clear vision of your destination. When I was on my first NLP Practitioner course, I got chatting to a pilot who told me something that really surprised me: the majority of the time an aeroplane doesn't travel on its specific flight course – it's actually off course for 90 per cent of its journey!

I wondered how planes reach their destination, when there are so many factors such as air currents and weather constantly moving them off course. Obviously, the pilot's navigation instruments, skill and expertise help to bring the aeroplane to its safe destination, and throughout the flight the pilot is constantly guiding and adjusting the plane towards its intended flight path. But the key thing for me was that the ultimate destination is always in the pilot's mind throughout the journey, and no matter how far away from its route the plane is flying, he is constantly steering it back towards the intended landing place. This made me think that bringing up children is not so dissimilar to piloting a plane – and most of us don't even have a flight plan!

It is impossible to be a perfect parent all the time and it's difficult staying on a really tight, defined course because there are too many variables, such as your children's personalities, the pressures of work, other kids in the family, looking after elderly relatives and all the other unexpected dynamics and challenges of everyday living. I believe that good families – even great families – are off track 90 per cent of the time, just like aircraft. But effective and successful parents do have a flight plan. They know where they are going and what they want to achieve – they have a strategy, not necessarily a specific, hard-and-fast map that's cast in stone, but an overall plan to guide them to their destination.

By designing and planning an appropriate parenting path in your mind, you too can keep yourself from straying too far off course, and it will really help you to reach your parenting goals.

Think about where you are going in your parenting and where you want to end up. Every family is individual with its own way of doing things and its own rhythm, but sitting down together and talking about where you all want to go focuses you on the destination and makes being a family exciting – a bit like planning a holiday.

'The wonderful thing is that vision is greater than baggage.'

~ Stephen Covey

So let's design your family's flight plan so that you can have a safe and enjoyable trip and not just fly by the seat of your pants! We'll start by learning what's important to your family.

What's your family all about?

All families face difficult pressures and stressful times. When people lead busy lives, they often take their frustrations, tiredness or worries out on each other when they get home at the end of a hectic day. But if you are aware that this can happen and make the effort to step back from a situation when it becomes stressful, you can learn how to stay strong, happy and supportive of each other.

Take a few minutes to write down all the things you believe are important in a family – things like respecting each other's ideas, thoughts and opinions; respecting someone else's belongings; being patient and taking care of younger children; showing tolerance, kindness and patience towards others; being helpful; working

hard at school; showing tenacity; being curious or conscientious; being dependable and reliable; being adaptable; being generous and fun loving; or being thoughtful. Just write all the things that you believe are important principles in life, and in family life in particular.

What makes some families strong and what is their flight plan?

I believe the strength of a family comes from your inner beliefs and values – from the parent, as you are the one flying the plane. If you know what you are trying to achieve, then in the long run you will succeed and you won't be blown so easily off course. Take a few moments here to ponder and reflect on what you are trying to achieve as a parent in the long term, as it will give you enormous clarity and confidence, and a clear vision of where you are trying to get to with your family.

I remember reading the amazing autobiography of Lance Armstrong, an American former-professional road-racing cyclist, who won the Tour de France a record seven consecutive times, after having survived testicular cancer, and it got me thinking about his competitive spirit, his driving force, his resilience, his attitude and his mindset in life. What makes him special? What makes him different? What made him get back up to have another go and not be beaten by a traumatic diagnosis? I think it's about having a goal, having a vision, having a passion and a purpose; he knew where he wanted to get to and what he wanted to achieve.

So how do you create this powerful mindset and attitude in your family?

Begin with the end in mind

Most parents are not accustomed to looking at the bigger, long-term picture of their parenting. Most families just muddle along, reacting to life's circumstances as they come up. But as a Parent Coach I'm here to get you to think and act differently to the 98 per cent of other parents.

In my workshops I always get parents to think about the long-term goals of their parenting. We start by looking at their family ethos, philosophy and values. Creating your own family ethos or philosophy keeps you firmly focused and can serve you like a compass when your family strays off course from time to time. Your family ethos keeps your destination clear.

Take some time now and turn off your mobile phone, turn off the TV or grab a cup of coffee so that you can ponder and reflect on what's really important to you as a parent and as a person. This is what I call beginning with the end in mind.

What values are important to you?

Relax and ask yourself these simple questions:

- What is the purpose of our family?
- What kind of family do we want to be?
- What kinds of things do we want to do?
- What kinds of feelings do we want to have in our home?
- How would a stranger describe the atmosphere in our home?
- What kinds of relationships do we want to have with each other?
- What things are truly important to us as a family?
- What do we stand for?

In other words – what are the values of your family?

These are very important and rather unusual questions to ask yourself but the reason for doing this is that your values are like your personal compass – they guide your decisions. They are what you stand for and most people or parents don't spend any time actually analysing this, but if you're not absolutely clear about your values, how can you possibly pass them on to your children? Values are the things by which you live your life and on which you are not willing to compromise. They drive all your behaviours and it's because of your values that you do something and decide afterwards whether it was good or bad or sits comfortably with you. Examples of a value are being honest, having determination, being kind and compassionate towards others, having the ability to finish a task, doing well at school, always doing your best, always telling the truth, being loyal, being trustworthy, being considerate, etc.

Write down all your guiding values by which you live your life so that you can see really clearly what they are, and take a few moments to reflect on who gave you these values. Was it your parents, teachers, aunts, uncles, friends, your authority figures, your religious leaders? Are those the values you choose to hold now and want to pass on to your children? If you discover that you don't like what you have revealed, only reflect on the values that you **do** want to pass on to your children.

I bet you've never done this type of exercise before, because most parents don't actually stop to ponder the bigger picture of their parenting, but I think considering your values really helps to give you clarity, direction and focus.

It's also a great idea to get your partner to do the same thing so that you can see if you are both going in the same direction. If you find that you're not, don't panic. Have a coffee together, or maybe even go out for a glass of wine to chat over what's

important to you as a couple, as it's really important for your kids to know and be clear about what your values are as a family unit. Take some time to define what you feel is important to your family. It's rather like having a mission statement – what you stand for, what your family is all about and the principles that you choose to govern your family life and that you feel are important to you all. It's all part of planning your parenting destination and deciding what kind of family you want to be.

Also consider if there are any areas of your lifestyle that you'd like to change. Would you like to spend more time playing together, riding bikes on Saturdays or eating together more during the week, or would you like to create more personal family traditions or enjoy getting home from the office a little earlier once a week to read a story together at bedtime?

Think of some small changes that you could make simply and easily this week and stick to them because you will then be committing to the sort of family life you want to create. It will help you to feel more in control of your relationships; like you not only have a map, but also a compass. Consciously deciding on the things you'd like to change will give you a clear, shared vision of the destination you want to reach as a family.

Practise what you preach

Think about how you pass on your values – how do you pass them on in your words, in your actions or in the way you talk to your kids? Do you talk about being patient and tolerant but scream at the driver who cuts you up at the roundabout? Your children will remember how you act far more than what you say, so be careful and mindful to walk your talk.

Sharing your family values

The next thing to do is to decide a time when you can all sit down round the kitchen table without the TV on and have a talk about the ‘spirit’ or philosophy of your family and start planning it together, with your kids involved too. Even young children have clear ideas about what a happy family looks, sounds and feels like so include them in your family time and listen to what they say – children’s innocence always catches you by surprise in its simplicity and truth.

The secret is to make the conversation fun and enjoyable and think ahead so that you have an idea of what you want to talk about with your children and some simple ways to include them in the discussion. A really helpful technique I use with my clients is to plan what you are going to say and how you are going to say it in your mind beforehand. Sit quietly and imagine what you’ll see: the kids wondering what’s happening and fidgeting; what you’ll hear: maybe giggling and laughing; and how you’ll feel when you are in control and preparing something new and important to you.

It’s probably not a good idea to introduce this idea when you are exhausted, angry, tired or in the middle of a family upheaval. A good time is when you are on holiday and are all feeling relaxed and chilled out or simply choose a time when you are at ease and feeling positive, upbeat and ready to chat about the ‘spirit’ of your family. Just take your time, be patient and don’t rush it.

What’s Important to You as a Parent?

Here are some more questions to ponder to help you get clear about what’s important to you as a parent:

- How do you develop, nurture and grow your child's self-esteem? (Do you focus on what they get right, more than what they get wrong? Do you consistently speak positively to them; praise what you like to see so that you get more of that behaviour? Do you talk, laugh and joke with them? Do you spend time together doing fun activities? Do you eat together, read together? Relax together?)
- How do you develop good habits such as being on time, eating healthily, exercising, having good personal hygiene, showing tenacity, keeping their word, telling the truth, passing exams, doing their homework, being kind, helping others, being kind to their siblings or giving back to the community?
- Does your child get enough sleep so that they can get up on time and without being grumpy and function effectively at school? What time would be sensible and realistic for your child to go to bed? How can you encourage your child to take responsibility for getting enough sleep?
- What are your views on going to play on weeknights or your rules about sleepovers?
- What are your expectations and routines about homework, tidying up, helping around the house? How do you encourage your children with these tasks?
- What are your views or rules about mobile-phone use?
- What is a balanced amount of TV/DVD/computer games to watch or play each day/week? How can you encourage responsibility in those areas? What things can you do to encourage balance, commitment and honesty?
- What are your views on education, schoolwork and passing exams?
- How can you actively and positively support, encourage and remain interested in what your children are doing at school?

- How can you help, support and encourage your children to set simple goals and achieve them?
- How do you help them manage money?
- How do you encourage them to show respect to others, other people's property and younger and older members of the family and community at large?
- How do you show an interest in the films they watch, games they play, music they like and things that make them laugh?
- How do you spend time together? What new ways could you find to spend time with them?

These questions give you clarity about what's important to you and although I'm suggesting you remain flexible, centred, grounded and mature in your approach it's about choosing your battles so that your kids feel you care but they also know that there are some simple boundaries and rules.

Where Does Your Parenting Style Come From?

Raising children often brings up issues for parents about their past. Some of the parents I work with don't want to repeat the patterns of their past, others fall into the same patterns and others just don't think about these aspects at all. But it will help your confidence if you are aware of how the way you were brought up has influenced you now as a parent so you can either carry on, or change some aspects of what you are currently repeating.

Reflect and think about some of the important messages you received from your parents – both your mother and your father – and what you learnt about yourself from school experiences and from other important authority figures in your life, such as your

teachers, religious figures, older family members or other close adults. Are those beliefs empowering and positive, or disempowering and negative? You may discover some aspects to yourself that surprise, delight or shock you and, as you reflect on the messages you received, consider whether those beliefs you hold about yourself are true now. Were they ever true and, if you don't like what you have discovered, what would you like to change from today onwards about the messages you received? I hope you can now see the very important role you play in shaping the messages and beliefs your children pick up from you, both consciously and unconsciously.

How do you see yourself as parent? Choose one belief that you'd like to change about yourself as a parent and write it down. For example: I'm not patient enough, I shout too much, I don't play with my kids enough...

Now ask yourself:

- What would I have to believe in order to change this view of myself and to see how this belief is ridiculous, absurd or untrue?
- Where did I get this belief about myself and what will holding on to this belief cost me emotionally if I don't let go of it?
- What will it ultimately cost me and my family relationships if I don't let go of this belief?

Take some time now to rephrase the belief you had about yourself. For example if you said: 'I can never succeed as a good parent because I'm hopeless at discipline because my parents were too strict with me and I don't want to inflict that kind of harsh style of discipline on my kids,' this could be rephrased into: 'Because my parents were too strict with me, I'm a more balanced parent with more consistent, flexible but fair boundaries that suit my family.'

Being conscious of how you are thinking about yourself as a parent is one of the most essential skills you can develop so take some time to write out your current beliefs about yourself, and if they don't feel good, reframe them into something more positive.

Changing your critical, negative beliefs about yourself makes you feel more confident, more in control, more focused on getting a better result, and it helps you to look forward more positively, releasing you from being too judgemental about yourself. If you have a positive outlook you can move forward as a parent; if you are negative, you will stay stuck.

The Relationship You Want with Your Children

All families are strengthened by the expressions of caring, appreciation and love that everyone shows towards each other and members of strong families always find ways to support and encourage each other even when someone makes a mistake or gets it wrong. They make decisions, solve family problems and do things together and they have the mindset that everyone participates and everyone joins in.

The things you say and do with your children determine the kind of relationship you have with them, and sometimes after some reflection and standing back, you may realise that the relationships with your children may need to change.

Often relationships with children centre too much on control and correction, with parents trying to get the children to do things the children don't want to do, or trying to stop their children from doing things they want to do. For example, have you ever tried to force a struggling child into a car seat on a wet Tuesday at the supermarket? Have you ever tried to stop your kids from eating

chocolate or crisps before dinner? Have you tried to get your children to do their homework, eat their vegetables or stop fighting with each other? Then you'll know how hard it is to get children to do as they are told!

Naturally, parents generally have more power and authority than children, as we are bigger and stronger. But it's hard to force people to do something they don't want to do. Sometimes we find ourselves spending all of our time shouting, nagging and moaning at our kids, trying to bribe, convince or force them into doing something that we want them to do. That's the trouble with control: it takes over the relationship. It can be the only thing that you and your children seem to talk about, so it's not a very good basis for a balanced and healthy relationship or even a loving and fun one.

If your relationship with your children is based purely on correction it can become a bit strained and sometimes even insulting. I've heard people in supermarkets saying things like, 'How can you be so stupid?' or 'Can't you do anything right?' These types of insults are really damaging as they don't give children useful information. They only make them feel bad. Even if you avoid insults, too much correction can still be bad for your relationship because there are better, more fun and more interesting things to talk about.

I'm not saying control and correction is always bad – of course it's a necessary and essential part of raising your children – but when control and correction are all that a child gets from you, your child can become discouraged or even rebellious; so really think about the sort of relationship you want to create in the long term and don't let controlling and correcting your children be the only thing you focus on in your relationship.

Most of us spend a lot of time talking about only a few things with our children. 'Wash your hands.' 'Stop teasing your sister.' 'Do your homework.' 'Stop that.' 'Go to bed,' which sets us up

to be rather negative with our children. Stop for a moment here and think about your last week with your kids. What are the things you have talked, shouted, nagged or moaned about with each of them? Think about whether the conversations were friendly (helpful, happy) or unfriendly (angry, bossy, unkind). Go back over your week and notice and observe what you saw, what you heard, what you said and how you felt in different scenarios.

Now step into the shoes of your kids and see the previous week from their perspective – really seeing the situations from their eyes, their ears and their feelings. What do you discover?

Now step into the shoes of your partner, really imagining what your family looks, sounds and feels like from their point of view. What do you discover?

This is quite a powerful thing to do, isn't it? Don't panic or feel guilty if you don't like what you see – this is why you are reading this book: to help you make small changes that can make a big difference in everyone's life. So relax and think of just one or two small changes you could make this week to behave differently – in your words, actions or tone of voice – and try them out and see what happens.

The Pause Button Exercise

I teach all my clients this really simple but very effective technique.

1. Imagine a situation that's all going a bit pear-shaped and not as you planned or expected. You're tired, the kids are tired or hungry, and you are feeling overwhelmed, exhausted, weary or just plain fed up repeating yourself over and over again. You can feel your anger, frustration or temper beginning to rise...

2. So, instead, just imagine that you are holding your DVD or TV remote control in your hand. Now press 'PAUSE' on it while you take a deep breath and freeze-frame where you are for a split second. This detaches you from your immediate situation and helps you to disassociate yourself from it while you ask yourself better questions.
3. Now ask:
 - 'What is it I want to happen?'
 - 'What is it I want the kids to do?'
 - 'What is it I want to say?'
 - 'How do I want to say it?'
4. Relax and bring yourself gently back into the present.

This technique helps you to feel back in control of the situation again and helps you to relax and feel more confident, knowing that you are not simply being a reactive parent but a proactive, aware parent. It gives you breathing space for a couple of minutes and is a really simple but highly effective tool in your parenting toolkit.

How you treat one another

I am a very positive and enthusiastic person by nature and hopefully that rubs off on my parenting. In order to make your relationships with your children more positive, think about what you want the relationships to be like.

- Would you like to have more fun time with each child?
- Would you like to nag less often?
- Would you like to share your hobby or passion with them?
- Would you like to spend more time chatting to them?

- Would you like to spend more time reading them stories?
- Would you like to laugh and joke together more?

Think about the ways in which you can achieve these things:

- How could you build more opportunities for doing what you'd like to do more of?
- How could you build more affection into your relationships and remove some of the control and correction?
- How could you show more respect to each other?

We expect adults to be individuals and to have different likes and dislikes, sometimes different to ours, and to be good at some things and not at others. But it often surprises us that our kids are also individuals with their own tastes, styles and abilities. All children have different rates of development and different personalities. Knowing this can help you to be more patient and understanding towards your kids. Show them that you really care about them by accepting each of them as individuals and think about how you treat one another in the words you use or the way you say things. Remember that you are a huge role model and watching the way you do things is the way your kids learn, so relax and be a respectful, positive parent.

The Atmosphere in Your Home

Reflecting on the atmosphere in your home can act like a thermostat and marker for the way your children see their surroundings and can be a very effective way of noticing what's currently going on in your house.

Take a moment to consider whether you are a Thermometer or a Thermostat. A thermometer tells you when something isn't right; it's an indicator that something's out of sync, unbalanced, out of kilter, ill, broken, troubled or in need of help. Whereas a thermostat brings everything back into balance. This is far more valuable, as it manages to keep a family environment in sync with what's going on, as it bends not breaks through change, it adapts, it's flexible and it keeps adjusting to meet the needs of a growing, maturing family.

Have a think now and jot down your first thoughts about the atmosphere in your home so that you can tweak your family thermostat. Is it relaxed, frenetic, chaotic, noisy, tense, happy, a place to feel at ease, a place to laugh, bring home friends and to feel safe? If you are not completely happy with your answer have a think about some changes you could make to improve it this week.

- What makes it frenetic? Is it the dog rushing madly about barking? Then put him in the utility room for a bit. Is it the kids running about playing Harry Potter? Then send them outside to play.
- Is it chaotic because you aren't good at organising time? Then just take some time to sit down and plan out your day without leaving it all to the last minute.
- Is it tense because you are feeling stressed and overwhelmed? Then think of simple ways to delegate some of your chores and jobs around the house.

Also ask your family their thoughts on the atmosphere in your home. Get everyone involved in finding the solutions and thinking of new and different ways to improve the atmosphere if there are areas that your family don't like. Then talk about the ideas together and see what answers you can come up with and can agree to.

Positive and negative anchors

What are the triggers that affect your moods at home? Pause for a moment to ponder this rather unusual question as it could be running a pattern in your house that may not be very empowering or useful.

Here's an example of a positive anchor that helps you to relax, feel good and enjoy your home life. Imagine the smell of a log fire on a relaxing winter Sunday afternoon after a lovely lunch and a good glass of red wine. This is a positive anchor as it brings back happy, soothing memories that affect your mood in a positive way.

Now imagine the sound of the TV blaring, empty crisp packets on the floor, shoes and socks scattered all over the living room, the curtains not drawn and your children slumped in front of the TV, when you first walk in tired from work. This scenario immediately kick-starts your stress and unhappiness so it is a negative anchor.

By recognising your different experiences you can start changing your negative anchors into positive experiences. Take a few minutes now to ponder and reflect on the positive and negative anchors that trigger you, either into a good mood or into a bad mood. This is not intended to make you beat yourself up, but to empower you to notice the triggers so that you can make small changes and feel far more in control of your family life, which will really improve your confidence. Be curious and inquisitive to learn what your anchors are, so that you can change them for the better. It's a lot easier to blame someone else for your bad luck, unhappy life or bad day, but then you are playing the victim and not taking responsibility for your attitude and approach to your circumstances. Take control of your attitude, take control of the situation you find yourself in, take control of your stress levels and learn to feel more empowered and confident!

So ask yourself what negative feelings you have and then have fun changing your attitude and approach whenever you notice yourself falling into this pattern – swap your images around, relax and get back in control. So now the sound of the TV blaring, empty crisp packets on the floor, shoes and socks scattered all over the living room, the curtains not drawn and your children slumped in front of the TV when you first walk in tired from work is an opportunity to teach your kids about your house rules: about putting things in the bin, putting socks and shoes in the basket by the door and having the TV on at a certain time each day at a certain level of sound.

It's also about you recognising your trigger – relaxing, even smiling and saying to yourself, 'Ah here's an opportunity to teach the kids what I DO want.' It's not always easy the first or second time you do this but it is really worthwhile, and this simple re-frame can really help to change your mood, your attitude and your approach to life's challenges as it helps you to feel more in control of your life, which can only be a great thing.

The Ideal Parent?

Cruella de Vil or Mary Poppins? That is the question! What skills and qualities do you want to demonstrate: love, calmness, compassion, control, respect, integrity, fun, fairness? The decision is yours and yours alone as you have the power to CHOOSE your style, skills and ways of bringing up your children.

Most parents have never taken the time to ponder these types of questions, so this puts you ahead of the game in taking the first steps to becoming a great parent. I hope you have enjoyed stepping into this more unusual, more reflective, slightly detached perspective on your parenting. This is what I call 'Awareness

Parenting': These thought-provoking questions help you to detach from the mundane and humdrum, and empower you to see yourself from the point of view of your children, analysing and examining life from a completely different angle, which will make you more self-aware, discerning and a better parent, consciously choosing the way you want to bring up your children.