

Grandma Says

KEEPING THE BALANCE

As I was discussing a problem that a first-time parent had brought to me recently, it occurred to me that being a parent is largely a matter of balance.

I'm not exactly referring to the task of juggling all the roles a parent must, while acknowledging freely that keeping the multiple balls of spouse, parent, worker, and home care aloft takes astonishing stamina and vigor, to say nothing of a pretty good sense of humor.

No, rather I mean the kind of balance that is needed not to take a hard and fast position in many of the parenting situations that arise in the course of any given day.

Consider the matter of bedtime. You know the importance of a regular routine in creating hassle-free bedtime practices and rituals for a peaceful end of the day for you and your children. But there's absolutely no reason to adhere to that rigidly when staying up later might allow you and the kids to go out to marvel at the blood-red full moon.

Similarly, you are determined to provide healthy and nutritious food experiences for meals and snacks. But that's no reason to deny yourselves the pleasure of a stop at the ice cream store or the joy and wonderful smells of baking chocolate chip cookies together.

I'm sure you can see the wisdom of these kinds of balance and flexibility. But consider other occasions where parents should not consider an either/or stance on decisions, but rather adopt a both/and approach.

Reflect on the matter of keeping children safe. Between government regulations for seatbelts, helmets, and other precautions, parents understand the importance of keeping their children safe. But unfortunately, with the ready availability of knee- and elbow-pads and the implied messages of danger everywhere, it is all too easy to swing the pendulum to such an extreme that your children never get an opportunity to skin a knee.

Believe it or not, such over-protection is not really healthy for them. Learning to survive a skinned knee involves learning that life will indeed provide some bumps when lived with gusto, and we heal and go on.

Yes, I am speaking metaphorically as well as physically. When parents take a position of balance, they understand the importance of providing safe environments, as well as allowing kids to take on physical risks and mental challenges.

And then there's the matter of helping kids with tasks, whether they be homework assignments or even the basics of self-care. To do it all yourself keeps children dependent on your assistance, not a good preparation for their futures. But to adopt a rigid hands-off policy does not demonstrate respect for individual needs. Some middle ground of balance is healthy for all. Same with when they ask you to play with them. Playing with them all the time defeats the purpose of play for young children - to become creative, imaginative, self-sufficient at problem solving, etc.

To never play with them robs you of joyful moments, as well as the opportunity to subtly introduce or demonstrate new ideas. You get it - balance, some of the time.

Find that rational sweet spot.

P.S. Thank you to the Grandma Says reader who learned that Dear Boy will be published in April this year. Equal opportunity for all!

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