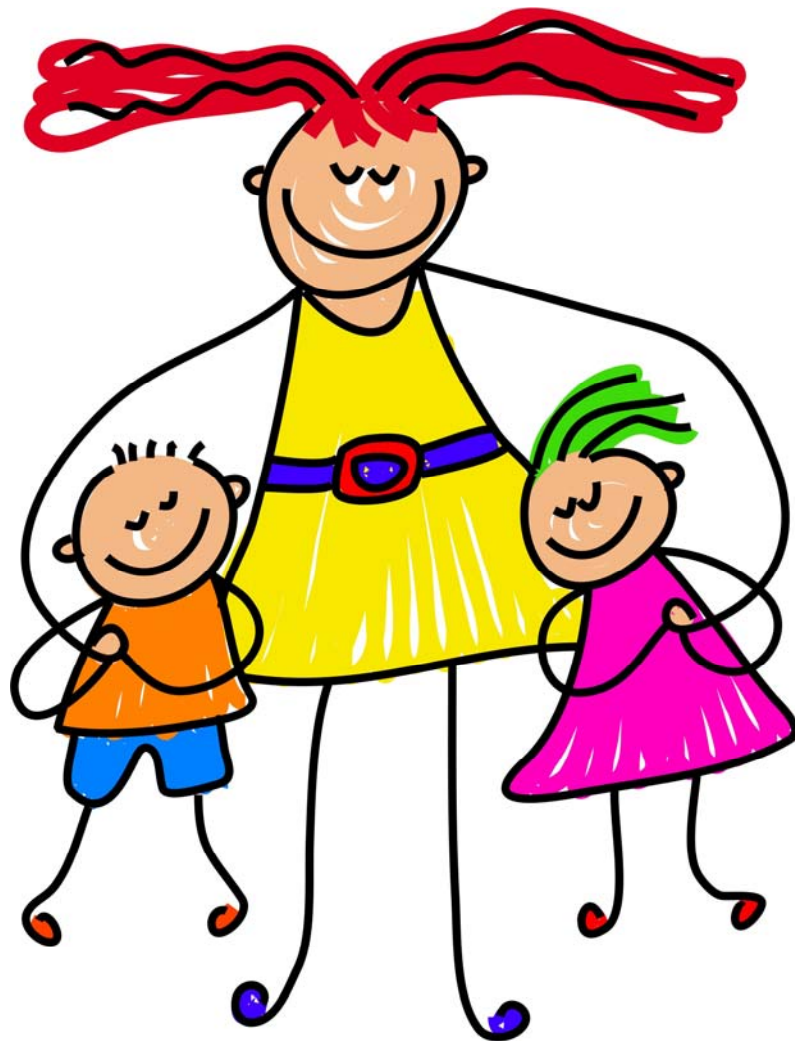


The Chilled Parent's Guide
To
Parenting Problems
Toddler To Teens



Rita Offen

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FOREWORD

This ebook is designed to address some of the common issues parents face in our day-to-day to lives. It comes from my own experience of parenting three children, and, like my book ‘The Chilled Parent’ – Effective Parenting, Peacefully and Powerfully, is inspired by my experience of my daughter who was 9 years old at the time, who suffered meningitis.

When she came close to death, the reality of our day-to-day lives hit me. The reality being, with all the commitments and expectations upon us today, many of us fail to put family first. We’re too busy meeting those expectations and commitments, and often what we lose is a close family relationship, a peaceful home, and an appreciation of and ability to live in the present (savour and appreciate all the wonderful moments of parenting). I wrote ‘The Chilled Parent’ as a message and reminder of what’s really important in parenting.

I also wrote it as an antidote to all the parenting advice we receive in our ‘advanced’, ‘information’ world – parenting advice that changes from one week to the next, and that often makes us feel we are a failure. I do not believe we have to be an expert to be good parents. We primarily need to provide a loving and supportive home. I believe it’s OK to feel the way we do about our children sometimes. I have kids that bring out the FBI Agent in me. By this, I mean, the times I’m busy driving around and we have numerous stops to make and a timescale to keep to, and I’ve got one child who seems to be living in another time zone – slow to get out of the car, expecting me to open the door, taking his time over everything. I feel like I want to shout “GET OUT OF THE CAR – RIGHT NOW – DO AS I SAY!!!!!!” I like to talk about the reality of parenting, which is what I believe all parents live from day-to-day.

I hope this ebook is useful and addresses at least some of the issues you are experiencing.

Rita Offen

Discipline

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Discipline

Common problems with discipline seem to be the same for most parents:-

- . Their kid's bedroom is a mess and they won't clean it up.
- . They won't do their homework without a fuss or a major fight.
- . They play on computer games and watch TV too much.
- . Their kids just won't do what they say!

First and foremost, it's us parents who make the rules, and our kids need to know this. Do you 'sort of make the rules', and then back down under pressure? Kids are great at pushing the boundaries and it's a great game for them.

Ask yourself "Is your child's behaviour a reflection of how you're dealing with him?" A good relationship through talking, listening, time, patience and setting a good example, build respect. If a child respects you they will be more likely to respond to your disciplinary rules. However, if you are quick to lose your temper, shout and try to be too controlling, children will only rebel and will not respect you.

Be a good example to your kids by obeying your own rules

Kids are quick to point out when you don't obey your own rules, and will use it to undermine your authority. Be a good role model, and behave as you would like your kids to behave. It's rather a matter of "do as I do", not "do as I say". Children are more likely to do what they **see** you do, not what you **tell** them to do.

Think before being too harsh or overbearing

Children are very sensitive to the fairness of your rules and punishments. If you are seen as being unfair rebellion takes over, and you may lose their respect. Admittedly, it is hard when a child gives you a blatant refusal or off-hand response to a request you make, not to react and impose a harsh restriction. At times like this try to take a deep breath and consider a more realistic answer.

Be consistent

Saying 'no' to something one day, and 'yes' to it the next is not being consistent. Kids have extra sensitivity where this is concerned. It's at the time when you are not consistent that their amazingly good memory comes into its own. They can remember way back in time when your answer to this same question was "yes", so why is it "no" on this occasion? Being inconsistent undermines your authority and only makes life more difficult for the future. You may have noticed that, with some adults, it's clear kids know that their 'no' really means 'no'!

Find out what their motivation is

For some children, money is a big motivation. A cut in pocket money or allowance for some misdemeanour can work for them, or even the withdrawal of a treat, or for younger children, time to 'cool off' away from the situation . Kids need to know that there are consequences to their behaviour, at whatever age.

Do not give up!

It is all too easy to give up if a new method of dealing with behaviour does not work the first, second or third time. It is really important to pursue your decision and keep at it. Sleeping problems are an excellent example. It may take not days but weeks of leaving a child to cry instead of picking them up during the night. For most children this is a habit which parents have reinforced. Whatever the discipline issues, it is important to stick to your decisions, and not to give in. It is worth it in the end.

FRIENDSHIPS

Friendships

“The most important lessons learnt at school are those that take place outside, in the playground” (teacher).

I'm sure it's widely accepted that one of the most significant parts of life for our children is their friendships.

Friendships are a source of extreme happiness as well as sadness. Friendships are often the cause of strong emotions. Children fall in and out of friendships, they break and make friendships, they look for identity through friendships, and friendships serve the child's need to belong with others. Especially in the large school community, such experiences are an everyday occurrence. However, it's not always 'roses' as many parents will testify.

When things are not going well for our children in the friendship scene it can be a great source of concern for parents, especially when it feels we are on the receiving end of our child's emotions, be it anger, frustration or tears, but there are ways we can help them:-

Share your own stories of your childhood friendships

Share the difficulties you had with friends when you were a child, what happened, and how it turned out. Because our children only mix with other children of a similar age to them, they do not get the richness of socialisation with adults, nor the lessons they can learn from us (adults) and our experiences. What we have to share can give them a bigger picture, especially when all they can see is what they're experiencing at that moment. Having gone through similar experiences, we have the benefit of hindsight that we can pass on to them.

Be an earpiece, but do not try to protect your child

Give ear to your child's hurt, or story, but do not be moved to intervene and talk to his/her friends. Be an earpiece but do not try to protect – children must be empowered to sort things out for themselves. They must experience the consequences of their behaviour, for example, if they are not kind to others, the consequence is that others will not want to be with them. The importance of kindness, generosity, loyalty, trustworthiness and sharing are common human behaviours akin to friendship, which children will learn and experience through their friendships. Unfortunately bitching, biting, hitting, shunning, bullying and making fun of others are also human behaviours that make up the rich tapestry of human interaction, and these they will encounter too.

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Do not make light of your child's woes

Whilst listening to your child's story, do not make light of his woes. Doing so may mean that consequently, he may not be inclined to share his problems with you. It's important to remain as someone to confide in.

Speak to a teacher

If all else fails and the issues are becoming so serious that your child does not want to go to school at all, then it's worth speaking to his teacher. Teachers can be a great, impartial help in situations like this. Good communication with teaching staff can really help your child, so long as you maintain a friendly, helpful relationship with them. Teachers need all the help they can get! But be aware that it may not always be helpful to your child if you share his difficulties with a teacher. Children really don't want to be seen as 'teacher's pet', nor do they want to be seen as someone who cannot be trusted, so speaking to a teacher is best when nothing else will work and it really is hindering your child's happiness and progress at school.

Make use of siblings

Siblings can be a great source of help. If they are willing to share their troubles with the family, each child sees that their brothers/sisters have similar experiences, and that they are not alone. There's nothing worse than feeling alone with a problem, and at the same time being unaware that other members of the family can help. The message here is share, share, share.

Provide a loving and supportive home environment

Children who have high self-esteem are confident. They behave confidently, they approach new situations and tasks with confidence, and they look confident. Such children are rarely targets of bullies nor picked upon. You can foster high self-esteem in your children by providing a loving, supportive home environment, with constructive praise rather than criticism, where you give time to talk to each other, and you are respectful towards one another. Children who are encouraged to do tasks for themselves from a young age also have high self-esteem, so whatever age your child, encourage him to do things for himself rather than you doing things for him.

School

School

Most parents have expectations and aspirations for their children, and a common concern for most is their achievement at school. The level of such expectations can range from satisfactory to high, depending on the parents. But what happens when our child is not achieving a satisfactory level, may not be fitting in at school, or is a disruptive influence in class? This can be worrying for parents who want to help their child, but who often feel they have little or no power over what goes on at school.

Poor achievement at school can be caused by many factors, but commonly a child may not like the rigid school regime, may have difficulty learning via the methods used at school, will find it boring, and then a range of symptoms appear, such as lack of confidence, poor attendance, and disruptive behaviour.

School matters are usually only dealt by school staff, but there are steps parents can take to help their child, or teenager, perform better at school.

Meet your child's teachers

If they have different teachers for each subject meet all of them. Discuss thoroughly what goes on in class. Let them know what you are doing at home to address any issues that have come up. Most importantly, ask the teacher if there is anything you can do to help with your child's schoolwork or behaviour. Teachers are no different to all human beings. They, like us, are quick to form opinions and judgements on others, including their pupils and their pupils' parents. Such judgements are formed from what they see, and what they see is your child, perhaps being disruptive or uncooperative. Your relationship with your child's teacher, your cooperation and support and willingness to help will make a significant difference to your child's relationship with his teacher and his time at school. A teacher who knows a pupil's parents are doing all they can to help their child and turn things around will be much more willing to put in his own time and effort for that pupil.

The homework headache!

Get thoroughly involved in your child's homework, making sure you know what is to be done, and ensuring it is completed. Help your child with all homework, making sure it is completed to the standard you expect. This can be a headache, especially as evenings are often busy, but your discipline with homework will make all the difference to your child's achievement. Simply knowing what he is learning in class means you can support him, and often answering a simple question he has on a subject can spark off his understanding of a topic. That simple question may be what had previously caused a block to his learning. Many children do not feel they can ask a question at school, but will be happier to do so at home.

Be your child's Ambassador

A child who is disruptive or uncooperative at school behaves so for a reason. Much that staff do all they can to help, they do have limited resources. A child who is labelled uncooperative is regarded as such by his teachers, which does not leave much room for positive regard, praise or improvement. Your job is to point out his strengths to the teacher, and anything you know that they can do to help him, eg. My son struggles to express what he knows onto paper. Once his teachers were informed, they could then use verbal tests to ascertain his grade, rather than written tests alone. Such a move can increase your child's attainment levels and as such, increase his level of confidence. As Ambassador, be open, honest and cooperative when dealing with teachers. They will appreciate this, and will regard your child in a positive way as a result.

Organisation is key

Make sure that your child is organised for school. This means being prepared in advance for the next day, having the right equipment needed, and getting up on time. Personal organisation and attendance are considered important in schools, and this is something you can help your child with.

Get informed

If possible, keep an eye on your child's classwork. Either pop into class after school, or peruse his exercise books during homework. Question areas where there seems to have been little work done in a lesson. This way your child will know you are keeping an eye on his progress in class as well as homework. Try to do this regularly. Time (weeks, months, years) goes by so fast that it is easy to miss what is going on, and all the more difficult when your child is a teenager to change his habits and re-learn the basics that he may have missed in the past.

Following these steps will help your child, but it is crucial to stress that you **do not put too much pressure upon your child**. The notable points are discipline and support. Knowing he has your support with schoolwork and dealing with teachers will help your child feel more comfortable about school, and encourage him to increase his effort and attendance. Pushing your child to meet standards that are too high will only make his behaviour and achievement worse. It is more important to support rather than to push. A loving and supportive relationship is far more influential on your child's future.

And finally

Make sure your child has a balanced view of our world and its expectations. Schoolwork and passing exams isn't the whole answer to success. Many of the most successful people around did not succeed at school. Einstein was a poor student, preferring day-dreaming to studying, and was eventually expelled from school for being a disruptive influence. Yet he was nominated as the greatest creative genius of the 20th Century!

Teens

Teens

If you're screaming on the inside (or on the outside come to think of it), pulling your hair out, summoning all the patience you can, and using up your reserves too, you are not alone! Teens can easily do this to you, and it's quite normal. Your once sweet, obedient, innocent little child, has changed, almost overnight, into a stroppy, rude, disobedient, and crude 'being'. Do not worry, it's nothing that you've done, or your parenting. You've done the best you can. This stage in your child's life is naturally going to be turbulent. It's how you deal with it that can either help or hinder the process.

Teenagers are involved in the developmental task of building an individual identity. This means they want to break away from their parents, do not listen to their parents, break rules, get into trouble, and are rude, often swearing. It's really hard to understand them, especially as it is such a complete change from the young child they were – it's almost as if they are a different person.

Teenagers' lives are all about looking good, and especially about how they look to their peers. Their main need is to fit in with their friends, and sometimes this can bring on weird behaviour that is hard for the parent to understand or to come to terms with. If your demands get in the way of their 'looking good' and 'fitting in' with their peers, expect fireworks! No matter how hard it is, try to respect their needs, and understand that their behaviour is driven by this.

With changing hormones that come about at this time, your teenager will appear grumpy, and it can be frustrating for parents who just want to see a smile every now and again. You may be forgiven for thinking 'there's something wrong with my teen', but really, nine times out of ten, there is nothing wrong. Your teen is whole and complete as he is, even though it's hard to believe! Refrain from reacting with "cheer up" or "let's see a smile". It will not work. What your teen needs to know is that you love and respect him just the way he is, and that there's nothing wrong.

Communicate!

It's easy not to communicate, especially at this time in your teen's life. He may disappear in his room for hours, or go out with friends for days, and barely a word can pass between you. It's really important to keep some dialogue going – talk to him, show interest in his interests. Do not criticise his interests, this will only cause a rift. I cannot stress enough the importance of listening. Listen to your teenager, and listen without judgement, interruptions, agendas and corrections. And acknowledge what he has said.

Your Most Powerful Tool

Your most powerful tool in parenting a teen is a strong relationship of trust, respect, support and listening. When your teen answers back or shows disrespect, it is your reaction that is what determines how your conversations, and ultimately, your relationship goes. It isn't easy, but if you can stay calm, and get your message across without heated debate and shouting, then you will not be 'fanning the flames', often caused by the teen temperament.

Oops Mistakes!

Do what you can to direct and guide your teen to make the right choices, but remember he's at the time in life where he wants to make his own choices, and cannot be controlled as in his younger years. This is the time of life where he especially learns from his mistakes more than ever before. You may have to watch your teen making the same mistakes over and over again. Somehow, it does not matter how much you tell him what to do, he needs to learn it for himself, and he will learn eventually.

Special Time

A good way of building a strong relationship is by giving your teen special time. At bedtime, even though she may retreat to her room, give a knock on the door, go in and have a chat. By a 'chat' I mean, rather than firing questions or prying into her life (she values her privacy) – just chat, but on a level playing field, talking to her as an adult. Still cuddle your teen – she values this. If you do not make the effort to do this yourself, it may not happen, and your teen may feel lonely and have feelings of self-doubt. Teenagers still need to feel loved and significant like everyone else.

Organise a day out, or shopping trip together, whatever your teen likes to do best, just you and her. Personally, I remember when my mum took me out to lunch or treated me and it was a special time. Such times are fond memories that have stayed with me throughout adulthood.

It will pass!

The parent-teen relationship is highly significant to how day-to-day life will be for both of you, and much of it depends upon your reaction to your teen. Whatever the behaviour – grumpiness, untidiness, lack of personal hygiene, swearing, lack of respect, ‘attitude’ – try not to react. As adult, assume responsibility, and always be the example.

Whatever happens though, remember, it will pass! Teenage is a phase all must go through. As parent, your job is to help this time to go as smoothly as possible for everyone, and if you can do so, the time will go a little quicker.

Relax!

Relax!

Most of our worries in parenting come from our expectation that we must be perfect. We worry that if we don't get it right our kids will grow up to be social misfits, unsuccessful, or unhappy. Partly, we want to look good, we want our kids to do well, to show that we have done a good job because if our kids don't meet expectations of society it looks bad on us.

Let go of these expectations, and accept that your children are whole and complete as they are, and that you are not the only parent with these experiences – you can be sure, every other parent has had the same issues since the beginning! Your children may not grow up to be or do what you want them to, but that's OK. They have the freedom to make their own choices. As a parent, if you've given them the environment where they know they are loved, respected, and accepted for who they are, then you have done well.

Author Biography

Rita Offen lives in the UK with her husband, three children and two guinea-pigs. She is the Author of 'The Chilled Parent' – Effective Parenting, Peacefully and Powerfully, in which she shares her experiences as a parent, and her roles in education, to deliver a powerful, information-packed book for parents, in which she makes us laugh, gives us tips, and most importantly, gives us hope that we can 'chill out' and be great parents

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