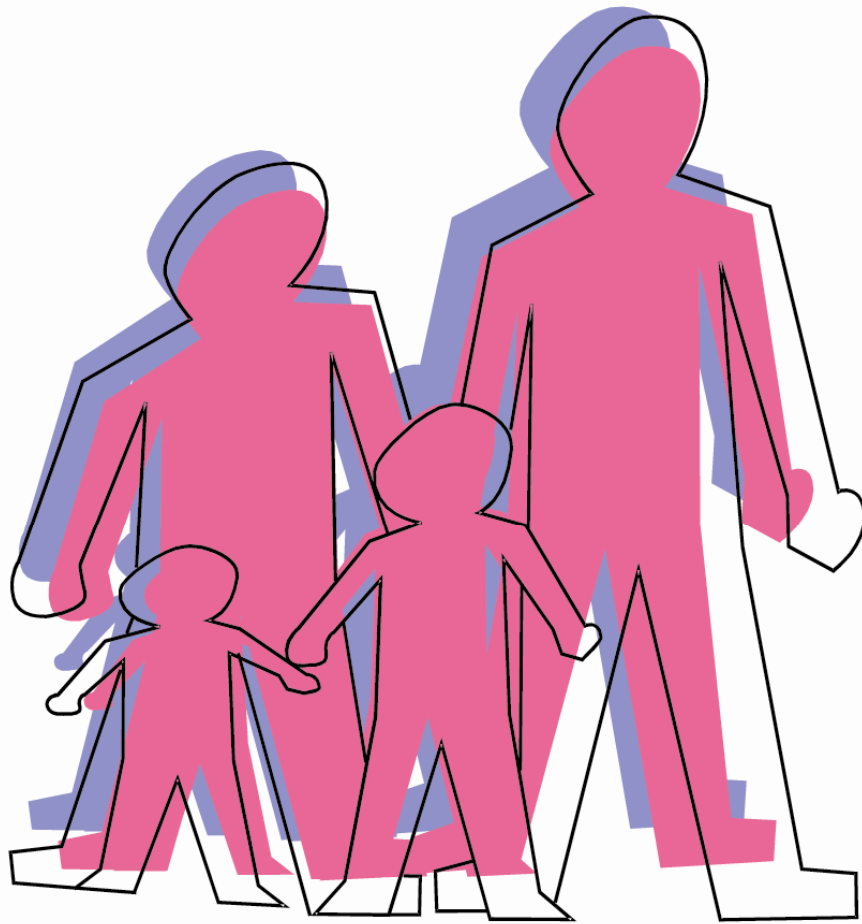


# Is that the reason our children don't mind?



*Tips and advice to learn effective  
parenting skills*

By Jef Gazley, M.S., LMFT  
[www.asktheinternettherapist.com](http://www.asktheinternettherapist.com)

## **Is that the reason our children don't mind?**

It certainly is a cliché that parenting is a tremendously hard job, but it is also true. There are so many different aspects and roles that have to be undertaken. Parents are taxi-cab drivers, doctors, teachers, and caregivers. The amount of care that one has to give is essentially a 24-hour job. There's absolutely no way that a person can be there with a child fully, to interact with them, to teach them and value them and have much of a life of their own. It simply is an overwhelming job. A parent has to do the best that they can. The most difficult part is that one has to be a whole, independent person if they are going to be a good parent. A good parent really cares about themselves, really wants to be a parent and has enough emotional and financial resources to be a good parent. That is often a rarity.

The chances of most parents being individuated and of having had healthy models for their own parenting are extremely slim. It's a job that people don't get training for. There are very few classes for it and most people only take classes after they've already gotten into trouble with parenting. Or they take the classes if they get divorced. They are required in some states, by law, to make sure that they take parenting classes to help with the children. What would be much more effective, of course, is if parenting were offered in schools, like for most other subjects. It would also be helpful if parents had parents who were loving and giving and truly available for them, because if a parent has infantile, childhood needs that have not been met, they very simply cannot be there for the child to the degree the child will need them.

Many parents don't really know much about how children think. In some ways, children are very different, and in some ways, they're very similar to adults. Time for a child is extremely different than time for an adult. For a child, a minute feels like an hour, and so when they hear, "just a moment," they're going to interrupt a person in about twenty seconds, if they're lucky. Five seconds is more likely. The child is not misbehaving. They have waited the right amount of time given the time sense of a child. But oftentimes parents feel that the child is being willful or inconsiderate. In other words, they attach adult thinking and adult reality to the child. If they believe it is misbehavior they're going to want to punish it. If they knew that it was just a mistake in perception they would view the problem more as an educational opportunity. They would understand, detach, and teach. Educating a child is the most difficult part of a parent's job, anyway.

It is imperative that parents teach their children the difference between personhood and behavior. Up until the age of twelve, children are unable to see grey. They are congenitally only able to see black and white. Therefore, if they do poorly on a test, they will take that moment in time, or that particular subject they are studying, and will generalize and decide that they are incredibly stupid. That feeling is about personhood, and personhood has to do with shame. If a person views themselves as a failure, they believe that their core being is insufficient.

If it's about behavior, it's about guilt. In this view behavior is something that is changeable. Behavior is flexible. In general if a person is a good golfer, most days he will go out and play a decent game. But for any particular game he would be totally capable of playing a horrible game, or playing much better than usual. Adults, for the most part, know that the only way to really assess a particular level of expertise is over a 20-year span and 80 per cent of the time. That'll give a rough idea, and one might, at that point, be able to talk about a general characteristic. But the day-to-day fluctuations are simply about behavior. In our society, unfortunately, we mix up the words guilt and shame. Guilt is used in place of shame. Guilt is actually a good thing. Guilt is felt when a mistake is viewed as behavior. Mistakes are viewed as normal in this schema and do not define the individual. The mistake should be taken seriously, apologized for and changed, but shame is something that is never goes away. If a person feels defective in some way, they will never be able to overcome it, but the tendency will be to try. The way people try is to become shameless, god-like, and perfect. That leads to heartache and failure.

A corollary of this problem is there's no real sense of history for a child. Up until the age of twelve, *now* means everything. So if a parent takes a child to a movie, the child is going to come out of the movie and be terribly grateful. However, if they want some ice cream and the parent tells them they can't have it right now, that they need to go home and eat, and maybe have a dessert later, what they'll often hear from the child is, "I hate you. You never do anything for me." It is a very black/white statement, an all-inclusive statement, and very often it confuses the parent completely. They often view the child as being spoiled or misbehaving.

The rules of our society are very black and white themselves. We've had a long history of children parenting children and really wanting to be