

Parenting: Are you helping or hurting your children today?

Russell Viljoen

This past December holiday was most probably the craziest one I have ever had. I spent almost a whole three weeks with my extended family...all 20 - 30 of them! We also spent some time with friends who had younger kids.

What a wild ride! I really enjoyed every minute with them, and we are actually planning to do it again at the end of this year. Madness, I know!

We spent about five days on a guest farm just outside Swellendam, then another week in Cape Town and after that another four days here in Gqeberha. Then I came back to church to something very disturbing that I first noticed while on holiday.

Young parents are really struggling to raise their children in this modern era of technology, social media and human rights (which are sometimes human wrongs).

This is a trend I identified as a high school mathematics teacher for 11 years. Parents were losing the disciplinary battle at an alarming rate. It is a battle which needs to be won early in the war.

Psychologists say the personality and character of a child is formed in the first 7-10 years of their lives. After that, you can only pray and trust the Lord.

Amazingly, I came across this article on social media and found it extremely insightful and helpful. So, without plagiarising I share the insights of paediatric therapist Cindy Ketron below.

My personal comments are in italics.

As a paediatric therapist for more than 30 years, I have come up with a list of what I believe kids need and don't need. I wish I could have a do-over on a few of these.

What kids don't need:

1. Cell phones when they're in *primary school (Grades 1-7)*. Over the years, I cannot tell you one good thing that can come from this. *I know that most parents see a cell phone as a security need, but the truth is that it only makes your child more of a target the younger they are. The rule in my home was that my kids would only get a phone in high school on condition that my wife and I could check it at any time.*
2. Unlimited access to social media. There is very little that is healthy on social media for children, and it is getting worse.
3. So many toys that they can't even think of something to want at birthday or holiday times. Too much of anything leaves children unable to be full. They become like buckets with holes in them.
4. Televisions in their rooms. Rooms are for sleeping. Good sleep hygiene is a dying art for too many children.

5. To be able to control the emotional climate of the home. Moody kids should not be allowed to hold the whole house hostage. If a child wants to be moody, he can go to his room and be moody by himself. Everyone else need not suffer.

6. Too much indoor time. Our kids have become hermits with social media and high tech games. It is ruining their social skills. It's also taking a toll on their physical well-being. *The rule again in my home when my kids were very young was that I would buy them anything to do with playing outside until high school. It worked like a bomb; they still enjoy the outdoors today.*

7. Too many activities outside of school. No wonder this generation is so anxiety-ridden. They are overloaded. If we want to teach them to take care of themselves as they age, we must teach them to do that by our example and by limiting their extracurricular activities. Scripture recognizes the need to rest. *I fully agree that the children are getting far too much homework at school and recent studies have shown that "less or no homework schools" are producing better results and more importantly, better developed children. This excessive homework burden is stressing not only the child but the parents also.*

8. To be able to disrespect any authority. Even authority that you as a parent dislike or the child dislikes should still be respected. There will always be an authority in your child's life even when your child is 50. *Wow...enough said...let me rather not comment.*

9. To always call the shots. Children who get to always choose where to eat, where to play, and what the family does end up being brats.

10. Constant approval and pats on the back. You will not always be around to do this. Children need to learn to be proud of themselves when they do something good whether anyone tells them or not.

What children do need:

1. Rest. They play hard. Their bodies need rest to grow and develop.

2. Uninterrupted family time. The most important people to a child are those under the same roof. Make family time purposeful and protected.

3. Outdoor play time where they can explore and create. All kids need free time to imagine.

4. Rules and expectations. Be clear. Be concise. And don't be afraid to give them.

5. Consistent discipline. If a rule is broken, a child needs to know what to expect. All fear is not a bad thing. There is a fear that can represent respect.

6. Parents who love them and love each other. Security begins here.

7. For you as a parent to say "no" sometimes. Your child does not need a lollipop or a new shirt every time you go to the shops.

8. Hugs. Physical touch affects the development of children.

9. The ability to share their feelings about anything as long as they are respectful.

10. The most precious gift that a parent can give any child is to demonstrate a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus and consistently teach that child through your actions what having faith in God really means. In the toughest times of their lives, they will learn in large part to rely on God by the example you display for them.

In conclusion, I really hope and pray that the above article will motivate parents to be more firm with their children so that they can grow up to raise their own children properly one day and so on...and so on...

Russell Viljoen: Pastor of Ebenezer North Community Church, Jacksonville, Port Elizabeth, with thanks to Cindy Ketron.