

Parenting Foundations

By Jonathan Decker

Lesson 1: Before Becoming a Parent

Ask questions of yourself and have conversations with your partner. You need more than love. You need a plan. You will deviate from the plan, but it's better to start with one.

Questions to ask yourself:

- What do I want to do the same as my parents?
 - What was good?
 - What do I want to duplicate?
- What do I want to do differently from my parents?

If you don't think it through, you'll slide into what you know, for better or worse. Make a plan and write it down. Journal it. We get where we're going intentionally. A big part of parenting is parenting yourself. Parenting will bring up every insecurity, flaw, and weakness.

Kids will mirror you. Work on yourself. What traits do you want your kids to have? They will become what you model for them, so model introspection and accountability. Don't impose gender and role expectations. Let your children be their own people. You teach your children values, not personality. Their personalities are often pre-packaged and molded from there.

Lesson 2: Honoring Free Will

Parents too often see their child as a lump of clay to be molded as they see fit. Kids have a will of their own. Power struggles cause parents and children to gridlock. Kids don't like being controlled just like the rest of us. How do we guide them without controlling them?

Like Master Oogway teaches Po in *Kung Fu Panda*, no matter how hard you try, the seed will grow up to become a peach tree. Your kids are who they are. Trying to force your child to be something they're not will lead to resentment, broken relationships, and/or anxiety and depression. Your role is to nurture the child and believe in them. A child with free will will determine their own destiny. Parenting is stewardship. The owner of the child is the child themselves when they are of age.

How do we give up control? Establish choices with consequences. Making your child do things leads you to go bigger and meaner. You lose the child's respect and affection, replaced by fear.



There's no bond, no influence, and they won't turn to you with problems. You just become an authority figure to rebel against.

Choices with consequences looks like using "if/then" statements to establish boundaries. Kids don't have to obey. It's not your job to make them obey. You teach them that choices have consequences. Sidestep the power struggle. You don't need to get mad. Don't back down on the consequence. Instead, give them consequences that you're willing to enforce.

Lesson 3: Bond Over Traditions

Do not take for granted that your kids will listen to you and be connected to you. You have to do more than provide. Establishing traditions and bonding time assists in forming secure support systems and safety nets. Put in the work for them to trust you with the little things so that they'll trust you with the big things.

Tradition is how you create and nurture bonding. Set aside time without screens. Consider one night a week to set aside time to spend as a family. Share your interests, but also take an interest in what matters to your kids. If it's important to them, make it important to you. You can take care of your children physically and neglect them emotionally. Connection comes from traditions and rituals. When something big comes up in their lives, they will only turn to you if you've taken the time when things were small.

Lesson 4: Parent as Teacher

Your role is to prepare your children for life and to teach them how the world works. Example matters more than anything else. "Do as I say, not as I do" won't fly. Practice what you preach. Help your kids prepare for their relationships.

Teach them values and ethics:

- Accountability and apologizing
- Moral character (lying, stealing, and cheating vs. respect, kindness, and love)
- Work ethic
- Love yourself

If you teach them, you shouldn't blame yourself for the choices they make. If you must be firm, show an increase of love. Don't compare yourself to other families. If you think they don't have problems, you don't know them well enough.



“‘Discipline’ and ‘punishment’ are not synonymous. Punishment suggests hurting, paying someone back for a wrong committed. Discipline implies an action directed toward a goal ... of helping the recipient to improve himself.” — William E. Homan

Lesson 5: Parent as Friend

You can be their friend, but you also have a duty to guide, discipline, and provide structure for them. Children need to feel loved, wanted, and appreciated.

Balance love and discipline. Many parents go to extremes and are too lenient or too strict. They feel that to love their children, they must be pushovers, or to discipline their children, they must be harsh. You’re actually seeking the middle ground. Sacrifice your time, other priorities, and energy to spend with them. BUT make sure you have boundaries, self-care, and expect your children to honor that. Spend individual time with each child. Be playful and affectionate.

Lesson 6: Fight Less, Connect More in Parenting

How parents resolve conflict is how children learn to do it. Instead of harsh words and yelling, work on patience and kindness. Kindness in the partnership is a model for your kids. They’re always watching. Calm communication requires you to be an affirmer.

To be an affirmer:

- Recognize your body signs of anger
- Stop and calm down
- Identify the emotions underneath the anger
- Try to see things from your child’s perspective
- Model vulnerability and accountability by expressing your underlying emotions and practicing perspective-taking

Your children have the right to food, shelter, clothing, and love. Everything else is a privilege. Privileges are tied to behavior and can be used as positive or negative consequences.



Lesson 7: Love Languages in Parenting

We all receive love differently. Love languages are ways that we each prefer to receive love from others. Teach your children to recognize their love language.

There are five love languages:

1. Words of affirmation - supportive, positive, and encouraging words
2. Acts of service - doing helpful things (like household chores) for others
3. Receiving gifts - giving thoughtful, personalized, or extravagant gifts
4. Quality time - spending meaningful time without distractions, giving undivided attention
5. Physical touch - being close and feeling love through touch

Teach your children to recognize and express what makes them feel loved, and see it in others.

Lesson 8: Personalities in Parenting

What works with one child won't necessarily work with another. Every child is unique. Most children are Dreamers by default, but can also be Healers, Thinkers, or Closers.

As parents:

Dreamers struggle when their kids don't like them.

Healers struggle when their kids aren't happy.

Thinkers struggle with perspective-taking and empathy.

Closers struggle with children impeding their goals.

As children:

Dreamers need fun, creativity, and adventure.

Healers need one-on-one connection and comfort.

Thinkers need to be valued for their insights and understanding.

Closers need tasks, incentives, goals, achievements, and rewards.

The solution is self-care and being present with what each child needs. No one has failed who keeps trying. Take the time to know your children, adjust your displays of affection, instruction, bonding, and discipline to the needs and developmental stages of each child.

