

The Secrets to being a Successful Parent Miriam Koenig, M.S., M.F.T.

Successful parents figure out the techniques and strategies that are a good match for them and their children. But there are a few secrets that parents of all persuasions know and practice.

Successful parents know who their children are. They know what drives their children, what scares them, what their passions are and what makes them who they are. They are not parents who try to shape their kids into what they want them to be. Rather, they are parents who help their children figure out what they want to be and who take pleasure in sharing that journey. They understand that what works for one child may not work for another and they adapt their parenting to the specific needs of each child.

Successful parents love their children. That may seem obvious, but one should never overlook the obvious. Successful parents love their children for *who they are*. While it sounds simple, many parents want their child to be someone other than who he is – perhaps they want an athletic child instead of an artistic child or want their child to share their interests and passions. Children – especially babies and young children – need lots of love. They need to be held and they need to be told they are loved. There is a falling-in-love period between parent and child that is healthy, desirable and necessary. It's the basic foundation that every child needs.

Successful parents understand that they are in charge and their children need them to be in charge. Children do not need to live in a family in which everyone functions in the same capacity. They need to feel that there is someone in charge who knows what's best. They need their parents to be genuine authority figures. This is comforting and reassuring to a child. As much as a small child (and later a teenager) may defiantly state, "you can't make me", they want to know that you can run things. They want to know that when they fall apart, you can pick up the pieces. Being in charge does not mean screaming or constantly announcing that you are in charge. Parents who are in charge don't need to yell and threaten.

So what defines an "in charge" parent? These parents are consistent. Their kids can count on them because they follow through with what they say. If they offer an incentive for a changed behavior, they follow through. If they say there will be a consequence, they enforce what they have said. One of

the most effective teachers I have ever known never raised her voice. Every child in her room felt known and loved. Her classroom ran smoothly because each child knew what was expected and each child knew that she followed through. She had a clipboard with her at all times and made checks next to the names of children breaking the class rules. All she had to do was look across a room at a child who was talking out of turn, clear her voice and glance at the clipboard, and the child would quiet down. This was not because she had some special magic; it's because she had proven herself to be consistent. They knew what to expect from her. Kids thrive when there is consistency.

This is the secret: many parents are ineffective with regard to discipline, because they don't follow through on what they say. A child who doesn't believe that you mean what you say is not going to respond to you. Say you've announced that you want your children to pick up their toys before you go out and they don't do it. If you scoop the toys into the bin on your way out while you express your displeasure, you've sent a powerful message. You have told them that you didn't really mean that they had to pick up the toys before they left. Contrast that to the following parent. She walks in, looks around and says, "Oh, I see the toys aren't put away. We'll leave when they are put away." She then sits down and reads a magazine. The key – and successful parents know this – is not to make an idle threat. Many parents say things they are unprepared to back up.

If you would like a personal consultation on parenting, or are interested in a parenting workshop, please contact me at Miriam@miriamkoenig.com or at 818-783-4032.