

PARENT CONVERSATIONS

Am I the only parent who doubts herself so much that one minute I'm nervous that I'm being too strict and then the next I'm worried that I'm too much of a softy? Parenting is so high stakes that finding the right balance is important, but it sure isn't easy. Our authors this month provide just the Christian encouragement I need to keep moving forward with the confidence that God is by my side.

—Nicole Balza

HOW CAN PARENTS FIND THE BALANCE BETWEEN BEING TOO RESTRICTIVE AND TOO PERMISSIVE?

PARENTING IS a balancing act. Often we have a hard time seeing clearly that we are too far to one side until after the fact. Many parents, including myself, fall into habits that are based on emotion and may not realize that we need to adjust our approach until we see behavior or reactions in our children that are undesirable or worrisome. We may also become so consumed with the busyness of life that we are not always mindful of how parenting decisions we make now might impact the future. It's easy to conclude, "Parenting is difficult! Why don't children come with an instruction manual?"

Thankfully, we do have guidance on how to approach our children—and I'm not referring to the long list of parenting books you can find online. If you read many of those, your head will spin with the wide variety of approaches and opinions. As Christians, we can lean on the Bible for guidance.

GOD'S ENCOURAGEMENT FOR PARENTS

I find it interesting, although not surprising, that God gives us what we need to know, and it matches what researchers in psychology and development have found.

- God tells us that raising children is a responsibility to take seriously.
- God tells us that we need to be consistent so as not to confuse our children.
- God tells us that discipline includes being firm (having limits) while also showing love (which doesn't mean we have to give in).
- God tells us that we are role models and need to consider our influence on our children.

- God tells us that parenting includes teaching and encouraging.

The most important advice you will not find in psychology: God tells us to train our children in his Word and follow his commands. Because we all fall short of these things daily, we also have—and can teach our children—forgiveness through Christ's death and resurrection. See how God treats us and teaches us, and you will have all you need to find the right balance.

MY ENCOURAGEMENT FOR PARENTS

Since parenting requires a balance between being warm and gentle while also providing structure and control, parents need to consider where their own strengths and weaknesses might be. When possible, it is good to rely on your spouse and work together toward this balance as each parent has his or her own strengths that can benefit the children. If you have a soft spot that might cause you to give in

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often to your children, consider how to firm up. If you are often firm and rigid in teaching your children right and wrong, consider how to show them emotional support and connection. Children need both in a consistent and predictable manner. Remember, it's important to support each other in parenting as many parents find themselves fighting about how to raise their children.

The trend in parenting today is to let children lead, and many parents believe they are being good parents if their children like them and are pleased with their parenting. When teaching children, you will find it difficult if the goal is to make them happy. Good parents will upset their children frequently (e.g., "Eat your vegetables," "Time for bed"). Understanding that trend, I need the reminder I share with everyone else: It is important that your children learn how to deal with frustration, to struggle or fail sometimes, to be bored and problem solve, and to handle responsibility. We parents need to create an environment where they can learn these things. We need to set limits and follow through so our children know what to expect, all the while showing them love and support as we guide them through the challenges of life.



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I **STRUGGLED** writing this. After solitude with God, I realized why—I don't have an answer. Thinking about the balance between being too restrictive and too permissive, it seems as if I have control over what my kids do and don't do. While that was truer when they were little, that is far from true as they get older. Sadly, there is no formula. The closest thing we have are these words from 1 Corinthians 6:12, " 'Everything is permissible for me,' but not everything is beneficial" (Christian Standard Bible). So instead of the perfect formula, I will share with you a few random thoughts that my husband, Tad, and I have learned in our 21 years of parenting.

WHAT IS PERMISSIBLE?

Honestly? The answer is anything other than sin. However, Tad and I have chosen things that were more about our comfort than what God allows. That isn't necessarily wrong. However, I'm sad that often this was our motiva-

tion instead of what would help our children grow.

GUARDRAILS

A few years back our pastor did a sermon series on guardrails. What boundaries do we put into place to protect our children from the world and from themselves? There is a tension in what that looks like. This tension changes as they grow older. It also changes with each individual child. We learned to include our children in the decisions on what those guardrails are. It is easier for them to buy in, and oftentimes their guardrails are stricter than what Tad and I would choose.

CONSEQUENCES FOR OUR CHILDREN

We rely on natural consequences more than imposing our consequences on them. The scary thing is that as they grow older, the consequences become greater. Tad and I work on giving them a safe place to land while still feeling the sting of the consequence. This is challenging because it is so uncomfortable to watch our children be uncomfortable with the consequences they experience. Again, it is important for us as parents to be thinking about the well-being of our children over our comfort as their parents. Children need to feel the effects of their decisions.

CONSEQUENCES FOR US AS PARENTS

Whether we are too permissive or too restrictive, Tad and I feel the consequences of our decisions. Decisions on which battles to fight. Decisions as to how to fight them. Decisions on the consequences we will impose. We have learned to ask for forgiveness—from God and from our children. We mess up a lot. They know it. We know it. Forgiveness is key.

OUTCOMES

While we don't know the outcomes for our children, we know who holds their outcomes. It isn't us. It is our heavenly Father, who loves them more than we do. And he loves us, imperfect parents on whom he showers his grace. Through it all, I am so grateful to be able to watch my children grow into who God wants them to be—even in their imperfections, their wanderings, and their struggles.



Jenni Schubring and her husband, Tad, are currently parenting their two youngest children and navigating their change of roles as their three adult children are now living on their own.

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