

# Introduction

## Parenting in Windows

### Raising Beaut Kids

Recipes for **parents** on when to say 'yes'

and how to say 'no'

Welcome to **Raising Beaut Kids**: Recipes for parents on when to say 'yes' and how to say 'no', a magazine styled 'parenting cookbook' filled with resourceful, relational recipes to steer parents in the best directions to build better behaviours in children.

**Beaut Kids** just don't happen! Children begin life by being naturally impulsive, immature and self-motivated. This is because they are young, inexperienced, growing and frantic to belong. In the midst of all this, kids and teens look to parents to show sound judgement, compassionate leadership and the capacity to develop predictable structures, boundaries and routines. Kids need parents who can make the tough calls when required, even when making these tough calls inconveniences parents a little. In short, our kids need parents that know 'when to say yes, how to say no'.



#### **Being a parent – what a test!**

In the beginning parenthood seems so natural.

Most of us never dream the extent to which our children will challenge us, and push our intellectual and emotional growth. We don't realise that they trigger a second stage of growth in human beings. They grow us up! It's from being a mum or a dad that we learn so much more about ourselves, and it isn't always pleasant or painless. Our kids provide us with powerful evidence about our temperament, anxieties, frailties, fears, dreams and hopes, lost opportunities and how we deal with these. In reflective moments, some of us begin to see that our children's behaviour, just like our own, has a purpose. It's always trying to

tell us something, and we must be smart enough to figure out what it's really saying. We also need to be honest enough to acknowledge how their behaviour makes us 'feel'. Only then, can we look at whether our response is actually refining their behaviour and improving our relationship with them. Yes, Raising Beaut Kids has as much to do with our relationship with them as it has to do with shaping their behaviour – the two go hand in hand.

when things get tough. Life with kids is always easier when we retain a respectful and friendly air - the notion of keeping the big picture in focus, not sweating over the small stuff and being mindful of our moods and emotional tone. Life also improves when we deliberately construct opportunities to connect; times to talk, listen, share, laugh and play. On the flip side, just watch the kids bite back, withdraw or become reactive when we get too snippy at them for too long!

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#### **The all-important 'relationship' balance**

As parents, the best way to keep our 'relationship' with the kids in check is by continually reviewing what our interactions with them look and sound like, especially

Parents who know 'when to say yes and how to say no' are able to make expectations clear, or, when necessary, let the kids matter-of-factly experience the consequences of poor choices, whether they just happen or are intelligently imposed.

# Introduction

## Parenting in Windows

### Learn your style by parenting in windows

A helpful way to think about how our kids experience our parenting style - how we lead and use authority - is to use the Social Control Window (McCold and Wachtel, adapted from Glaser, 1969). It offers two broad styles of 'parenting' or 'being in authority'.

#### Style one:

##### *Firmness, how 'strict' our kids see us as being*

When we are high on firmness we set tight behavioural boundaries so our kids experience the limits fast. When they don't meet our expectations we call them on it to keep them accountable. "What consequences should be dished out, and how tough should they be?" are key questions asked by parents who work at this high end of firmness.

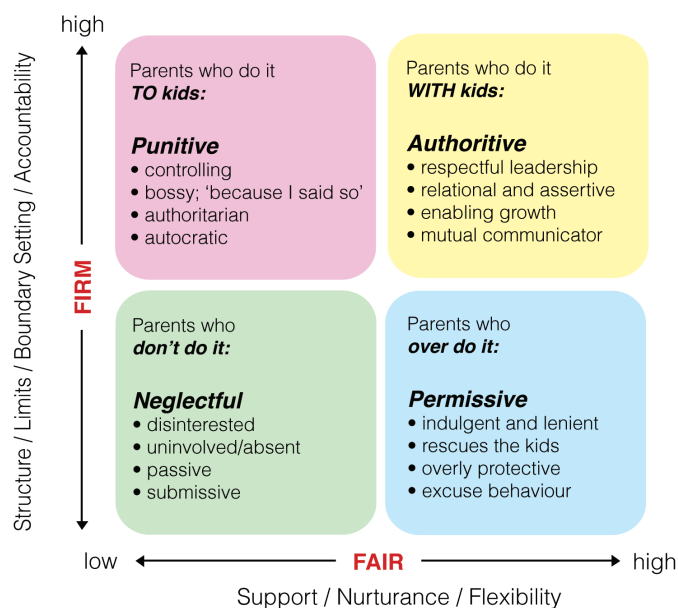
#### Style two:

##### *Fairness, how 'nice' our kids see us as being*

When we are high on fairness we're absorbed by encouraging approaches; flexibility, nurturance, tolerance, and leniency. We try to be highly sensitive to the needs of the kids. We value good relationships with our children and always try to understand what might be driving their behaviour. Sometimes our quest to be flexible and fair can trigger us to make too many excuses for them.

As we merge these two general 'parenting styles' into the Social Control Window you can see that four possible leadership styles are generated.

### The Social Control Window



Adapted from Wachtel & McCold (2001)

Remember, your style is the one that your kids experience, it's not the window you 'think' you work from, or 'wish' you could work from. Hey, don't despair, because in truth, all of us spend time in each of the four windows. The length and intensity of our visits are ruled by our emotional states; moods, motivations, engagement, levels of stress, how fresh we feel and other life forces. Most of us are able to identify a window we tend to live in, a window we default to when the going gets tough, and a window that would be healthier to spend a lot more time in.

So, let's begin the unveiling! But, try not to interpret each window as a 'good' or 'bad' parenting style. This exercise isn't about rating one window against another; after all there are fifty shades of grey on the fairness and firmness continuums. We're far more concerned with understanding the range of helpful strategies we have to choose from when managing our kids.

# Introduction

## Parenting in Windows



### **Punitive parenting**

You're in authority! You've got to be the boss, got to have the final say and know how to deliver the sting in your tail so it hurts. You are strict, demanding and controlling, but offer the kids little emotional support and empathy. The famous Barbara Coloroso, in "Kids Are Worth It!" described you as a 'brick-wall parent'. Got the idea? Sure, you love the kids deeply, but believe that if they're to turn out well you have to be demanding of high standards. As a 'Tiger Mum' or 'Tiger Dad' you insist on the '3R's': right, respect and responsibility. You keep the lid on unruly behaviour by closely supervising their thoughts, controlling their friendships, school activities and pushing them in directions that you believe best. You believe that you do this for their benefit because without your relentless input they could very well lose their way in life. That 'slippery slope' is never far away!

You've learnt to trot out emotionally confronting phrases and threats to the kids when things aren't going so well; "you must," "you will," "you won't," "I want," "I want it," "I want it now," "how many times do I have to ask," "if you make me ask one more time you'll

lose your...," "don't make me come over there" and "don't you dare!" You never admit your mistakes openly and don't apologise to the kids when you make mistakes that affect them. In your eyes these are displays of weakness that the kids may take advantage of.

Sometimes you sense disapproval from friends and relations about the

uncompromising way you manage the kids, but you justify what you do because they don't know your kids like you do. Nor do they have the 'special insights' into your children that you do.

When things go wrong, just as they do for all of us, your attention is on what went wrong, finding the culprit and finding a way to let them feel your disapproval, scorn or revenge. You regularly hear yourself saying, "whose

fault was that?" "who's to blame?" or "what's the right punishment?" You quickly take on the role of detective, judge and executioner. Your motive is always to rebalance the scales of justice and bring the kids back in line so they learn their lesson quick smart. Rarely does the chosen consequence take into account how others may have been affected by their actions, and how those in trouble might make amends with others for their misdeed. The fact is that one of your rules has been broken and to maintain order, someone has to feel the sting. Without this, the family could slip into anarchy.

Sadly, those who manage their children exclusively from this window draw from a very narrow tool box and rely on how loud they can yell, how intimidating they can be or how much they can take away from their children. These tools make some kids nervy, and motivate others to be confrontational, oppositional and highly reactive. And, as kids grow into young teens, there is usually a point where they begin to seek fabulous entertainment from a mum or dad's predictable and emotionally charged reactions - the punitive buttons are so much fun to push and parents become sport for kids. Despite your supposed power and your longwinded rants, they've

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sussed you out and work around you when they have to, or want to. In the end, you have taught your kids a highly controlling and confrontational way to deal with others which will affect their social relationships, and may very well come back to bite you the day they grow to a size that makes them your physical match.

# Introduction

## Parenting in Windows



### *Neglectful parenting*

You offer little support and guidance to your kids. You are unavailable to give them the love and attention all children need to attach to their parents. You're not strict, nor are you emotionally responsive - actually, nothing much is happening between you and the kids. In your own way you love them, but they just take more time, energy and effort than you have, well, at least at the moment.

Truth is, there may be very good reasons for this. You may be struggling with poor health, relationship issues, depression, alcohol abuse, substance addictions or perhaps you're overwhelmed by impossible financial pressures. And, if you do have plenty of money, rather than giving the kids your time and affection, you shower them with the latest toys and gadgets instead. The supply of material possessions has become your interface and you spoil them, hoping the things you buy will fill the void that your emotional absence has created. Even worse, perhaps you have a wildly mistaken belief that dragging children up without loving connectedness will toughen them up, readying them to

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deal with the hardships that await them in the future? Or, even grimmer, you may be contending with a genuinely disconnected personality where it is difficult for you to reach out and consistently show affection. In the final analysis, regardless of what motivates your neglect, your expectations and contact with the kids become small because this lessens the likelihood of discussions and disputes with them.

We know what you're thinking. You've just taken the moral high ground and believe there's no way you could possibly fit into the neglectful window. Not so - we've all been here from time to time. Think back; what about that Sunday afternoon when the kids were driving you mad? Remember

feeling annoyed, fed-up and over them. Remember, distancing yourself from them, choosing not to respond, ignoring behaviours that really shouldn't have been ignored. For a mini-moment you placed yourself in the neglectful window. There is no judgement here. Our point is that we need to acknowledge it happens, and we need to be aware when it's happening to determine whether it is appropriate in that moment.



# Introduction

## Parenting in Windows

### Permissive parenting

A permissive style is in direct contrast to parents who rely on heavy handed punitive tactics. As a permissive or 'jellyfish parent' you offer the kids loads of care and encouragement - you love them to bits! You're not strict, rarely consistent and don't follow through when it comes to following expectations and applying consequences. You don't have the capacity to set up structures, rules, routines and expectations in their lives. You tend to serve them in an easy-going, lenient and 'friendshipy' style. You've replaced 'relationship' with 'friendship'. You love being their friend and quietly admit that your kids are the 'best friends' you always dreamt of. Given the complication, it's easy to see why you excuse and downplay your children's obnoxious and tricky behaviours. You are their most fervent supporter and take massive offence to those who challenge your kids at school, in the local playground or at the supermarket, even when they need to be challenged about their anti-social behaviour. You are their greatest protector and excuser. You are the classic 'helicopter' or 'cottonwool' parent. Others see this but you don't.

You may make light of your children's less-than social behaviour by documenting your highly embarrassing outings with your kids on facebook. You've given up on the dream that your children will ever be well behaved in waiting rooms or supermarkets. You've decided your children are especially 'spirited' and that there are two types of kids: the calm and compliant ones that the lucky parents get, and kids like yours. You think it's just luck of the draw! Make no mistake, you're in deep denial!

The illusion created by your denial means that you are blind to your permissiveness. You have little or no self-awareness and because of this, you take in what others say through your permissive parent lens. Yes, you're always inclined to reinterpret sensible parenting advice and use it permissively. To illustrate this dominant

permissive trait, a couple we worked with during our 'What's the Buzz?' social skills program ([www.whatsthebuzz.net.au](http://www.whatsthebuzz.net.au)) were given advice to use the 90%/10% rule with their daughter. This sensible 'rule of thumb' promotes the idea that parents try to shift what they focus on by tactically ignoring 90% of their child's slightly irritating, attention seeking behaviour, and focus on the 10% of behaviours, misbehaviours, that really matter. This permissive couple's interpretation was to completely ignore their daughter's disruptive and inconsiderate behaviour, and disregard the use of consequences or the notion of accountability. The 'permissive parent lens' has a lot to answer for!

Despite your blinkers, you do have one reoccurring source of frustration. It's when the kids end up being disrespectful to get their way. Your first reaction to their rude behaviour is to apologise to them for not delivering what they want, even when the demand is unreasonable.

***You fear saying 'no' to them because you worry about the threat of reprisal - they know that you'll back down.***

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# Introduction

## Parenting in Windows

What you haven't grasped is the reason why they push you to breaking point. All kids push to work out how far you'll let them go in order to find where the limits are. Your poor kids are literally 'feeling their way in the dark' for a wall that never stays still and leaves them feeling out of control. A child's search and discovery of boundaries is vital to help them to feel secure; it's all a part of belonging, attaching, fitting in and feeling safe. Your child's behaviour is actually a plea – "please show me where the boundaries are so I can stop!" You just haven't worked this out yet.

Suddenly, when you are pushed too far you SNAP! As soon as you snap, you become a raging 'brick-wall' parent. Your talk becomes nasty and your response is hard hitting, often vengeful. When five minutes in time out would have done (which you were typically unwilling to enforce), you find yourself removing their iPod for a month, telling them how much you sacrifice for them to make sure they have nice things and how you don't deserve to be treated this way. It's your desperate attempt to restore what you see as a rightful balance to the relationship. Then, when

you hand the hard hitting punishments out, the kids become resentful, surly and angry because you were too severe.

A few hours later, or the next day, once your emotion has settled and your guilt has caught up, you know that you acted too quickly and spoke too harshly. So, to make things 'right' you jump back to being lax, lenient and laissez-faire. You return to your reluctance to use sensible, well placed consequences. It's what you know. It's become a well-honed habit. From time to time you'll deliver an exaggerated apology for your overblown actions, but it's all about sucking back up to the kids.

You wouldn't be surprised to learn that kids exposed to this swinging situation often end up confused. The influence of you jumping from one window to another on children is muddling. They lose their 'sense of self'; their esteem, and what they are really capable of. Over time these kids become highly vulnerable as they are often attracted to marginalised groups, such as gangs, cults and bullies who have a worrying power over them because they yearn for a sense of structure, belonging and consistency



# Introduction

## Parenting in Windows

### Authoritative parenting

The research supports authoritative parenting as most effective for Raising Beautiful Kids. Working in this window you offer the kids high levels of understanding, encouragement, nurturance and love. Likewise, you make expectations clear by cooperatively developing suitable limits, structures and boundaries.

You read your kids well because you're actively involved in their lives - you choose to know them. You sit together as a family for dinner, you gently encourage conversation, you know what they do and how they feel about things, you value honest communication and expect helpful behaviours from your kids. You know they won't always get it right, and when they make mistakes, you'll let them know and be prepared to walk alongside them offering succinct guidance as it's needed. You understand the balance between encouraging their independence, smothering them, offering too much advice and being too critical.

Mostly, you try to create an air of warmth and respect. However, when a problem does arise you're able to deal with it so the kids are left feeling relatively comfortable about the re-direction. They won't thank you for it, but you can live with being out of their favour for a while because you are a secure grown-up. In fact, the act of re-direction often strengthens connections between the kids and you. And, when it is you who makes a mistake, you're able to apologise



to your kids sincerely. You're rarely challenged by the everyday problems and conflicts that crop up because you understand they are inevitable - that's life! Instead, you try to seize on these setbacks and hiccups as valuable learning opportunities for the kids.

You recognise that respect has less to do with you being 'the mother' or 'the father', and much more to do with how you get along with each other. You talk regularly with them, whether it is informally or at organised family meetings. As you talk you deliberately use words and phrases such as "us" "we" and "our family", encouraging that family unity is highly prized. You constantly follow up, revisit and adapt rules and expectations in an emotionally steady manner, giving everyone a say. Your talk is centred on ways to find improvement, repair and strengthen relationships and make things right again when they go wrong.

***Well, there you have it; that's the Social Control Window. Doesn't it clarify how we parent, how we see ourselves and how others see us?***

- What did you learn about your parenting style?
- Do you know which window your instinctive attitudes influence you to 'live in'?
- Does the management style you rely on at home mirror how you manage at work, or in public?
- Have you worked out, when the pressure is really on, which window do you snap into?
- Is your parenting style working for you?
- Is it likely to work for you in the future as the kids mature?

### Your homework

The next time you're faced with one of those 'classically tricky moments' with the kids, ask yourself;

Which window do I 'feel' like reacting from?

Should I move to another window?

If I need to move, how can I gather the energy and poise to do this?

Which window is most likely to result in a constructive solution, and has a good chance of keeping our relationship intact?

In the end, parents who Raise *Beautiful Kids* know how to apply 'when to say **yes**, how to say **no**'.

