

## How to Survive Parenting an Introduction

*By Mike Witzky*

Being a parent is not a simple job. We need to keep in mind that the primary goal of parenting is to prepare our children for the time when they are able to take over the adult responsibilities by having the skills necessary to make independent decisions and live with the consequences. Nested in this goal is the need to have a good value system and decision making abilities.

In the last article, I discussed how important it is to understand the phases of development from childhood through the teen years. Just as the saying goes, “You have to crawl before you walk and walk before you run.” It is important for parents to have some idea about the stages (phases) of emotional, mental and social development through which children grow. For parents that have two or three children, this task becomes even more important and complex especially when the children are at different developmental stages.

We sometimes want to treat all our children the same. This is not only impossible but probably not the best idea. Take for example the family that has a teenager and a pre-teen. These children are clearly at different developmental stages and need to be dealt with differently. When parents take the one size fits all approach, we can wind up either being too permissive with the younger child or too restrictive with the older one. This is not to say that in many areas of family life what you do for one child you may also do for the others. This is a matter of fairness that has nothing to do with the stage of development.

Lets look at an example. This is most clearly seen in families where there is a middle school and an elementary school aged child. For several years, both children may have shared the same developmental stage and the differences in parenting approach were based on the differences in the children themselves. A big shift occurs emotionally, socially and cognitively when a child begins to move into the early teen years, from ages 12 to 14. Parents need to recognize this and find ways to support them through this transitional phase. We often see things like later bed times, wanting to be out with friends more and exposure to PG 13 material. They also may want more independence than they are ready for. The younger sibling is going to want to be allowed to do some of the same things and will challenge you when you say “no” with “That’s not fair”. This is where an explanation is necessary and the child needs to be assured that they will have the same privileges when they reach that age, but for now they aren’t allowed to do some of the things their older sibling is doing.

You may also hear the older child says “Why does she get to do that – I wasn’t able to do that at her age.” This may be true or may be incorrect and they need to be reminded that they were able to do that at the same age. It also may be a correct observation. You may not have let the older child do something that you are now allowing the younger child to do. This may be due to the differences in the children not a developmental issue at all. Each child is different and we need to respect that and learn how to apply these general concepts in ways that take into consideration these differences.

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Again, an explanation may be necessary. How well this explanation is accepted is another matter altogether. Sibling rivalry is usually at work here and deserves an article all its own.

I use the above example to show the importance in knowing something about what a parent can expect to encounter as their children grow up. No one ever said that parenting would be easy but we don't have to "reinvent the wheel" either. This series of articles will provide specific information about childhood development and some practical applications to parenting.

If you think your child may benefit from professional assistance, please go to the "Find a Service Provider" section of the BHG Web site <http://www.bhg.org> to locate a behavioral healthcare agency in your county.

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