

Parent Traps

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Do you frequently feel exasperated, ashamed, or embarrassed by your child's behaviour? Do you find that your child often irritates you? Do you have to threaten and shout to get your child to cooperate? Do you frequently argue with your partner about how to handle your child's behaviour?

If the answer to some of these questions is yes, then you might have become caught in what I call a parent trap.

The criticism trap involves frequent and unnecessary power struggles with your child typically resulting in escalating criticism, threats, yelling and finally hitting. This type of discipline often backfires, with the parent's anger leading to resentment and further hostility. If these kinds of battles take place frequently, its time to try a new way of handling the situation.

The leave them alone trap involves the parent simply ignoring their child when they are behaving well. If good behaviour is taken for granted it may be replaced with the misbehaviour that receives so much attention. A basic principle of positive parenting is the praising and rewarding of behaviours you would like to see more often.

The for the sake of the children trap occurs when parents in unhappy marriages stick doggedly to the same marriage routines, for the sake of the children, rather than addressing the problems constructively. Research shows that children who live in families with a lot of conflict and stress develop more emotional and behavioural problems than those raised in stable families regardless of whether that stable family is a one- or two-parent family.

The perfect parent trap is the result of the desire to be perfect rather than just competent. There is no such thing as a perfect parent and trying to be one will only lead to disappointment, resentment, guilt, and feelings of inadequacy. It's better to realise that parenting has elements of both a learned skill and an ongoing loving relationship between individuals.

The martyr trap is one where parents become so over-involved in the task of parenting they neglect their own needs. The parents' relationship suffers and may end in feelings of dissatisfaction and resentment. Quality parenting takes place when adults have their own lives in balance.

Find more parenting tips at: manitoba.ca/triplep or call 945-4777 in Winnipeg or toll-free 1-877-945-4777.

Professor Matt Sanders is founder of the Triple P - Positive Parenting Program.

