

1-2-3 Magic PARENTING

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Parenting: The Dream vs. The Reality



Dealing successfully with your own children and being a good parent involves praising your children, listening to them and having fun with them. It also involves managing kids' difficult behavior—gently but effectively. Reading a story at bedtime is easy; so is taking the kids to a movie or teaching them how to ride a bike. Those activities are part of the reality of parenting. What's not so easy is managing sibling rivalry, deciding what to do with the child who gets out of bed thirty times, or handling the youngster who whines incessantly with very little provocation. These aggravations and dilemmas are also part of the reality of parenting.

A lot of bad parenting, as well as abusive parenting, starts with frustrated expectations. Ironically, those parents who have the most trouble managing their anger toward their children stubbornly hang on to their pleasant images about raising kids. In their minds, kids should always be cooperative and enjoyable. Anything else just isn't right. There's no room for the many unanticipated negatives that come along with having children.

Parents who have not successfully made the transition from enjoying the parenting dream to accepting the parenting reality sound like this when they talk to their kids:

"What's the matter with you!?"

"How many time do I have to tell you!?"

"When are you going to learn!?"

"That's it! THAT'S IT! I've had it!!!"

"Are you trying to drive me crazy!?"

"What is your problem?"

Statements like these indicate expectations that are off-base—way off-base. Underlying these angry verbal blasts are thoughts such as "No other parents have to put up with this. Something's wrong with my kid. Something's wrong with me. This isn't right and it's not fair. Parenting young children is not supposed to be like this."

The Reality

Yes, it is supposed to be like this. Kids are just kids. They don't always cooperate and they're not always fun. Behaviors like whining, tantrums and sibling rivalry certainly aren't fun but they are a normal part of childhood. And learning how to manage them well—without excessive anger or abusiveness—is part of the reality of being a parent.

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