

Parenting just gets more complicated

Mark Pavilons



Children.

Seemed like such a good idea we had three of them.

What were we thinking?

Don't get me wrong, parenting adds a really neat dynamic to the human journey. It just seems odd to leave the fate of humankind in the hands of, well, untrained parents.

And so, in making this leap of faith, we have now become the parents, leaders, mentors, guides and caretakers of three human beings. These human beings have yet to assert themselves on the fabric of society, but in their own worlds, they've likely made a difference, one person at a time.

My eldest, who recently turned 17, has turned into quite the solid young adult. She's athletic, assertive, strong, smart and compassionate beyond belief. She's a world traveller and embraces people of all cultures and lifestyles. At such a young age she already fully grasps the concept of the 'spice of life.'

She took on part-time jobs to raise the money for her excursions. With her drama class, her next stop is Los Angeles, and Hollywood. Look out!

She's a leader in her own right, but doesn't realize it. I know she touches hearts and her large group of friends are lucky to have her in their lives.

Right now I'm helping to teach her to drive. She's looking toward the future and trying to figure out what to take at university and what to do with her life.

Oh boy! Apparently guidance counsellors no longer 'guide,' so it's up to us to send her on her journey. It's not easy, to be sure. How many of us, at 17 or 18, knew what we wanted to do with our lives?

Even though we've had 17 years to prepare, we're no closer to paving the way for her. My wife and I have seen a ton of changes in the past 30 years and there will undoubtedly be even more in the years to come.

My crystal ball has long since faded. My powers of prediction have waned. My ESP is not as sharp as it once was.

Just the other day, Lexie asked me an interesting question. 'Dad, what's the role of a parent?'

Wow. Well, in a nutshell, parents try their best to prepare their children for the future. We give them all the tools, skills, self-confidence, support, backing and emotional strength to tackle the ups and downs they will encounter. Our love is unconditional. While we keep one hand on the leash we've woven over the years, we know we have to allow some slack, and eventually let go completely.

Lexie has had a boyfriend for about a year now. Boys.

I was a teenage boy once.

Fortunately, the good head on her shoulders comes from her mom, but I'm always ready to chime in, because chiming in is another

parental responsibility.

Advice on teenage romance, though, is a touchy subject. They say girl children try to find partners that resemble their dads, but I'm not convinced that's true. I think our young try to find partners with good qualities they admire that complement their own.

I try to remain in the loop, but her mom handles those delicate things.

But I do encourage her to chat, or ask me about anything. They're under the impression I'm an expert on every subject, mainly because that's what I've told them. But I think they know the truth. But what I can offer is an opinion, anecdotes, bits of wisdom and some pithy witticisms.

I've been chastised by my eldest on more than one occasion for being a tad immature and not rising to the challenges at hand. Even though most men retain a bit of that inner child, mine apparently surfaces too often for their liking. What can I say, I'm misunderstood! I've had my share of serious situations, life and death scenarios, so I truly believe levity is key in maintaining our sanity.

Back to my first born girl child. I know that often first loves are followed by first heart-reaks and that will require a lot of consolation.

On to the middle child, my son Liam. He will turn 15 in a couple of weeks and he shares a birthday with his mom.

His voice is changing and that caught everyone by surprise. When did this happen?? When did he grow six inches?? Just what the heck is going on?

Just a while ago, he was playing with toys and video games and now he's becoming a young man. Where's the chapter on that in the parents' handbook?

Girls. Boys and girls. Oh man.

I never asked my dad for advice on women. In all honesty, I don't know much more about them today than I did when I was a teen myself. And now I have to pass the torch to my son. Fortunately, I'm a good storyteller and since I've convinced them I know everything, it shouldn't be too hard, right?

My wife is not anxious to have him start dating, but alas, we can't stop what's programmed in our DNA. He has a Grade 8 formal coming up later this year, and while we'll send him out in spiffy duds, the rest is up to him. Dear, old dad can arm him with plenty of one-liners and tips on swagger, he'll have to rely on his own charm.

How long does this last?

Our youngest, at 9, is already wise beyond her years. She's a smart cookie and already knows what she wants to do and the type of man she wants to marry. We've had a few general talks, but unfortunately themes in TV sitcoms and playground banter reign supreme.

Fortunately, I'm blessed with a full head of hair, so I can afford to lose many, many strands.

Serenity now!

We learn by doing. Like it or not, parenting is an ongoing process, fraught with inherent weaknesses. Setting a good example may not be easy all the time, but it's vital.

Good luck everyone!