

Parenting requires tilting your head a bit

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"Be happy. Stop being who you are!"

These words came not from a parent or counsellor.

These were uttered by my 11-year-old daughter, who tried to get me out of a funk recently. She's quite astute, even though she's still struggling with pre-teen emotions and doesn't really have



a handle on grown-up issues.

A lack of self-confidence, dented by a childhood filled with awkwardness and acne, still lingers in this older soul.

I'd call myself a classic under-achiever, despite my intelligence. I had book smarts, and many years in the journalism business gave me a certain amount of "wisdom." I compensated any self-perceived shortcomings with a rapier-sharp wit and sense of humour. No, humility has never been a problem!

We have a great education and support system in this province of ours. We have some great mentors, if we know where to look and how to appreciate them. We have many resources to draw upon for information, social etiquette and interaction. Our kids today have access to many tools to help them succeed and be decent social creatures.

And yet, stress among our teens is at an all-time high. Depression is rampant. Bullying, despite all efforts to stamp out this evil, still exists.

Our children are taught many things, but nowhere in any curriculum is there a course on self-esteem.

This fragile ingredient is perhaps one of the most important human qualities.

Self-esteem, which translates into passion, confidence, assertiveness and drive, serves a person so well in life. And yet there is nowhere a person can go to get their fill, or even a top-up of this vital fuel for the soul.

Try as we may, parents may be ill equipped to feed our children their daily requirements of such things. We spoon-feed them a diet of encouragement, ego-inflating words of praise and we temper our harshness, all in the name of protecting their fragile egos. We dance around, worrying about damaging them for life.

I'm often criticized by my better half for not being supportive enough, or saying the wrong thing. I believe that kids need an equal amount of support and honest criticism. I don't believe that holding their hands all the time will sufficiently motivate them to take risks, study hard or climb the ladder. They need a reality check from time to time, and I believe it's my job to give it to them. Better me, than getting kicked in the knees by a school guidance counsellor or boss at their first part-time job.

Our society is still in recovery mode, where those in their late 40s and early 50s are raising children with skills our parents never had. We're still learning, and "recovering" from being called "stupid" and getting a swat at the back of the head for talking back. My dad tried many methods of "discipline," but I grew too fast and by the time I was 15 I was much too strong and fast for him!

My father had no training himself and so I can't blame him for his child-rearing abilities. He mellowed quite a bit in his 60s and we made our peace before he passed away.

His pride and love were kept close to his vest, tucked away in his shirt pocket, close to his heart.

I thought boys and girls remained pretty much the same over the years. But alas, it seems I haven't kept up with the times. Kids can be mean and cruel. They can be petty. Cliques are still important. You are judged by your looks.

We didn't know how to deal with these things when we were young. How do I make these more palatable for my kids? Emotions and support aside, today's society, economic climate and harsh realities do make parenting a bit more challenging. Gizmos and social media are slowly stealing away our young, like those stealthy dingos in the Outback. When my boy gets home, he eats and then dashes off to play video games. He emerges from his room to eat some more and then vanishes once again. Our 11-year-old has to constantly check Instagram or Facebook to make sure no one is dissing her that day. There are many things that I simply did not encounter in my youth. My younger wife has a better handle on it, and as a social worker, she's more than capable of guiding our youngins. She also told me I cannot be a goofy "friend" to my kids. I need to be a father and proper role model. No pressure there. "Pocket money" takes on a whole new twist than it did in my day. Even when I was 19, \$20 could put gas in the car and even buy a case a beer. Today's kids can burn through that in an hour. And the kids are forever asking for money to pay for this and that at school each week. Don't get me started on education funding woes. My son puts a massive dent in our grocery bill each week. He's learning to drive, and desperately wants to buy a 1970s muscle car. So do I, my son, but times have changed. They're super expensive now and you would certainly have to get the [best price car insurance](#) otherwise it would cost a fortune to maintain too. Liam asked me why I never kept my 1970 Camaro or 1973 Dodge Charger. At the time these were not rare nor were they expensive. I find I'm learning along with my kids today. While every generation has its pros and cons, I'm not sure I would want to be a teen growing up today. The hurdles these days are seriously cramping my legs. I'm tilting my head more often, causing a tremendous kink in my neck. Maybe my children need to take me by the hand and spoon-feed me the deets!