



# Ignite Choice

*where Intention meets Results*

## Do Parents 'truly' evolve from generation to generation?

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Have you ever sat down and compared your parenting strategies with the ones your parents used with you?

Do you notice more similarities or more differences?

Parenting is an assumed skill by society...a natural skill that every parent is expected to just know instinctively. Then, when situations arise in which we as parents do not know instinctively what to do, we draw on our own experiences with our parents and look at the actions of other parents for guidance. If that yields no results we compare our children with all the other children. The usual conclusion is that our children are no worse off than others.... we are all in the same boat and there is nothing we can do...or is there?

Have you noticed that many of the parenting techniques that your parents used with you no longer work with this current generation?

There are several reasons for this. One of the reasons is a change in societies' values. For example, administering corporal punishment is no longer as widely accepted as it was in our parent's generation, not to mention the realisation of its ineffectiveness long term.

Another key reason is that we tend to unconsciously accept and replicate many of the 'programs' or strategies used by the people in our lives that we trust and respect. It is a widely known fact that most of our behaviour is learnt at an early age. Sociologist Morris Massey appropriately named this period between 0 – 7 years, the imprint period. Our parents are therefore the most obvious role models for us. We are constantly acting and reacting based on the 'programs' learnt during this period of our life. Can we be conscious enough to recognise and break these patterns? Have you ever questioned any of these 'programs'?

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On the other hand, there are those parents who disagreed with their parent's parenting techniques so much that they made a conscious decision never to emulate their example. Humans, by nature, polarise themselves with whatever they don't agree with. Therefore, these parents do exactly the opposite, usually to the extreme. If their parents were very autocratic, they are very permissive. For example, some parents who as children, were locked in their rooms and told to go to sleep, now allow their children to sleep in the bed with them all night.

Which way did you swing the pendulum after experiencing your parent's techniques?

## **Who needs to change: the Parents or the Children?**

Children look at their parents as Gods. Mum and Dad are always perfect no matter how they act. Children idealise their parents and mimic their every action and every word. Have you ever been driving and someone cuts you off then before you can say anything your 3 year old yells "Bloody Idiot" in exactly the same tone of voice. Children are video cameras constantly recording every word and noting every action to be studied and played back.

Children have more behavioural flexibility than adults, as they do not live by the constraints we have accepted either consciously or unconsciously. How many different ways can our children ask for ice cream? 10, 20 maybe even 30 ways. Adults give up after 1 or 2 attempts.

There is usually only one way to solve something, right! The way we were taught in school or by our own parents is the only way! Right?

Most adults tend to follow the rules they were taught – the only way, the right way! If we showed our children 3 different ways to solve a puzzle, next time they are faced with another puzzle or problem at school how many ways do you think they would try and solve it?

How do we react when we hear a swear word from our children? Usually the same way every time. Imagine if we reacted differently every time, sometimes laughed, sometimes totally unresponsive, sometimes danced.... Now the children are not sure what will happen when they press that 'button' and are less likely to continue if we don't react the way they expect.

Do we want our children to grow up and run our behavioural 'programs' or do we want to empower them to be conscious and flexible enough to choose the most effective way to act?

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Our children are just immature adults. By constantly explaining what we are doing, responding to them as immature adults and always offering choices we are teaching them responsibility. By openly communicating, we are constantly building and nurturing a great relationship with our children enabling them to feel comfortable to ask us anything from advice to help when feeling overwhelmed. Of course boundaries must be set for protection and our children must be part of this process for these boundaries to be 100% effective. When children are included in setting their own boundaries, this allows them the opportunity to 'truly' understand the importance of these boundaries and they will even enforce them on themselves! You don't believe me? My 3 year old son sends himself to his 'quiet place' when he is angry or disruptive. His understanding of this process is that it makes him feel better (he calms down) by spending a little time on his own.

Let's celebrate our children's differences, encourage them to share their feelings, enjoy them being playful even if they make a mess. Get involved and model their behaviour. Celebrate the child in you. We have as much to learn from our children as they do from us. This will lead to a happier family environment and a happier you.

Now, imagine if our children understand how to take full responsibility for their actions and their lives. What sort of adults will they become? Imagine if they dared to believe anything is possible? Imagine if they could consciously make decisions for themselves?

So, how do we teach our children to take responsibility for themselves and make conscious decisions?

Learn and model these principles ourselves. Encourage and empower our children by treating them as equals and communicating openly and honestly. Yes, we have to become what we want our children to believe they can become.

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