



REDFIELD COLLEGE

## Making the right demands on children

*“Parents have a duty to teach their children to solve their own problems.”* Raphael Pich.

Many parents seem to be losing confidence that they can raise their children successfully, that they can prepare them to cope with the difficulties of adolescence and adult life. Raising children has become an operation with a high degree of uncertainty and a considerable likelihood of failure. Many seem to have forgotten that an affectionately demanding upbringing can be the way to prepare children to handle the uncertainty of life's problems and challenges.

In a society which likes to avoid suffering, it is too easy for parents to minimise their own parenting hassles. Unfortunately parents who demand little of themselves can demand little of their children. And tragically children who have little asked of them, but a lot given to them, will be totally underprepared in life. Too often today we see children who are bereft of the character development they need before the pressures that society, media, and peer group are constantly exerting.

The best parents realise they do no favour to their children by making life as easy as possible. They know that they have a limited time to prepare their children. They know that while they have a duty not to expose their children to dangerous influences, they will have to rely less and less on a sheltering environment as their teenagers grow into adulthood. As their children grow older, they must be taught to solve their own problems and to face these problems with inner convictions, fortitude, and Faith. Time is short, and the stakes are high.

As a consequence they give of themselves and they expect a lot of their children. With affection they make the right demands on each one of their children. The bottom line is set at a very healthy height where membership in the family implies that every member puts others before himself, works hard at his responsibilities, learns to control his own temperament, contributes to family life, and practises generosity with his material possessions. And in all these areas the best parents lead by example.

### Some principles in making the right demands on children.

#### 1. **Don't be afraid to ask a lot.**

*“Be demanding. This is positive advice. Many people equate being demanding with taking away the children's freedom... However freedom only exists if a person is able to make a choice. A person who cannot read has no freedom because of his inability to read. The person who can read is free to choose which book to read even whether to read or not.*

*Hence helping our children to acquire human values, we are helping them to be free. They will be free to be generous or not, as they wish. However, if generosity has no real meaning*

*for them, they will be unable to choose; in other words they will be deprived of their freedom of choice.*

*In order for children to acquire the human values, we must make demands on them that lead to an active practice of the virtues. We need to be constantly requiring them to engage in repetitive acts of generosity, industriousness or patience in order to enable them to develop these good operative habits.” Family Values, Margaret and Gerard O’Donnell.*

Ask a lot of kids. Have high expectations. Ensure that your children have afternoon and evening timetables which are followed. Ensure that their holidays and weekends are busy. Teach them to show plenty of initiative in their recreation, rather than fall into habits of wasting time. Ask a great deal of your children in every area... spiritually, in human virtues, socially (build confidence, communication skills and leadership), artistically; expect them to be open to all new experiences which are potentially enriching... but do make these new experiences enjoyable.

## **2. What a child can do he/she should do.**

*“Work at home for children promotes the early maturity of children.” Raphael Pich.*

Children grow up quicker than we think. Give them jobs in keeping with their capacity... the normal seven year old is quite capable of making his bed, of hanging up his clothes, of making lunches, putting out garbage, picking up after himself, shining his shoes, even of doing vacuuming. Don’t deny them the opportunity of learning responsibility at an age when it is more easily learned.

## **3. Demand with affection.**

*“I give them lots of love and tell them that we don’t tolerate that behaviour here.”*

Louisiana reform school headmistress. Interview on Sydney radio.

The secret of setting high expectations for children is to demand with genuine love and affection. And when a child carries out a responsibility badly tell him firmly and affectionately that he has to do it again. Make sure your expectations are very specific so that there is real accountability. Responsibilities do not need to be big. For a small child they will be quite insignificant... putting a toy away when he finishes playing, turning off the television immediately when he is called, not to lay a finger on a smaller brother or sister. A child who grows up with a sense of responsibility in small things will be responsible in big things later on.

## **4. Lead by example.**

*“It’s amazing how high some parents put the crossbar for their kids and how low they put it for themselves.” Jack Gibson. Rugby League Coach.*

Demandingness on self is the key to demandingness on others. Children need the example of their parents demanding daily on themselves. Never ask anything of your child that you are not prepared do yourself.

5. **Don't take over every time your child has a problem.**

*'This century we are witness ing the age of 'Monopolistic Mums'.'*" Raphael Pich.

Do not shield them from the small difficulties that they can experience as a child, it is not doing them a favour; one sometimes must be "cruel" to be kind. Do intervene in situations of moral or physical danger... but do not fight their battles for them, if they can safely fight their own. Do not run to their protection if they are oversensitive, or if are having a minor problem with someone. They must learn to solve these small measured problems so that they will not be swamped when the "real" problems of life arrive... their happiness and perhaps their marriage may depend on it.

6. **Be physically demanding.**

*'He never had be tough on me because he was so tough on himself.'*" John Paul II on his father.

*'No progress without painful effort.'*" Motto of the School of Athens, 400 BC.

Without toughness kids grow up dodging work and commitments. And unfortunately too many kids these days are soft in this way. Soft kids can't be found when there is work to be done. They don't like to work before play, in fact they don't like work much at all. They complain, or they nag until they get what they want. They are fussy eaters and compulsive softdrink buyers and they don't like walking anywhere. But remember when you look at your kids you look in a mirror: soft kids have soft parents.

7. **Delegate even if it takes more time to get the job done.**

*'Mum shouldn't do anything anyone e lse can do... and if no one else can do it, then teach 'em how.'*" Redfield mum.

Sometimes its more comfortable not to delegate, simply because it seems more efficient, but this is short term thinking. In larger families delegation is a must to survive, but in all families it is the key to developing a sense of responsibility in kids. Rosters and planning out jobs for even the smallest kids will pay big dividends when teenage years arrive. Take the initiative: plan responsibilities for all the members of the family together with your spouse or in a family discussion. Frequently review them. Objective goals can help to make jobs and responsibilities clearer and make each child more accountable. Facts can speak for themselves and allow your reprimands or praise to be more educationally effective.

8. **Don't accept tripe!**

*'Treat a man as he is and he will remain what he is; treat him as he can and should be and he will become as he can and should be.'*" Goethe.

Don't accept any pattern of excuses. If the request is reasonable, 'I forgot!' or 'I can't' don't wash. Calmly insist that your child accepts all the consequences of his/her actions... and reflects on their causes.

**9. Respect and responsibility are not negotiable.**

*'Successful parents realise that children grow up not when they can take care of themselves but rather when they can take care of others and want to... of all the fears that can haunt modern man and woman, the greatest, is the fear that the future marriage of their children will break down.'* James Stenson.

*"New York Times Magazine documents the growing influence of Thomas Lickona, a developmental psychologist and education professor who has established the Centre for the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Rs: 'Respect and Responsibility'."The Australian 21.7. 95.*

Never allow a child to challenge your authority with impunity; never allow a responsibility given to go unaccounted for. Teach responsibility by having your child consider the consequences of his actions; first he must reflect on these consequences, then repair any damage he has caused. The most serious damage is usually some form of lack of charity and concern for others... hence the best reparation is to take on the responsibility to apologise. An older child should also be helped to reflect on the causes of his or her actions. Expect that children learn how to "erase" their faults by apologising, making restitution, etc.

**10. Correct faults.**

*"The calmer the better."* Ray Guarendi.

There is a window of opportunity in parenting. Young children are already well on the way to virtues and vices so it is important to correct small faults in childhood before these faults grow into ingrained habits. Correct faults calmly and personally. Let the punishment fit the crime; but always ensure that you explain what is wrong with what the child has done... so that the lesson is reflected on and internalised. Avoid anger when correcting; fear can motivate formal compliance, but not good behaviour.

**11. Say "no". Start with weekday television, and raids on the fridge.**

*'Do not permit what you disapprove of.... Be conscious that 'no' is also a loving word, and a necessary means for children's growth in self control.'* James Stenson.

*"Say no when it is a matter of physical or moral danger."*

David Issacs.

Clear moral direction from parents gives kids the criteria they need to make their own correct decisions. This self mastery is an absolute necessity for life; in adolescence it may even be a matter of life and death.

**12. Persevere. Don't give up. Parents have felt this way before.**

*'Woe is me. Children no longer obey their parents.'* Syrian inscription, 2000 BC.

Don't let your child become complacent about his deliberate or habitual defects; lack of parental follow up is little more than a pact with personal comfort. It's never too late. A parent who perseveres in building virtue in his or her child will have that child's eternal gratitude.