

INTERNATIONAL BEST-SELLING SERIES

# THE RULES OF PARENTING

EXPANDED EDITION



A Personal Code  
for Raising Happy,  
Confident Children

RICHARD TEMPLAR

The author of the international best-seller *The Rules of Work*

THE

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PARENTING

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Happy, Confident Children

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RICHARD TEMPLAR

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## For Rich

“We are Earth’s best that learned her lesson here.

Life is our cry. We have kept the faith!”

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# Introduction

Nothing can prepare you for being a parent. It tests your stamina, your nerves, your emotions and at times even your sanity. You start out fretting over how to change a diaper or bathe the baby without drowning it, and before long you discover that that's the least of your challenges. And just when you think you've got one phase of childhood cracked, they grow a bit older and it's a whole new scenario. Toddling, school, boyfriends or girlfriends, driving lessons—it never stops. Luckily the rewards are huge—the fun, the hugs, and the closeness. Even the thanks eventually, if you're very lucky. And of course the pleasure of seeing them grow into the kind of person you can be proud of.

Along the way there's sure to be plenty of frustration, angst, bewilderment, and soul searching as you look for the right things to say and do that will set your child on the road to growing up into a happy, well-balanced adult. And that's what this book is about.

The path you're now treading is well worn—millions of people have been parents before you, and by trial and error some of them have worked a few things out that might just be useful to you now. I've been through the parenting cycle twice. I've had two families spread over a total of nearly 30 years. That means I've had the chance to make most of the classic mistakes several times. But it also means that, through my friends and my children's friends, I've had the chance to watch and observe other families in action and see how other parents behave. It's an endlessly fascinating study.

Some parents seem to know instinctively how to handle every situation. Others get some parts wrong, but have brilliant ways of dealing with certain issues. If you study other parents long enough, as I have, you begin to spot patterns—tactics, techniques and principles of behavior that get the best out

of children, and that can be adapted whatever the personality of the child. It's those attitudes and principles that have been distilled into the *Rules of Parenting*, to guide you through the tough times, help you bring your child up to be all they can be, and improve the relationship between you for life.

The *Rules of Parenting* aren't intended to be a revelation – they are a reminder. Many are common sense, but it's easy to lose sight of them when you are dealing with a 2-year-old having a tantrum or a teenager who thinks the world and everything in it exists solely for her benefit. So even the seemingly obvious ones are worth putting in front of you again. After all, it's an important job to get right.

Over 100 Rules might seem like a lot at first glance. But then, 18 years is a pretty long contract for a job. More than 18 if you have more than one child.\* You've got to get your kids through weaning, diapers, toddling, learning to talk, the three Rs, school, friends, sex and drugs, and rock-'n'-roll. Actually, 109 Rules isn't much at all.

It seems pretty clear to me how you can tell a good parent. You just have to look at their children. Some kids go through bad patches for a while for all sorts of reasons, many of which you really can't pin on the parents, but I've found that once they leave home, you can see what kind of a job their parents did. And I figure the parents whose kids are able to look after themselves, to enjoy life and to make those around them happy, to be caring and kind, and to stand up for what they believe in—those parents are the ones who are getting it right. And over the years I've seen what kind of parenting produces those kinds of adults 18 years on.

When you think about the huge responsibility you have as a parent, it can stop you in your tracks and take your breath away. What you do and say over the years will have a huge influence on whether your child grows up to be screwed up or

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\* Yes, I know, not if they're twins. Thank you.

well balanced. The good news is that by thinking about it all now, as you will if you read through this book, you'll automatically begin to correct many of your little foibles or bad habits as well as introducing new more helpful ones (helpful for you and your offspring).

There's more good news. There are lots of wrong ways to raise your kids, but there are lots of right ones too. What you'll find in this book are principles to follow, which you can adapt to suit you and your children. There's no list of instructions you have to follow to the letter if you don't want your child to end up a loser. I've seen parents find all kinds of original, creative, and unusual ways of interpreting these Rules successfully. It's about following the spirit, not the letter. For example, I've known great parents who home schooled their kids, excellent parents whose children went to the local public school, and equally successful parents whose kids attended a private school. If you've got the right attitude, the rest will follow on.

I can personally vouch for the fact that it's impossible to get all the Rules just right every day for 18 years. But then, I also know that all the best parents I've watched have messed up here and there. Just not too badly, and not too often, and they've always known when they've gone wrong. That seems to be very important: recognize where you've gone wrong and try harder to remember next time. That's as much as anyone can ask. And, from the kids I've watched grow up, that's good enough.

I can also tell you (and you may be relieved to hear this) that none of the Rules requires you to brush your child's hair religiously, or make sure they have clean socks every day. I'm sure that's all very nice, but I've also seen parents raise their kids brilliantly with messy hair and no socks at all.

These Rules are about the important stuff. Things to do with your child's attitudes and values and self-image, not to do with their socks. They are Rules which will help you and your child to enjoy each other, enjoy life, and treat other people with

respect. They are broad principles which apply equally in traditional nuclear families and in more modern formats such as single-parent or step-families.

I'm not claiming that there are exactly 109 Rules you have to follow and there will never be any more. Far from it. These are the Rules that I have observed as being the most important, but I'm always interested to hear from you and would love to collect more Rules of parenting if you have any up your sleeve. You're welcome to post your very own Rules on my Facebook page at [www.facebook.com/richardtemplar](http://www.facebook.com/richardtemplar).

*Richard Templar*

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# RULE 1

## Relax

So who are the best parents you know? The ones who have a seemingly instinctive ability to say and do the things that will result in happy, confident, well-balanced children? Have you ever wondered what makes them so good at it? Now think about the ones you privately don't think are that great. Why not?

All the best parents I know have one key thing in common. They're relaxed about it. And all the worst ones are hung up on something. Maybe they're not stressed out about how good they are as parents (perhaps they should be), but they're hung up about something that affects their ability to be a really good parent.

I know a couple of parents who are neurotically clean and tidy. Their children have to take their shoes off at the door or the whole world falls apart. Even if the shoes are clean. They get really uptight if their children leave anything out of place or make any kind of a mess (even if it gets cleaned up later). It makes it impossible for the kids just to relax and enjoy themselves, in case they get grass stains on their pants, or knock over the ketchup bottle.

I have another friend who is so obsessively competitive that his children are under huge pressure to win every friendly game they ever play. And one who frets excessively every time her child grazes his knees. I bet you can think of plenty of similar examples among people you know.

The really good parents I've encountered, on the other hand, expect their children to be noisy, messy, bouncy, squabbly, and covered in mud. They take it all in stride. They know they've got 18 years to turn these small creatures into respectable

grown-ups, and they pace themselves. No rush to get them acting like adults—they'll get there in good time.

Between you and me, this Rule gets easier with time, though some people still never master it the way true Rules parents do. It's much harder to relax fully with your first baby than with your last teenager to leave home. With babies, you need to focus on the essentials—a healthy baby that isn't too hungry or too uncomfortable—and don't sweat the rest of it. It doesn't matter if their shoelaces are untied, or you didn't find time to bathe them today, or you've gone away for the weekend without anything for them to sleep in (yes, I have a friend who has done this, and no, she didn't sweat it, being a Rules parent).

Much better altogether if you can get to the end of each day, put your feet up with a glass of wine or a G&T,\* and say cheerfully to each other, "What the hell ... they're all still alive so we must have got something right."

**REALLY GOOD PARENTS  
EXPECT THEIR  
CHILDREN TO BE NOISY,  
MESSY, BOUNCY,  
SQUABBLY, AND  
COVERED IN MUD**

---

\* No, I'm not encouraging parents to use alcohol to get them through. Just relax!

## RULE 2

### No One is Perfect

Have you ever thought what it would be like to have perfect parents? Well, think about it now. Imagine your parents had been faultless when you were growing up (I'm betting they weren't).<sup>\*</sup> Suppose they were textbook parents—that your mother was *always right*. Sound like fun? Of course not.

Look, kids need something to kick against when they're growing up. They need someone to blame, and I'm afraid that's your job. So you might as well give them something to blame you for.

So what's it going to be? Nothing cruel or abusive of course—you need to pick something that's not unreasonable and shows a bit of human frailty. Maybe you've got a fuse that's just a little bit shorter than it should be? Perhaps you tend to put a bit too much pressure on them? Could it be that you're slightly neurotic about keeping everything tidy and ordered? Or tell you what, better still, why bother to choose? Just go with your own natural imperfections, and then you don't have to make an effort. Chances are you have a character flaw or two that will come in handy here.

Of course this doesn't mean that you're off the hook, that you shouldn't try to improve your parenting skills. Apart from anything else, that would make the rest of this book redundant. It just means that you shouldn't give yourself too hard a time when you fall a bit short of the standards you set yourself. After all, what kind of an example would it be to your kids if you were unable ever to fail, even a little bit? I wouldn't like having to live up to parents like that, and I don't suppose your children would either.

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<sup>\*</sup> Please don't write in to accuse me of insulting your mother. I'm just making a point.

Your children are going to blame you for something, because that's how it works. If you were perfect, they'd have every reason to blame you for that. You can't win. You can only hope that eventually, especially if they become parents themselves, they'll come to see that actually they should be grateful to you for not being perfect.

**YOUR CHILDREN ARE  
GOING TO BLAME YOU  
FOR SOMETHING,  
BECAUSE THAT'S HOW  
IT WORKS**

# RULE 3

## Be Content

Contented parents make for contented kids. I certainly found out when I was growing up that stressed parents *don't* make their kids relaxed and at ease. So it stands to reason that you need to make sure you're as happy and relaxed as you can be.

This isn't some guilt trip to make you feel bad every time you're grumpy or unhappy. Not at all. Quite the reverse, in fact. Our kids need to learn to read people's emotions and recognize that everyone has their off moments. We all have bad days and tough experiences that affect our moods, but there are also things we can control. Aspects of our lives where we can make choices that leave us happier than the alternative. And the very fact that a certain choice makes us less stressed is in itself a good reason to make it. I'm not talking here about day to day mood swings, but about making big decisions that will reduce your stress levels in the long term.

So if breastfeeding your baby makes you feel really rotten and though you've really stuck at it, it's still making your stress levels rocket, you're probably doing your child a favor by choosing to bottle feed them, whatever anyone else may tell you. Sure, the milk itself may be less perfect, and in an ideal world breastfeeding is better, but this isn't an ideal world and that's only one aspect of the equation. Sometimes bottle feeding really is the formula for a happy baby (sorry, couldn't resist that one).

Here's another example. Some families—entirely understandably in my view—find vacation travel deeply stressful. Yes, they're supposed to be relaxing, and you feel you "ought" to enjoy them, but actually they never seem to turn out to be all that pleasurable. I once saw it described as "hard work in a different place." The effort of getting everything organized,

buying and transporting all the stuff you might need as you don't know what's at the other end, traveling long distances with fidgety kids, and then finding at the other end that the kids struggle to cope with a dramatically different temperature and are cranky, and won't eat anything that's available ... Not exactly the recipe for a calm, happy family able to fully enjoy their time together. So why not give yourself a break? Find somewhere nearby to vacation. It may not be as exotic, but if it means you can relax more and enjoy the trip, surely it's better for everyone? Once the kids are older you can think about taking more adventurous vacations again.

In the end your mood is as important as your childrearing strategy and how you live as a family, if not more so. So don't let anyone guilt-trip you about the way you do it. If it makes you more relaxed and less stressed, it's probably the right thing to do—whatever it is.

**YOUR MOOD IS AS  
IMPORTANT AS YOUR  
CHILDREARING  
STRATEGY**