



Top 30 Parenting Myths



Most Parents — and Some Professionals — Believe And Truths Everyone Should Know

by Jody Johnston Pawel, LSW, CFLE, author of *The Parents Toolshop*

“There's so much about The Parent's Toolshop that I like. As a parent, it is so easy to react to problems. This offers so many healthy alternatives. As a counselor, I like the way I can apply the process to all relationships. There were so many things that even as a therapist, with all the training I've had, that I didn't realize—like the myths about timeouts. I've been giving the same kind of advice lots of other professionals give—and assumed it must be right, because so many people believed it. This was a real eye-opener.” — Ken Rogiers, M.A., Lighthouse Christian Counseling, Inc., Columbus OH

EVERY bold statement is a common parenting MYTH. What follows it is the related parenting Truth. There are also suggestions for which Toolshop®/ Universal Blueprint™ resource can give you more information on that subject. The order of the statements matches the order they appear in *The Parents Toolshop* book. **(The Top 10 Myths have yellow highlights.)**

- 1. Effective parenting is just a matter of common sense and comes naturally to some people.** Relying only on “common sense” can lead parents to follow “common practices” that are less effective than less-common practices that get proven results. ***Parental love may come naturally, but effective parenting skills are learned*** — and some of the lesser-known most-effective skills are only taught by trained parent educators. (The Parents Toolshop® and Universal Blueprint™ resources only teach practices that have been proven effective, even if they are “uncommon.” The author knows these skills because she is a second-generation parent educator, Licensed Social Worker and Certified Family Life Educator with 25 years' experience.)
- 2. Parents should attend parenting classes when having problems with their children.** Parenting classes can benefit *anyone*. Ideally, parents take parenting classes *before* serious problems develop, to prevent problems. (There are Parents Toolshop® classes available for any parent, from home-study e-courses, to audio tapes, to videos, to books and, in some locations, in-person live classes. For information about distance learning packages, see <http://www.parentstoolshop.com/7ecourse/packages.htm>. For information about locating a Parents Toolshop® “Tour Guide” instructor near you, see: http://www.parentstoolshop.com/HTML/TG_Listing.htm)

“I was upset when I was told I'd have to take a parenting class before adopting a child. I thought it would be a waste of time, since I already knew a lot about parenting. I was so wrong! I learned a lot of very practical, get-us-through-the-day techniques to make my philosophy and expectations a reality. Take this class. I guarantee you'll learn something that will make you an even better parent than you already are.” — Connie Collett, from her article in "The Legacy," a newsletter for adoptive parents, Winter 1996

- 3. Parents can tell if a parenting skill is effective by how quickly it works.** Most quick fixes work in the short-run but have other negative long-term side effects. When using skills that have proven long-term results, it may take slightly longer to see results, but the results will be better and longer-lasting. (Fortunately, the only skills included in Parents Toolshop® and Universal Blueprint™ resources are those that have been proven effective in long-term research studies.)

- 4. If “I turned out okay,” I can probably just do what my parents did and get the similar results.** Your child is different from you and society is different than it was when you were a child, so using the same practices will probably not get similar results. Children may turn out “okay” — and parents can choose to settle for “okay” — but effective parenting skills will bring even better outcomes. Fortunately, we have much more knowledge and research at our disposal than our parents did, so parents can achieve the goal of being the “most effective” parent they can be. (*Chapter 2, the Foundation-Building Toolset, in The Parents Toolshop book looks at how and why parenting has changed from the 1960's to today.*)

“As a grandmother of two and mother of two, I wish that I had this when I was raising my children and I'm sending a copy to my son, the father of my grandsons. My own child-rearing was haphazard to say the least although I did the best I could with the information available.” — — Oshara Petaja, MT

- 5. Children should not be the center of the family; the parent should.** No individual family member or relationship should be the all-time sole center of the family at the expense of all other family relationships. Each relationship's needs are equally important, but different. (*Balanced parenting, which you learn in The Parents Toolshop Chapter 2, Foundation-Building Toolset, will help you establish and maintain respect for all relationships without neglecting any one relationship. It strengthens marital, parental and parent/child relationships.*)
- 6. It is the parent's job to control children's behavior.** When parents focus on controlling children, they usually get power struggles, testing and rebellion. Effective parents focus on teaching their children how to be self-controlled. (*In all Parents Toolshop® and Universal Blueprint™ resources we learn about a “Balanced” parenting style and the problems with extreme approaches like over-controlling and permissive parenting.*)
- 7. Parents need to immediately react to a problem to effectively resolve it.** It is better to stop and think first, before responding to a problem. (*Every Universal Blueprint™ resource will teach you a plan for responding effectively to problems without reacting to them.*)

“I liked this book because it gave me power - not over my child, but over the situation and myself. It also empowers my children to be in control of themselves. I'm spending less time being in power struggles and she's learning to make choices. I know, now, that there is going to be a solution to every problem. I especially like the fact that the book tells me what to do, instead of what not to do”. — — Bonnie Sessely, parent

- 8. If you learn the basic parenting skills most resources teach, you can probably figure out solutions to most parenting problems.** Parents can know hundreds of skills, but if they don't know which skill/tool is the best one to use for certain types of problems, don't know what order to use the skills and don't use them in specific ways, the skills will be less effective and may not solve the problem. (*Only Universal Blueprint™ resources teach this Parenting Success Formula, including Chapter 3 of The Parents Toolshop book*)
- 9. Parents can build self-esteem in children by giving them lots of praise and rewards for good behavior.** Praise and rewards focus on pleasing others and *external* motivation, so they are often addictive and develop ego-esteem, not self-worth. The most effective way to build self-esteem is to use descriptive encouragement and other skills that focus on the child's *internal* skills/qualities. (*All Parents Toolshop® and Universal Blueprint™ resources teach the basics of building self-esteem. Chapter 4 in The Parents Toolshop book teaches all 28 tools for building self-esteem.*)
- 10. When parents let children know they are proud of them, children feel their parents are giving them credit for their accomplishments.** Surprisingly, most children feel like the parent is taking credit for the child's accomplishments! Parents want to focus on the *child's* feeling by saying, “I bet *you* feel proud of *yourself*” or “I bet it feels good to know you could (describe accomplishment).” (*You can learn the difference between praise & encouragement in every*

Universal Blueprint™ and Parents Toolshop® resource. You will only find this specific tool, though, in Chapter 4 of The Parents Toolshop book, Self-Esteem Toolset, and Universal Blueprint™ Intermediate or Advanced training programs.)

- 11. Sometimes it helps to offer constructive criticism to help children improve.** “Constructive criticism” doesn’t exist: constructive builds up while criticism tears down; they cancel each other out! Pointing out faults or mistakes is not encouraging, it is discouraging. Parents want to describe what children do right and ask *them* how or if they could improve. *(You will only find details about this specific tool in Chapter 4 of The Parents Toolshop book, Self-Esteem Toolset, and Universal Blueprint™ Intermediate or Advanced training programs.)*
- 12. Children should obey their parents because they are adults in authority. When children ask “Why should I?” parents only need to say, “Because I said so.”** Children need to respect *all* people, not just adults and parents. Children also need to not blindly obey an adult just because the adult is in a position of authority; that puts children at risk. Parents need to teach children self-discipline and the value behind their rules so children will voluntarily follow the rules whether an authority figure is present or not. *(All Parents Toolshop® and Universal Blueprint™ resources teach the difference between demanding obedience and engaging cooperation. Chapter 5 of The Parents Toolshop book, the Cooperation Toolset, teaches all 15 practical tools.)*
- 13. Behavior charts with stars or rewards are helpful in teaching children new behavior skills and fostering internal motivation.** Long-term research has proven that behavior charts, stickers, bribes, incentives, and rewards foster *external* motivation, unhealthy competition and actually *discourage* those who are already struggling to succeed. When they seem to work, both adults and children can become addicted to them and children don’t develop the ability to *self-motivate* themselves. *(Alfie Kohn has done extensive research into these issues. See <http://www.alfiekohn.org/> for more information on his research. All Parents Toolshop® and Universal Blueprint™ resources teach the most important and basic tools for fostering internal motivation, without bribes or power struggles. Some, including Chapter 5, the Cooperation Toolset in The Parents Toolshop book, teach parents how to modify or phase out behavior charts to avoid these pitfalls.)*
- 14. When parents give children choices, children think they should have a choice about everything.** Parents can give choices *within* limits, so children know they do not have a choice about *everything*. *(All Parents Toolshop® and Universal Blueprint™ resources teach this four-star tool, because it is one of the universal basic tools for getting cooperation. Chapter 5 of The Parents Toolshop book, the Cooperation Toolset, teaches this practical tool in detail.)*
- 15. All toddlers will go through a “no” phase; it’s a normal part of childhood.** Not all children go through a “no” phase. It depends on the child’s personality and how parents use “no.” Most parents can avoid the no-phase and the “Terrible Twos” by using positive requests and other cooperation tools. *(All Parents Toolshop® and Universal Blueprint™ resources teach the most important four-star tool that practically guarantees you can avoid the “no” phase. They also teach the most basic tools for avoiding the Terrible Twos and other difficult stages when children tend to test limits, start power struggles or rebel against authority. Chapter 5, the Cooperation Toolset in The Parents Toolshop book teaches all the tools.)*

“All my friends would complain about the Terrible Twos, but my kids never even went through a ‘No’ phase! I know it’s because I learned from the class how to get cooperation in positive ways.” — — Kathy Hagerty
- 16. Parents should give children more independence when they show they can handle it.** How will children develop responsibility and independence if they don’t get practice at it? Parents need to teach children skills and then give them enough freedom to practice the skills. Only then will parents see whether their children are ready to learn more skills and handle more independence. *(All Parents Toolshop® and Universal Blueprint™ resources teach the most important and basic tools for fostering independence. Chapter 6, the Independence Toolset, in The Parents Toolshop*

book, offers 23 tools for teaching skills and fostering independence in children, so you can let go and trust children to be responsible.)

17. **When children struggle with simple tasks, it helps to say, “You can do it if you try harder.”** This statement implies children aren’t already trying their hardest and is discouraging. Parents want to acknowledge the difficulty so children feel excited if they do it and not so bad if they can’t. *(You will only find this specific tool in Chapter 6 of The Parents Toolshop book, Independence Toolset, and Universal Blueprint™ Intermediate or Advanced training programs.)*
18. **Parents need to solve problems for children who are too inexperienced to resolve problems independently.** How will children ever learn how to solve their own problems if parents solve their problems for them? When children have problems, parents can use “F-A-X Listening” to guide children through the problem-solving process, without taking over. *(All Parents Toolshop® and Universal Blueprint™ resources teach the most important and basic tools for helping children learn how to solve problems. Only chapters 7 & 8 of The Parents Toolshop book, however, teach all the fine details of how to guide children to their own solutions, without taking over.*
19. **When children don’t do their homework, parents should set up a homework schedule, make sure children stick to it, supervise their work, and sign off on it every day.** Homework is a child’s responsibility. In this scenario, the parent is assuming all the responsibility for scheduling and reminding the child. Instead, parents can use the F-A-X process in the Child Problem Toolbox to “keep the ball in the child’s court,” brainstorm solutions, and hold the child responsible for following through. *(Only Chapter 8, the Problem-Solving Toolset of The Parents Toolshop book, offers specific suggestions for 14 different “Child” problems, including 8 different types of sibling squabbles, problems with homework, teachers, peers, bullies...and more!)*
20. **People get angry because of events and people they can’t control.** Our beliefs and interpretations about people and events determines whether we get angry. We have a choice about our beliefs and emotions. *(You will learn this tool in Chapter 9 of The Parents Toolshop book, Keep Your Cool Toolset, and Universal Blueprint™ Intermediate or Advanced training programs.)*
21. **Children know how to push their parents’ buttons because they program and control them.** Children don’t program parents’ trigger buttons, they just discover them. We can learn to reprogram our buttons and control our reactions. *(You will learn this tool in great detail in Chapter 9 of The Parents Toolshop book, Keep Your Cool Toolset, and Universal Blueprint™ Advanced training programs.)*
22. **Timeout is a discipline tool you want to use as follows: make the child sit alone, quiet and still, without playing, for one minute per year of the child’s age.** Time-outs are not effective discipline tools; they are most effective as anger management tools parents can use to teach children self-control. Therefore, the only logical use of a timeout is when the child has lost control. Parents determine the timeout location based on the child’s recharge style and suggest activities for the child to engage in based on the type of anger energy the child experiences. The time-out is over as soon as the child has regained control. *(Most Parents Toolshop® and Universal Blueprint™ resources teach the most important and basic anger-management tools. Chapter 9, the Keep Your Cool Toolset in The Parents Toolshop book is the most comprehensive information on developing individualized stress & anger management plans you may find anywhere! Chapter 13, the Discipline Toolset covers timeouts, specifically how to use them so they teach self-control and don’t violate the basic guidelines of effective discipline.)*
23. **When children misbehave, parents should show their disappointment so the children will want to change.** When parents tell children they are disappointed in them, children feel worthless, discouraged and less motivated to improve themselves. If they do improve, it’s out of shame and guilt, to please the parents, not because the children see the value of changing. Therefore, the change is not healthy and probably won’t last. *(All Parents Toolshop® and Universal Blueprint™ resources teach the most important and basic tools for communicating your*

concerns assertively. Chapter 10, the Clear Communication Toolset in The Parents Toolshop book teaches all the “Top Ten Tactful Talking Tools.”)

- 24. If parents have repeatedly told children to stop misbehaving and they don't stop, parents can assume their children know how to behave better and are deliberately disobeying.** Just because we tell children “a million times” doesn't mean they fully understand and have *mastered* the skills to behave appropriately. Parents must teach children skills and have realistic expectations about how quickly children can perfect the skills. (*All Parents Toolshop® and Universal Blueprint™ resources teach parents how to tell the difference between “unintentional” and “intentional” misbehavior and the most important and basic tools for responding to each type of misbehavior. Chapter 11, the PU Toolset (Parent problems involving Unintentional misbehavior) in The Parents Toolshop book, explains the 5 reasons why children might misbehave “unintentionally.” It includes information on developmental stages, temperaments, common age-specific misbehavior and even a special section on ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder). It also teaches 5 tools for responding to unintentional misbehavior, without excusing it away or reacting to it unhelpfully, which causes the misbehavior to “mutate” into deliberate misbehavior!*)
- 25. Usually, if parents trust and follow their gut reactions, they will respond to deliberate misbehavior properly.** Gut reactions to deliberate misbehavior will — guaranteed — either escalate the situation or give the misbehavior an accidental payoff, which will cause the misbehavior to recur. It is better to stop and identify the “goal” of the misbehavior and plan a response based on that. (*All Parents Toolshop® and Universal Blueprint™ resources teach the most important and basic tools for identifying and responding effectively to the 4 kinds of intentional misbehavior. Only Chapter 12, The PO Toolset (Parent problem, involving “On purpose” misbehavior) in The Parents Toolshop book teaches all the fine details. Deliberate misbehavior is the trickiest misbehavior to deal with, because if parents react or don't choose the most effective tool for the situation, the problem will continue or get worse.*)
- 26. To get children to behave, parents should threaten to punish the children.** Threats may offer a quick fix but if the parent doesn't follow through, children quickly learn to ignore the threats. Since punishment is less effective than discipline, parents would not want to threaten it, let alone follow through with it. So both threats and punishment are ineffective. (*Chapter 13, Discipline Toolset of The Parents Toolshop and all Universal Blueprint™ training programs teach positive alternatives to punishment and threats.*)
- 27. When misbehaving children need to learn a lesson, parents should make sure the discipline is a little unpleasant or bothers the child somehow, to drive home the point.** Suffering distracts from learning. Therefore, any time there is physical or emotional suffering, it turns the discipline into punishment. Suffering also distracts the child from learning the lesson and shifts the focus to resenting the person who is imposing the suffering. (Imagine reading this while you were handcuffed to a chair; bet *you'd* be distracted from learning!) (*All Parents Toolshop® and Universal Blueprint™ resources teach the most important, top 4 four-star tools for disciplining effectively. Only Chapter 13, the Discipline Toolset in The Parents Toolshop book also explains the 6 differences between punishment and discipline, why the most common punishment techniques don't work long-term, and all 8 effective discipline tools parents can use.*)
- 28. Parents should call a family meeting when there is a problem and give every family member a vote on the solution.** Ideally, family councils occur weekly, so the family can discuss issues *before* they become problems. Effective family councils use consensus decision-making, because voting always has winners and “losers” — and the “losers” often feel discouraged and resist or sabotage the decision. Consensus decisions are more effective because they are win/win; everyone agrees to the decision. (*The only Parents Toolshop® or Universal Blueprint™ resource that currently teaches all the tools for conducting family councils is Chapter 14, the Family Council Toolset in The Parents Toolshop book.*)

- 29. Parents need to be consistent. If they say they are going to do something, they need to follow through, even if they realize later they overreacted.** If parents are truly consistent, they will “get back on track” when they realize they have overreacted by admitting their mistake and restating an appropriate discipline. *(All Parents Toolshop® and Universal Blueprint™ resources teach the most important and basic tools for maintaining consistency and disciplining effectively. Detailed information is in Chapters 13, the Discipline Toolset, and 15, the 3 C’s: Consistency, Criticism and Confidence in The Parents Toolshop book.)*
- 30. Inconsistent parenting partners are damaging. Effective parenting partners will try to do things the same way.** Each parenting partner can have a different, unique personal style of parenting as long as it’s within the “Balanced” zone. In fact, it is good for children to learn how to get along with people who have different personalities. They learn acceptance and flexibility. Only when inconsistencies sabotage the other parent or children can use them to manipulate, do the differences become damaging to relationships. *(Several Parents Toolshop® and Universal Blueprint™ resources offer some basic tips for improving parenting teamwork, but Chapter 2, the Foundation-Building Toolset and Chapter 15, the 3 C’s: Consistency, Criticism and Confidence in The Parents Toolshop book have special sections and tips for helping improve consistency among parenting partners.)*

So, what do you think? Are you surprised by some of the parenting myths and truths? Are you skeptical about some of them? That’s okay! Learn more so you can recognize more common parenting myths and master the universal parenting truths. Just go to:

<http://www.parentstoolshop.com/7ecourse/packages.htm>

Jody Johnston Pawel, LSW, CFLE is a second-generation parent educator who has been training parents and family-service professionals for 20+ years through her uniquely interactive and informative workshops. As president of Parent’s Toolshop Consulting, she trains and supervises a nationwide network of parent educators who use her award-winning book, The Parent’s Toolshop, as a parent-education curriculum. As an internationally-recognized parenting expert, Jody frequently appears on radio / TV talk shows and national magazines and newspapers regularly quote her advice. She has also produced 100+ resources which are available through her award-winning website: <http://www.ParentsToolshop.com>