

The Common Sense Guide To Screening & Weeding Parenting Advice

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

Your ideas are consistent with other resources I'm familiar with, but there are some things in their books I disagree with and I get so frustrated picking and choosing and screening them. It is so nice to finally find a resource that has done that for me. I can completely trust that it is comprehensive and accurate. – Marla Hurst, parent, Adult Education teacher

When Faced with a Parenting Challenge, How Do Most Parents Decide What to Do?

Some parents use trial and error. The problem with trial and error parenting is that there might be a quick fix, but negative side effects that don't show up right away.

Some parents ask someone they trust for advice. In a 2000 study by Zero to Three National Center for Infants, Toddlers and Families, most parents said they get their parenting advice from their spouse, mother or pediatrician.

A spouse knows a child better than a stranger, but might not know *all* the parenting techniques available or how to choose the most effective one for the situation. Then there's the issue of whether spouses *agree* on their parenting plan!

"My wife and I have agreed more about our parenting in the past three weeks than we have in the past three years!" – Joe Hood, OH

"I was so impressed with the change in my wife's parenting, I had to take this class just to find out what happened!" – Ben Cohen, NY

One's mother may be a trustworthy advisor, especially if parents think they "turned out okay." If you ask most grandparents, however, they'll admit that they never had to deal with some of the challenges today's parents and children face every day. We live in a very different world than the one we grew up in, so we need different skills than what our parents used. Our parents also didn't have as much parenting information available to them in their child-rearing years, as we do. It only makes sense to access expert advice if it's readily available.

As an educator, parent, and now a grandparent, I was delighted by the information Jody shared at our early childhood conference. A lot of new information she shared helped me in all three roles I have. I bought her wonderful book for my adult children and one for me to use as I train professionals, advise my children and babysit my grandchildren! – Betsy Sadler, TX

This book presents a practical, positive approach to working and living with children. I recommend it highly to parents, teachers, and any person who touches the life of a child. I wish this book had been available when my son was a child. – Elizabeth M. Engelhardt, Administrator, St. Rita Child Care Center, Adjunct Faculty E.C.E., Clark State Community College OH.

I am so thrilled by the comprehensive parenting framework I see in this book!!! As a grandmother of two and mother of two, I wish that I had this when I was raising my children. My own child rearing was haphazard to say the least, although I did the best I could with the information available. I'm sending a copy to my son, the father of my grandsons. — — Oshara Petaja, MT

Most parents assume a **pediatrician** will give them the most effective parenting advice. I've trained many pediatricians, including a Parents Toolshop® instructor who is a "Behavioral and Developmental Pediatrician. They *all* have confirmed that effective *practical* parenting skills are *not* a required course of study in medical school. Pediatricians *do* receive education about child development issues (what is considered "normal" at certain ages) and learn about particular medical or psychological disorders they might need to diagnose or refer to a specialist. Unless a pediatrician chooses to do *independent* study on effective parenting skills, they might theoretically understand *why* a child is having a problem, but their advice about specifically what to do or say might only be an educated guess. So definitely consult your pediatrician for medical concerns, but don't assume the doctor will recommend the most effective response to daily parenting challenges.

Ditch your Dr. Spock paperback; eschew Miss Manner's guidebook on the proper way for your children to eat petit fours; pitch 'Parenting for Dummies.' This book is it – a parenting guide par excellence! It's chock full of tips, trends and positive parenting techniques that are truly informative and most important – effective. – – Lance Winkler, Oakwood Register, OH.

Where Do Most Parents Get Their Parenting Information?

From the media, like TV, magazines and newspaper columns? Producers of *documentary TV* shows usually do thorough research and consult credible parenting experts, so their advice is probably the most reliable TV advice. Reality shows, like the various nanny series, are designed to *entertain*, not inform. The situations are usually extreme, but solvable within a week's time. (Notice how many involve power struggles?) While some nannies model effective skills, others use "naughty chairs" in demeaning ways and post rigid schedules for every minute of the day. While these "quick fix" methods do get short-term results, long-term research can predict some negative side effects later, months after the TV cameras have gone.

Print media has a questionable reputation for being accurate. "If it's in the paper it must be true!" Right? Actually, magazines are like TV documentaries in that they consult experts, so their advice is usually accurate. Newspaper columnists, on the other hand, could be anyone the local or syndicated paper chooses to feature! The newspaper editors usually don't know what's accurate parenting advice; they base their decisions on who is the most widely published columnist or the least expensive to hire.

Just because someone is a nationally-syndicated columnist, it doesn't mean his or her advice is reliable. Consider these actual statements one nationally-syndicated parenting columnist has made:

- In answer to a question about why his advice was so extreme, he said he tries to be controversial, to get press coverage. He also said he knows parents won't do what he tells them to do, so he gives them extreme advice, assuming they'll only do part of it.
- This columnist admitted that his parenting advice is based on "what worked" for him as a parent and his psychology degree just gives credibility to his personal opinions.
- When challenged on national TV about his pro-spanking advice, he backed down and told the interviewers to quick "picking on" him.
- When a late-night talk show host read a passage from this new book and challenged the columnist's statements, the columnist said he didn't remember what he had written. When the audience booed, the columnist replied, "well I can change my mind if I want to."

What about the **internet**? Now there's a resource for plenty of free information! In fact, there's almost *too* much information and much of the advice is conflicting. It's overwhelming and confusing! Unless someone is trained in effective parenting skills or family studies, they aren't reliable sources of advice or qualified to recognize which advice is accurate! Many of the family professionals who take my continuing education workshops admit that they didn't know a lot of the skills I teach. Fortunately, long-term research backs up every piece of *The Parents Toolshop* advice.

There's so much about The Parent's Toolshop that I like. As a parent, it is easy to react to problems; this offers 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 time-outs. 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.

How about going to the **book store**? There are rows of shelves of parenting books, so how does one decide which book to get? Probably one recommended by a spouse, fellow parent, pediatrician or that was featured in the media...which brings us right back to where we started!

Parents Have a Choice. They Can Do Their Own Research, Screening and Weeding or Seek Advice from a Reliable, Trained Experienced Parenting Expert

When you check the credentials of most parenting advisors, you find some:

- Were raised by "good parents" and share what their parents did.
- Are parents who raised "good kids" and tell other parents what worked for them.
- Are parents who have read a lot of parenting books and share what they learned.
- Have received special training as parent educators and teach parenting classes.
- Have advanced degrees, licenses and certifications in parenting studies or family life education.

There may be parenting authors who have *one* or *several* of these qualifications, but it's quite rare to find someone who has ALL of these qualifications. I have all the above, plus 25+ years experience, plus, I am one of the few *second-generation* parent educators in the world.

Now obviously, I'd like you to trust my advice and take advantage of the resources I offer since I've spent years of research, screening, weeding, compiling, summarizing, and illustrating the specific practical suggestions for you. Nevertheless, you will still likely see or hear parenting advice at some point from some other source. So I want you to be prepared with some guidelines for screening *that* advice. Here are some tips, based on Chapter 15 of *The Parents Toolshop* book:

Whenever you hear or read advice, ask, "Is this consistent with my positive parenting plan and long-term goals?" Ask yourself, "What would this teach the child?" If it seems like a quick-fix, look years into the future. Will it accomplish your long-term goals?

Never blindly accept parenting advice without double-checking its accuracy. Consider the basis for the advice.

- ***Is it someone's personal opinion or is it based on research, broad experience, and methods that have been proven effective over time?*** Don't automatically trust advice just because someone believes "my children 'turned out okay,' therefore this is the best way for

everyone.” There could be other factors that led to the success, the outcomes could have been even *more* positive with a different approach, or the long-term negative effects are yet to be seen!

- ***Is the advice based on fear or does it reflect personal power, control, or superiority issues?*** Be careful if you experts send a hidden message that says, “If you don’t do what I say you’re a wimp and will lose control of your kids.” The advice will often offer unhealthy quick fixes or extreme reactions.
- ***Compare the advice to the proper definitions and guidelines of healthy parenting philosophies and techniques you learn in *The Parents Toolshop*.*** Don’t get hung-up on whether the person uses the same terms we use in the book. Look beyond the words to the *qualities* and *philosophy* of the technique.
- ***Is the philosophy positive, balanced, and healthy?*** Does an author promote a balanced approach or only see things in black and white; their way and the wrong way. Do they use the correct definitions for healthy parenting techniques? If the definition is incorrect, does the advice still fit the guidelines of healthy, balanced parenting you learned in *The Parents Toolshop*?
- ***Is the advice developmentally appropriate?*** Are they suggesting you explain something beyond a toddler’s comprehension or expect a young child to do something it would be unrealistic for them to understand or do?
- ***What is the philosophy of discipline?*** Is it really punishment? Does it violate the parent or child’s right to be treated respectfully? Does it focus on external control or teaching the child *self-discipline*?
- ***Will the technique help or harm parent-child relationships?*** Does it empower the parent and child with skills that will improve their communication and problem-solving skills and enhance their relationship? Or are there unhealthy hidden messages that could cause future conflicts?
- ***Does the advice say this is the only way to handle a situation or that there are choices to pick from?*** While there are universally-effective parenting skills, no one response is the only possible helpful response in a given situation. There are usually several options we can choose.
- ***Is the advice tailored to the individual child, situation or parents’ values?*** Beware of advice that says there is one best response to a particular *behavior*. The appropriate response depends on the *child* involved and the *reason* the child is behaving that way *that time*. Only the Universal Blueprint™ Parenting Success Formula offers a reliable *universal* plan for finding *individualized* responses to parenting challenges.
- ***Is the advice a commonly accepted idea, but inaccurate, unhealthy, or unhelpful?*** For example, when I pick up a book, I look in the table of contents, index and a scan a few pages. I see if the author endorses or teaches common practices that long-term research has either proven ineffective or not proven to be effective. I specifically look for whether the author encourages:
 - praise versus encouragement,
 - bribes, rewards, sticker charts, or behavior modification,
 - power and control tactics, like using timeouts for discipline instead of anger control,
 - negative tactics that shame, blame or humiliate children (like the “naughty chair”) and
 - punishment tactics (including physical) versus discipline.

If it endorses *any* of these, I disregard *all* of the author's advice. These days, there's too much information out there for me to wade through and weed. If I can't trust an author 100%, then I don't follow their advice for my own children and won't recommend them to other parents.

You will find that you can trust the advice of the authors I've referenced in *The Parents Toolshop: The Universal Blueprint for Building a Healthy Family*. Since *The Parent's Toolshop* is so comprehensive and references many other books, it could take a lifetime just to master *these* ideas or check out the authors it references. We don't need to confuse ourselves by reading books where we have to pick and choose ideas with a fine-toothed comb. We can be selective about our future reading, choosing those books and articles that explore proven-effective parenting techniques in more depth or those that deal with specific issues.

Learn practical effective parenting tools at: <http://www.parentstoolshop.com/7ecourse/packages.htm>
Get *The Parents Toolshop* book at: <http://www.parentstoolshop.com/HTML/book.htm>

Jody Johnston Pawel, LSW, CFLE is a second-generation parent educator who has been training parents and family-service professionals for 25+ 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>