

10 Common ‘Mistakes’ Loving Parents Make

1. They never put themselves first

Self-care is not something that loving parents often value. They are so entirely focused on their children’s welfare, mental health and wellbeing, that they fail to recognise the importance of taking care of their own bodies and minds. This is understandable, yet short-sighted. We know that parental mental health is highly correlated with children’s mental health, so we need to take our own feelings and experiences seriously. We need to be proactive about self-care, show our children what matters to us and actively model how we invest in both our mental and physical health.

In this way, we help to futureproof our children. Believe it or not, by investing in self-care, we take the pressure off our children in a way that is beneficial to them. Children don’t relish being constantly scrutinised and will enjoy (and be inspired by) hearing a parent articulate what makes them feel good, how they want to set goals for themselves, and how they manage to remain motivated, despite any challenges that crop up.

2. They think they need to have every answer

Whether it is during homework time, or when your child struggles emotionally, parents often think that they need to have all the answers, give expert advice and be able to solve all problems. As counter-intuitive as it may be, this approach does not help our children whatsoever. By providing all the answers, we are in danger of undermining their self-confidence. A better approach is to ‘sit alongside them’ emotionally, actively listening to them when problems crop up and giving them space and time to puzzle things out for themselves. In this way, the lessons they learn along the way are more deeply understood and their confidence in their own capabilities grows.

3. They express alarm when their child messes up

Is there anything worse in the world than seeing grave disappointment on your parent’s face? Knowing that you messed up, when you tried your very best? Our facial gestures, tone and immediate emotional responses to our children’s ‘oops!’ moments matter a great deal. Unfortunately, negative parental responses to children’s mistakes can be detrimental to their self-esteem, confidence and be extremely de-motivating.

Children can quickly decide never to confess any future errors due to fear of the reaction and simply pass on highly sanitised reports of their progress at school. This isn’t healthy. Instead, children need to know that, in *your* household, mistakes are seen as a normal part of learning, innovation and effort. The main thing is that we acknowledge and learn from them. A failure to accept failure can exacerbate anxiety in children and nobody wants that.

4. They don’t have enough faith in their child

Children are capable of great things, yet often, if they sense that others lack faith in them, their aspirations can be stopped dead in their tracks. Sadly, sometimes, it is the parent who exhibits the least amount of faith and this can have long term consequences. I have often stood beside a parent who declares in full earshot of their child that “they aren’t very academic” or “maths isn’t his thing”.

The child's demeanour in these moments says it all; "if you have no faith in me, I won't either". Children need their strengths to be identified and nurtured by those who love them the most, not their weaknesses! When they do struggle, support them. Look for strategies that will help them. Help them to chart their progress and watch them grow in confidence.

5. They don't pick up on early hints

The health visitor, those early years' teachers, the primary teacher who took a parent aside or the secondary teacher who conveyed concerns in a school report – they all had a point to make and this point may have been swiftly brushed under the carpet. It can be hard to hear concerns relating to your own child and parents can easily and mistakenly assume that they are being blamed. However, it takes courage for professionals to make gentle observations and, as parents, we need to take them on the chin, recognise that they are made with our child's interests at heart and focus on working collaboratively to formulate the next steps.

6. They have a laissez-faire attitude to sleep

When I am contacted by any parent worried about their child's anxiety, behaviour, school friendships, mental health or wellbeing, my first question is always about sleep. Poor sleep hygiene (which is currently rife in the UK among teens) can easily contribute to lack of focus and concentration as well as behavioural and emotional difficulties.

Getting your child to go to bed at night is at the heart of authoritative parenting; a parenting style that is associated with optimal academic, emotional and social outcomes in children. There is even recent evidence that setting a bedtime for older teens is associated with less depression and suicidal ideation. Sleep matters, and it needs to be a major focus within family life at all ages of a child's development.

7. They think 'one size fits' all in parenting

I recall meeting a young mum who could not work out why her twin girls were so different. One had no trouble sitting down at the desk in her bedroom to do homework, whilst the other found settling down at a desk after a long day at school really restrictive.

It hadn't occurred to this mum that her children had different approaches, preferences, personalities and that what worked for one child may not work for the other. Parents often compare one child's compliance to that of a sibling and reach false and negative conclusions. Instead, parents should tune in to what makes each individual child 'tick' and adopt a more flexible mindset when trying to accommodate their needs.

8. They use negative self-talk when describing their own bodies

Body image is how we think about own body and whether or not we feel positive about it. Unfortunately, poor body image is widespread among children and young people (with girls being disproportionately impacted). The reasons for this are complex, but the rise in social media, the amplification of a celebrity culture that values body perfectionism and the associated technology that allows users to edit and improve their own looks undoubtedly play a part.

A more overlooked aspect of negative body image is how we talk about own bodies in front of our children. Looking in

the mirror and expressing negative self-talk about one's own adult body can affect listening children. Instead, practise **body gratitude** as a family. Talk about how amazing how bodies are. Teach your children to be media literate, challenging, rather than accepting, everything that they digest on digital media. Tell your children all the things about their bodies that you love.

9. They think that all the learning happens at school

Parental engagement in children's lives and learning is critical and is strongly associated with positive academic outcomes. Parental aspirations and the views that they hold about school shape children's attitudes. The extent to which a child comes from a positive home learning environment can dictate how well they do at school.

If parents model a positive attitude to learning, set high but realistic expectations, value reading, family talk and discussion, and see their role as 'partner' to the teacher, children will nearly always thrive. The greatest learning happens between parent and child, within everyday interaction and through the opportunities and experiences afforded to that child within family life. School can only supplement the work that you put in at home. Ask yourself: *who am I sending into school each day? Are they well-rested, happy, feeling good about themselves and ready for learning?*

10. They focus on screen time rather than on digital hygiene

Yes, excessive screen time is not so good for eyesight or posture, but it is not harmful *per se*. So says the research evidence, which emphasises something much more important – the concept of *digital hygiene*. There is a big difference between whether a child doing a Latin quiz for an hour online or viewing highly inappropriate material. Parents need to pay much more attention to the *quality and suitability* of what their children are doing online, rather than policing the numbers of minutes spent using the tech. Loving parents always teach their children how to cross the road, wash their hands before dinner, but may neglect to teach them how to navigate the world wide web safely and securely.