



When all else fails, read the manual

I don't have children yet. I can only wonder how it will feel the first time I find out that I will become a parent. How exciting it must be! The first time you hold that precious bundle of life in your hands and you promise that you will do everything in your power to protect and to love him or her unconditionally. How overwhelmed and scared you must feel at the same time.

And then there are the late nights without sleep, the constant changing of nappies and being deprived of any time for yourself. You find out it is not always as rosy as you thought it would be. Then there are the joys of the first words, the first steps, and all those amusing, silly little things that will only make a parent smile.

Then you send your child to school. You have to let go and trust another adult with your most precious belonging, your child. You have a constant question in the back of your mind: "Are we doing the right thing?"

The saying goes that when all else fails, read the manual. Children are not, however, born with a manual. Not one child is the same as another. Just when you think you have the answer, you are proven wrong.

The good news is that parents are allowed to make mistakes. Even teachers sometimes make mistakes. Yes, even though I sometimes give the impression that I think I know everything, and am sometimes quick to give advice to the parents of children in my class, I make mistakes. You can read as much as you want to, you can prepare as much as you want, but you will never be fully prepared with all the answers to do what is best for your child.

I will never forget the hiding my mom gave me when I

was about ten years old because I accidentally broke a glass. I did nothing wrong and did not deserve to get punished. Coming from an Afrikaans family, pride prevented my mom from saying sorry. She knew she was wrong and was under a lot of stress. We all do the best we can do in the context in which we find ourselves. A basic principle of Montessori education is to "make a friend of error". Basically that means to recognise and acknowledge mistakes and learn from them. Like I always say to the children in my class, a mistake is not a mistake if you can rectify it. We need to look past our stubbornness and realise when we make mistakes.

Learning to say that you are sorry, and communicating it to your child might be one of the most important lessons you can teach your child. Your child will understand and still love you unconditionally. When I make a mistake in class, I apologise to the children. I explain to them why I acted in the way I did, and I am often amazed at their understanding. This also helps them to understand me better and opens communication with me through which they can express their own feelings. They are more prepared to say sorry when they do something wrong.

Why feel guilty if you as parent do something wrong. You are also human. You cannot go to page 145 in the manual and read up what to do when Johnny broke that glass by accident.

Only when you are a parent do you truly understand what unconditional love means. All parents want to do what is best for their child, but when all else fails, trust your instincts.

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