



25 Ways to Raise Capable, Confident Children

The fourth of our twelve children will soon be leaving the nest, and it has my husband and me reexamining the job we have done (thus far) raising our children.

Of course, we've made lots of mistakes (that's another post for another day), but by the abundant grace of God (and by following the great example that our own parents modeled for us), there are many things we've done right — things we want to make sure we continue to do as we train up the remaining eight children still under our care.

And so I offer you "25 Ways to Raise Capable, Confident Children." These are in no particular order, beyond the first, which should be our starting point in every endeavor:

1. Pray without Ceasing:

Parenting is one of the most demanding (and most rewarding) jobs any of us will ever do. As such, it requires an extra measure of wisdom from above, as well as strength, endurance, and consistency. Pray for yourself, but pray also for and with your children. The best parenting practices in the world will fall flat apart from God's blessing. Pray that He will soften your children's heart, that He'll give them a teachable spirit, that He'll begin this work early, and that He'll be faithful to complete it, as He promises in His word. (Philippians 1:6, 1 Thessalonians 5:17)

2. Clearly Define the Rules:

Make sure your children know what you expect of them, and then oblige them to obey cheerfully and completely. Well-established and consistently enforced boundaries are both a protection and a comfort. Do not allow children to disregard the rules without consequence, or to speak to parents (or anyone else) in a disrespectful manner. Bad behavior should be penalized and good behavior should be rewarded. (Ephesians 6:1)

3. Teach Them to Listen:

Everything in life comes more easily to a child who knows how to pay attention. Fortunately, listening is a skill which can be practiced from infancy — train your baby to track your voice as you call his name from one side then the other, play "Simon Says" with your toddler, insist that your energetic grade-schooler stand still and make eye contact when you are giving him instructions, call your teen by name and use a key phrase (such as, "Listen to my words...") to communicate the fact that what you are about to say is important and should be taken to heart. (Proverbs 4:1)

4. Bid Them Be Happy:

Cultivate contentment in your children, and you will all live happily ever after. No whining allowed! If you make certain your child's whining is never rewarded, he will cease to do it. Conversely, when you give in to whining, you reward and reinforce the very behavior that drives most of us crazy and thereby encourage your kids to whine all the more. Of course, it should go without saying that we need to maintain a happy, positive attitude ourselves. The irony of an enraged parent screaming at a child, "Why can't you just be happy?" is not lost, even on very small children. (Philippians 2:14)

5. Nurture Your Marriage:

One of the most important things a father can do for his children is to love their mother, and vice versa. If you are married, do all that you can to invest in and safeguard that relationship. Let your children know that you are 100% committed to making sure your marriage lasts. Kids who are given cause to doubt that fact spend a lot of emotional and psychological energy worrying that their parents may divorce (then feeling somehow responsible when they do). This can completely undermine a child's sense of stability and security and will often sidetrack the normal development of confidence and competency in multiple areas. (Mark 10:7-9)

6. Show Them You Care:

Dr. Anthony Witham once said, "Children spell love T-I-M-E," and it is true. Spend time with your kids, individually (use errands as an opportunity for one-on-one time) and as a group. Get excited about the things that excite or fascinate them. Take delight in their company, and let them see that delight in your eyes and your smile and your manner. Children need quality and quantity time, so give them plenty of both. There is no substitute for your intentional, fully-invested presence in the life of your child. (Isaiah 49:15)

7. Put Them to Work:

Assign household chores. Give them real and increasing responsibility from as young an age as possible. Kids who do chores grow up to be more successful than those who don't. One of the most important lessons you can teach your child is to work hard and to take pleasure in a job well done. (Colossians 3:23)

8. Enjoy Them at Play:

Regularly enter into your child's world of play. Take pleasure in relaxing with your children, especially after they've spent time working alongside you. Get up a rousing game of catch or tag or Spoons or Scrabble. Shoot hoops in the driveway or toss a frisbee at the park. Work a puzzle together. Teach your child how to play chess or bridge or dominoes. (Ecclesiastes 3:1)

9. Encourage Them to Try New Things:

Expose your children to as broad a range of experience as you are able: music, sports, travel, missions, charity, social and cultural events, etc. This will furnish them with a more well-rounded view of the world and will hopefully make it easier for them to find their place in it. Give them the freedom and the tools to pursue the things that pique their interest. Let them know that by God's grace, they can do anything they set their minds to. (Philippians 4:13)

10. Point Them to Scripture:

Let the Word of God permeate, influence, and inform every facet of family life. Read the Word of God to your children. Teach it to them diligently. Memorize it as a family. This is something that comes especially easy to children, so take advantage of that fact! Hide God's Word in your heart. (Deuteronomy 11:18-21, Psalm 119:11)

11. Protect Them from Harm:

Vigilantly guard your kids against harmful influences, as well as physical threats. This is fairly easy when they are little, while you still enjoy complete control over their schedules, you pick all their friends for them, and they have not yet discovered a way around those child-proof locks (a skill some kids acquire at an exasperatingly young age). This task becomes more challenging, though no less important, as children grow older and begin to make most choices themselves. Even then, parents should be aware of the company their children keep, the movies they watch, the music they listen to, and the websites they frequent — not for the purpose of micro-managing or being legalistic (that plan will backfire, for sure), but in order to discuss freely and frankly any potential hazards of which parents are aware. (Ezekiel 33:6, Proverbs 4:14-15)

12. Help Them Stay Healthy:

Work to establish good habits in the areas of diet, sleep, exercise, and hygiene. Feed your children square meals, and if you want to nourish their souls as well as their bodies, preserve the family dinner hour. Use it as an opportunity to discuss and dissect the day's events, both within your family circle and in the world at large. Teens whose families eat dinner together at least five times per week are far less likely to abuse drugs or alcohol or engage in other risky behavior. They also tend to eat more fruit and vegetables than children in families who do not consistently dine together.

13. Give Them Good Manners:

Common courtesy and respect are no longer as common as they ought to be. Teach your children to say "please," "thank you," "excuse me," "you're welcome," "yes, ma'm," and "no, sir." Well-behaved kids are such a novelty these days. Good manners make a young person stand out in a crowd in a more memorable way than the wildest tattoo or body piercing can ever do. (1 Timothy 4:12)

14. Read Them Great Books:

Read well-written and beautifully illustrated picture books aloud to your children when they are little, yes, but continue to read engaging novels, inspiring biographies, and thought-provoking non-fiction aloud, even after they grow too big for your lap. Children are never too old to be read to, so choose well and discuss at length. Sharing books together this way is the surest way to foster in your kids a lifetime love for reading, which itself opens whole new worlds of knowledge and experience to them. Thanks to public libraries, this is a practice even the poorest of families can afford.

15. Equip Them to Lead:

Stress the importance of integrity, humility, self-discipline, and willingness to stand alone. Model servant-leadership, and challenge them to follow Christ's example, who came not to be served, but to serve. Encourage them to take initiative and do things that need to be done without being asked. (Mark 10:45, Philippians 2:3-8)

16. Treat Them with Understanding:

Kids are people, too! Be patient with your children and treat them with kindness. Do not be unnecessarily harsh with them, and be quick to forgive when they repent of wrongdoing. Be sympathetic. Try to remember what it was like to be in their shoes. (Ephesians 6:4, Ephesians 4:32)

17. Turn Off the TV:

Set reasonable limits on screen time of any sort, including but not limited to television, computers, smart phones, tablets, and video games. It would probably be both unrealistic and impractical to attempt to eliminate all electronic media usage from our homes, but any child who spends 53 hours a week staring at a screen could probably find something more productive to do with much of that time. (Psalm 90:12)

18. Inspire Good Sportsmanship:

Teach them to lose with grace and to win with humility, conscious that their natural talents and abilities are gifts from above. Stress the importance of always playing fairly and if you must err, err in favor of your opponent. Better to lose the game than to be thought a cheater. (Philippians 2:15)

19. Lead Them by Example:

Model for your children the character and behavior you wish them to exhibit, but do not pretend to be perfect (or expect your children to be). Be honest about personal flaws and quick to admit mistakes, apologizing and asking your children's forgiveness when you wrong them. (1 John 1:8-10)

20. Train Them to Think:

Education is more than regurgitating facts; our kids must also learn to reason and to think through things on their own. We can ask questions of them to help the process along (Socratic method), but we must not shy away from their asking questions of us, as well. Anticipate, encourage, and answer their inquiries in a way that is intellectually honest, morally upright, scientifically accurate, and

neither defensive nor overly-dramatic. And for those questions for which we have no good answer? Admit you don't know, then pray about the matter and search for a solution together. (Jeremiah 33:3)

21. Grant Them Some Space:

Beginning with letting your two-year-old choose what she wants to wear, allow your children to make their own decisions whenever possible, and be supportive of their choices. You can offer your kids guidance and encouragement without smothering and micromanaging them. But be forewarned: Their thoughts, tastes, and values may not always line up with yours 100%, which is okay. They are individuals and are entitled to have their own hopes and dreams and opinions. Parents can reserve the right to overrule younger children whenever they deem it necessary, but as your kids grow, look for ways they can express their individuality in a manner that is acceptable to both of you. (Romans 14:5)

22. Bless Your Children:

Let your sons and daughters know that you are proud of them. Don't get so focused on correcting your children when they do wrong that you forget to praise them when they do right. Our kids never outgrow the need for approval and affirmation, so give it freely. (Genesis 27:34)

23. Don't Overreact:

Whether your toddler takes a spill while learning to walk or your grade-schooler makes a C on his spelling test or your teenager makes a wrong turn while learning to drive, swallow your fears. Remember that we ALL have mishaps and we ALL make mistakes — surely this one is not the end of the world. Don't be negligent and reckless, but don't be hovering and over-protective either. Keep calm and carry on! Take failures in stride and don't give in to worrying. (Philippians 4:6)

24. Entrust Them to God:

Instill in your children a clear vision of what they can accomplish for God's glory. Do your best to give them an eternal perspective. Pass them the baton. Our kids are in His hands: only by His grace do any of our efforts succeed.

25. Let Them Grow Up:

Our ultimate goal is not to raise oversized children, but to raise mature, responsible adults. This will not happen overnight. Neither can you expect to cling tightly until the day your child turns 18 (or 21 or 30), and then let go all at once. It is a gradual process, like the letting out of kite string. Keep a firm hold on the end while they are younger, yes, but be willing to spool out the thread smoothly and steadily as needed. (Proverbs 22:6, Luke 16:10)

So that's my list. Is there anything you would add? Leave off? What types of things have you found most helpful in raising capable, confident children?