

When other people judge your parenting



Nothing stings quite so much as your parenting skills being judged, and these days, everybody seems to be a parenting expert.

Perhaps it's the over-abundance of parenting books and programs available, the blogs and the websites, but everyone (singles included) seem to feel they have a right to tell you that you are too strict, too slack, disciplining the wrong way, praising the wrong way. It may come from parents, in-laws, friends or random strangers, but it seems that you're damned if you do and damned if you don't.

So how can parents today deal with this array of unsolicited advice and well-meaning comments, let alone the critical looks and snide remarks? There are some parents who couldn't give a fig what the neighbors think about their chaotic attempt to pile the kids into the car in the morning with half-eaten pieces of toast dropping crumbs on the way, or your decision not to buy organic milk or fill your kids' lunchboxes with watermelon shaped like Disney characters. But it's difficult for most.

After all, everyone wants to be a good parent and give their child the best education, the best upbringing, the best nutrition and all the love and support that they need to grow into productive and confident adults. So it cuts to the core when parents' methods for raising kids are criticized.

There is nothing wrong with high standards: the problem is where those standards come from. Research from Ohio State University finds that having high self-imposed standards can actually be beneficial, while caring what other playground parents think about your choice of stroller can undermine your confidence and up your stress levels.

When it comes to unsolicited parenting advice from parents or friends, take a deep breath and a moment to gather yourself. Remind yourself that you chose a parenting strategy for a reason, and remain confident in your own parenting choices. As one parenting blogger put it, "You have to understand that just because something worked for one parent, it doesn't mean that it's going to work for you! Every child is different. Again, you know your own child better than anyone else. Period."

After you've calmed yourself, deflect the conversation: respond with "Really? Is that what you did with your child? Tell me more!" Of course this only works if you can do it without sarcasm, but if executed well it serves a purpose. After all, people who give advice are often just looking for the opportunity to talk about their own experience. Give them a chance to do so and the focus is off you and your choices, and onto them and theirs. This is particularly helpful with family and friends that you want to keep the peace with.

But then there are random strangers too, who feel it is their duty to point out that your baby isn't wearing a hat. **One way to handle it is to deflect with humor.** "Oh, we decided to stop wearing hats when we left the cult." Your toddler is having a meltdown at the supermarket and you are ignoring it: "This is nothing. You should have seen him the last time the Vikings lost." Nine times out of 10, humor will diffuse the situation and you can get back to parenting. Your way.

What do you find helps you handle unsolicited parenting advice?