

Banish Common Parenting Myths

by Elizabeth Pantley, author of *The No-Cry Discipline Solution* (McGraw-Hill 2007)



As if it isn't challenging enough to raise children, most parents believe myths that make them feel confused and inadequate. These horrible myths can spoil the joy of raising your children. You may have never realized how intensely these beliefs affect you, but they do. After you identify the myths that color your daily life, learn the truth about each one. By acknowledging that these myths exist in your life, you take the first step towards eliminating them. Learning the truth will erase your doubts and leave you open to learning effective new ways of raising your children. Here are a few of the most common parenting myths:

MYTH: If a parent is truly attached and committed to a child, then that child will behave properly.

TRUTH: You could be totally committed to your child from the moment of birth. You could do absolutely everything right. In fact, you could be a magnificent, spectacular, utterly faultless saint, and your child would still misbehave. The truth is: ALL children misbehave. ALL children make mistakes. ALL children will have temper tantrums, whine and fuss. It's part of the process of growing up.

REALITY CHECK: Love your child, and do the best you can. And don't let normal misbehavior wear down your confidence. Give yourself and your child enough room to be human.

MYTH: If you love your child, and if your intentions are good, parenting will come naturally to you.

TRUTH: Loving your child is easy. Raising your child is hard. Effective parenting skills are learned. Parenting is complicated, intense, and ever-changing. In order to be a calm, effective, parent you need knowledge and skills, but almost no one is born with these skills.

REALITY CHECK: Just like driving a car, mastering a computer program, or becoming skilled at any sport or hobby - good parenting is something we need to learn. You can learn by trial-and-error - but that can be wildly frustrating. Instead, take a class, read a book, join a support group - you'll be amazed to find that a few good tips can make your life much easier.

MYTH: You should read baby books and take a baby care class when you are a new parent, after that you'll figure out how to raise your child on your own - through experience.

TRUTH: Taking care of a baby is our first step in the journey of parenthood. Just when we feel confident with our skills for raising babies, we turn around to find many of the things that we've learned do not apply to a walking, talking toddler. We adjust our approach, only to find that disrupted when our toddler turns into a preschooler, and again when he becomes a grade-schooler, and again when he enters the teen years . . . and yet again when our child graduates and moves on to college or adult life.

REALITY CHECK: We actually have a brand new parenting job each time our child passes from one milestone to another in his life. Just like any other undertaking, the more knowledge you have at each step of the way, the more confident you will feel and the easier your job will be, and the better your life-long relationship with your child.

MYTH: If parents are a perfectly matched couple, and they have a strong relationship, then they will agree about how to raise their children.

TRUTH: It's very common for two parents, even those who are perfectly matched and in a happy relationship, to disagree about child-rearing approaches. Some may disagree about baby care issues, yet others will be perfectly in sync during the baby years and then find they are at odds when their child becomes school age or enters the teen years.

The way that we approach child-rearing is influenced by our own past experiences - both the things we choose to do, and the things we try to avoid. It is nearly impossible for two people to be in perfect agreement on every parenting decision.

REALITY CHECK: Even when we agree on basic fundamental parenting theory, we might slightly disagree on approach. Even if we agree on approach, our differing personalities guarantee that we won't always handle things in exactly the same way. Good communication and ongoing discussion can help any couple to find agreement on important issues as they raise their children.

MYTH: Good parents don't lose their patience and yell at their children.

TRUTH: Even the most peaceful easy-going parent loses patience and yells from time to time. No matter how much we love our children, they will try our patience, they will make mistakes, and they will make us mad. All children have their "naughty" moments. And, guess what? When children are "naughty"--- parents lose their patience and <gasp> they YELL.

REALITY CHECK: It's normal to lose your cool and yell at your children, but it isn't fun and it isn't productive. Take the time to learn a few new anger management skills and some parenting tools. These will help those angry moments become less intense and less frequent.

Take some time to think about these and other myths, theories, ideals and expectations that you have believed. Ponder where these beliefs originated, and why you believe them to be truth. Then contemplate what you learning about the truth of the matter. When you analyze myths and replace them with your own truth, it can help you to approach parenting in a more honest, uncluttered and enjoyable way.

Excerpted with permission by McGraw-Hill Publishing from The No-Cry Discipline Solution (McGraw-Hill 2007) by Elizabeth Pantley <http://www.pantley.com/elizabeth>