

Virtual Mum

Sam Munslow
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The only
Parenting
Guide
you need

“Parenting is the hardest job in the world—no pay; massive responsibility; exhausting; financial suicide; no time off for good behaviour and very little thanks...”

If this is what we hear, no wonder parents are constantly doubting themselves!

We start off failing—new parents... so much to learn...

In this guide, you're NOT going to be told what to do.

In this guide, you're NOT going to be told what **not** to do.

It's NOT an instruction book.

It's a guide and does exactly that—guides you.

My intention is to guide you to follow your wisdom/instincts/gut feelings/what's right for you and your family—because every family is different .

We spend too much time looking at what it 'should' be like and in reality, there is no 'should' - there's just what is.

So grab a cuppa and see if any of this sounds useful to you—and let me know. I love hearing how parents tweak advice and make it their own!

With love—and here's to your awesome parenting,

Sam xx

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Sam Munslow is a Transformational Coach focusing on supporting parents and children—she would love to hear from you at sam@bluemonkeycoaching.co.uk to answer questions, hear what you do as an awesome parent or for 1-2-1 support to help you realise how awesome you already are.

About the author...

Sam Munslow

Parent
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Coach
Stress buster



When my daughter was 2, she had the most horrendous tantrum... as a 23-year-old mum, I was at a loss for what to do... why was she doing this to me? Why didn't she stop? I was so angry, felt useless as a parent - everyone else was managing so much better than me...

I now have 4 children and I see this so differently - she was 2!!! She didn't do anything TO me - she had a tantrum because her world didn't make sense at that moment.

Since then, I have noticed many occasions where my misunderstanding has caused friction in my mind – children will be children – we can't change that and I wouldn't want to. So, it was up to me to find a new way of looking at it.

I did and I enjoyed my family time so much more. I have 4 beautiful and very different children and I treasure the moments.

You can too.

I know that ALL parents are awesome and just need help looking at what they have and what they do with a fresh pair of eyes.

My Facebook group '[Awesome Parenting](#)' is a huge success with simple tips and strategies to help you to enjoy the time you have with your children—please join the group and see for yourself how easy it is to realise your awesomeness.



How to use this guide...

I did consider not including this section but feel it's important to note that YOU are the parents for your children, not me, so feel free to ignore what doesn't fit for you just now.

I can make suggestions, give you tips and advice and point you to ideas that may make your time together calmer and happier, but if they're not right in your setting, then just read on.

I don't let anyone tell me how to do my job as a parent. It's the one job that doesn't come with a job description (haha! My next chapter IS the job description! How funny!)

So, read on—please don't miss any of it out. Even if you don't yet have teenagers, the teenager section will have something of relevance to you as ALL children display the teenage symptoms at times!

And I would love to hear your feedback on each of the points that resonate with you—I'm sure there will be some. I love a good story so let me know—email me at- sam@bluemonkeycoaching.co.uk and put parenting guide in the subject please.

I look forward to hearing from you

Sam

Job Description for Parents

My children don't have a bath or shower every day...
Sometimes they watch tv or play on the xbox for hours...
Some weekends, we work in the garden they get really muddy feet and they climb into bed like this...
And we eat sausage and chips as finger food!!

Are you gasping with horror? Rushing off to call social care to take my neglected children away...? No, I thought not. You don't judge me but I bet you're so hard on yourself if you send your child to school without fruit (or do you dash to the shops at 7.30am to make sure this doesn't happen?!))

What about cutting your child's nails every Sunday ready for school on Monday; making sure you have fun days out EVERY single weekend; providing the latest football shirt/xbox game/latest fad because EVERYONE ELSE has got them... (can't you hear the whiny voice as you read this?!)

These things don't make you a good or bad parent, though they can make life easier at times.

I'm going to tell you exactly what your job is as a parent—and it's not ticking all of the above. Incidentally, this is the only time I do tell you quite categorically what your role is. I am going to be really specific and say that, with absolute confidence, I am 100% right on this one—I AM claiming to be the expert here! So, if you're brave enough—read on...!

Here it is... the **MUST DO** list...

There are only 3 things on the list—

1. **PROTECT**

It's your job to keep your child safe, teach them how to stay safe and to understand the importance of keeping others safe too.

2. **PROVIDE**

Your role as a parent involves providing the skills, knowledge, understanding and love needed to be a decent member of society.

3. **PREPARE**

Offer them the unconditional support they need to flourish as confident, independent people and model this so that they know, without a doubt, that love, belief and encouragement are the best ways to be and they're prepared to live independent and awesome lives

And that's it!

So now you can... STOP comparing yourself to others, feeling guilty for working/having a life outside of theirs/can't give them everything—you're MODELLING! Teach them to accept that they can't have it all their way, instead of expecting to. 7

Everyone does it so much better than me

Do they? Really? What are you looking at? Unless you're there 24/7, living in their heads and in their homes, you're just seeing what they're happy to share with the world.

My favourite quote (found by my very wise mother-in-law) explains this one perfectly and is essential advice for surviving as a parent -

“Never make the mistake of comparing the outside of someone else's life with the inside of yours.”

So, you see all your mistakes, the imperfect bits that make up your family routines and ways—and you compare these unfavourably with the shiny exterior that we see at the school gates. So, when I rock up to school in my jogging bottoms and trainers, hair unbrushed with perhaps a little toothpaste on my top, I can't help but notice that manicured, styled, beautifully made up lady with perfect looking children and freshly polished shoes (I quickly spit on my boys shoes and rub the dirt off with my sleeve...)

What we don't see is the story of this lady—how much time she gets with her children; if she's on her way to an interview; if she's desperately unhappy with her lot... I have no idea but I make up a story where she's better than me!

And yet, I've done just what I love that morning—had a cuppa in bed, reading with my boys; enjoyed making breakfast and eating together; encouraged their independence by getting them to pack their own lunches—THAT's awesome parenting!

What you see on the outside is rarely what's really going on on the inside!

Think about it—when someone comes to stay for the weekend, do they see you ‘warts’n’all’ or do you tidy up and pretend the dining room table ALWAYS looks clear...? I know I do. I vacuum, clean floors; the bathroom gets fresh towels and the recycling gets cleared away neatly. It’s called surface dressing. And anyone looking would think I’m always like this. I dread to think what would happen if someone turned up on a Saturday afternoon when we’re working in the garden. Actually I can picture it now—kitchen a mess, mud on the floors, dog hair on the rugs, bathrooms looking less than perfect with toothpaste and muddy boy handprints on the towel and a mountain of clean but not yet put away washing on the sofa. That’s my inside—the real, raw me. But I don’t share that. I surface dress and so do we all. So, stop comparing!

And let’s say she does have it all under control—and a clean car with no crisp packets littered around too... so what? If my life works for me, what does it matter what someone else has? I bet the queen has never cleaned a toilet in her life—but I don’t resent this every time my bathroom needs doing. I have my life and everyone else can do what they want with theirs. We have NO IDEA what’s really going on for them, so stop making up perfect scenarios for them. It’s not helpful. It’s not healthy. And I bet it’s also not true!

Bickering Children... they all do it—and it drives us mad...!!

Why Do They Bicker?

Because they're children... because they're tired... because they want attention... because... Does it matter? The point is, children, being children, bicker.

The lovely thing is that children are so much wiser than us - they bicker, they fight, they 'tell on each other,' and then 5 minutes later they sit there engrossed in something together and you're left wondering what all the fuss was about!

Before we look at what you can do about it (and I warn you now - I'm not about to offer a magical solution - if I could, I'd be a millionaire!!) let's look at a few simple but obvious things that I need to point out -

1—they're children—yes, I've already said that, but it is worth mentioning again. ALL children bicker so don't be disappointed that yours aren't different—it's normal.

2—they are learning so many valuable skills, some painfully, and sometimes it takes a long time for them to sink in properly, but these skills will carry them through life. Boundaries, negotiating (clearly this starts off as fighting, maybe turns to manipulating for the older ones but eventually they'll get it), compromising (again, takes time for them to figure this out), losing (badly at first but they need to know that they can't always get their own way and siblings are great at helping them see this!)

3—THIS is the perfect place for them to learn all of these skills—at home, with people who will forgive and move on, where it's safe. They're experimenting with hierarchy and testing the waters. And they're letting off steam where it's safe to do so.

They can't do this at school without pretty drastic consequences (depending on how dramatic your children's squabbles are!); they'll lose friends if they start this malarkey in the park; and the last thing you want is your children kicking off when you're out as a family...! So this is the best place—and they know they're safe to do it here (although they may end up in their rooms, with some hair pulled out, a bruise here and there...).

You've enabled this (that's a positive, not an accusation!!) You've provided a safe environment for your children to stretch, test the boundaries and try out their arguing skills. That's awesome parenting!! (see job description :-))

But it drives you mad...?

Read on for a few sanity saving ideas (NB I am not about to provide a magical answer to squabbling siblings—but I may be able to offer some ideas to help you to find peace amidst the chaos...)

Sam's sanity saving tips for surviving the sibling squabbles

First of all, know that it's not personal. It's not about you—it's about them and what's important to them at that moment. So relax—it's also NOT an indication of your poor parenting because ALL children do it.

Secondly, it's not a sign of a 'bad' child. It is normal and even the extreme behaviour you see is part of them growing up. 'But they change from lovely people into horrible monsters!' Yes! When the red mist or red rage kicks in, they can't think rationally. The emotional part of the brain takes over and all sensible, logical thinking is hidden—it's like they forget who they usually are!

So remember this and give them time to recover before expecting rational thinking again...

And remember—when you come from a place of love instead of anger, you'll get a much better response. If you're experiencing red mist too, wait, breath, have a cuppa—and come back and discuss it together later (not accuse—discuss). I'm not going to tell you if you should punish, use time out, withdraw privileges... that's your call. I have my way (which changes often) and you have yours—and it's all good if you come from a calm place to begin with.

Teenagers—It's like having a toddler again!!

Yup! They're going through huge emotional, social and physical changes and are bound to have times when they can't cope/don't understand and just let off steam... When my toddlers were learning to talk, I often filled in words for them. When they get to teens, it's more about recognising and naming emotions – helping them to make sense this time of how they're feeling.

And it's really helpful too to recognise that feelings are transitory – that's not to say that we can just dismiss them (oh, you'll be all right... just get on with it... 'in my day...!') but that the feelings come and go and that's ok. Sometimes we feel grumpy, sometimes teary, sometimes angry... etc... if we try to analyse WHY we can create all sorts of stories in our minds and add unnecessary fuel to the feelings. Actually, they're feelings. Recognise them. Help your teen to verbalise them if need be. But don't wallow in the why and dwell on them. It's just the ebb and flow of feelings which often seem heightened during the teenage years – there's so much to learn and respond to and, unfortunately, the added complication of peer pressure. By noticing that they're feeling cross just now, without asking why or digging deep, we accept this ebb and flow and it helps calm otherwise volatile situations (I'm thinking of a grumpy teen one morning who could have put it down to his 8 year old brother singing in the bathroom... there's an unhappy start to the day with shouting... but this was avoided because we noticed that actually, it was a grumpy feeling and his brother singing in the bathroom was nothing to do with it – if he'd woken up happy, the singing would have made him smile!)

So, in summary, being a teenager is tough enough in this modern world and our job as a parent is to support them in coming through it as unscathed as possible. To do this, and preserve our own sanity we can

1. Recognise that it's not personal – they're not doing it to spite us, because they don't care about us/the family or for any reason other than they're doing it!
2. Put it in perspective – 'do mugs, not drugs' as a friend of mine said when she was eating her porridge out of a pan because her teens had all the bowls hidden in their pits...! (This came from my teenager stating that he could be out doing drugs—but no, he's a terrible teen for keeping mugs in his room—he had a point!)
3. Pick your battles – if he's not cleaned the kitchen, address this and don't drag up all past offences as you'll just add fuel to your anger and come across as ranty and unreasonable (which causes the 'take a chill pill mum!' response!)
4. Recognise the Primary Behaviour when you make a request (he did what you asked) and let the Secondary Behaviour go (he huffed/rolled his eyes/slammed his door...) – that's your child having a personality and there's nowt wrong with that.
5. Recognise that there's huge pressure on teenagers emotionally, socially and physically and support their development through this challenging time by verbalising what's going on, normalising it and helping them to see that these feelings fluctuate like the weather – we can't control the weather and we can't control our feelings – and if we try to control either we get frustrated and disappointed.

And finally...

wise words from MY mum when my teenage daughter, despite me trying all of the above, still pushed, pushed and pushed...

“Be the person you want them to talk about in 10 years’ time... when she’s 23, you want her to thank you for being fair, consistent and doing what’s right. You don’t want her to blame you for what went wrong because you reacted badly instead of responding with love.”

I listened to my mum. It was hard. My daughter tested my love to the limits.

She’s now 25 and one of my loveliest and best friends. (and she recently said, “I was such a bitch I don’t know how you didn’t stab me in my sleep!” – this was sooooo lovely to hear!)

Good luck.

And remember that there are times when you’ve got all your ducks lined up and it’s all good. These are the times when you know you’re an awesome parent. The rest of the time when you practise being one – you may not see it, but you are still an awesome parent xx

Let Them Be Bored...! (and why it's good for them)

Children don't need to be entertained 24 hours a day. In fact, it's best that they're not! Think about when you go away with friends or family – it's great for a while but after a couple of days (and maybe this is just me...) don't you just crave a little time on your own/with just your partner and children? We all need time to just be. Just thinking whilst doing whatever we want. Exploring our thoughts and imaginations... Children need this too – even more so, to be honest as they need to learn to enjoy their own company, learn how to entertain themselves without constant stimulus – in this day and age, there are too many things to do the stimulating for us – tv, xbox, phones, laptops... Don't get me wrong – I'm not some super eco-mum who doesn't use the technology babysitter at times. There's nothing wrong with that – in moderation.

But let's give our children the space just to be. To enjoy being in their own thinking. To find ways to entertain themselves without the need for flashing lights and noise.

They have to learn this. It's vital.

And we teach them by leaving them to it (when I'm feeling guilty, I call it ignoring them. When I'm feeling good, I call it good parenting – life skills being developed.)

And yes, they will tell you they're bored... so what do you do? NOTHING. Let them experience boredom sometimes and see what happens...

This gives them the opportunity to sit and do nothing and allow their minds to work without distraction—no tv, games, devices, people to do the thinking for them... space to think and be. And then they can problem solve—find something to do (NB proceed with caution with small people as they often find things that grown ups don't find as exciting as them, like drawing on walls and painting the mirror with toothpaste...)

And their creative abilities kick in.

They need this in life. So help them to develop it now.

When we have nothing else on our minds, that's when we get our best ideas (in the shower, at the gym, out walking the dog or just as you're nodding off to sleep...). That's because the mind is at rest and clear of clutter.

How often do you allow this to happen? Before I thought about it, it was called, "Doing nothing," or "wasting precious time!"

Actually, it's a great skill to master—freeing the mind to allow the natural wisdom to kick in and creativity to flow.

If children learn this at an early age, they'll never be bored; never stuck for something to do; and they'll have a great strategy for decluttering to allow creative thinking and problem solving to happen.

So let them be bored!

Life Skills every child needs to learn...

There are certain things we can teach our children that will make life easier for them when they leave home and set up in life as a self-sufficient adult. The list isn't exhaustive but I thought I'd mention a few to get you thinking.

- Cooking—if you don't want them to live off fast food, have to dine in restaurants all the time or eat beans out of a cold tin, then some help is needed here. The sooner you start it, the better. There are so many simple recipes available on the internet and if you cook together when they're young, the kitchen becomes a place to chat, create and enjoy being independent. They also then go to secondary school with skills and don't look like they live off take-aways when the cooking classes take place!
- Washing—my boys have a crib sheet by the washing machine so they know which buttons to press and they also know about separating darks and whites.
- Vacuuming, washing up, tidying, bed making, doing the recycling... basically, anything around the home that supports the family.

Learning to contribute when they're young makes doing their share less traumatic when they're older. In our house, we help each other out and there's very little moaning because it has been established as a part of family life.

Or you can do it all for them... and then pay a cleaner and cook to look after them and their families when they leave

So now what...?

Did you find yourself nodding in agreement and interested in trying some of this out?

Do you need to know more so that you too can get rid of the misunderstandings that stand between you and immense family happiness?

Then get in touch!

As well as my free Facebook group (['Awesome parenting'](#)), I also offer one-to-one support with regular coaching and breakthrough sessions, group programmes—you're really not the only one going through this, and bespoke family support .

The first step to getting rid of these unhappy feelings about your family life is there—get it touch.

After that, we work out how best to work together.

We borrow our children for such a small amount of their lives. We need to make the most of this ♥

Being a parent isn't the hardest job in the world—it's the greatest privilege.

I would love to hear from you.

You can email me at sam@bluemonkeycoaching.co.uk

With love

Sam x

PS If you enjoyed reading this and some of it resonated with you, please tell your parent friends about it and how to get it (from me!)—they'll thank you for it.