

Parenting Pointers

Parenting Tips on: Responsible Parenting

By Nancy Almond, EVICS Coordinator

It's been two weeks now since our nation watched with angst as the "balloon boy fiasco" played out on the Colorado Front Range, and many of us are still asking: "How could parents do such a thing?" To quote Tina Griego, Denver Post columnist, balloon boy's parents "were not the first and will not be the last father and mother to fail to understand the most basic aspect of parenting: It's not all about you anymore." Kids do not come with user guides and owner's manuals. In fact, it requires more preparation to receive a driver's license than to become a parent! There is no class or test required. Many of us enter into parenthood unprepared for the tremendous responsibilities that come along with it. At some point or another, we all fail as parents. We make poor decisions on our children's behalf and we get confused between our desires for ourselves and those for our children. There is no such thing as perfect parenting. Responsible parents learn from mistakes, grow, change, make adjustments and do better the next time. Parenting is a process and attentive parents are always learning. Just as children go through developmental stages, so do parents grow in their skills, and with experience, learn appropriate responses to their children's behavior. Successful parenting requires generosity, sacrifice and patience. It means putting the child's interest before our own, and being intentional about providing structure and discipline. No question, children need their parent's unconditional love, but parenting skills do not automatically develop out of love. It takes diligent work and often involves tough choices that force us to put our own self interests on the back burner. This is precisely where balloon boy's parents dropped the ball (or balloon!) so to speak.

Here are some tips for responsible parenting:

- You are your child's first, best and most influential teacher. Always model the behavior you expect and want from your children. They watch everything you do and say! Show them appropriate responses to anger, hurt, jealousy and disappointment.
- Giving your children tasks, jobs and responsibilities is critical for building independence and confidence. Expect success and reward positive effort and accomplishment. Kids are generally capable of much more than we give them credit for.
- Slow down the pace and allow children time and space to complete tasks and meet expectations. Pressure and urgency can make children feel discouraged, self-conscious and uncooperative.
- Ask, rather than demand that your child do something. Remember the golden rule!
- Work together on tasks or jobs that are more difficult, again modeling behavior and teaching your child new skills.
- Give children consequences for poor choices and decisions. Consequences need to flow naturally from the child's poor choice or action. For instance, if your child chooses not to complete homework, remove the TV privilege until

homework tasks are completed the next time. Consequences are intended to teach, not to punish.

- Acknowledge times your child takes responsibility and show confidence in his ability to make responsible choices.

Parenting is not for wimps! When things don't go as well as you'd hoped, forgive yourself and move on. Use it as another opportunity to model for your children how to handle the bumps in the road.

Here's to Happy Parenting!

Estes Valley Investment in Childhood Success (EVICS) offers free childcare referrals, parent information and resources, and childcare provider support and training in the Estes Valley. For more information contact 586-3055 or office@evics.org. Check out our website at www.evics.org.