

parenting*ideas insights



Four parenting priorities for 2017

By Michael Grose

Like the earth's crust the parenting landscape is constantly shifting always bringing new challenges for parents. Not only are children and young people constantly growing and developing but societal trends evolve and change at such rapid rates that it's hard to keep up. It's also hard to differentiate between the significant and the frivolous when it comes to trends and changes.

The following four priorities are both current and significant, deserving to be top of mind for parents as the 2017 school year begins.

1. Time to tackle technology

Want to travel along Parenting Easy Street? That's easy. Make tackling this parenting game-changer your priority. It's no point being all doom and gloom about technology because tablets, mobile phones and smartphones are here to stay. They connect us, educate us and entertain us like nothing has before.

But the jury is still out on the impact of digital devices on children and young people. Currently there are studies being conducted on the effects of technology on children's brains, as well as studies on gaming addiction, social media addiction, attention-related issues, obesity, decision-

making, hand-eye coordination and sleep to name a few.

The technology genie maybe out of the bottle, but we need to bring some sanity into the area. Children and teenagers, (and yes technology, primary school and secondary school kids can be mentioned in the same sentence as first-time smartphone users become younger by the day) who use communication technology need constant parent vigilance and diligence, a flexible approach and the ability to say a loud and clear "NO you can't have/use that now."

It takes a lot of parental backbone to swim against the current all-encompassing technology tide. You can't hold it back, but you can slow it down. You can suggest it sits on the metaphorical shelf for a while or at least while you eat dinner together. You can insist that social media isn't the only way to stay in touch with friends and show them that Dr. Google may be clever but he/she only knows so much and that accurate and current information can be found offline. When it comes to kids and technology, don't be an onlooker. Make this a year for getting in the game with kids, tech boots on and all.



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2. Promote physical and mental health

Finally, good mental health habits are top of mind in Australian schools. A focus on student wellbeing is now a well-established pathway to academic success for children and young people.

But kids' levels of physical activity need a boost. Recent research tells us that children's physical activity peaks at around four years of age in Australia and gradually decreases every year from there. It makes a mockery of the image of Australian childhood spent in the great outdoors.

Remember the old 'healthy body, healthy mind' maxim that past generations so fondly spruiked? Well, it's true. Physical and mental health are inextricably linked.

So this year while we encourage our kids to practise mindfulness; get a good night's sleep and ensure they relax and unwind, let's also make sure kids get plenty of physical activity, preferably outdoors.

3. Put the spoon back in the drawer

I've hidden the controversial part in the middle of the article. Ready for it? I think that parents currently do too much for kids. We spoonfeed them. We make life too easy and don't demand enough from them. Not all parents, but enough that we should be worried that our kids may grow up to become risk-averse, fearful adults who have difficulty making decisions lest they make a mistake. That is, if

they ever do grow up? As reported in Fairfax Media recently, "In 1970's only one in five under-30's in Australia lived with their parents but now it's one in two." This high dependency of children and teenagers on adults is the exact opposite of what adults have done in the past, which is develop their children's independence and achieve the most important parenting outcome of all – their own redundancy.

In 2017 remove the spoon, put it back in the drawer and make independence building a high priority in your family.

4. Put integrity top of the pedestal of character traits

Every parent wants their child to have the strength and fortitude to do the right thing and not follow the crowd. This is easier for young children because the pull of the group and the allure of the media doesn't have such a strong hold as it so often does in adolescence. Strong-willed children and those who like to have their own way can also find doing the right thing less of struggle. But the development of integrity and related traits such as respect, honesty and fairness is an important part of a child's moral compass that will help him/her make smart decisions when you're not around. Generally, integrity is developed in childhood and put to the test in adolescence.

In 2017 put some focus on developing a sense of integrity in your kids – the rock star of character traits.



Special note: I'm thrilled to announce that my latest book *Spoonfed Generation: How to raise independent children* is out. It's available at parentingideas.com.au

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