

HOW Imperfect Parents LEAD Great Families



A Pocket Guide to
How Imperfect Parents Lead Great Families

**Actionable Items You Can Take Today to
Improve Communication and Bring Your
Family Together**

Writing a book was never our intention — it was an afterthought.

Two parents. Two careers. Three kids with learning disabilities. Something had to give.

Our first attempts to fix what we knew was broken didn't work. We found hundreds of books telling us what we needed to do, but no one told us HOW we were supposed to pick the pieces up and put our family together. So we set out on a mission to build our own plan. We focused on clear, constant, and intentional communication. We knew we were not perfect — but that wasn't our goal. This wasn't a TV sitcom where everyone was going to hug at the end of every episode following a punchline from the dad character. This was a family of imperfect people looking to grow together being led by the most imperfect one of us, me.

Our purpose was to put together a simple framework for communicating that would lead us out of the darkness and into a place where our family could succeed. In the end, we created a roadmap to help us thrive as a family. Now we want to share what we learned with you to help your family succeed, be happy, and grow together. We're not experts; we're real parents who have been through rough times and came out the other side as a stronger family — though still not a perfect one!

The following is our "CliffsNotes" version of our book, *How Imperfect Parents Lead Great Families*. We still encourage you to read the book — you will learn you are not alone in being concerned about your family — but this shorter guide book will get you started, giving you action items to help your family move forward today.

Happy reading!

— Dale Vernon

Section 1: Unity — Bring Your Family Together

Unity asks you to look more deeply at who you are, what you believe in, and how you do it.

Together Stronger

Before anything else, agree that a better me is a better we, and go first. Take a deep look at yourself and conduct a thorough self-evaluation. When you're done, ask your spouse to give their honest evaluation of who you are as a parent and partner. Take time to reflect on what you heard, and take active steps towards self-improvement.

It's not about guilt or finger-pointing. But, someone has to go first. Trust has to be built. It's about growth and development. It's a journey and it will take time, but in the end, you will be together stronger. Go first and focus on a better me for a better we.

Declare Your Values

Define what you believe in through your family values. Surely you share values with your partner — it's likely what brought you together in the first place. Now you and your partner have to actually write down

who you are, what you believe in, and how you will do things as a family. What kind of environment do you want your children to be raised in? What do you want your children to believe in? Regardless of your religious or political beliefs, you have to be intentional about what's important to you and your family. And don't just talk about it, document it. Write it all down. When you write things down, wisdom presents itself.

Don't let the media shape your children's ideals and opinions. Articulate your values to your children. Values are the foundation of your family. They are what you use to show your children what you believe in, who you are, and how they should conduct themselves. It's all about intentional alignment. Values align you and your spouse in the direction you are taking your family. You are taking your family somewhere, but is it intentional? Know where you want to go and how you'll get there.

Gather Together

Establish your family's culture of communication by bringing your family together. Having values is great — and necessary — but it's not enough. Everyone has to be on the same page, everyone has to know what's going on with each other, and everything you do and say as a parent has to be consistent. This can be difficult when everyone leads different lives and is running in different directions, so you need to carve out time where everyone comes together. This is where family meetings and huddles come in.

It's all about true face-to-face communication, not via texts or emails — technology and devices should be banned from all meetings and huddles. Get together and just talk about where you've been, where you're going, and what questions and concerns you've faced. Our family does 10 minute family huddles every school day, and longer (45 minutes to an hour) family meetings twice a month on Sundays. But you need to do what works best for your family, and the best format for you and your family is the one you actually implement and carry out. Bottom line, make time to gather together, actually communicate, and continue to reinforce your values. Teach your children the importance of communication and emphasize that you are a family that communicates.

Section 2: Clarity — Enhance Your Family's Communication

Clarity is building trust and a culture of communication that thrives when you turn common sense into common practice.

Be The Example

Your actions speak loudly. Your children become what you show them. Be the example of your values. If you do nothing else, realize that you are the example to your children. What you do means more than what you say. Everything you do — and how you do it — is an example to your children, and they're going to follow it whether you like it or not.

If there is something your children do that you don't like, you gave it to them. And if you want them to "stop" doing it, then you have to go first. This means that you have to stop doing the things you don't want your children to do, and start doing the things you want them to do. We have to be aware of what we are doing and be intentional about what we want our children to see and become. Our children are mirror

images of us. Show, don't tell. Be the example. If you gain nothing else from our book than this point, you and your family will be better off.

Use A Common Language

Develop a common language to use as a framework for your family's culture of communication. A family's common language starts with its values. It's about knowing who you are and what you believe in. Your values are aligned, now use them in a common language and you'll align the whole family. This allows mom and dad to be consistent and get everyone on the same page, communicating for the betterment of the family.

The sections of the book on "Clarity" and "Action" — and particularly the chapters on "Be the Example," "Give Them the Why," and "Let Them Do It" — show you how to create that common language. A common language creates efficiency and alignment between spouses.

The most important common language in any home should be the continuous reminder to your children that you love them. With love, we build trust, and with love and trust, anything is possible.

It's important to remember that your family's common language is not an afterthought to your efforts to become a better family. It's the glue that cements you together.

Respond, Don't React

Choose to respond and control your emotions by starting with a pause. Nobody is perfect, and reacting is inevitable. It is human nature, but when it does happen, say "I'm Sorry," and hit the restart button to respond the way you should have.

We get it, stopping emotion in its tracks and hitting the pause button is not always easy. When you pause and think about the outcome you want, it allows you to turn your response into a teachable moment, not a shouting match or lecture and a tearing down of trust. It's about being intentional about what you're doing and saying. Responding creates a positive culture of communication within the family, a culture built on trust. Choose to respond rather than to react. Again, it's easier said than done, but it is possible to pause first — and if all else fails, saying "I'm sorry" is still there.

Get Off The Soapbox

Step down from your soapbox and into a conversation where listening builds trust. Our children don't learn from our lectures. They learn when we listen, understand their perspective, and engage in conversations that build trust. Trust gives our children the comfort of knowing that they can seek our advice or share difficulties in their lives, without any fear of losing our love.

Have a conversation. Ask questions. And, most importantly, listen. Understand where your children are coming from and why they did what they did. You can't correct what your children did, but you can correct how they thought about it and approached it. Understand their side and respect that. It's a two-

way street, and when you make it a true conversation, you increase your family's chances of success, no matter how you define what "success" means.

Give Them The Why

We want our children to learn and think for themselves, but so often we give them tasks to fulfill without understanding the reasoning behind why it's important and why we've asked them to do it. Children don't learn from "because I said so." They only learn when they understand the purpose or the why. Embrace their questions and fulfill that curiosity.

Think about your own work or personal life. How many times did somebody get you to do something even though you didn't really know why you were doing it? Did you actually learn anything or benefit from that? If your children don't understand why they're doing what they're doing or what the purpose of it is, then they aren't learning anything. They're just fulfilling a task and, eventually, they're going to forget it and move on. You've got to give them the why. You've got to help them learn. If you don't give them the why, they're never going to learn.

You Get What You Expect

First, have the right expectations. Then set and communicate them. More often than not, we have higher expectations for our children than we should. Expectations that are beyond a child's current level of comfort can be beneficial, but can also be damaging. You have to understand the capabilities of your children so your expectations are appropriate given their intellectual and physical abilities — your expectations must be consistent and achievable.

Every child has different abilities and interests, and if you don't understand what those are, then it's your fault for expecting them to be passionate about your desires, rather than letting them find out what excites and drives them. Seeing the potential in your children and believing in their ability to achieve that potential is critical.

Finally, you need to set expectations. Your children need to understand what is expected of them by setting expectations that will drive the behavior we want to see.

Establishing expectations is about having the right ones first and then being firm in setting them with your children.

Consistent And Continuous

Be continuous in what you do; be consistent in how you do it. Children need consistency in their lives and the consequences of inconsistency is self-evident. A lack of predictability and reliability can create anxiety and confusion for our children. Our consistency and continuity build and strengthen our children's trust with us. They develop the comfort of knowing what to expect of us and what we expect of them.

When they can rely on how we will communicate with them, how we will respond to their concerns, and that we will support them in times of need, then the probability of clarity increases.

Being consistent is difficult but we need to be consistent in the way we deal with our children, regardless of the situation. If you're not consistent in what you want for your kids, then you're not consistent in how you're teaching them, and they're not learning anything. It's not about "picking your battles" — it's about reducing uncertainty and reinforcing this is who we are, what we believe in, and how we do it. Being consistent and continuous is about being intentional in everything you do.

Section 3: Action — Turn Effort Into Experiences and Confidence

Action is where your children gain knowledge and experience and build confidence.

Let Them Do It

Experience builds knowledge, knowledge builds confidence, and confidence builds everything else. Even though we learn by watching others, we learn most effectively when we do things ourselves. The more experiences you give your children, the more knowledge they'll gain and have to build upon. It might be easier or quicker in the moment to do it for them or make decisions on their behalf, but when you do that, you strip them of opportunities to gain experience and knowledge. You know this; reflect on your own skills and abilities.

This is about failure and letting children learn through it. No matter what, one day your children are going to be on their own, and if you don't ever let them do things, explore for themselves, and, yes, fail, then they're never going to get it; they'll never thrive.

Everyone, at some point, wishes their children had greater confidence in some area. Well, where do you think confidence comes from? You are not born with it, it's gained through experience. How do you help your children gain confidence? You do it by letting them do things for themselves — yes, even the hard stuff. Let them get frustrated, let them understand it, and then let them figure it out — not your way, but their way. Your job is to guide and coach, not do. Sorry helicopter parents, this is going to be a tough one for you. It's your choice, you can either give them the gift of dependence or independence.

Effort Is My Smart

News flash, effort is the difference between success and failure. How?

Develop a growth mindset. The principal of a growth mindset asserts that our most basic abilities can be developed and enhanced through continuous effort and the process of finding solutions while also learning from experiences, including failures. Effort and learning through failure is the key to lifelong learning.

It may be instinctual to tell our children, "good job, you are so smart" and believe that this will instill confidence. The truth is, you need to learn to praise process, not the end result. Carol Dweck, PhD, proved clinically that when you focus on praising the effort and the process children go through to find the solution, the more they will learn and more they will succeed. Oh yeah, and the more they will build confidence. Focus on the process not the end result.

If your children don't understand the importance of effort and hard work, it's because you, as parents, aren't focusing on it. You're just praising outcomes and hoping that they're "getting it" and building confidence. But it's all about the experience and overcoming obstacles, and the only way you get through that is through effort.

It's also important that children are willing to try new things — they can't expand what they know without stretching their experiences.

In the end, effort is their smart.

Final Thoughts

In the end, we learned four critical points that can't be overlooked.

One, someone has to go first. If we spend all of our time pointing at the other person and saying they are the reason everything is wrong, then progress will never happen. Someone needs to go first, so why not you? Go first!

Two, if you do decide to go first, then you have to realize your journey may not be easy. It will take time and effort to resolve issues and rebuild the trust that was damaged. Ask yourself, is it worth it? More importantly, is your family worth it? It takes time.

Three, this is a journey and it is not one you can go alone. Everyone needs someone. Remember, you are never alone. Whether it's a friend or family member or both, you aren't alone, others are there for you. Don't be ashamed to ask for help and know that when you do, your chances of success increase exponentially. No one does it alone.

Four, stopping chasing the unicorn — the image of the perfect family that we strive to be. No family is perfect. There is a story behind every door and everyone has struggles. Stop focusing on everyone else and focus on your values, what's important to you, and what matters most — your family. Live your values, live your beliefs, and live your life your way. If your friends don't accept that, then they weren't your friends anyway. There's a story behind every door, focus on yours.



A Story About Imperfect Parents

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