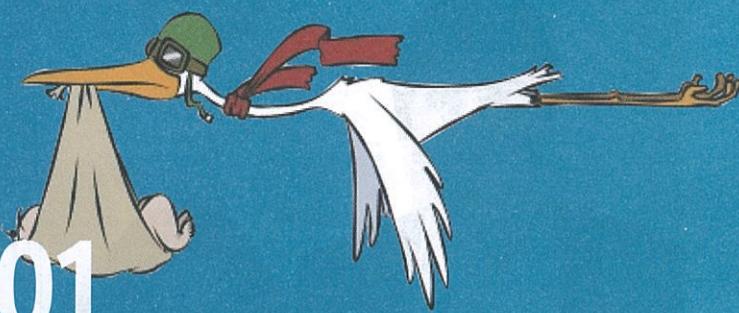


PARENTING 101



One of the most heart-warming moments of being a parent is when your child suddenly figures out how to call you "Mummy" or "Daddy".

In my daughter's case, she actually called me "Mama" first. It was just easier for her to pronounce, although she picked up Daddy fast enough.

She'd been building up an impressive vocabulary but absolutely refused to refer to me as anything but "gaga", a generic term she'd coined for anyone and anything! And then magically, after an evening of going over it again and again with her, it happened.

She graduated to Mummy just days ago, which is really nice.

But I'll never forget how it felt when she first called me Mama. My heart melted (still does) every time she calls me.

So what?

Well, it may seem obvious, but this little experience made me realise that our children really do depend on us to teach them so much about life. At this stage, my daughter isn't just picking up new words every day, she wants to do all the things we do — whether it's putting on her own shoes, trying to blow-dry her hair like I do, or putting the key in the front door lock.

As she gets older, she's going to pick up habits, values — almost all of it from us.

So how do I make sure I teach her all the right things? How can I be a good mum?

I was at a Parent's Network lunch the other day. We have these gatherings at work once every month or so and they include sharing sessions with various colleagues or guest speakers.

Whether it's on the topic of homeschooling or parenting styles, it's a great time to bond and pick up tips. During these discussions, it struck me that the things the other parents were talking about were issues I hadn't even thought about yet: how to make sure your child isn't going to flunk out of school if they're just not interested in it, how to develop a trusting relationship especially during the rebellious teenage years, how to bring up a well-mannered child? I may never have gotten pregnant if I'd attended one

of these before having my daughter!

I know I'm a devoted mum. I love my daughter more than life itself, almost.

But is that enough? Will that automatically make me a good role model, a good mum?

I'll give you a little example: I'm pretty hot-headed. I can't help it but I can lose my temper in an instant. I usually cool down almost immediately after, but when the outburst happens, it's not always pretty. My husband keeps reminding me to control myself because our daughter may pick up this behaviour. It's not that I don't want to, but because it's something so innate in me, it's almost impossible to control!

And yet, I must, mustn't I?

It's a little like being a leader in the workplace. It would be so much easier to stick to whatever makes you most comfortable. You could be an introvert, someone who avoids conflicts, or someone who just wants to focus on your work and not the stresses of management. But one thing I've learnt at PwC is that you can't afford that, especially not when you manage teams.

The term we use at work is to "flex" yourself. Basically it's not about changing the person you are but about being flexible enough to modify certain characteristics to suit the situation or person you're dealing with.

You could try the same thing with your kids. Here's what someone shared at the Parent's Network session. Say your teenager is dressed rather skimpily to go out with friends. Instead of telling her to change, because you say so, be honest and specific about the reason you don't want her to dress that way. There's a big difference between saying, "Please don't wear that short skirt", and adding, "because people might take advantage of you".

Flexing your parenting style isn't the be-all and end-all to raising your kids well. But it can be a good step to take, according to those who've done it.

I'm going to try it. This month, I'm learning to deal with toddler tantrums and I hope I don't lose my cool, or give in to her too quickly. Wish me luck, please! ■

Stephanie Caunter studied engineering but soon realised it wasn't meant for her. Today, she heads PwC Malaysia's marketing & communications team. She counts herself lucky to learn a bit more every day about being a better wife, daughter, sister, friend, mother and teammate.

Changing hats

by Stephanie Caunter

