

PART ONE

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INTRODUCTION



Claudia and Eberhard Mühlen

What can I do if my child always defiantly says no? What do I do if my son beats up another child? How should I react if my daughter drives me round the bend with her dawdling? And what about when the children always argue with each other, do not want to help in the house, and only ever want to do as they please?

To be able to pick up a book right then and find short, sensible answers to these and other questions could be a “lifesaver”. Concise chapters provide the answers to frequently asked questions, relating to the time from birth onwards through to the tricky teenage years. And, so that marital relationships are not left out of the picture, there is also a section giving food for thought on the topic of partnerships.

Our advice has been condensed out of our existing 15 books written on family matters. We have updated it – and indexed our answers with keywords. There are questionnaires and space is provided for taking notes which will enable you to put into practice what you have just read. There are over 300 photos (many of our family and friends) to enliven your study of this book. Now you have all the Muehlan tips in one book!

The twenty-five turbulent years we encountered bringing up as many as 13 children have enabled us to focus on the really important issues that should never be missing in family life if we want our children to grow up as confident individuals.

In our experience, success in parenting hangs on these three building blocks:

- *emotional security*
- *self-reliance*
- *reasonable boundaries*

To underline the importance of each of these topics, we have divided the book into three sections, each one covering one of these crucial areas:

- *an excellent environment*
- *a strong team*
- *tough yet tender*

To be emotionally secure, children must be certain of their mother’s and father’s love, need good friends and harmonious surroundings. Each one has to learn responsibility whilst gradually being shown how to gain independence and to contend with difficulties in our ever more complex and technological society. They also need parents who are consistent, have a clear set of values and are persistent in marking out boundaries, so that these key objectives can be achieved.

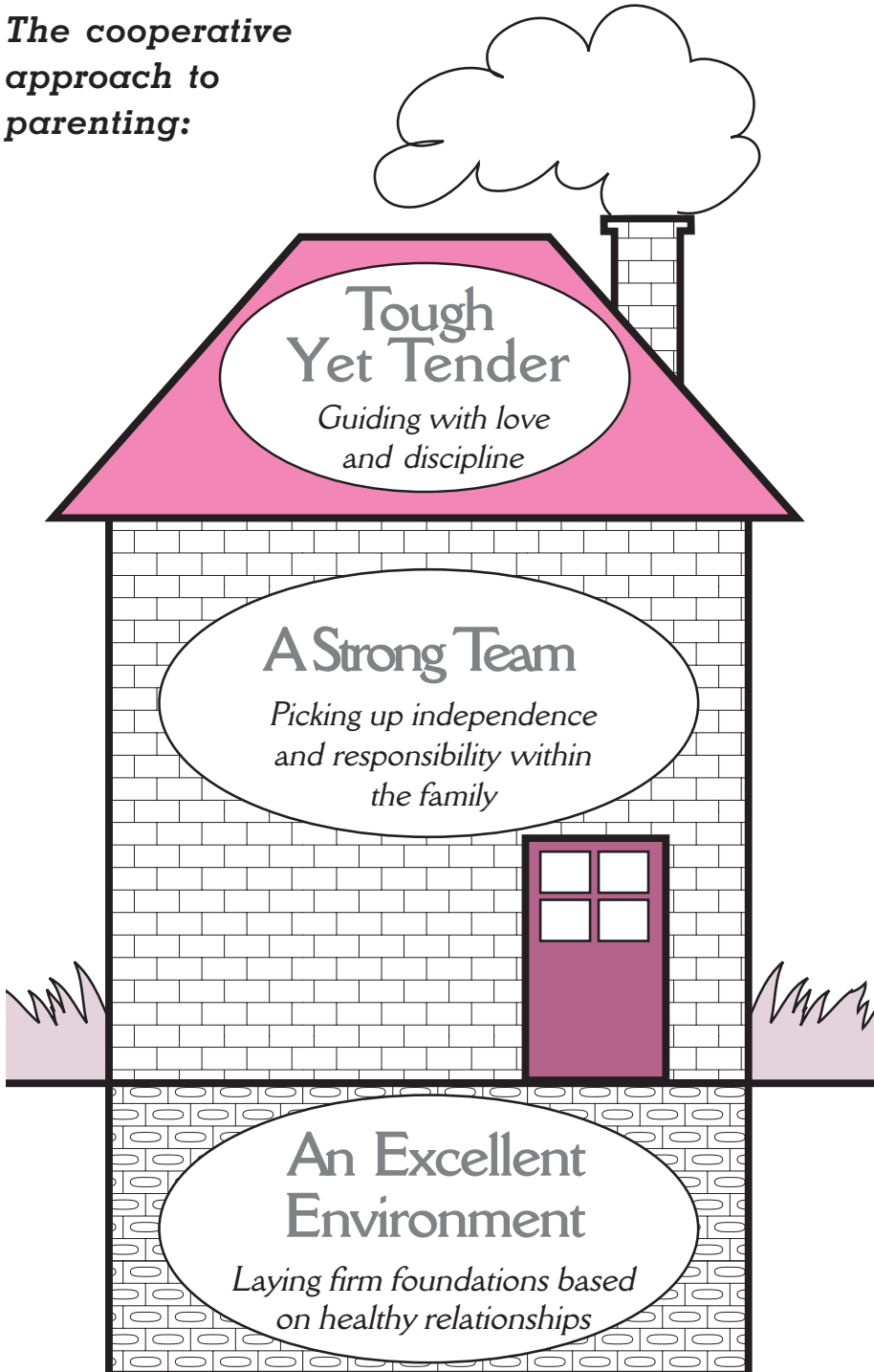
These three basic ideas for the positive development of children can be illustrated with our image of the “building called home”.

This picture clearly emphasises the main points and how they are linked: (page 7)

Imagine someone building a house and trying to start off with the roof! Similarly, If a child only encounters pressure, harsh words and discipline and experiences little communication, security or love, then the “roof” will weigh down heavily and damage his emotions.

It is a mistake to skimp on the work of laying the foundation. When someone builds on a wobbly foundation in an unloving and frenzied fashion, sets out the family rules in an angry tone and then tries to maintain an authoritarian “roof” of total control, it’s hardly a surprise if the walls begin to crack and later everything caves in.

**The cooperative
approach to
parenting:**



We want to spare you such a disaster. It must be awful to survey family relationships at the end of one's life and to see nothing but a heap of rubble.

The right way is to set about creating an **excellent environment**! Use lots of time, love and imagination to build your family's foundations. Only then can good relationships be created and maintained.

The stronger the foundations, the more accepted and secure the children feel and the more they will be willing to listen to you and to accept family rules. It is within the **strong team** of a healthy family that independence and responsibility are most effectively learned!

Follow these two rules and the basics will be correct, so that the "roof" of administering guidance through discipline will not weigh down heavily on your children, but will contribute towards a healthy development of their personality. **Tough yet tender**, i.e. being consistent and yet maintaining a sense of humour: this should be your motto! Discipline will not be necessary very often, because the children will feel loved and know how they should behave.

Do you see why we are enthusiastic about this simple parallel between building family and building a home? We have adopted this principle for the last twenty-five years that we have brought children up. It has enabled us to live in a goal-oriented and yet relaxed way with our children.

Special notes for this International Edition

This edition has been translated into the English language, which is understood by at least a billion people in our world. It has NOT been changed to reflect the cultural norms of any one country (England, say, or the USA), because there are clear differences in each national society.

For instance, the translators based in England are well aware that school age in their country comes one year earlier than in Germany. Therefore German children can be expected to achieve a greater level of independence before starting school. But to adapt the book to England would not only be rather difficult but also useless for readers based elsewhere.

The original had three bibliographies, which we have kept but have tended to replace German titles with British or American ones: German titles have not been cut but relegated to a fourth bibliography at the end.

Another example: in countries where children are driven or bussed to school, the chapter on walking to school may be redundant. Finally, corporal punishment, which the authors use as a very occasional 'last resort', is specifically outlawed in Scandinavian countries.

Finally, one thing that the authors strongly recommend is that every member of a family should undertake some job for the household: whereas this needs saying in Western culture, most Africans would think it the most natural thing in the world, and so hardly need to be told to do it!

Here is an amusing conversation with one of our daughters:

"Tell me, Daddy, is it difficult to bring up children?"

"Well, I don't think it is. But some parents find it quite difficult"

"Oh, Daddy, I am proud of you. If you hadn't brought me up so well, I would definitely be a real horror. Like one girl in our class. The way she treats her parents and the way she talks... We ought to adopt her for six months, she would turn into a little angel..."



An Excellent Environment



***Laying firm foundations
based on good relationships***



Animals and the garden

Consciously living alongside God's creation is a true expression of the Christian way of life. Since we became a family there have always been animals around us: a dog, a cat, small rabbits, hens and for a time even sheep and ponies. Contact with animals is very valuable for the development of children. It is there that they learn responsibility, consideration for others, endurance and even denial of self-interest. In addition to this they get a glimpse of the miracle of God's creation and profit from the devotion and love of an animal.

Experts emphasise that parents are often not aware of what an animal belonging to a child means for the child and its development. The relationship is far more than just stroking, feeding and playing, much more than the familiarity of the teddy bear. Animals open new worlds to children. With a four-legged creature they are on the ball. Because a dog needs plenty of exercise it can turn a child who would normally just stay indoors into an active child. An animal helps children to cope with sadness and failure.



But which animal is suitable for which child and at what age? Animals should never be presented as an unexpected gift and never be misused as a substitute for a toy. If a child wants an animal to caress, a guinea-pig is recommended (from about three to four years of age). Gerbils (mongolian desert-mice) are also possible as are turtles. Suitable for five to six year olds are: mice, small rabbits, cats or dogs. Hamsters are not recommended. These cute nocturnally active creatures should be left to sleep during the daytime. It is cruel to keep them awake during the day.

We know that parents drag their feet a bit when it comes to fulfilling their offspring's wish to have an animal, because they know what hassle is involved with having one. For the animal's sake consider the living accommodation and space available. The initial enthusiasm can evaporate rapidly and then the mother is stuck with all the work

What decision will you reach?

Reasons in favour of keeping an animal:-

Reasons against :

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involved. The most serious matter is being tied down. Either the dog, or whatever it is, comes along on all outings or it regularly needs an animal sitter. The pros and cons have to be weighed up very carefully.

Having a garden with a vegetable patch is equally valuable. Here the children can experience how a plant which you can eat grows out of a seed. Another reason to marvel at God's creation. Yes, this too makes work, but this can be good for your health for two reasons: Firstly, you exercise and begin to sweat and secondly, you get to eat fresh, healthy vegetables ... a winning combination if ever there was!

Why don't you get together with one or two families and rent an allotment? The resulting work can be managed more easily together, the children can run around in the fresh air, enjoy the outdoor life and can, depending on how old they are, help with the work. Even without a garden, you can experience the joy of sowing, growing and harvesting on a small scale. Kitchen herbs, salads, tomatoes and strawberries can be grown in pots and tubs on balconies or terraces.

As we are a very big family we have always had a sizeable vegetable plot and have been largely self-sufficient. For Eberhard it meant quite a bit of effort. But is there a more healthy balance to intellectual work than being physically active in the fresh air? Every school child in our family has a working day once a week with around two hours gardening preferably together with dad. We then squat on the edges of the beds and attack the weeds laughing and having fun, or do the harvesting. It is this working together which creates a feeling of belonging together. It is also one of the most wonderful and informal opportunities to talk about God and the world.



A successful strategy with toddlers

We can see essentially three measures of discipline for the toddler years:

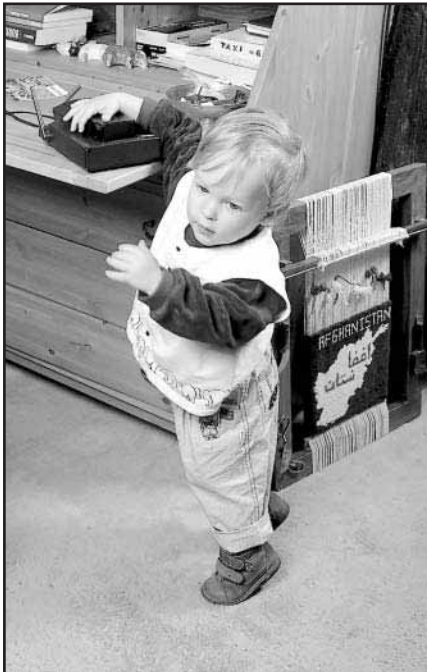
Provide feedback on the actions of the child

Be Patient and hold your ground

Diversenary tactics

Give feedback on the actions of the child

Parents who talk a lot to their children anyway will make plenty of comments about their endeavours. Nonetheless, you can make this form of communication count for more.



A small child constantly informs himself whether what he is doing at this point is okay or not. You the parents will soon realise this by his look. He crawls across the telephone and looks expectantly towards you as if he wanted to say: "Well, Mummy, is this allowed or not?" Now it's your turn. You shake your head and reply: "No my darling this is not for you." Your darling will react and by this you can confirm that he has understood the message even at just nine months. Either he withdraws his hand or he carries on with determination towards his objective. Now is not the time for you to stay silent: if your child cooperates you should praise him highly – positive affirmation is enormously important anyway. Particularly when he does something right, do tell him: "You have done this really well." Or: "I'm impressed, the way you eat!" If a child does something right the parents have a tendency to keep quiet, but whenever something does not work out they are very quick to scold.

Train yourself to accompany your child's actions with words (see ENCOURAGEMENT). Also, make sure your repertoire is as developed for praising as for scolding.

Be patient and hold your ground

Let us get back to the scene with the telephone. You need patience and perseverance if your child does not cooperate. Talk again to your child, go over to him, pick him up and put him on the carpet a few metres away.

"Great," you think, "that is settled." You return to your book and have scarcely covered the next paragraph before the little one is already back at the telephone. Do not become excited. He might not have taken you too seriously. You repeat this procedure probably two or three times. At the third time you grab him a little firmer, because he should realise that this is not a game, but for real.



used to things being done in this way and not another.

Make no mistake — we readily concede that it will not be so easy with all children. After all they are very different. There are the so-called “easy” ones and the “difficult to control” ones (see DIFFERENT TEMPERAMENTS).

To cope with a strong-willed toddler

Diversionary tactics

At the same time you should see if you cannot offer an alternative to your child. Perhaps you dig out a book and the telephone with all its temptations is forgotten. You can feel relieved because you did not have to fight this small fight right to the end.

Diversion is a legitimate means, during the toddler years, of avoiding unnecessary conflicts. Of course this possibility must not be exaggerated. There are parents who constantly wave something in front of their child's nose, in order to divert his attention. This is not what we mean. With a looming confrontation reflect whether it is worth carrying on to the end. If the answer is yes, then stay stubbornly with your No; if not, by all means try diversionary tactics.

If persistent encouragement, patience, firmness or diversionary tactics are getting you nowhere, and your toddler, despite everything, engages in a battle of wills (see CRAVING FOR FREEDOM OR BATTLE OF WILLS), then give him one(!) smack on his fingers or on his thigh as an unmistakable message: “Stop, my friend, not like this! It is better to obey me. I'm intervening for your benefit.”

We are firmly convinced that this threefold strategy works with most toddlers. Of course the parents have to practise and a child has to get

Try to get a good night's sleep and start the day in a good mood with the resolution not to be beaten by anything.

Develop a vision for the future of your little rebel and pray for him.

Give him plenty of opportunity to exercise and tire himself out.

Give few commands and respect his independence

Your “yes” should be a YES and your “no” an unwavering NO.

For your thoughts and notes

In your mind go through the last confrontations with your toddler and apply this three step strategy: “Feedback — Patient firmness — Diversionary tactics.”