



Raising Kids 101

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FLYMF May 2005, The Welcome To The Real World Issue, Volume 2 Issue 5

I recently made the mistake of introducing knock-knock jokes to my four-year old nephew. Now he won't stop with them, but he doesn't quite grasp their nature. His usual attempt goes something like this:

Him: Knock, knock.

Me: Who's there?

Him: Why don't fish have testicles?

Me: What??

Him: Because they're fish.

Or this:

Him: Knock, knock.

Me: Who's there?

Him: London Bridge.

Me: London Bridge who?

Him: Your face is stupid!

So I have only myself to blame for that. But it set me to thinking about some other rules people should follow when raising children.

First, never have children, because they're difficult and often cost money. But if you must, or if you cannot get an even exchange (such as a pinball machine or trampoline) for the ones you have, here are some other guidelines to follow:

During the pregnancy, don't play coy with others about the gender of the baby. Either you know, or you don't know. The technology has long existed to inform parents as to whether the baby is going to be a boy or a girl, so what's the point in not finding out? So you can tell nine-year old Jack how he could've been a "Janice"? And then you'll wonder why he's wearing a dress to the prom. Just find out already!

When you do find out the baby's gender before birth, no one thinks it's cute if you keep it to yourself. Again, what's the point? Are you trying to hedge against a decision you'll have to make if it comes out with dual exhaust systems, to put it indelicately? You can play head games with the kid as soon as he or she is born. Give the rest of us a break.

Finally, don't show us the ultrasound picture. We can't figure out what it is either.

As to whether parents should hope for a boy or a girl, I'm as neutral as Pluto. I haven't seen any studies showing a predilection in one gender more than the other for bringing home some hamburgers or doughnuts for Dad, so either one should do.

Once the baby does arrive, don't push the kid to succeed or achieve too soon in life. Let Alice or Teddy be a goofball for a while. We're only young once, right? And then later, when you want the kid to shape up and get out of the house, you'll be justified in referring to your child as "dumbass." Most five-year olds will know you're half-kidding.

In addition, don't harass your kid into talking too soon. First of all, everyone thinks it's gibberish except you. More importantly, remember that the sooner they can say, "Mama," the sooner they can say, "Mama, I have the clap," or "I reject your ideology as a falsity, and abhor your efforts to provide me with love and a warm meal." Kids, huh?

Another good parenting tip is to not let your kid go outside wearing dirty clothes. If you do, the neighbors will think you're a bad parent, but you're not. It's just that your kid is a slob with no self-esteem.

Speaking of clothes, be sure to dress up your kid in all kinds of crazy outfits. Dragon, carrot, gavel – that sort of thing, even if it's not Halloween. Especially if it's not Halloween! Don't put clothes on your son or daughter that you picked up at Target or Baby Gap like anyone else. In today's media-driven world, you need to create buzz for him or her. No one is going to talk up a girl in a pastel pink sweater with blue jeans. But dress her up like a steam shovel on a Tuesday in June, and all of a sudden her picture is in the paper and people want to know who she is.

Likewise, steer clear of ordinary names for your children. It never ceases to amaze me how many parents cop out and go with Larry, Ben, Nancy, Jane, etc. Be bold! When you have that first kid, you don't know if this is your only opportunity to leave a legacy, so take a chance with something memorable. Do you want to roll the dice with "Timmy," or "Underdog Johnson"? Also good: "Godzilla Gorilla Pimp Burger King".

Make sure your children maintain a healthy diet. If they don't like spinach or brussel sprouts, just mash them up and add them to a chocolate milkshake. After all, calcium means strong bones and teeth.

Never do your kid's homework, because this will make other parents jealous of you if you're better at it than them. Consequently, they won't invite your kid to their kid's parties. To wit: in fourth grade, my Dad made me a working model of a space station. It wasn't a homework assignment or anything; he was just bored that

weekend. The class stood around marveling at it and asked how it worked. "Beats me," I said.

I got an A+ for it, but was blackballed from Annie Mocklighter's birthday bash. It was the one where her two bloodhounds, Cagney and Lacey, grabbed Stevie Janklow by the pants and jumped into the pool. You're not going to see that twice in a lifetime. (To his credit, Stevie never let go of the corndog.)

The lesson from all this is that not everyone is cut out to be a parent. Many pitfalls and worries surround raising kids, but the most important thing to remember about having children is this: keep the knock-knock jokes to yourself, Stupid Face.