

## When You Love But Don't Like Your Child

### Michael Grose

Michael Grose, founder of Parenting Ideas, is one of Australia's leading parenting educators. He's an award-winning speaker and the author of 12 books for parents including *Spoonfed Generation*, and the bestselling *Why First Borns Rule the World and Last Borns Want to Change It*. Michael is a former teacher with 15 years experience, and has 30 years experience in parenting education. He also holds a Master of Educational Studies from Monash University specialising in parenting education.

It goes without saying that we always love our children. That doesn't mean however, that we always like them or how they are behaving. Rather than beating yourself up, it's useful to figure out what you don't like and work from there. Here are some of the common reasons, and some ways to help overcome it.

### Common reasons

#### It's their behaviour

Generally, it's a child's behaviour that you won't like rather than the child themselves. Whether it's a surly adolescent who scowls every time you walk into a room, or a toddler who whines when they don't get their own way, it can be difficult separating the child from the behaviour.

#### It's a stage

Some developmental stages are more problematic than others. Both toddlers and teens are programmed to get under their parent's skin. The respective developmental tasks are independence and identity formation, both involving a degree of parental challenge, making them hard to get close to, at times.

#### It's their gender

Some people are naturally drawn to a particular gender, and struggle interacting with the other gender. The struggle can be personality driven, or come as a result of family background. For instance, a mother who grew up in an all-girl household may struggle with the boisterousness involved in raising a son.

#### It's their personality

Some personalities grate, even in families. If you're a quiet, task-oriented type and you really struggle relating to loud, life of the party types at work then this won't necessarily change when you come home. You will probably struggle to relate to that loud, got-to-be-the-centre-of-attention type of child or teen in your family. If you value sensitivity and a careful choice of words and someone else comes off as flippant with 'no filter', equally it can be jarring.

#### They're not meeting your expectations

Parents usually have hopes and dreams for their children, which are not always fulfilled. A child who doesn't follow in your footsteps or meet your academic or lifestyle expectations can be a source of disappointment and frustration.

It's a lack of common ground

Just as is the case with adult relationships, sometimes people in the same family are just somewhat (or wildly!) different to each other. Neither of you need to work to become a carbon copy of the other, but you do need to work to understand each other. Remembering the preferences, soft spots, no-go zones and other nuances of each other's personality goes a long way towards reaching a language you can speak fluently with each other. Kids interests can change a lot over time, and you may even find something in common that you never thought possible.

### **How to move forward constructively**

Face your feelings

Resist the temptation to push away or ignore your feelings, as this is the antithesis of emotional intelligence. Unrecognised feelings are a heavy burden to bear. It's far better to face up to and accept the way you feel about your child. Do you feel anger, disappointment, sadness, frustration or even discouraged? Is it a mixture? Own your feelings and you'll find that you will have more control over them in time.

Make adjustments accordingly

Work out what's behind these feelings. If it's a personality clash or differences in life goals then you may need to adjust your expectations accordingly or start to manage your own behaviours and reactions better. Accepting your child or young person for who they are can bring you a great deal of relief. If you have a child who you wouldn't have chosen to be your friend, then it's up to you to make a change. Accept and appreciate them for who they are you'll find that your child or teen will be easier to like and your relationship will improve.

Bring some playfulness into your parenting

Do you need to be more playful and less serious when you are in your child's company? If so, look for ways to build your relationship by spending some enjoyable one-on-one time together.

Follow their interests

Considering following their interests, even if they're not necessarily your own. If you're a creative type and your child is a sports buff, then take the time to follow their interests. Understanding why will tell you a lot about your child and what makes them tick. You may also find that he or she also starts following your interests once you take the lead.

Look for the good

When we are struggling to like and connect with a child there is a tendency to focus on the things we don't like about them. Our attention becomes like a television antenna tuned into the negative rather the positive behaviour or attitudes. Tune your antenna to look for the good rather than the bad in your child.

Bite your tongue

Resist the temptation to criticise your child about minor and annoying behaviours, as nit-picking will only reinforce mutual disregard. Biting your tongue and smiling when your child

says or does something that grates on you is the type of emotional labour that makes parenting challenging. But choosing your battles will make your day easier and improve your relationship long term.

#### Hold them accountable

It's not always appropriate to hold your tongue. Children need to be held accountable for poor, inconsiderate behaviour. There are some behaviours such as being disrespectful to others, or not following set family rules and values that need to be picked up on. Ensure that you treat all kids on your family fairly and justly.

#### Keep showing up

There may be times where you may feel there is nothing left to do. Keep showing up anyway. The single, most important thing you can do as a parent is to show up every single day. It will send a powerful message to your child that even if you don't like how they are behaving, you're always going to love them. If you can accept your child for who they are, then they are more likely to make subtle changes in their behaviours to meet your needs and expectations. This type of social adjustment is the lynchpin of healthy, respectful relationships.