

Ken Swarner is a Humor columnist and Author of *Whose Kids Are These Anyway?* He can be reached at <http://www.kenswarner.bigstep.com> .

True confessions of a family man
By Ken Swarner

I have a confession to make. Parenting is a lot harder than I thought it would be. Before I had children, I had the notion that being a dad was all about snuggling, playing games, and sharing my wisdom with little people that looked like me.

That's grandparenting.

Parenting is responsibility - trying to raise children who don't run with scissors and don't chew with their mouths open. It's about teaching courtesy and why you shouldn't hit your friend on the head with a lunchbox. It's about allowing your children to fail, and telling them 'no' for the thousandth time without losing your mind.

Parenting is about hearing yourself sound like your parents, and still believing what you're saying is right. It's about being a modern family - living a fast-paced lifestyle fraught with pressures, guilt, and the high expectations to create the 'perfect' childhood.

Parenting is a job. Incidentally, they don't teach you this in Lamaze class. Sure, some of you are already questioning me for saying these things. You're thinking 'how can he call it a job? It's a privilege. Every moment is 'nirvana.' I agree...except for the part about 'nirvana.' It's more like 'noisy.' Despite the cookie cutter advice from psychologists, pediatricians and my mother, I have come to the conclusion that parenting is just plain challenging.

Period. There are no easy fixes - no miracles - no obedience classes offered for children. It's all about surviving the toils of daycare, childless co-workers and muddy footprints on the sofa only to be rewarded for this hard work by entering the teenage years! God has quite the sense of humor!

So why do I mention all of this? Because, for a long time, I thought I was the only one struggling with the job of raising children. I figured I was just an idiot. The one parent in the world with goofy kids. Why? Because other parents LIE. Very few people, for whatever reason, will be honest that they have goofy kids too. At the soccer fields, during school field trips, at toddler gym - they don't mention that their kids are flunking math, or having trouble making friends, or still not potty trained even though they're four. They keep these things to themselves, going so far as to look cross-eyed when someone admits the truth.

Maybe their embarrassed or worried it reflects poorly on them. What I've learned, however, is that every family struggles in some way with raising children. It's just a part of the job. It's okay. If everything was perfect, we wouldn't have those great character wrinkles.

I have decided, therefore, to share even more about my family life with my friends in the coming years, so they won't feel quite so alone. I encourage you to do the same.

It's a tough job, parenting. Important, rewarding...but messy. I enjoy the work...the benefits are pretty good. But, I still want a raise!

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