

The Way of the Peaceful Parent by Leo Babauta

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□□□'... and she loved a boy very, very much- even more than she loved herself.' ~Shel Silverstein, The Giving Tree

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□□There is no such thing as stress-free parenting.

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□□A reader requested that I share my thoughts on stress-free parenting, as the father of six kids. And while I have learned a lot about being a dad, and finding joy in parenthood, I also know that stress-free parenting is a myth.

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□□Parents will always have stress: we not only have to deal with tantrums and scraped knees and refusing to eat anything you cook, but we worry about potential accidents, whether we are ruining our kids, whether our children will find happiness as adults and be able to provide for themselves and find love.

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□□That said, I've learned that we can find peace.

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□□Peace isn't a place with no stress, but a place where you take the stress as it comes, in stride, and don't let it rule you. You let it flow through you, and then smile, and breathe, and give your child a hug.

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□□There is a Way of the Peaceful Parent, but it isn't one that I've learned completely. I'll share what I've learned so far, with the caveat that I don't always follow the Way, that I still make mistakes daily, that I still have a lot to learn, that I don't claim to have all the answers as a parent.

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□□The Way

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□□The Way is only learned by walking it. Here are the steps I recommend:

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□□* Greet your child each morning with a smile, a hug, a loving Good Morning! This is how we would all like to be greeted each day.

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□□* Teach your child to make her own breakfast. This starts for most children at around the age of 3 or 4. Teach them progressively to brush their teeth, bathe themselves, clean up their rooms, put away clothes, wash their dishes, make lunch, wash their own clothes, sweep and clean, etc.

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☐☐* Teaching these skills takes patience. Kids suck at them at first, so you have to show them about a hundred times, but let them try it, correct them, and let them make mistakes. They will gradually learn independence as you will gradually have less work to do caring for them.

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☐☐* Older children can help younger children — it's good for them to learn responsibility, it helps the younger children learn from the older ones, and it takes some of the stress off you.

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☐☐* Read to them often. It's a wonderful way to bond, to educate, to explore imaginary worlds.

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☐☐* Build forts with them. Play hide and seek. Shoot each other with Nerf dart guns. Have tea together. Squeeze lemons and make lemonade. Play, often, as play is the essence of childhood. Don't try to force them to stop playing.

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☐☐* When your child asks for your attention, grant it.

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☐☐* Parents need alone time, though. Set certain traditions so that you'll have time to work on your own, or have mommy and daddy time in the evening, when your child can do things on her own.

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☐☐* When your child is upset, put yourself in his shoes. Don't just judge the behavior (yes, crying and screaming isn't ideal), but the needs behind the behavior. Does he need a hug, or attention, or maybe he's just tired?

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☐☐* Model the behavior you want your child to learn. Don't yell at the child because he was screaming. Don't get angry at a child for losing his temper. Don't get mad at a kid who wants to play video games all the time if you're always on your laptop. Be calm, smile, be kind, go outdoors and be active.

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☐☐* When a stressful time arises (and it will), learn to deal with it with a smile. Make a joke, turn it into a game, laugh ... you'll teach your child not to take things so seriously, and that life is to be enjoyed. Breathe, walk away if you've lost your temper, and come back when you can smile.

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☐☐* Remember that your child is a gift. She won't be a child for long, and so your time with her is fleeting. Every moment you can spend with her is a miracle, and you should savor it. Enjoy it to the fullest, and be grateful for that moment.

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☐☐* Let your child share your interests. Bake cookies together. Sew together. Exercise together. Read together. Work on a website together. Write a blog together.

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☐☐* Know that when you screw up as a parent, everything will be fine. Forgive yourself. Apologize. Learn from that screw up. In other words, model the behavior you'd like your child to learn whenever he screws up.

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☐☐* Patiently teach your child the boundaries of behavior. There should be boundaries — what's acceptable and what's not. It's not OK to do things that might harm yourself or others.

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☐☐* We should treat each other with kindness and respect. Those aren't things the child learns immediately, so have patience, but set the boundaries. Within those boundaries,

allow lots of freedom.

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□□* Give your child some space. Parents too often overschedule their child's life, with classes and sports and play dates and music and clubs and the like, but it's a constant source of stress for both child and parent to keep this schedule going. Let the child go outside and play. Free time is necessary. You don't always have to be by her side either — she needs alone time just as much as you do.

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□□* Exercise to cope with stress. A run in solitude is a lovely thing. Get a massage now and then.

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□□* It helps tremendously to be a parenting team — one parent can take over when the other gets stressed. When one parent starts to lose his temper, the other should be a calming force.

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□□* Mom and dad need a date night every week or so. Get a babysitter, or better yet, teach the older kids to babysit.

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□□* Sing and dance together.

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□□* Take every opportunity to teach kindness and love. It's the best lesson.

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□□* Kiss your child goodnight. And give thanks for another amazing day with your beautiful, unique, crazy child.