

Tips from the sofa

Buzz off kids! Mum's watching *Supernanny*
— Deborah Ross gets down to the basics of child-rearing

CHILDHOOD, SAYS A REPORT
out last week, is in crisis, and it's all the parents' fault. We are too selfish, we don't care enough about the messages we send out to young people, and we pursue our own success at the expense of standing between two jumpers in the park on a Saturday and pretending to be in goal, or playing Power Rangers which, in effect, boils down to a war cry of "Go, Go, Go..." and then being stamped on and cruelly kicked in the shin.

I admit it: I am one of those mothers who has said to her children "clear off" and "just leave me alone" and "that bloody hurt, you know", which is horribly and unforgivably selfish, especially considering God gave us two shins, one of which can obviously afford to get mashed.

The report — published by The Children's Society, a charity — points out everything it claims parents are doing wrong, but says little about what they are doing right or how to do it right, but that's okay, because now I am here.

Yes, I am one of those perfect mothers who can see instantly how other mothers are failing and isn't it afraid to say so.

For example, I saw a mother give her toddler son a small carton of Tropicana and said to her, "Whoa! Do you have any idea how much money you could save by giving him a Capri-Sun from a multipack, which is nowhere near 100% fresh juice, but do you think he's going to know?"

At this, the mother was so ashamed by her extravagant incompetence that after giving me a hard look, she quickly turned tail, ushering her son along with her. This was a great shame, as having noted she was giving out carrot sticks as a snack, I could also have told her, "Get a grip, love. Everybody knows kids prefer crisps!"

I did, actually, shout out after her, "Hey, lady, everyone knows kids prefer crisps!"

So here we are, and below you will find a template for doing it right. Trust me, I'm a mother myself and as one of my own children volunteered, "My mum is definitely the best, because she said if I didn't say so she'd clip me round the ear and then lock me in the cellar. Again."

And you can't get a better endorsement than that. Here goes.

COMMUNICATE WITH YOUR KIDS

It's not always easy to find the time to communicate with your children, particularly if it's *Masterchef* and then *Grand Designs* and then *QI*. Or even, perhaps more appropriately, *Supernanny*. Indeed, modern life being what it is, some nights you might not even have time for *Holby City*.

However, regardless of how busy you are, it's important to affect an interest in the boring, trivial rubbish your kids are interested in. Remember: they need to feel like you give a monkey's. And remember, too, that as they are going on and on about Thomas the Tank Engine or Dora, the world's most tedious little explorer, you can always go "Hmmm,



Illustration: LUKE MOLVER — 3rd-year graphic design student at Durban University of Technology

... AND THEY RUIN YOUR LOVE LIFE, TOO!

THERE'S no question about it: being a parent puts a huge strain on your relationship. Everything, after all, changes when a baby comes on the scene.

It's all too easy for a partnership that was easy-going, fun and sexually exciting to become hard work, weighed down with domestic detritus, and sexually stale.

As your children get older and their needs become more complicated, many couples fall into the trap of concentrating all their efforts on getting TVs and microwaves into each and every bedroom, and spend less and less time on their needs as a couple.

But you owe it not only to your children, but also to yourself, not to neglect the relationship that led to your family happening in the first place, and no relationship can flourish without a bit of attention.

The following tips should set your right: • Be sure to thank him whenever he does something nice, even if it is something as

small as poking you with a spatula just for his own amusement.

• Book granny to look after the kids, and book yourselves into a hotel for several years.

• Always make love first thing, before all the hate has a chance to kick in.

• If the combination of work and family life is proving too much for him, offer to outsource his marital duties to the nice young Polish man who does the garden next door.

• Run a bubble bath, adorn it with rose petals, and then do a big trump. This way you can have it all to yourself.

And remember this: if it all gets too much, you can walk out on your family for years at a time. They may not even mind that much.

hmmm", while simultaneously keeping one eye on the television and leafing through *Hello!*.

Children grow up very fast these days, so pretend to listen to them now. Before you know it, they'll be teenagers, off their heads, and the opportunity will have passed.

DEAL WITH CONSUMERISM

At last there's something good to be said for the credit crunch!

It's not easy raising children through tough economic times, but for families there is a silver lining: stuff is cheaper than ever before!

Being a parent isn't about your children having the latest iPhone or newest games for the Wii, but they are all brilliant at keeping them out of your hair and are now available at tremendous discounts.

Alternatively, with interest rates being as low as they are, you may wish to opt for a loan and then a TV and microwave in each of their bedrooms.

In fact, if all goes well, you might never have to significantly involve yourself with them again.

Thank you, credit crunch! You're a pal!



Illustration:
BRYCE LOUW
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design student at
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Indeed, as one mother told us, "You can sometimes feel very alone when bringing up children, so it's good to meet other people in a similar situation and all be patronised together."

Alternatively, why not ask a passing stranger to babysit? You never know, he might just be out from prison and looking for something to do.

DON'T PREACH — BE A ROLE MODEL

What we do as parents is so much more important than what we say. From their earliest moments, our children are observing how we, their parents, behave in the world and the way you behave now could very easily be the way they go on to behave tomorrow.

"Stop talking about stuff you know nothing about," I said to one of my teenagers the other day.

"But Mum," she said, "you do it all the time!"

Touche. Or it would have been touche if she wasn't. It was a nice try, though.

* SM publishes Deborah Ross's columns fortnightly. This column first appeared in the *Daily Mail*, London.