

There are television programmes that show us how to repair our homes and how to invest our savings. Why not a television programme to show us "How to Parent"?

The statistics are all there to prove it: the "traditional" family is rapidly becoming the exception rather than the rule. How are we coping? Stories of child abuse and other atrocities are spread across the pages of our daily papers. Those are the extremes. But every day in many families there are dramatic and often tragic life changes. The single parent family is a new reality. What happens to the children in these homes? How do parents react when feeling isolated and overwhelmed by their own life problems? When parents are faced with stressful situations are their children unaffected?

Of course life is not always tragic in today's families. But many parents find it hard to cope with being a parent. Some are young and inexperienced and have no extended family to offer advice and support. Others are starting parenthood later in life and finding it hard to adapt. Then there is the "new man," the father who wants to play an important role in raising his children but lacks the know-how. Not to mention those who marry into parenthood, missing the first years of life of their spouse's children and having parenthood thrust upon them.

The purpose of this proposed television series is not to explain the origins of physical and mental child abuse, nor is it a sociological study of families today. Rather, it is based on the premise that most parents want to do what's best for their children but often don't know how. This programme would provide practical hints on solving the everyday problems most parents face--from temper tantrums to the child who consistently lies--give basic information on child development in a visually captivating way and show how to deal with medical emergencies using an easy-to-retain format of "do's and dont's."

We live in an era of specialists and are fortunate to have doctors, psychiatrists and other professionals knowledgeable in every aspect of child rearing. Why not make their competence available to the general public?

This proposed series has been conceived by an educator aware of the importance of the early years in a child's life and aware of the importance of attitude in all things. It is designed to give all parents a hand in making the best of those first years while at the same time helping those who missed them make up for lost time. As well, this programme aims at reducing the isolation many parents experience. But mainly, it is hoped that this programme will be an interesting and somewhat entertaining way of putting parenthood back where it belongs: high on the scale of values of our society.

A PROPOSAL FOR A TELEVISION SERIES ON PARENTING:
AFTER THEY'RE BORN

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I. Given:

- the breakdown of the nuclear family leading to the increase of single-parent families
- the increase of one-generation families and the absence of experienced elders
- the increasing number of women having their children later on in life, who often feel panic-stricken as new mothers
- the increasing number of "new men"--fathers who want to play an important role in raising their children--but lack the training
- the increasing number of "instant parents"--individuals who marry into parenthood and have missed the first years of their spouse's child or children
- the gross inequality of opportunity for children from varying backgrounds
- the apparently increasing number of abused children
- the existence of experts knowledgeable in every aspect of child development and care
- that most parents sincerely want to do what's best for their children, but often don't know how

II. Aims:

- to present an informative and entertaining series on child care
- to de-stress, de-intensify child-raising, to show the humorous side of potentially dramatic situations
- to show the chronological progression of children from infancy to adolescence (physical and emotional development); to provide information on meeting the different needs of each age
- to give good common sense information to those raising children
- to help parents cope by offering experts' advice on a wide variety of topics
- to revive the importance and value of raising children: 1) to show the fun and excitement it can be; 2) to reduce the feelings of isolation felt by many parents; 3) to reduce feelings of guilt many parents have by showing it is "never too late"
- to give the latest FIRST AID information in a visually effective way:
 - the DO's
 - the DON'T's
 covering different emergency situations, keeping in mind the philosophy that "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure" (or that "a gram of prevention is worth a kilo of cure"?)
- to teach parents and others working with babies and children to recognize the danger signs when something is going wrong physically or emotionally

III. Target audience

- parents, adoptive parents, foster parents
- adults who deal with children (teachers, child-care workers, nannies
- older brothers and sisters
- baby-sitters
- the general public

IV. Suggested format: a series of half-hour programs combining location filming, in-studio interviews with "write-ins" or "phone-ins," and animation

A. VIEWERS WRITE IN OR PHONE IN (filmed in studio)
Experts reply to letters from the public on a wide variety of subjects, including:

- lying
- stealing
- temper tantrums
- bed wetting
- violent behavior
- the withdrawn child
- discipline
- speech and hearing problems
- children who whine
- sibling rivalry
- the importance of traditions
- home-school relations
- the unhappy child
- eating
- anger: theirs, yours
- sexuality
- toilet training
- language development
- drugs and alcohol
- grandparents; the role of family
- racism: teaching tolerance
- TV
- sleep

B. CHILD DEVELOPMENT (location filming)

A comprehensive treatment of child development presented chronologically in visually explicit sequences filmed "on the spot" in maternity wards, hospitals, doctors' offices, homes, schools, child study centres, showing children of racially and culturally different backgrounds. To be broken into the following categories:

1. From birth to pre-school
2. Pre-school to primary school
3. Primary-school age to puberty
4. Adolescence

Each segment will cover some of the following:

- the normal child
- description of child's development, physical and emotional
- likes, dislikes
- hygiene: giving baths, changing diapers, etc.
- food
- problems particular to that age: how to handle them, special hints
- suggested activities: "the ideal day"
- the importance of pets, plants, other living things
- toys, furniture and equipment
- when to "push the panic button"
- when you need help

C. FIRST AID (a cartoon sequence to introduce the situation of the week; then, location filming)

- presentation of an emergency situation: one per week (for example: fever, bad fall, eye injury, ingestion of foreign object, toxic substances, cuts, animal or insect bites or stings, burns, choking)
- how to recognize an emergency
- how to deal with it
- simple medical explanation
- advice of doctor
- repetition of advice in simplified form: "the DO's"; the "DON'T's"
- prevention: dangerous products, peanuts, electrical shocks
- general safety tips
- CPR for babies and children explained and demonstrated

V. The Specials

To present in more detail certain subjects, the "specials" format might be used from time to time. This could address particular subjects such as:

- the special child: mentally or physically handicapped children
- sleep
- children and the arts, and related activities: music, drawing, dance, dress-up, cooking
- how to tell stories
- divorce and children; step-parents
- the single parent
- the babysitter
- when calamity strikes: how to deal with tragedy, illness, death in the family, loss of job by parent, separation of parents, etc.
- abuse
- developing your child's potential
- children of inter-racial marriages
- twins (and other multiples)
- the ward, the foster child

VI. Possible sponsors/advertisers

- government grant
- McDonald's
- companies related to child care: food, toys, clothing, furniture, books
- socially conscious individuals or corporations

VII. Possibilities

- having transcripts available in different languages and captions for the hearing-impaired
- turning the letters and replies into a book
- creating a first-aid handbook based on the show

Estelle Paget is a 38-year-old educator and mother of two children, aged ten and eight, with a special interest in parenting. She is at present living in Vancouver where she teaches French at the University of British Columbia. Prior to moving to Vancouver, she lived, studied and taught in France and Toronto.

Mrs. Paget feels there is an increasingly urgent need to reach those who have custody of young children, to make visually available to them the advice, explanations and insights of child-rearing specialists. Concerned about the mental and physical abuse many children suffer, she conceived this programme for all parents but destines it especially to those who are unaware of the existence of books on child rearing and to those whose own childhoods would never have made the pages of such books.