

ParentBrief



Parenting to the beat of our own drum

Why is it that some relatives and friends just can't help giving us advice on how to raise our kids? It's not as though we've asked for input, or sought their opinion, or wanted their top ten tips. But it seems there's no stopping the helpful hints brigade. Just because they'd like us to take note and adjust our parenting style to suit what they think works (or in the case of older family members, worked in their day) doesn't mean we're obliged to take them or their advice on board. The reality is we do have permission to politely ignore their opinion, however well-meant...

Why do people feel they have to offer advice?

There are a number of reasons why others might want to stick their beaks into our parenting business. Some 'helpers' just want to be friendly. Others do it because they sincerely think their advice can make our life easier. Some people do it to create drama or engender excitement or just pass judgment. Family members may interfere to establish dominance or because of their need to be needed. Whatever their motives, we don't need to apologise for our choices, especially our parenting style, our way of doing things, or the lifestyle that we're creating for our family.

The older generation know best

Been hearing any of these little pearls of wisdom lately? "When you were little, your father and I never let you get away with that sort of behaviour....." "you shouldn't be making allowances for temperament you know..." "you're not going to let them leave the table

yet, are you?" Yes, it's annoying and for the most part, best ignored. We know our kids, we live with them, we engage and communicate with them, and we're living in today's world. Studies tell us that most of us will parent (or not) as we were parented, but that doesn't mean we have to listen to Granny's intolerance or accommodate her dominance. Politely sort the pearls of wisdom and discard the ones you don't want to wear.

It worked for us

Sometimes friends are so excited that they've solved a problem with their kids, they want us to try the same approach. Before taking their advice on board, we need to check the facts. Just because something works, doesn't mean it's in the best interests of our family. A bit of digging and delving on our part can hopefully uncover whether their advice is based on research or hearsay or the latest on social media.

Before we take any unsolicited advice on board, check out whether the advice is:

- research-based or based on the ten best parenting tips according to a blogger
- helpful to our situation or just confusing and unsettling
- giving our kids the wrong message
- providing an opportunity for the person to exert control, interference, superiority or power
- in response to a previous conversation and a way of trying to help us solve a problem
- unhealthy from a philosophical, dietary, behavioural or parenting perspective

We can set ground rules for relatives, especially if they're caring for our kids. We can erect boundaries for friends and be polite where possible. And when blunt is the only way to go, we don't have to feel guilty. "In my experience" is a handy line to have at the ready.