

Are you an Eldest?

by Lisa McKimm



I mentioned a couple of weeks ago that eldests might have a bit of trouble at getting a grip on how to have spontaneous fun. This week I would like to explain what sits behind that comment!

Anyone who has ever been born into the eldest position will know of the expectations and responsibility that comes with it. Example? Your younger sibling has climbed onto the table and taken just one bite out of every piece of fruit in the fruit bowl. You have been sitting mesmerised by your favourite TV programme, whilst all of this was taking place. Nevertheless, when your mother walks in – she goes nuts! 'Why weren't you watching him? You're old enough to know better' (at six!).

The expectation that you should be all-seeing can create feelings of nervous responsibility that eldest children often endure. Eldests will often push themselves mercilessly to aim for perfection. Not that there is anything wrong with perfection per se.

I always say that if you are going in tomorrow for a spot of brain surgery, you'll be hoping for a perfectionist to be working on you. Things only become problematic when the drive for flawlessness steers you, rather than vice versa. If you rarely rest to enjoy your achievements; or you find it difficult to forgive yourself for your mistakes; or impose your expectations of perfection onto all those that you live with – it can disadvantage you in your relationship with both yourself and others.

If you believe that your eldest child is developing some of the characteristics that I have described take note. Help them grow 'the courage to be imperfect'. Very often they will not have a go at something because they are worried that they will screw it up – and make a fool of themselves. Getting it right is very important to them.

I jest about the fact that an eldest child's favourite piece of stationery is an eraser. Rub it out. Do it again. Rub it out. Do it again. Oh blast – rip the page out because it's now all messy. Start all over again. When this attitude becomes extreme, a child can simply stop all attempts. The logic behind this is 'if you don't have a go, you can't screw up'.

Coach them to see that the best way to learn things is through the mistakes that they make. Share some of the similar mistakes that you remember making.

Although their responsible pro-active ways are vital in keeping the world ticking along, one thing that eldests can often lack is spontaneity. Their organised way of doing things is often managed inflexibly by their business-like diary or list-of-things-to-do.

This is magnetted onto the fridge, and duly has things crossed off it as they are accomplished. Whoops- all those people who have ever seen my endless lists of unrealistic self-expectations now know my family position! All eldests should have a spontaneous friend to nudge them into spur-of-moment-fun. I do. She is a person who could be sitting about with her kids in her Hamilton home, when she is suddenly ignited by wanting to smell the sea.

Awesome athletes get coaching, why shouldn't awesome parents!! Want to be an awesome parent?

They are all in the car and gone in ten minutes. Off to Raglan or Mount Maunganui. No pile of jobs That Must Be Accomplished Before We Leave Home. Nothing to dampen the spark of excitement about the adventure.

I thank the Universe that she is my friend. She, of course, is a youngest. The family position least likely to be fettered by 'responsible action'. Spontaneity. Allow for more of it.

There's nothing like it to keep the fires of family fun burning!

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