

Are you a “Guilt trip” travel agent?

by Lisa McKimm



I know. You want your kids to learn right from wrong. To grow up with good values (which probably means similar to yours!). And you'd like all of this because you want the best for them in the lives they are going to lead. Fair Enough!

However, it is the many approaches we can take as a path to this end that I find fascinating. And which path we choose can make all the difference in our kid's lives.

For example, some parents lecture. Some search for tear-filled eyes as a sign of remorse. Others discuss the issue - at great length. Some create a form of penitent suffering. Some will weep and ring their hanky. And others will lay the expert guilt trip.

All of these techniques are supposed to aid kids to 'learn the lesson'. However they do not all achieve this aim. For instance - the beloved guilt trip. Most parents expect this action to appeal to their children's conscience. In reality though, there is a big difference between a pricked conscience and experiencing guilt.

Conscience is when a person's own sense of right and wrong directs them into action. To me, this is a good thing to stimulate. Guilt however is another matter. When kids feel guilt, they blame and criticise themselves. They can start (or continue) to believe that they are 'bad' people - someone who is untrustworthy.

If a person of any age has these thoughts for long enough, they may grow to see themselves as worthless and unlovable, and settle for less than they really deserve in life. Although no parents set out to leave their kids with such a legacy, sadly it's a fact that many do.

I invite you to consider the following well used phrases that parents bandy about when trying to put their kids 'on the right track'. I will also connect it to a potential thought that may start grow in your child's developing self-image as a result.

"It breaks our heart that we can't trust you!" (I'm untrustworthy. I'm bad.).

"We haven't raised you kids to do this kind of thing. Your brother would never dream of doing anything like this." (I'm the bad one. I'm not as good as my brother. Never have been. Never will be. I must remember to get him for that!).

"What is wrong with you for God's sake?" (I have something wrong with me. Apparently most normal people don't act like this. Yeah I'm the bad one).

"Do you set out specifically to embarrass our family?" (I'm the family reject. Nobody in this house understands what it's like for me. Yeah, I'm the bad one alright).

"Why are you always letting us down like this?" (I never get it right. My parents are ashamed of me. I am so bad).

Sadly, it is important to keep in mind that this may become sub-conscious programming that children may hold onto for the rest of their lives.

Phew. It's not easy for we parents is it?

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So what can we do instead of using guilt - especially as its use is so ingrained in many of us? Don't worry. There are alternatives to help our kids build their conscience and their self esteem at the same time. Learning to discuss things without judgement would be the most powerful and positive thing that you could do.

There are books in the library that can help you on this journey. Or even better still, come and have some fun with the ParentingWorx team and join us for an Awesome Parents Programme!

Remember our families will benefit from a guilt-free atmosphere to live in - and so will we!

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