

1-2-3 Magic PARENTING

Newsletter – March 2017

Attitude Adjustment Time! Big Dog vs. Underdog Parenting

Anyone who is a parent knows that the job is tough. *Really tough*. If we moms and dads were really honest with ourselves, we'd have to admit that we had almost no idea what we were getting into when we brought that first baby home.

The old saying about kids not coming with a training manual is true. And the problem of "What do I do with this kid?" is intensified for parents in our contemporary rush-rush, worry-worry world. The problem is that when parents don't quite know what they're doing and they're too busy to find out, they tend to shoot from the hip. Shooting from the hip can lead to two opposite, out-of-control parenting styles, neither of which is good for children. Let's call these two styles "Underdog" parenting and "Big Dog" parenting.



Underdog parents whimper. Big Dog parents bite.

The Underdog parent is a pushover. The children run the house and mom and dad tend to take a back seat. Where Big Dog parents are involved, however, it's the adults who intimidate and it's the kids who stay out of the way. Big Dog parents are T-Rexes in disguise.

Underdog parents' behavior with their children is motivated primarily by anxiety and guilt. "Don't want to do anything to offend or upset the children" and "If the kids are mad at me I must have done something wrong" are the overriding thoughts. Big Dog parents' behavior with their children, on the other hand, is dominated primarily by irritation and anger. "Because I said so!" and "Do what I tell you or else!" are the predominant themes.

Underdoggers tend to plead with their kids like this: "Come on now, honey, don't you think it's time for bed? Why can't you just do this one little thing for me?" Translation (in other words, what does the youngster really hear?): "Even though you're my child, you're too strong and powerful for me. I haven't the slightest idea how to control you other than begging." **Whimpering tells the children that they—the kids—are really running the show and that their parent is basically weak and helpless.**

What about Big Dog Parents? Big Dog parents bite. They can bite emotionally as well as physically. Here's an emotional "sound bite": "What the hell's the matter with you!? You better start listening to me or else! How many times do I have to tell you to clean up your room!" Translation (in other words,

1-2-3 Magic Parenting Newsletter by Dr. Thomas Phelan © 2017

Simple, straightforward parenting advice and helpful tips from Dr. Phelan's award-winning, bestselling 1-2-3 Magic parenting programs.

To learn more or to subscribe visit www.123magic.com

what does the youngster really hear?): “You’re no good, kid, and you never will be. If it weren’t for me, you’d be in even more hot water.” The Big Dog parent may also throw in a spanking after the lecture just to make sure the point is really driven home. **Big Dog parents bite – both emotionally and sometimes physically.**

Does either style really work?

Not surprisingly, these two opposite forms of out-of-control parenting produce two different results. Kids from Underdog parents tend to become adults with a robust sense of entitlement. They think the world owes them a living and they try to push other people around. When life doesn’t treat them like they think it should (which is inevitable), they blame everyone else for their misery.

Our children from the T-Rex moms and dads, though, will become adults with a deep sense of insecurity and unworthiness. They’ll think everyone else is better than they are and they’ll tend to withdraw. Even if they do succeed at certain things, they won’t be able to give themselves credit for what they’ve done.

Breaking the parenting cycle.

How can we interrupt this tragic cycle? *1-2-3 Magic: Effective Discipline for Children 2-12* helps parents understand that their parenting job consists of three things: 1) controlling obnoxious behavior, 2) encouraging good behavior and 3) strengthening relationships with the children. And yes, specific, effective, tried-and-true, and fairly simple strategies are provided in *1-2-3 Magic* for accomplishing these three parenting tasks. The program is evidence based—it works.

But something stands between Underdog parents and their ability to adopt new strategies like *1-2-3 Magic*. The same thing, in different form, stands in the way of the Big Doggers.

It's their *attitude*. It's their view of parenting itself. Both of these kinds of impulsive, out-of-control parents need a major attitude adjustment before they can learn to become decent parents. Yes, useful advice for managing children is out there, but the Underdog folks and the Big Dog folks have to learn how to think differently before they can use these helpful suggestions.

The attitude adjustments required here fall into three main categories:

- 1) Appreciating the “rights” of family members,
- 2) Understanding the effects of different parenting styles, and
- 3) Accepting the need to switch to deliberate, thoughtful parenting strategies.

Let's look at each of these.

Rights of Family Members

- Underdog moms and dads need to understand that not only do *they have a right to be a parent*, but it is in everyone’s best interests if they—the adults— do set limits. Kids not liking limits is normal. It is not a tragedy and it is not due to parental error.

1-2-3 Magic Parenting Newsletter by Dr. Thomas Phelan © 2017

Simple, straightforward parenting advice and helpful tips from Dr. Phelan’s award-winning, bestselling 1-2-3 Magic parenting programs.

To learn more or to subscribe visit www.123magic.com

- Big Doggers, on the other hand, need to appreciate that *their children have rights*. The kids have a right not to fear physical or emotional abuse from their own parents. Big Doggers need to consider the possibility that a home should not always revolve around the whims of the largest mongrel in the joint.

Effects of parenting style

- Underdoggers need to realize that repeated parental whimpering creates Entitled Super Brats.
- Big Doggers need to realize that repeated biting eliminates kids' sense of self-worth.

Deliberate parenting

Both types of parents, Big Dog and Underdog, need to accept the necessity of switching from an automatic/impulsive to a more deliberate/thoughtful approach to parenting. It's not *that* hard.

“Parenting” primarily out of irritation and anger is not really parenting. Neither is “parenting” primarily out of anxiety or guilt. Both Big Doggers and Underdoggers need to see that simply engaging in emotional self-indulgence is bad for everyone in the family—including themselves.

Good parenting advice is already out there. *1-2-3 Magic* offers a ton of good suggestions. But for many moms and dads the main thing that stands in the way of their becoming decent parents is a straightforward—though not easy—attitude adjustment.