



Parenting Playbook

Stealing a few pages from the folks

By Kelli Wheeler

You know, I like to think I turned out OK. It must mean my parents did something right. So why wouldn't I steal a few pages from their parenting playbook?

One of my favorite classics is "Send 'em to Their Rooms If They Won't Quit Fighting" because then the coach (me) gets peace and quiet to prepare for the next play while the kids are contained.

I can still see the highlight reel in my mind. When we were little, my older brother and I, ignoring all threats to cease fire, would finally be sent to our rooms. Mom always threw in the audible "clean it too while you're in there." We never knew when the time clock to our punishment would go off. Eventually, we learned that Mom thought we had suffered enough by the time we started calling out "I'm sorry. I love you, brother," and "I'm sorry. I love you, sissy," through the floor heater vents (unaware it echoed through the entire house).

My kids' heater vents are in the ceiling. I modified the play so they can come out when their rooms are clean. Task-oriented, sensitive Logan, who hates to play alone, usually gets sprung within 10 minutes. He's even offered to help clean his opponent's room to reclaim a playmate. Creative, side-tracking Whitney, who likes to manipulate her brother's play-by-yourself weakness, can be content in her room until dinner—and then it's messier.



When it comes to dinner, I tried getting my kids to eat healthier with the "You're Going to Sit There All Night Until You Eat It" play. But I'm not as tough a coach as my parents were. I could not take the crying, arguing and tension it brought to the table. When I heard myself utter, "If you throw that up, I will make you eat double!" I realized I'm not in it for the winning, but everyone tries their best and has fun.

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So, if they at least try the tuna casserole, I will let them have plain noodles. There's no reason to force them to eat lima beans and Brussels sprouts (still bitter and holding a grudge there, Mom) if they can get the same nutrients from vegetables they do like. Great new play, everyone's happy.

I also caved a bit on the bedtime section of the parenting playbook. When I was a kid, I was in bed at

7:30 sharp even in the long twilight hours of summer. I could hear kids still playing outside through my open windows as I lay there. (Still bitter and holding a grudge there, Dad.) But we could stay up a half hour later if we read a book in bed. My brother and I, to this day, are avid readers.

Modified play there: If you get your reading done first, you can stay up until 8:30 during the school year and 9 in the summer. But flexibility is key. We've been known to overlook the clock to watch an especially irresistible episode of "Big People Little World" together or for a family round of night swimming.

The chores section of the parenting playbook was hard for me to translate. As a kid, I remember my least favorite play: "No Allowance for Family Responsibilities." While my friends were getting 50 cents a week for keeping their rooms clean and helping with the dinner dishes, I got stiffed. My brother and I were sure it was an abuse of child labor.

With my own kids, after conferring with my assistant coach (sorry, honey, but I am the head coach), I am currently on board with my dad's call. In fact, it led to a recent interesting exchange with my son when I asked

him to vacuum his room after he straightened it.

Logan: I really don't like vacuuming.

Mommy: You think I like vacuuming?

Logan: No, but it's your job.

Now, in some old parenting playbooks this might call for the follow-up play of "Go to Your Room, Mister, For That One" or "Bring That Butt Over Here." But I'm trying to work from a more modern playbook. So, I went with the "Hit Them with Sarcasm" route.

Mommy: Excuse me! It's my job? I don't receive a paycheck for vacuuming. Have you seen any paychecks coming here for me, because I certainly haven't!

OK, so some of the plays need to be reworked a bit. But hopefully one day, when my adult children are sitting around thinking they turned out all right, better than nominating me for a Coach of the Year award would be their taking a page or two from my parenting playbook.

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