

5 Logical-But-Wrong Parenting Myths

I was sent a wonderful article the other day from a friend that I wanted to share here. Here you go:

<https://www.propublica.org/article/when-evidence-says-no-but-doctors-say-yes>

The article talks about the many times medicine is wrong when it comes to our lives because some decisions are really reflecting psychological processes that don't have anything to do with evidence. I wanted to extend this a bit here to talk about some of the "logic" that does not hold when it comes to parenting because it is very important that we shut these assumptions down as they often result in us doing more harm than good.

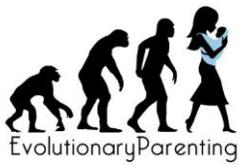
Logic Myth #1: Leaving Your Child To Cry Leads To Less Crying and More Self-Soothing

I know the entire logic of first wave behaviourism is that if you ignore a behaviour you will stop it. This is not actually how it seems to work. The evidence we have actually suggests something very different, with babies who have parents who are responsive crying less in the long-run than those who are ignored. Further, the cessation of crying is not the same as self-soothing (or emotion regulation). The process by which children learn to regulate their own emotions comes first by being regulated and then by knowing that they need others and seeking them out for regulation. Over time, children take over that role when it's not too hard but will continue to look for support in regulation when they are too distressed (kind of like us adults). Thus, contrary to the common view of leaving them to cry to stop, this can actually have the opposite effect on kids: they may cry more and may impede the development of emotion regulation, or self-soothing.

Logic Myth #2: Weaning Will Increase Solid Food Intake

There is nothing - I repeat nothing - in the literature to support this, but this is one line of advice often given to families when children aren't "eating enough". First off, we have a skewed idea of what is "eating enough" and we have to remember that foods before one are just for fun while foods after one may still be eating only sporadically for a bit. I have personally found this to be more common when children have food allergies or intolerances, likely because of food aversions earlier. If a child is thriving and eating some, we need not worry too much. If a child really is not eating enough then weaning is definitely not the answer. Why? Because breast milk is providing valuable nutrients for the child (something not gotten through food because of the low intake and the variety in breast milk is so great that the amount of food the child would need is much more) and contains valuable immune support, which may be what is keeping the child healthy. Removing this may put the child at greater risk.

Furthermore, the logic behind weaning is that if you starve a child enough, they will eat more. This is simply not supported by any type of research or even what we know about the relationships between food intake, control, and biological functions. For example, if starvation always led to eating more, we



would not have individuals with anorexia. Food restriction may be about control (something many toddlers struggle with), but it also may reflect a biological problem. Vitamin B12 can be deficient and this suppresses appetite meaning no matter how hungry a child is, they simply don't look for food because they aren't feeling it. Weaning won't help either of these things.

Logic Myth #3: Forcing Sharing Will Lead To Sharing

Nope. What we do know in research is that modeling sharing does lead to sharing behaviours, but forcing sharing seems to have the opposite effect. Yes, that's right, children who are forced to share tend not to share as much later on as those who were not forced to share. Although on the surface we think of forced sharing as teaching children to share, if we do think a bit more on this, it may not be surprising that if others take your things away from you and force you to give them to others, you may be more protective when you are given the chance given that what you learned was not that sharing is a kind act, but that it hurts you.

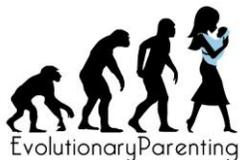
Logic Myth #4: Personal Praise Increases Self-Esteem

Sadly most praise does not help boost our kids self-esteem, but can either lead to narcissism or may actually reduce self-esteem. Children become more focused on maintaining the praise rather than growing, learning, and actually feeling good about themselves, and this is particularly true when we focus on praising traits rather than process. Self-esteem is about having the positive sense of self within oneself; however, praise tells a child that their self-worth comes from what others think of them. Thus, the more we praise, the more we actually impose our own ideas of what is good and bad onto our children and then they spend their time trying to gain that praise instead of being happy with who they are.

One exception here: It seems that when we praise traits like kindness which the child has control over, they actually do act more kindly and believe themselves to be kind. So if you want to praise your child, don't say they're smart, but say they are kind and offer them examples of their kindness.

Logic Myth #5: Punishment Reduces Unwanted Behaviours

This one is a bit difficult because there can be a short-term reduction in very specific behaviours; however, in the long-term there is no evidence that punishment actually reduces unwanted behaviours. The logic is that you make something undesirable, people won't do it. This is true most of the time, but ignores the very key element here that misbehaviour doesn't exist in a vacuum. It's often a response to other stressors and so punishment actually fails to look at the entire picture and address the true underlying cause. For example, a child may get angry and hit because s/he couldn't watch a show. That show is the trigger, but the cause may be that the child is hungry, tired, or simply needing more connection from his/her parents. Punishment can also result in a breaking of the parent-child bond which can lead to less trust and worse behaviours later on as our children no longer think we are the people to listen to or aspire to be like. If we think about how much we like people who have punished



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us, it should be clear that it's no real way to build a relationship and that is exactly what we need to focus on with our own kids.

There are many more ways that logic can fail us as parents, but these are five of the big ones. The key is to remember that we are not logical creatures (despite many of us trying to be) and instead we are emotion creatures who look for connection and trust. Especially young children whose brain is constantly developing and their ability to think in a logical manner just simply isn't as developed. Logic is a part of who we are, but it is not the entirety of us and our parenting needs to reflect what is at our core: the need to be loved. If we think about the above examples of when logic fails, they are examples of acting in a way that counters our children's need to be loved unconditionally. Thus, love unconditionally and hopefully the rest follows (logically).

Tracy Cassels, PhD is the Director of Evolutionary Parenting, a science-based, attachment-oriented resource for families on a variety of parenting issues. In addition to her online resources, she offers one-on-one support to families around the world and is regularly asked to speak on a variety of issues from sleep to tantrums at conferences and in the media. She lives in Prince Edward County, Ontario, Canada with her husband and two children.