

MOTHER OF FIVE PONDERS HOW TO BE A BETTER PARENT IN 2016 AND IF IT'S POSSIBLE...

One of life's truisms is that the older you get the faster the years go by, and I swear I'm still trying to lose the Christmas weight from 2010!

But with a new year comes a whole new set of hopes, expectations and unrealistic goal-setting. Apart from the obvious stuff – lose a stone, drink less, take up yoga – I'm aware that my parenting skills leave much to be desired and so, with this in mind, here are my top eight parenting resolutions for 2016:

1.) Get all five children to eat at least one vegetable per day: Easier said than done unless I employ the techniques of the Sneaky Chef (by hiding pureed vegetables in sauces). I have no idea where their aversion to vegetables comes from – certainly not me, I'm a vegetarian – but they'd rather tidy their bedrooms than eat something green. Time to deal with this, even if it takes bribery.

2.) I will prepare for school the night before: Mornings are chaotic in this house, a jumble of lost shoes, missing school bags and lots of yelling – mainly mine. And as I slam the front door behind us – the children piling into the car, shoes in hand and with un-brushed heads – I know deep down that I'm entirely to blame for this chaos. Yes they are slow in the mornings but if they got up earlier (read, if I got up earlier) this needn't be an issue. (Note to self: try getting them to sleep in their uniforms – imagine the time saved?)

3.) Make a sign for the bathroom: 'Please pee IN the bowl and don't forget to flush'. This one is self-explanatory to any parent of a boy. Now, try to imagine living with four of them, it's a sort of pee spattered hell.

4.) I will spend an hour on homework with them every night. Again, this one sounds simple enough but for some reason never quite happens. Instead we have a three hour homework marathon every few weeks, usually prompted by a stern note from a teacher, and I'll inevitably end up writing out the life-cycle of a tadpole with my left hand, just to save time. This madness has to stop!
5.) Give them regular chores and ensure they do them. I frequently ask the children to tidy their bedrooms or pick up the toys, which is usually met with

the response, 'how much will you pay me?' Time for a chores chart and a stern punishment if they don't do it (such as force-feeding them broccoli).
6.) Limit screen time to one hour a day and gaming must be confined to Harry Potter, My Little Pony games or similar. There's something disconcerting about walking into a room to see my eight-year-old murder and pillage his way through a village while yelling, 'die old woman, DIE!'

7.) I will not buy random crap just to make them behave in public. My kids exploit this weakness in me in order to gain sweets, cheap toys and other items when we're out and about as they know I'll do anything to keep order. They use this same weakness in me in order to gain permission to eat half a tub of ice-cream while I'm deep in phone conversation with my sister. It's time I toughened up!

8.) Finally, I won't compare my kids to other people's – they're all different. Yes, so my friend's little boy Tarquin can conjugate Italian verbs and has a black belt in Taekwondo, but my five-year-old

can give you an impressively detailed account of the plot for Child's Play 2 (according to his Reception teacher) and bite his own toenails. I mean really, who are we to judge which skill is more valuable?

I'll be honest, I'm not getting my hopes up on most of these; experience tells me that failure is inevitable and I'll be back to mopping up pee and buying Smarties at the Tesco checkout by the end of January. I may even have to resort to putting them to bed in their uniforms if the mornings don't improve drastically. So if you see five children wandering through your school gate one morning, looking a little dishevelled, you'll know I was forced to take drastic but unavoidable measures – at least they'll be on time!

Happy New Year!

Written by
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Your Letterbox Magazine.



Theatre Arts Schools Stagecoach™



Principal Melissa Allen has achieved a lot with her school since its first production of Annie in 2006. Stagecoach Banbury has had many guest teachers including performers from Hairspray, Fame, Dirty Dancing, Shrek and Legally Blonde. Over the years the school has also offered workshops in television and presenting, stage combat and stage make up. Committed to helping its students develop the school also offers several performing arts exams including Trinity Musical Theatre and LAMDA. These examinations have really allowed the participating students to 'beef up' their personal statements for college and university applications.

All parents want their children to succeed both academically and socially. Stagecoach Banbury has been helping children to do this since 2006. The renowned part-time performing arts school provides children aged 4-18 with 3 hours of singing, dancing and acting lessons every Saturday during term time. Based at the Blessed George Napier School, Stagecoach Banbury not only aims to assist children with their dreams of becoming stars, but also places a real emphasis on developing the confidence, social development and life skills of its students.



Stagecoach Banbury also provides its students with many performance opportunities. This has seen them perform at Her Majesty's Theatre London as well as other regional theatres including Milton Keynes and Malvern. Stagecoach parent Gemma Scott says "Stagecoach has been wonderful for my daughter, she loved performing at Milton Keynes and I know she will remember it for the rest of their life."



The school never rests on its laurels however, and 2016 promises to be its most exciting year yet. "We are looking forward to our next show, The Wiz, and we are excited to be launching our weekday Early Stages classes for ages 4-6." said Principal Melissa Allen.



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