



Mean Parents Anonymous

By Mary Fagan

My name is Mary and I'm a mean parent.

Like the other member of Mean Parents Anonymous (MPA), I have paid my dues: the long accounting of snotty comments, dirty looks, appendages lifted in my honor, exasperated huffs, slammed doors, chucked items, and enough "whys" to split King Solomon in half.

My crimes include, but are not limited to:

- ✍ Requiring identification and communication of my child's whereabouts and activities.
- ✍ Encouraging them to get a job AND save some of their paycheck.
- ✍ Requiring a clean room and a bit of help around the house.
- ✍ Payment for some gas when tooling around for no reason.
- ✍ Speaking to them with respect and demanding the same back.
- ✍ Allowing them to bear the consequences of their own behavior.
- ✍ Being able to pronounce the word "no."
- ✍ Simple rules for clean and appropriate clothing, which implies use of their senses, namely sight, smell and common.
- ✍ Feckless grounding.
- ✍ Aiding and abetting other authority figures.
- ✍ Meaning what I say and saying what I mean.

I plead guilty to multiple counts of the above, have no remorse and do not fear punishment. Since a mean parent's children function as judge, jury and jailor, punishment takes many forms, the worst being isolation, a type of family solitary confinement.

Isolation works like the cooties. Cast out from their inner circle, devoid of the details of their day, you experience the dreaded "silent treatment." (Now you know why I have no fear. It's more like a vacation.)

Unfortunately, this doesn't last very long as your kids will be unable to tolerate your confinement any better than Paris took to hers. This time off from hearing about their behavior will be short-lived as they soon discover they need you for nearly every aspect of daily life.

Despite the little perks of mean parenthood such as this, some parents need special help accepting their lot in life. Hence, the need for the Mean Parents Anonymous 12-Step Program.

Guilty mean parents should remember to take each step one by one at their own pace. Begin by stating your name, admitting that you are a mean parent, and follow it with the following 12 hard core statements:

1. Admit that we have all the power and that our family life is manageable when adults are in charge.
2. Believe that a Power greater than ourselves blessed us with this child that challenges our sanity.
3. Decide to turn our lives over to the care and raising of a healthy competent future adult.
4. I have made a moral and fearless inventory of what is best for my kids. That involves having them share some jobs around the house, talking to others with respect and encouraging them to do their best.
5. I have sworn to God (and at some other human beings) at the nature of their wrongs.
6. I am entirely ready for God to remove all of their defects of character as soon as I get rid of my own.
7. I humbly ask Him to overlook my own because I am really busy right now.
8. I list all my children that I have corrected and am willing to consider admitting years later if I was ever wrong. (It' s probably a short list.)
9. I plan to make amends to this short list when possible, although not probable.
10. Continue to take close inventory of the persons under my care even as they get mouthier and nastier.
11. Pray to God for the knowledge and courage to continue providing parental guidance and supervision until they are of the age of reason or until age 30, whichever comes first.
12. As a result of following these steps, I acknowledge that I am trying to show my children how to grow into a responsible adult though I realize right now my messages may fall on deaf ears.

The real issue is being “mean.” Children define “mean” as nasty and unfair: A parent defines this same behavior as being responsible, caring, protective and loving. Once a parent internalized the real meaning of “mean,” making decisions gets a lot easier.

It' s also important to tell yourself that someday, your kids will know what you mean.

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