

GOAL 9

Don't take all the credit, don't take all the blame

I enjoy reading self-help books, and I can always put them into two categories. In the first come books which make you feel like giving up after you've read them – they make you feel such a failure. The writer has every intention of helping you, but somehow they just manage to make you feel so inadequate. The second type is when I connect with what the writer is saying, and it lifts my inner being. After I've read the book the world looks a better place, the next-door neighbour's dog doesn't seem so annoying, and above all I feel that there is some hope in what I'm trying to achieve. What is it that makes the difference between the first and second type of book? It is obviously a number of things, but I think that one of the most important is that the second type is written from reality: the books are about joys and pains, about things that worked and others that did not. They are books that do not pretend to have any easy answers, but they do offer hope.

And that is one of my major purposes in writing this book. There are no simple answers to keeping your children drug-free. I wish it were that simple – but it's not. But as we have already seen, there is the possibility of giving them a framework that will

give them a greater chance of making it through life without taking drugs.

However, in writing a book like this my purpose is to help you as a parent. And so there is a very important principle that you need to hear. You must realise that you're not a failure as a parent. All your experience may tell you so. Your child still wears nappies whereas your friend's child flushes the toilet after they've used it. Your child manages a monosyllabic grunt while your friend's child can recite the whole works of Shakespeare. It may be that you have teenage children and they don't look the way you'd like them to – rings through nose, ears and lips, whereas your friend's children are simply ... smart! But you are not a failure.

On a more serious note, I have sat with many parents as they've poured out their hearts and shared their pain about their children, and at some point they will blurt out, 'Where did we fail?' The answer is that they did not. There is no magic formula for bringing up children. You know what I mean: 'Do A, B and C and your children will work out well-rounded people.' I wish it were so easy! The truth is that each child is a unique creation. There is nobody else like them. To help, I'd like to share three principles with you in the hope that these will take away some of the guilt you may feel as a parent, and make you realise that you are doing a good job after all.

RECOGNISE THE LIMITS OF YOUR RESPONSIBILITY

It's taken me many years, but I've finally realised we can't make other people do what we want them to. Which parent hasn't wished they could make their son or daughter pick another partner? Who hasn't wished that they could change their son's or daughter's behaviour to something that would be acceptable in front of their friends? The desire to control our children's lives comes from all the best reasons – our desire to see them get the best out of life, a realisation that certain decisions could have major implications. But our children will refuse to do what we want, and we can feel the control slipping out of our fingers. We need to let that responsibility go. We can't make decisions for our children. We want to be able to wave a magic wand and make everything all right – but we can't do that. Your children will make decisions that may well result in pain for them.

We need to free them to make their own choices and to learn through the consequences. The role of a parent is to let children make mistakes. That's not bad parenting – that's good parenting. The hard part for a parent is to protect children from making big mistakes. We need to have given them frameworks within which to make decisions. We must just stand with them and love them, irrespective of the decision.

REALISE THE GREAT THINGS YOU HAVE DONE

Many of us will always look at the negative side of

things. 'If only I had done this with my children,' or 'If only we had made this decision.' And we go through this whole list and conclude that we are very poor parents. Take five minutes and list all the good things about your children. You've made many good choices, you've created a loving environment for your kids, you've sacrificed many things for them. You are a good parent. Your children may not recognise it yet, but that is not the point. So stop putting yourself down – you're probably doing a good job.

TALK TO SOME GOOD FRIENDS

I think one of the most moving experiences I have had is when I've been carrying some problem for months. It has kept me awake at night, it has made me more touchy, and I seem to lose my temper at very small things. Finally I pluck up the courage to tell a good friend. The relief at just telling the person is great, but imagine the feeling when they tell me that what I've been going through is 'normal' and that loads of people face the same problem. We are created as social creatures and we need the support of friends. One of the most positive steps you can take is to talk through your problems with a good friend. They may not have any answers, but the support you get will help you cope.

People will come home if they know somebody is waiting for them.

One thing I have learned is that success is not about money and power. Real success is about relationships. There's no point in making \$50 million a year if your teenagers think you're a jerk and you spend no time with your wife.

Christopher Reeve ('Superman')¹³