

Good Habits, Family Style

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The kids do their homework on their way to piano lessons, your family meal is often eaten in front of the TV, and the floor of the family room is covered with shoes, game pieces, and newspapers.

Most families don't strive to serve frozen TV dinners every night or purposely ignore the clutter that builds up at home. But busy schedules, growing kids, and any change in lifestyle can trigger the onset of a bad habit.

So, how do we teach our kids good habits in the midst of all our bad ones?

"It's really not the kids that are the issue," says Laura Gauld, parent of three, who coordinates national parenting workshops derived from her book *The Biggest Job We'll Ever Have*. "Once we get parents where they need to be, their children will be inspired by their parents' growth."

Gauld's book is built around ten core beliefs on how families can find a balance between character and achievement.

"What we try to do is help parents focus on themselves as the primary teachers and the home as the primary classroom," says Gauld, who adds that families who can confront their bad habits can change their ways and influence their children.

Recognize any of these bad habits in your family? If so, try these suggestions for turning them around.

Bad habit: The kids eat in the car on the way to soccer practice, standing at the kitchen counter, or in front of the TV.

"We can't beat ourselves up for being on the go, but the action of making an effort to sit down as a family, even once or twice a week, is really important," says Gauld. Instead of feeling guilty about missing out on a big family meal every night, plan on one or two nights a week to share a

Despite busy lives, parents need to lead way for kids

family dinner. Turn off the ringer on the phone, light candles, bring out the china, and make it special.

Bad habit: You drive to school, the grocery store, even your neighbor's home just two blocks away.

Encouraging children to walk to school, the park, even to the convenience store for a gallon of milk, will keep your family exercised and teach kids to appreciate the ride. If you have to drive, build in some extra time, park half way to your destination, and get some fresh air.

Bad habit: Dad's birthday came and went. Your anniversary passed by without a card. It's easier to deal with the guilt of missing special days than the pressure of planning a big celebration.

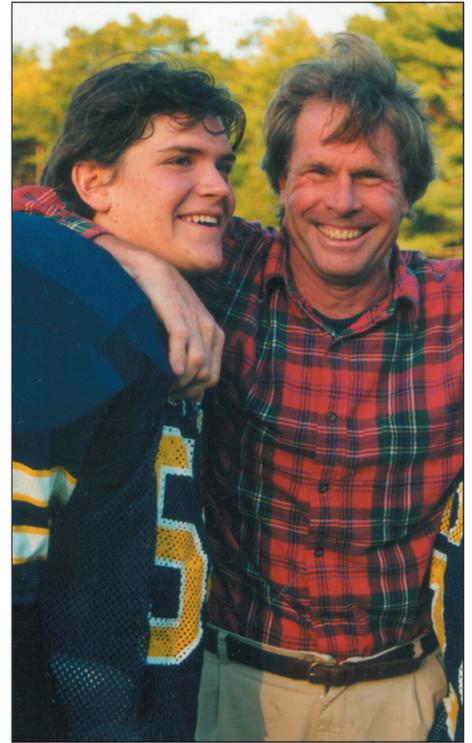
"Some of the most special things are done when people work together," comments Gauld, who adds that the achievement culture drives us to think that special events need to be big.

Think small when planning a party and ask for help from other family members. Develop a family celebration day that fits into everyone's schedule each month to honor special events: anniversaries, sports victories, birthdays, and good grades.

Bad habit: The dining room table is stacked with papers. The fish tank is dirty, and you can't see the floor in the children's rooms.

"The home needs to be a cherished place," says Gauld, who notes that the home is often treated as a way station. "There is a principle of ownership and respect for our things that we need to go back to."

You may not clean out the garage or basement, but getting personal spaces tidy once a week can set your fam-



Parents need to take time out of their hectic schedule, and make time for their children. The reward is priceless.

ily up for success. Dust and vacuum bedrooms, clean out backpacks and briefcases, and organize your closet so you'll have clean clothes for the coming week.

Bad habit: Mom works late most nights, Dad is drowning in home improvements, and Junior is signed up for five extracurricular activities.

"We aren't very good at saying no," says Gauld. "But when you get going and put too many things on your calendar you become a slave to that schedule and no one is served."

Before your monthly agenda books up, set aside some time for R & R in permanent marker, just like you would for one of your other obligations.

Making a commitment to zone out in front of the TV, read on the weekend, or soak in the bathtub is just as important as any meeting you have during the week.

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