

THE primary Lessons OF PARENTING

A GOOD parent is someone who is realistic, prepared to be vulnerable and doesn't take themselves too seriously,' says Katharine Hill, a mother of four and the UK director of Care for the Family, an organisation that promotes family life and helps families in difficulty. In her new book *If You Forget Everything Else Remember This* Katharine offers parents advice on how to cope during their child's primary school years, shares some of her own parenting experiences (and mistakes) and encourages parents that, on the days when they feel overwhelmed with pressures, 'good enough is good enough'.

'I think a parent's biggest challenge in the primary years is to set clear boundaries,' she says when we talk over the phone. 'Once the parent sets them, it's the child's job to test them, to make sure they're there. Boundaries are not just about discipline, they're about creating security for a child.'

'Parents need to show their child that they love them and in a way that they understand. In his book, *The Five Love Languages*, Gary Chapman says that we can communicate our love to people through giving gifts, physically touching them, spending quality time with them, doing acts of service and saying words of affirmation. Our children need to see us express love for them using all those ways, but as they get older we tend to find that one "language" in particular speaks to them the most.'

Another topic that Katharine touches on in her book is the pressure to be

There are a million ways to be a great parent

KATHARINE HILL tells Claire Brine about overcoming the pressures of parenthood



perfect. Chapters entitled 'There's no point trying to be Supermum (or Superdad)' and 'Lay down the guilt' are designed to encourage parents to go easy on themselves.

'I want people to know that there's no way to be a perfect parent, but there are a million ways to be a great one,' she says. 'I think mums and dads can feel under pressure because glossy magazines present us with images of women and men with straight white teeth and skinny jeans, living in immaculate houses, and it all looks so effortless. As parents, we can look at others and so easily make comparisons. That's not doing us any favours. Yes, we should celebrate the good things we and our children achieve, but it would

be better if we could also let people know about the parts of parenting that we find difficult.'

Although her children are now grown up, Katharine says that she and a group of close friends share the joys and struggles of parenting together by meeting up regularly to talk. She recommends it to parents who are feeling isolated.

'It's important for parents to find people they can be honest with,' she says. 'Being able to hear the words "Me, too" can be a real comfort.'

'Time spent with other adults – and away from the children – can also be beneficial because it helps parents to step back a bit, get off the treadmill of packing school lunches and doing the

washing and gain a new perspective. Everyone needs time out. A break from the children may be something parents have to fight for, but a bit of a rest is worth it, if it means they are less exhausted and ratty. I know that I'm a lot more patient if I've had enough sleep and I've done things that re-energise me.'

Having a break can also help parents be better at listening, which, Katharine believes, helps to strengthen relationships with their children.

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If You Forget Everything Else Remember This is published by Muddy Pearl

'When a parent listens to their child, they are giving them value,' she explains. 'The child knows that what they are saying matters. When young children talk about situations but have a limited vocabulary, we can help them by encouraging them to express their emotions. So if there has been a falling-out in the playground, we could say: "I expect that was a bit sad for you, wasn't it?" It's important to help children develop the words to talk about their feelings.'

'Parents also need to be ready to listen and respond at any moment. A child might come out with something important to tell their parent in the middle of bath time or story time. As parents, we have to seize those moments and go along with them.'

Through the ups and downs she has faced in parenting, Katharine maintains that her Christian faith has been a consistent source of strength. She wouldn't want to be without it.

'The way God parents us as his children is the example that I want to follow,' she says. 'Having him in my life helps me in the task.'

'I believe that, as parents, we need to seize the day. Each new day is a gift and it's down to us to make the most of it.'