Playing it By Ear

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When I became a parent, I really had no idea what I was getting myself into. No matter how many books you read or how many people you talk to about their experiences, at the end of the day you are the one who has to take the decisions regarding your children. The most daunting thing is that each and every decision you take has a direct impact on your family. Even the decisions that seem trivial and inconsequential have an effect on the wellbeing of your children. I am sometimes overwhelmed when I stop to think that starting from what I am feeding my children, i.e. whether it is nutritious in content, to which school I am sending them to, i.e. single sex school, co-ed school, whether it is private or public, to what values I am instilling in them etc. will ultimately be an intrinsic part of who they are. I think it is only when you become a parent that you understand the enormity of the role you have decided to undertake. Not that I am trying to scare off any potential parents with this article!

Sometimes I wish that there was a book giving us guidelines and telling us exactly what to do in each and every circumstance but sadly we have to use our own judgement and do what our instincts dictate to us. How are you supposed to know if you are doings things right? How are you supposed know where to draw the line between being a prudent parent and an overprotective one or a tolerant parent and an indulgent one.

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We all have our individual opinions about what type of food we give our children. Some parents try and stick to a highly regimented diet restricting the amount of sugars and fats their children are eating, not allowing them anything which they feel is nutritionally harmful. At the other end of the spectrum there are parents who have no qualms about letting their children eat whatever they want, including chocolates, fizzy drinks, crisps etc. whenever they want. In the UK, many households do not have a balanced diet as fruit and vegetable do not feature highly, unhealthy snacks taking their place. This of course can lead to all sorts of physical ailments such as, vitamin deficiencies, skin problems, tooth decay, obesity etc. Although most of us try our best to strike a happy balance between the two, it is not always easy. I think unintentionally, we tend to feed our kids, foods that we ourselves prefer to eat. Not being much of a salad person myself I do not insist that my children eat salads regularly but vegetables at mealtimes are non-negotiable! As far as sweets and snacks are concerned, I personally feel that if you let your children eat them in moderation it is easier to control than if you have an outright ban on them as they may go to school or a friend's house and eat them without your knowledge, which kind of defeats the purpose, don't you think?

When children start going to school, you have to acknowledge that they will be exposed to external stimuli. Even if you provide a very sheltered home life, you cannot control what they hear or see outside. I know my children think I am rather strict about what films or TV programmes I allow them to watch and even my husband comments that I am a bit of a hardliner but I would like my children to be children for as long as possible. Why expose them to sex and violence if you avoid it? Why accelerate the process of transition between childhood and adulthood? If a film has a 15 rating which means the film is unsuitable for children under the age of 15 then none of my children are allowed to watch it. Obviously they have tried in the past to change my position on this by telling me that a lot of their friends watch whatever they want to, with no success. It reminds me of a time when we were on holiday and my three kids were spending time with our friends' children. What I did not realise is that they were all watching a horror film in the other room. The outcome of this was that for the next week or so, all three of my offspring stuck to me like superglue. If they could they would have accompanied me to the bathroom. Thankfully their attempt at rebellion backfired and since then I have heard minor grumblings but no major complaints about my censorship.

A few years ago when my eldest daughter was only 11, one of the other parents in her class commented on how her daughter was going to be walking to school on her