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Just because my kids are well-behaved, it doesn't mean they're boring

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Kylie Orr

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My husband and I have occasionally received compliments from complete strangers about how well-behaved our children are. Like most parents, we've tried to raise them to be polite and compassionate. I guess we could be considered strict; we have high expectations of their behaviour and try to follow through with reasonable, age-appropriate consequences when they misbehave. Let's just say, they spent a lot of quality time in the laundry when they were younger (if only I'd taught them to fold washing back then!).

Being consistent, and continually guiding four children down paths that are deemed socially acceptable, correcting wayward behaviour and expecting them to give their best a red-hot go, is a hard slog. Bloody hard. Exhausting. Brain-draining. Nerve-fraying. Grey-hair-inducing.

So, when I hear comments from other parents describing well-behaved children as "boring", I don't feel so well-behaved myself.

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Sure, some kids are louder by nature and throw a plethora of challenges at their parents. These kids can be tough to raise and take a shedload of energy to parent. But don't mistake our well-behaved kids as quiet, introverted bores who never disobey, give cheek, never ignore requests, give sass or cause our anger receptors to explode. They are children, after all.

We've experienced a myriad of difficult behaviours over the past 14 years of parenting, and no doubt will experience more times when our children give us reason to ask for entry straight into hell because it would be easier than sharing a house with them. (At this point, we only have one teenager, so there'll be more challenges to come).

But when other parents say, "your kids are well-behaved, mine are full of spunk" they take away all the hard work we've put in. We're not bragging about our kids, we're not saying others haven't also put in the time, effort and consistency needed to raise good people, we are not saying one child is better than another. In fact, we are not saying anything. We are being told our kids lack spunk.

Claire Orange, is a mother of four, and a Children's Mental Health Author & Trainer. She, too, has received backhanded compliments about her children's behaviour. "I've had someone say that I've broken [my children's] spirits with too many rules and boundaries and that's why they're so good."

She has also wondered where this thinking comes from and questions the double standards of expectations.

"Well-behaved children are boring – to who? Have you ever been in a restaurant with children sitting with their parents, eating nicely, having fun and not creating havoc and said, 'Gee – look at those boring children!' Why is it that in some contexts we frown on children who, very obviously have no boundaries and no behavioural limits, and then in other contexts we celebrate them?"

Parenting is certainly an arena for comparison. Rightly or wrongly, we like to validate our own successes as a parent by sizing ourselves and our children up against others. It's unhelpful and in some instances, downright offensive.

Claire acknowledges, "parenting is a very individual pursuit. I'm a parent who believes in good, predictable and consistent boundaries. My children know how to behave in lots of different contexts and I expect them to behave well when they've been taught the rules and the know the expectations. I have fair, predictable and consistent consequences for pushing over those boundaries and not playing by the rules. If that's boring, I'm happy to take that."

Some people may think it's luck to have children who follow instructions and who are generally pleasant to get along with. As Clare says, "there's no luck – there's considerable and consistent parenting involved to get them to be that way. And I know that it's going to make for happy, resilient, well-adjusted adults."

Dannielle Miller, teen author and educator, agrees that children who are well-behaved tend to be labelled as uninteresting. "During adolescence, there's a myth that the 'straight' kids are dull. They may get taunted by their peers, they may find they are given less attention in class if their teachers are distracted by those who act out. But the reality is, the world needs more genuinely good kids - not those who mindlessly follow instructions, but rather those who can make ethical decisions and think not just of themselves, but of others."

A restaurant is offering discounts to patrons with well-behaved children

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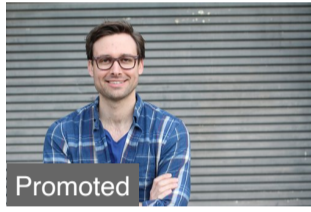


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