

# What Do Parents Owe Their Children ?

Ann Landers

**IF I HAD** to select a word that best describes the majority of American parents, that word would be guilt ridden. How sad it is to see parents become the willing victims of the “give-me game,” only to discover that, no matter what they do, it isn't enough. In the end, they are despised for their lack of firmness and blamed when their spoiled children get into trouble. With this in mind, I shall first answer the question: “What do parents owe their children?” and I shall start with what they don't owe them.

Parents don't owe their children every minute of their day and every ounce of their energy. They don't owe them round-the-clock car service, singing lessons, tennis lessons, expensive bicycles, a motorcycle or a car when they reach sixteen, or a trip to Europe when they graduate. I take the firm position that parents do not owe their children a college education. If they can afford it, fine; they can certainly send them to the best universities. But they must not feel guilty if they can't. If the children really want to go, they'll find a way. There are plenty of loans and scholarships for the bright and eager who can't afford to pay.

After children marry, their parents do not owe them a down payment on a house or money for the furniture. They do not have an obligation to baby-sit or to take their grandchildren in their home when the parents are on vacation. If they want to do it, it must be considered a favour, not an obligation.

In my opinion, parents do not owe their children an inheritance, no matter how much money they have. One of the surest ways to produce a loafer is to let children know that their future is assured. Do parents owe their children anything? Yes, they owe them a great deal.

One of their chief obligations is to give their children a sense of personal worth, for self-esteem; is the basis of a good mental health. A youngster who is constantly made to feel stupid and unworthy, constantly compared to brighter brothers, sisters, or cousins, will become so unsure, so afraid of failing, that he (or she) won't try at all. Of course, they should be corrected when they do wrong this is the way children learn. But the criticisms should be balanced with praises, preferably with a smile and a kiss. No child is ever too old to be hugged.


Parents owe their children firm guidance and consistent discipline. It is frightening for a youngster to feel that he is in charge of himself; it's like being in a car without brakes. The parent who says “No” when other parents say “Yes” sends a double message. He is also saying: “I love you, and I am ready to risk your anger, because I don't want you to get into trouble.”

Parents owe their children some religious training. The fact that so many strange cults are enjoying such success is proof that children feel the need for something spiritual in their life. Parents owe their children a comfortable feeling about their body, and enough information about sex to balance the misinformation that they will surely receive from their friends. Parents owe their children privacy and respect for their personal belongings. This means not borrowing things without permission, not reading diaries and mail, not looking through purses, pockets, and drawers. If a mother feels that she must read her daughter's diary to know what is going on, the communication between them must be pretty bad

Parents owe their children a set of solid values around which to build their Lives. This means teaching them to respect the rights and opinions of others; it means being respectful to elders, to teachers, and to the law. The best way to teach such values is by example. A child who is lied to will lie. A child who sees his parents steal tools from the factory or towels from a hotel will think that it is all right to steal. A youngster who sees no laughter and no love in the home will have a difficult time laughing and loving.

No child asks to be born. If you bring a life into the world, you owe the child something. And if you give him his due, he'll have something of value to pass along to your grandchildren.

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