

I was thinking the other day “what’s the point of being the Editor of a prestigious journal like the Australians Caring for Children newsletter if I can’t bore the readers with my own view of the world. After all, I’ve already bored my family and friends, why not torture a whole new audience?” So here it is, the first (hopefully – after the certain public outcry – not the last) Kathy’s Korner.

Have you noticed how parents are really never satisfied with their children? Maybe as adoptive parents we are all perfectionists. After all, haven’t we all been conditioned – Pavlov-style – to present ourselves as the “perfect” family? I don’t know about you but I always felt like nothing but the best would do when it came to proving ourselves acceptable parent material.

We had to be fitter and healthier than the norm (what other parents have to virtually guarantee, in writing, that they’ll survive until their child’s 18th birthday?). Don’t get me wrong I would be more than happy to guarantee such an idea. Hey, I’d be happy to guarantee that I’ll still be around to help my child celebrate his 80th birthday but the pessimist in me thinks that no amount of Body Mass Index calculations are going to help when that rogue bus crosses my destiny.

Our house had to be prettier, safer and cleaner than the norm (sure, they said don’t go to any trouble, but who didn’t clean, polish and fluff cushions to within an inch of their lives prior to that first, nerve-wrecking social worker visit – I would have gone to less trouble if Vogue Living was coming to do a photo shoot).

Our finances had to be ship-shape, our jobs had to be respectable and secure (you don’t see too many circus knife-throwers adopting, now do you?) and we had to secure references from everyone we had ever met (especially if they had a PhD, were High Court Judges or related to Kerry Packer).

So we end up jumping through the hoops and lo-and-behold we are deemed to be allowed to parent. But by now our old ideas of parenting have faded into the past, along with our dignity and self-respect. We have had to answer questions about what we may or may not do should our children get a splinter when they are 15. We have had to look deep within ourselves and question every aspect of who we are and how we are going to parent our imaginary children. No wonder by the time our child actually comes along we have set the bar so high only a giraffe on speed could successfully hurdle it.

We cannot enjoy our children as they are – we are too busy wanting them to stop those embarrassing displays of childhood behaviour which may hint that we are not the perfect parents after all and move on to the sorts of behaviour which proves that they are geniuses in the making, thus making us perfect parents.

Our son was slow to walk and talk. We spent many, many months pleading and encouraging, looking for any sign that he would stand up and walk, that he would open his mouth and speak. Now that he is four all we want is for him to sit down and shut up!

He was a placid toddler, content to quietly play on his own, to be taken wherever we needed to go. He slept well and ate everything placed in front of him. We complained that he didn’t have “enough personality”. We wanted an outgoing child, a child who was spirited and strong-willed and independent. Now that he is four all we want is for him to please, just do things our way, just once!

So now my dark, dirty secret is out (sob, sob) – I am not a perfect parent. My son chews on his sleeve, he has been known to throw himself on the floor of the supermarket in an Oscar-worthy tantrum, and the other night he spat mouthfuls of dinner on the floor to entertain my boss and his wife. I hang my head in shame.

If any other readers would like to experience the healing effects of such a purge of the psyche please feel free. I would love to hear stories of your children’s exploits (and print them in a column titled “Kids do the ~~funniest~~ ~~most annoying~~ ~~funniest~~ ~~most annoying~~ things” – I’m still working on the title). Not only will you feel better once your skeletons are out of the closet but think of all the other readers (like me, for example) who would benefit from knowing that other parents aren’t perfect either. Writing down your personal stories might make you cry but it will make us laugh and that has to be worth the effort.

OK, gang – wait until the little monster, I mean little darling, is asleep and get writing. I’ll expect a full mailbag before the next issue. I’m off to explain to my little treasure why unlocking the back gate and letting the dog out isn’t such a funny thing to do. Then I’ll sit down and meditate on how I’m going to be a better mother the second time around.