

# INSIGHTS

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## Raising G-rated kids in an R-rated world

Kids today are exposed to too much adult-oriented content too early. In some ways today's children remind me of slum children in Victorian England, who saw too much but experienced very little.



Effective parenting involves good character development, that is, raising kids who have a sense of 'other' rather than a sense of entitlement. It also means raising kids with a moral compass that helps them work out right from wrong. Kids usually pick up this moral compass from their parents, however parental influence is easily diluted by the huge array of messages they hear from the media, music, peers and online.

Kids today are exposed to too much adult-oriented content too early. In some ways today's children remind me of slum children in Victorian England, who saw too much but experienced very little. They see things in the media that they don't understand and they may not have had enough adventure experiences that develop real independence and problem-solving skills.

The following four simple processes will provide the means for you to help develop a moral compass in your children and ensure that you stay in the game as your kids move into adolescence.

### 1. Make bedrooms screen-free places.

Kids these days can disappear into their bedrooms for hours at a time watching television or engaging in online activities. This not only limits your supervision and monitoring options but removes the chance for children to easily speak to you regarding content or activities that they are not sure about. As much as possible encourage kids to watch television, and use computers and mobile applications in public spaces and places.

### 2. Have regular meals together.

Sounds deceptively simple but mealtimes are tremendous opportunities for parents and children to talk. Let your kids be heard but also be heard yourself. The free interchange of ideas

and information that a vibrant meal-time provides is one of the best forms of adult/child/young person interaction there is. That is not to say every mealtime will provide opportunities for brilliant conversations. However even if the conversation flows once in every three mealtimes, that is a great hit rate and better than not at all.

### 3. Read good literature to children.

Good children's books and novels generally have messages that revolve around a diverse array of positive values such as tolerance, persistence and courage. Just ten minutes a night spent reading to your children will help them develop a love of reading, but also expose them to ideas that are generally constructed with the relevant age group in mind. Kids are hard-wired to learn from stories so expose your kids to good ideas through the written word.

### 4. Share uplifting stories with kids.

Look beyond the bad news that seems to crowd the media for the stories of hope, resilience and inspiration that you can share with your kids. The recent Cadel Evans Tour de France triumph is one such story that kids should know about. On one level it may be a sporting story, but it's also a story of grit, determination and focus that's worthwhile unpacking with your kids.

The best interactions with kids happen when no one is working at it. However, in this noisy world parents need to be proactive and make sure they engineer situations where they can maximise their well-intentioned influence on the children they are raising. Lecturing and moralising doesn't work these days with kids, but parent influence still does.

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