

Our parenting skills alone did not get us this far

by Mark Pavilons

How did we get here?

No, that's not a rhetorical question.

As a tail-end Baby Boomer I flip through the blank pages of my parenting handbook to reveal nothing.

Just how did my wife and I raise our bundles of joy to walking, taking independent adults?

I have no idea. All the "What to Expect" parenting handbooks offered little in the way of concrete advice or direction. Sure, there were sections on how when and when not to "freak out." We learn by doing, I suppose.

Our children come out like little pink bundles, not unlike bunnies or mice or raccoons. They're helpless and would not survive a night out in the wild on their own. They would be food. They're squishy, cute little critters.

And parents are just as helpless, holding these tiny creatures that demand so much work and attention.

We learn about infant schedules - feeding, changing, sleeping, etc. These tiny beings test our mettle and our lives are turned upside down. But it's all worth it, right?

Once they "graduate" and begin to resemble humans, they are more recognizable, but still require a lot of attention. We have fun bending their arms and legs like a doll, and making very odd sounds, just inches from their faces.

Doesn't look very civilized or modern by any means. I doubt whether our Neanderthal brethren made kissy faces.

The bottom line is unprepared adults are allowed to bring children into the world without any knowledge or foresight.

Were our ancestors stronger, heartier and more focused? They rolled up their sleeves, delivered babies in log huts by the fire. Our primate ancestors likely had no biological knowledge of umbilical cords, clearing airways and the like, but they did.

How many were lost in childbirth? How did we ever make it, really?

At one point during our existence, humankind was almost wiped out, leaving only a few thousand souls roaming the earth. And from this we "rebuilt." That's incredible. Judging from the countless post-apocalyptic TV shows I've seen, should this happen today, our outlook would not be so bright.

And here we are, millennia later, and we're still making a royal mess of child rearing and mucking up the family unit. We're faulty to a fault.

And yet they let anyone have and raise children these days!

I don't know how we haven't blown ourselves out of existence.

I don't know much about Generations X, Y or Z but even we Boomers - wise in our own ways - lacked sufficient acumen to be perfect parents. The proof is in the pudding - our 20-something offspring. They, too, would perish if left in their own in the woods behind our subdivision homes. Ok. Some would be able to fish and dig for berries. But without a phone? Unlikely.

But what the heck! It's 2025 and we're just a stone's throw from our cave-dwelling relatives in terms of perfecting the family unit. In fact, we've made a right mess of it all, with a host of conflicting and ever-changing advice, data, and perceptions.

And what about coping skills or mechanisms? My parents, and to an extent myself, rely on tried and true methods like raising eyebrows, turning a blind eye or Canadian whisky.

Sure, we ?know? more today than ever before but how has that helped? If we evolved, why aren't we and our children the epitome of perfection?

Why are we plagued by mental health issues, stress, bullying, hatred and uncertainty at record levels?

Did we mess up? How did we let things get so out of whack?

We can't always give our children everything, even though we try our hardest, often at the expense of ourselves. That's the trade-off one makes when taking on this role.

More than money or material things, I believe in giving our kids an idea of self-worth, the strength to chase their dreams, and knowing they are deeply loved.

But is it enough?

At times, yes. But there are those times ? and every parent goes through them ? when you feel so helpless and hopeless that you question everything.

This can relate to big, or little things.

I don't know too many storybook families, where everyone gets along perfectly; where images of the Cleavers ? albeit in black and white ? come to mind.

In our day, most disagreements were settled with a few pushes and shoves. After dusting ourselves off, we got back to business.

We are more, how you say, refined and less barbaric today.

There are times in our family ?debates??when tempers flare, but words fly like eloquent Shakespearean soliloquies. Points and counter-points are well founded, well presented. And yet, emotions run very high. Must be in our simian DNA.

Parents slip on our black-and-white striped shirts and jump into the fray, separating the combatants with our arms. We order them to stand down, back off and take a breather. Perhaps there should be chapters ? no, entire editions ??f parenting books dedicated to refereeing our kids. I admit that I?spout off, sometimes adding fuel to the fire. My wife, an experienced social worker, is the master. While our skills are plentiful, they don't always work on your own kind.

I've been waiting for our kids to be fully self-sufficient, when they can fend for themselves. That's supposed to happen, right?

Perhaps that was once true, in my generation.

But in today's world, world filled with stressors, issues and economic realities, our offspring face ongoing hurdles and challenges.

Again, I realize that's what I signed up for, but I thought at one point it would become much easier, more enjoyable. I'm still waiting.

Are our children less prepared, less able to confront today's trials and tribulations??I'm not sure.

I?do not envy any 20-something today.

Parenthood, it seems, requires strength beyond the natural laws.

You love beyond reason. You fight beyond endurance. You hope beyond despair.

And we continue to raise children despite it all.