



by Karen Stephens

Parents Take On a Daunting, But Rewarding Job Description

Parenting requires a lot of stretch and versatility; and it can be downright confusing. But making the decision to be a parent — a good parent — is important beyond measure. It's nothing short of accepting a sacred trust. Parents accept responsibility for the future by taking good care of children today.

Parenting is often an undervalued service, but I consider it the most critical job around; and the most demanding, too! To bring my point home, below is a parenting job description set out in black and white. I hope it reminds you of the respect you deserve for taking on such a tough job. Does any of the following ring a bell to you?

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Supervisory Position Available: Creator, caretaker, and nurturer of new human beings.

Job Title: Parent.

Division Assignment: Head of the family unit, otherwise known as mom or dad.

Minimum Qualifications: Be of sound body, unselfish mind, and big heart. Knack for tender, loving care. Experience in relating well to others highly recommended.

Job Description: Fill bellies, maintain home, cradle, protect, teach, guide, listen, empathize, communicate, accept, trust, check up on, love, discipline, role model, doctor, clean and wash, (and then clean and wash some more) tolerate . . . and enjoy.

Desired traits: Trustworthy, stable, mature, sane, honest, wise, self-confident, patient, empathetic, compassionate, optimistic, predictable, respectful, reliable, persistent, determined, loyal, sensitive to feelings, possess faith in humankind, immune to sleep deprivation.

Knowledge required: Pre-natal and early childhood development up to and including early adulthood, health and nutrition, family budgeting, child psychology, how relationships work in a family “system,” first aid and car seat safety, accident and poison prevention, new algebra, toy and play yard safety, criminal justice, how to raise a reader, 101 ways to side-step power struggle, grasp of enrollment applications — from child care to college, coaching techniques for beginner athletes, and last, but not least, how to survive holidays with extended family.

Abilities required: Self-sacrifice, flexibility, rapid decision-making, problem solving, positive coping skills, effective time management, self-motivation, constructive stress management, excellent communication skills, grace under pressure, record keeping, closet organization, cooking, cleaning, mowing, cleaning garage, car maintenance. In addition, must be able to: breathe through mouth while changing diapers, stare down a tantrum, respond stoically to vomiting, ignore bathroom humor, discreetly save the dignity of overweight dinner guests who a child innocently announces is “really fat,” get grass stains out of athletic uniforms, remain calm in face of a pebble found inside a toddler’s nose, host “the perfect” birthday party, and explain nuances of human reproduction without blushing.

Responsible To: Children’s grandparents, neighbors, child care centers, schools, criminal justice system, the IRS.

Hours: Perpetual 24 hour shift, 7 days a week, 52 weeks a year.

Vacation: Negotiable after 18 to 25 years of service, dependent on successful completion of job duties.

Contract Terms: Lifetime obligation, non-negotiable, contract can not be severed.

Labor Protections: Exempt from Fair Labor Practices, overtime is mandatory, breaks unheard of, ineligible for leave of absence, grievance procedures not provided — even when assigned children are unreasonably unruly.

Career Ladder: Commensurate with motivation and stamina. Possibilities include: play group organizer, nursery volunteer, child care board member, car pool driver, candy bar salesperson (for new band uniforms, of course), Little League coach, baby pool lifeguard, Cub or Brownie Scout leader, recess supervisor, story hour assistant, field trip driver, sex educator, spiritual advisor, and if you’re really really committed (or about *to be* committed!) prom chaperone.

Pay and Benefits Package: Expanded opportunities for contentment and self-fulfillment offered in lieu of monetary compensation. Free license to spoil adorable grandchildren and then send them back home. Stock options not provided, but long-term dividends include family to share holidays with, someone to read to you when your eyes have gone bad, a chance to contribute to the future.

Goals and Objectives for Parent Position

1. Sustain children’s physical survival.
2. Create a healthy environment for optimal brain development.
3. Sensitively respond to and guide intellectual, social, emotional, physical, and moral competence from infancy through adolescence.
4. Create a secure and stable sense of family, preferably including a place to call home.
5. Promote children’s emotional stability and resilience — even during senseless acts of public tantrums.
6. Respond to each child’s personality and temperament without yelling or name calling (or otherwise becoming like your own parents at their weakest moments.)
7. Encourage children’s social attachments to siblings, extended family and peers, while simultaneously teaching them to be wary of strangers. (Unless, of course, the stranger wears a Santa suit, thus requiring parents to teach children to smile and be friendly in spite of absurd, mind-boggling appearance.)
8. Prepare children to be the perfect student and future employee — or die trying.
9. Foster loyalty to neighborhood and community through participation, preferably not gang-related.
10. Teach children to respect authority, even if the kids don’t like being “bossed” by child care providers, school teachers, librarians, life guards, police officers, and other guardian angels of the community.
11. Inspire children’s self-confidence, trust and optimism; and their commitment to hometown and dedication to the welfare of humankind.

Does that about cover it? Whew, no wonder parents are tired a lot!

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About the Author — Karen Stephens is director of Illinois State University Child Care Center and instructor in child development for the ISU Family and Consumer Sciences Department. For nine years she wrote a weekly parenting column in her local newspaper. Karen is author of two books and frequent contributor to *Exchange*.

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