



What your child wants... that money can't buy

Much of life's real wealth can't be shown on a bank statement - it's wealth that is registered on the balance sheets of the head and heart. That may well be the most precious inheritance we can leave our kids. Here are some gems that will set your kids up for life.

A love of wild, awesome nature

It's one thing to enjoy a golden bay with blue sky and sunshine, but quite another to lean into a howling gale on a bleak, lonely beach, with foam flying past you and huge surf crashing around towering rocks. It's an acquired taste, like olives or mushrooms, that your kids might not enjoy at first (or ever) but the wordless poetry of 'big nature' puts you in your place and heals your nerves.

A love of learning, not just good grades

The 'right' teachers plus the 'right' school plus parental encouragement can combine to create a culture of high academic achievement. Great - we all want our kids to achieve well - as long as striving for grades gives them an intellectual itch that keeps them growing and delighting in what they learn. Sometimes high performance at school and university has far more to do with competitiveness, ego and fear of failure than learning, and once the external rewards and honours are removed, there is no appetite, no inquisitiveness to learn.

A range of friendships

Some people develop the habit, from their youngest years, of only evaluating people in what they can do for them - financially, sexually, emotionally; and to therefore avoid, even fear, the odd, the old, the needy, the unattractive. The measure of someone's character is the way they treat people who cannot benefit them in any way.

One of the mysteries and delights of life is that to give love selflessly, without thought of reward, does repay the giver immensely. So don't rob your children - let them see your fearless friendship and hospitality.

A love of the arts and music

Everyone loves music, just like everyone loves food; and just as we must battle to force anything green-coloured into their mouths, it will also take energy and persistence to give your children a wider diet of music than just the burgers-and-coke-type music served up by TV and radio.

- Encourage (no, coerce!) them to learn an instrument or do singing lessons. Wait a decade or two for any thanks from them, but it will come.
- Control the main stereo in your home, and play a whole range of music, loudly and often.
- Where possible take them to big concerts, the orchestra or operas, but don't overlook lots of amateur theatres and performances.
- Rent Amadeus and other musicals on DVD, and bravely give CDs of music that they might come to love, rather than chickening out by just giving them music vouchers.

A sense of their roots

Most New Zealanders spring from immigrant stock, and continue our nomadic heritage by relocating, on average, about every five years. Add that to the fracturing and reblending of many homes, and kids today grow up with little sense of origins or a wider family. In your home, you are the custodian of family stories that will die with you if you don't tell them.

- Go through old photo albums with your kids
- Visit family graves
- Get your kids used to visiting relatives and attending family functions
- Do a family tree
- Create a 'tipuna wall' with photos of all your ancestors

If you have step or adopted children, it may be harder for you to help them to discover and honour their roots. But hard doesn't mean impossible – and their sense of identity and connectedness may be even more important to them, in their circumstances, than to other children.

Being able to play – not just have toys

Some kids can have more fun with a stick than others do with a room full of flash toys. Play does more than entertain: serious studies have linked childhood play with skill learning and, more importantly, good mental and social health.

Space in the day

Kids can get very busy. 'Doing' is great, 'being' is better: sometimes, let them be. Nevertheless, moderation is the thing. Telly-watching and cyber-surfing have their place, but it is a small place. Model healthier modes of relaxation - pottering with hobbies, sports, books.

Wisdom, not just knowledge

"Knowledge is knowing a tomato is a fruit. Wisdom is not putting it in a fruit salad." - Peter Kay



Humour

How do you give your kids a sense of humour? I say I got mine from my parents - or from being dropped on my head as a baby. If I did get it from my parents, I'm grateful.

Intimacy

One of life's tragedies is to pass through life without truly connecting at the deepest level with a soul mate and friend. There are many who are socially adept, attractive, married and sexually active who, in their hearts, are bitterly lonely. Social skills are a good start, but true intimacy grows out of character - trust, tolerance, integrity and generosity.

Try this

The gift of inquisitiveness

- "My only talent for genius," said Einstein, "is my inquisitiveness." Forget "learning for success"; learning to learn is success in itself.
- Read to your kids when they are young. Visit museums and the zoo and read the signs to them. Visit the library every week.
- Discover second-hand book shops and books stalls at school fairs and fill your house with books. Encourage more than just 'vocational' courses of study that merely equip a person for a job.
- Develop your own love of learning. Do night classes. Let your kids see you reading. Express more interest in what they are learning than what grades they are getting.

At The Parenting Place we believe '**family is everything**' so we've created a series of 45 Hot Tips brochures to help you make the most of your parenting journey. They're grouped into four categories: Early Years, Middle Years, Tweens and Teens, and General Parenting.

General Parenting topics include:

- Communication that work
- Family meal times
- Feeling guilty?
- How am I doing?
- How to talk to kids
- Media diet
- Parenting alone
- Parenting from a united front
- Simple parenting strategies
- Talking about money
- Too much talk
- What money can't buy
- 5 keys to blended family success