



Care  
for the  
Family

# Pester Power

Families Surviving the Consumer Society

A collection of practical ideas for parents -  
submitted by parents!

Published in Parents' Week 2007

A joint initiative by Care for the Family, Ed Mayo (National Consumer Council) and  
Dr Agnes Nairn (EM-Lyon Business School and RSM Erasmus University, Netherlands)

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## Parents providing pointers about pester power

Like many parents, I've experienced how powerful pestering can be! Whether it's just one more hour on the internet, or some extra pocket money, sometimes the hardest thing a parent can say is "No".

However much life changes, one thing remains the same – as a parent there will come a time when you will want to set a boundary. Depending on your child's age, it might be time spent online, how short your daughter's skirt is, or which TV shows they're allowed to watch. Every child wants to be 'cool', but often cool means edgy.

Advertisers and companies know this, so they provide edgy products, which push at boundaries. And as those limits are pushed, you find it harder to set boundaries – especially when everything you do will cause your kids to complain that "it's not fair".

The parents who have supplied the tips in this booklet have found ways to set boundaries, and ways to stick to them. I'd like to say a big thank you to all the parents who took part and shared their wisdom with us – your tips will help many, many parents.



**Rob Parsons** is the author of several books on parenting. His most recent book – *Teenagers! What Every Parent Has to Know* – was published in 2007.

**1 Rob Parsons**

*Executive Director, Care for the Family*

## Listening to people who are really in the know

We're used to hearing the viewpoint of 'experts', especially in the arena of family life. But who are the real experts?

It's okay for people to share their opinions on what parents should do in any given situation. But we got the sense that parents at the 'sharp end' of parenting often feel frustrated and pressured trying to do everything the experts tell them to.

This Care for the Family survey was designed to find out about the pressures parents were under, but also to collect some road-tested ideas from those parents; the things they've discovered work, and the things that don't.

There were a huge number of excellent ideas – and we were struck by how practical they were. When we started out we felt parents would be the best people to ask for ideas to encourage and support parents, and we're pleased to say we were proved right. This booklet is the result – we hope you find it helpful.

**Ed Mayo**

**Agnes Nairn**



**Ed Mayo** is Chief Executive of the National Consumer Council (NCC), the independent consumer policy expert in the UK, championing the consumer interest across the public and private sectors.



**Agnes Nairn** is a leading expert in the commercialisation of childhood, based in EM-Lyon Business School and RSM Erasmus University, Netherlands.

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# Mobile phones



A phone is the must-have accessory for many teenagers and pre-teens today. But parents had a number of good ideas they wanted to pass on...

- Only give your children 'pay as you go' – if they have contracts they can run up huge bills, especially by signing up for ring-tones or other 'subscription services' (which they might not realise will take money week after week)
- Tell kids phones are functional not fashion items
- Set up an age for getting a phone and stick to it
- Help prevent kids being victims of theft, e.g. by not showing off their phone
- Monitor who is calling your children and suggest they ask their friends to ring them on the house landline
- Restrict use during family times e.g. when eating a meal together

*"Let them have one when they are old enough to pay for their own calls."*

*"Once you have paid out for the first phone the child should be totally responsible for the cost of running it from pocket money or earnings. Even if they mess up one month, do not bail them out. Yes it will be inconvenient ... but it probably won't happen again! This is the best introduction to budgeting a child can have."*

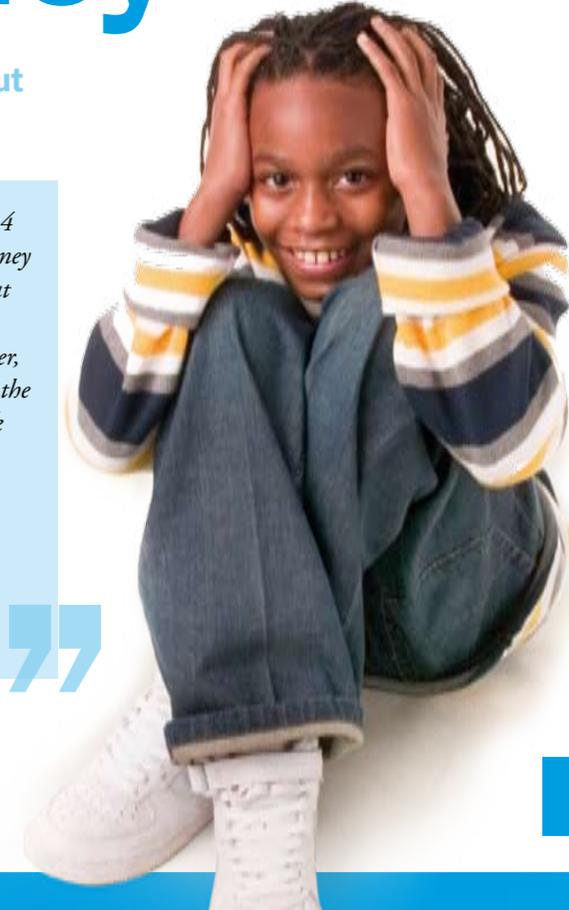
# Pocket money

Most parents give their children some pocket money, but deciding on how much to give can prove tricky...

- It helps if pocket money is earned and children understand it's not a right – many parents suggest using pocket money to reward good behaviour
- Use pocket money to teach budgeting skills – so children realise buying one thing may mean they can't afford something else
- Explain why it's good to save some money
- Review the rules regularly
- Encourage children to give some money away
- Set up a bank account for your children

*"I hope by encouraging my 12 and 14 year old boys to earn their pocket money I am instilling into them the fact that you only get paid for the effort and commitment you make to an employer, i.e. no work, no pay. They also enjoy the feel-good factor of helping, teamwork and achieving the amount of pocket money they have earned."*

*"Make reasonable rules and stick to them. Don't give in and give more money if they have spent it all."*





# Fashion

If you've caught yourself saying "You're not going out looking like that!", then be encouraged! Plenty of other parents said they'd done the same, but it is possible to avoid arguments...

- Don't fuss about fashion. We were all young once!
- Remember fashion is a way to express themselves
- Take a stand on premium brand pricing
- Discuss the fine line between 'fashionable' / 'inappropriate'
- Be sensitive to the realities of peer group pressure
- Establish age limits for piercings and stick to them

*"Try and stay cool. Remember some of the disasters you wore as a youngster!"*

*"Parents need to decide which battles are worth fighting and which are not worth breaking the relationship for – e.g. coloured hair will eventually wash out!"*

# The internet

While many parents had concerns about the internet, most saw it as beneficial for their children. However, parents recommended...

- Keep the computer in a family room
- Install parental control software to block unsuitable sites
- Limit children's internet access time
- Talk about the internet with your children
- Educate your children about strangers on the net
- Check your children's internet history files

*"Keep the computer in the kitchen or lounge, where you are frequently passing them by, that way you can glance at what they are doing without breathing down their neck..."*

*"Learn about and use proper internet security software and do not rely on the so called parent controls built into some ISP's access software"*

*"Talk to them about what they are doing/seeing. Ask them to teach you something - my 10 year old showed me how to do a PowerPoint presentation."*





# Body image

Growing up in a world which seems to be obsessed with the way celebrities look can put pressure on children, but parents can help...

- Tell them you like the way they look
- Emphasise the importance of the 'inner' person
- Don't fuss about fashion, but do take self-esteem seriously
- Take practical action if they seem to be becoming obsessive about dieting etc.
- Don't obsess about your own appearance
- Sometimes, you might need to convince them of their self-worth so they take care of themselves, e.g. personal fitness – but do this sensitively

*“Try to say positive things and refute any negative ones by themselves or others. Never criticise their appearance in public and especially not in front of other children!”*

*“If I tell my daughter she is beautiful, I always say “inside and out” as I am trying to teach her that looks aren't everything.”*

# Talking about sex

Do you feel your child is 'growing up too fast?' Hipster jeans and sex-quizzes in teen girls magazines, or reading 'lads mags' in the playground leaves many parents uncomfortable about the 'sexualisation' of childhood. But there are things you can do as a parent...

- Have open and honest discussions
- Monitor or prohibit access to some TV and magazines
- Lead by example e.g. in your choice of 'going out' clothes
- Childhood is short – try and let your kids be kids for as long as possible
- Complain and campaign

*“Don't censor too much, rather try and ask them what they think about these issues. We were both brought up by parents who either turned off the TV when something 'a bit steamy' was on or made a very judgemental comment, neither of which helped us feel less embarrassed.”*



## Who said what?

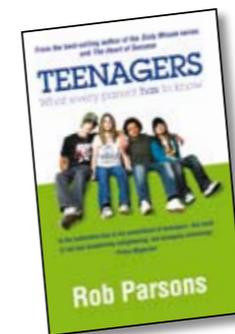
The tips in this booklet were collected through a survey designed by Care for the Family, in consultation with Ed Mayo from the National Consumer Council and Dr Agnes Nairn, a leading UK expert on the commercialisation of childhood, to find out how parents help their children to navigate the consumer society.

We asked parents to share their tips on handling pester power. 248 parents from across the UK got in touch. Altogether they shared 1,183 tips.

The tips from parents were collated and analysed by Agnes Nairn, EM-Lyon Business School and RSM Erasmus University, Netherlands, and Jon Matthias, Care for the Family. This booklet contains the general themes that parents put forward and sums them up. The full report, with even more information and parents' tips is available online at [www.careforthefamily.org.uk/pesterpower](http://www.careforthefamily.org.uk/pesterpower)



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### Getting the low-down on teenagers

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£7.99

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## **Pester Power Families Surviving the Consumer Society**

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For more information on:

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National Consumer Council, visit [www.ncc.org.uk](http://www.ncc.org.uk)

Academic research into the commercialisation of childhood,  
contact Agnes Nairn: [Nairn@em-lyon.com](mailto:Nairn@em-lyon.com)

For further copies of this booklet, please contact

Care for the Family, Garth House, PO Box 488 Cardiff CF15 7YY  
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### Your *Family* Charity

Care for the Family has been supporting and encouraging families in the UK since 1988. Its family-building events have been attended by over 300,000 people and many more have been helped through special initiatives - including stepfamilies, bereaved parents and those parenting alone. Founded by best-selling author and speaker Rob Parsons, the charity is committed to strengthening family life and helping those who face family difficulties.

Care for the Family - A Christian response to a world of need.

Care for the Family is a charity registered in England and Wales (no. 1066905) and in Scotland (no. SC038497).

