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RAISING HAPPY SIBLINGS

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FREE 25 Great Parenting Ideas fridge hanger

GETTING CLEVER WITH SCHOOL LUNCHES
Welcome to the fourth edition of Parentingideas magazine, designed to give you great up-to-date advice to make your parenting easier.

Variety is the spice of life, so it’s said.
If that’s true then this issue of Parentingideas magazine should really spice up your life as a mum or a dad. There’s something for everyone!
I’ve written a scene-setting article, looking at the key areas you should focus on as a parent this year. Sibling relationships is one area I’ve identified for your attention, so I’ve also included an article to help resolve conflict between siblings, and a short piece about only children.
The Secret Girls’ Business team is back with a fabulous piece about boys and puberty. It’s a must read if your son is about to hit puberty, or is already there.
Here’s something to hide from the kids. South Australia’s Jodie Benveniste reveals the secret to better parenting in this issue’s practical contribution. And it may well surprise you.
As every mum knows developing healthy eating habits in kids is vital, but it can also be challenging. New contributor Hazel Key of Clever Packed Lunch fame, shows you how to get clever with school lunches. She’s also included a tasty recipe that will have your kids devouring their greens. Guaranteed!
Child-safety expert Catherine Gerhardt redefines stranger danger and gives a new twist to keeping kids safe in this issue’s contribution.
Bill Jennings has written another thought-provoker that speaks right to the heart of effective parenting. It’s a well-crafted reminder about the importance of taking the time to listen to what our kids have to say.
If you enjoy this edition of Parentingideas Magazine, then do all the writers a big favour and PASS IT ON to a friend, colleague or family member. Everyone will benefit from your generosity!
Here’s to better parenting,
Michael Grose
REFINE YOUR PARENTING FOCUS THIS YEAR

Nothing stays the same. The world is constantly changing so we need to be flexible and proactive to stay ahead. This holds true in the workplace and also in our family life.

To help you stay one step ahead as a parent here are some trends or challenges I see impacting on kids this year, followed by six key strategies to focus on throughout the year.

1. Develop good sleep hygiene and sleep habits.
   Make 2012 the year you learn about good sleep hygiene and sleep habits. Recent research from the land of the long white cloud links increased sleep levels with a decrease in kids’ anxiety and depression levels. It’s simple. Sleep more and you’ll generally feel better and learn more too.

   With these trends in mind here are six great parenting strategies to focus on in 2012.

   1. Develop good sleep hygiene and sleep habits.
      Make 2012 the year you learn about good sleep hygiene and sleep habits. Recent research from the land of the long white cloud links increased sleep levels with a decrease in kids’ anxiety and depression levels. It’s simple. Sleep more and you’ll generally feel better and learn more too.

      There’s quite a science around sleep now, but much of it is common sense. Keep bedrooms screen-free and cave-like; wind down 45 minutes before bedtime; maintain relaxing bed-time rituals; get up at the same time each morning and have a slight catch-up on the weekend but not so much that it throws the sleep clock out. There’s more to it than that, but this will do for starters.

   2. Develop cyber smarts and social media savvy.
      We now need to move way beyond teaching kids about cyber safety! We need to now raise a generation who are savvy about how they use social media. Too many kids pour their hearts out online, unaware that the genie is out of the bottle and can’t be put back. To be safe they’ve got to be smart. So do parents!

      Why is it that 20-somethings who currently live at home do very little to help out? Well, that would be because they’ve never had to contribute in the first place. From the age of two you need to develop self-help skills (dressing, feeding themselves, cleaning away their cups, etc.) Make this the year that you STOP DOING THINGS FOR KIDS THAT THEY CAN NORMALLY DO FOR THEMSELVES! Then when they are still at home a decade or two from now they’ll at least be able to make themselves a decent meal and wash their own clothes. Well, maybe!

      While I’m on that subject, let’s replace 21st birthdays with something more meaningful such as a 25th birthday party, when they are closer to real autonomy.

   4. Make home a sanctuary for siblings.
      Leave competition at the front door and don’t allow it to impact on sibling relationships. Teasing can be damaging. Continual negative comments from siblings are more damaging than the same statements from adults. Negative statements about appearance and ability from siblings become part of a child’s self-talk. Stamp out sibling put-downs, promote social interest and sit down to sort out disputes between siblings.

   5. Swap movement for sedentary.
      Look for opportunities to get more movement into your children’s lives. Swap driving them to school, a friend’s house or the shops, for walking. Swap sitting inside for...
playing outside. Swap a passive game for an active game. Swapping activity for passivity is good for kids’ mental and physical health.

6. Bring partners into your parenting. Parents don’t raise kids well in isolation, yet there has been a significant shift in recent years to an individual style of parenting. If you have a teen you need to develop joint positions around developmental issues such as introducing alcohol, going to parties, curfews, sex and other issues as they arise. Even better, before they arise. That means you should work together before they reach adolescence.

Working with your child’s school means you develop a relationship with at least one teacher. Make this a year that you side with others – your partner (if applicable), your child’s school and follow a parenting mentor.

I’m sure there are more strategies that I could mention, but this is a good start. I’ll be focusing on these strategies and more on my regular blog posts throughout the year. Subscribe to my award-winning blog at Parentingideas.com.au/blog and you’ll get a reminder of each new blog post as soon as it’s written.
We’ve all probably rung our hands in frustration at why our children won’t sleep/listen to us/keep their room tidy!

Or why they can’t eat every morsel on their plate/stop whinging/do their jobs without being asked twenty million times!

If only our children were more cooperative, obliging and compliant, life would be so much better.

But that’s not most people’s every-day reality.

Kids misbehave, make mistakes and challenge us. That’s their job.

It’s our job to raise them despite this.

But there is one very important point about parenting that can help you manage the most challenging of your kids’ behaviour.

It is not them, it’s you.

"It is not them, it’s you" is one of the more provocative sentences in my book, *The Parent Manifesto*.

When it comes to raising our kids, we experience many challenges – challenging behaviours from our kids and challenging emotions within ourselves.

How you handle the situation says more about you than it does about the situation or your children. You can guide, influence and teach others, including your children, but you cannot control them. You can only control yourself.

It isn’t about blame or who caused what behaviour. It is about how you want to behave.

We’ve probably all had moments when we’ve stayed the calm, confident parent we would always like to be, and other times when we haven’t. Instead of pointing the finger at our children’s problem behaviour, it helps to look a little closer to home.

### 3 reasons why this helps

**You have the power...**

We can often feel powerless when our children are misbehaving. We don’t know what to do to make them behave differently. But when you focus on what you can control – yourself – you actually feel more power in the situation. You decide how you would like to behave and you no longer feel powerless.

**You lead the way...**

Our kids aren’t always listening to us but they are watching us.

You are a role model for your children. When you behave well in a situation with your child, they learn what is appropriate behaviour. And you feel so much better about yourself.

**You set the tone...**

Yelling plus yelling often equals more yelling. But yelling plus calm often leads to calm.

By staying calm but firm, you are in a better position to calm your child and encourage their cooperation.

**How this has worked for other parents**

**1.** A good example happened the other night when I was trying to get my three-year-old out of the bath.

I had let the water out but she was refusing to get out. Instead of getting angry, I walked out of the room.

She got really upset and started calling out to me. I had a chance to calm down in the minute I was on my own and she got out of the bath beautifully.
She got dressed and into bed like the true little champion she is. If I had lost my temper it would have been an almighty battle, which is not ideal right before bed!"

Kerrie, mother of one

2. "Reading about, ‘It’s not them, it’s you’ I felt guilt, guilt and guilt! I then got over it, and thought, ‘No, I must take responsibility for my behaviour and reactions.’

I now see behaviour in my three-year-old, which I don’t like. I know exactly where it comes from, but I don’t think it’s too late to change!

Talking to other mums has made me feel less guilty about this behaviour, as many of them have got the “angries”, particularly when number two arrives and sleep deprivation sets in again.

So I am going to have less guilt about it, move on, and do something about changing it so my sons do not believe this is an appropriate way to react when something doesn’t work out.”

Toni, mother of two

"Wow, it makes perfect sense! I have never looked at it this way before. I really need to have that awareness of being confident, calm and behaving the way I would like my kids to behave. It doesn’t come naturally.

I’m used to being a stressed out, depressed, snappy mum, so it’s going to take some doing! No wonder my kids are always grumpy. Guess who’s the queen of grumpy in my household?

The challenge will be to let go of those ‘unhelpful thoughts’ and stay calm and confident."

Tracey, mother of two

Worried that instead of setting your kids up for life you’re stuffing them up? There are three things your kids really need from you. Find out what they are – watch a free short video at www.parentwellbeing.com

YOU ARE A ROLE MODEL FOR YOUR CHILDREN

Jodie Benveniste, Parent Wellbeing

Jodie Benveniste is director and founder of Parent Wellbeing – a website for parents to worry less and enjoy parenting more.

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“Will they ever be friends?”

This was my wife talking as she took a deep breath and waded into the murky waters of another noisy sibling fight in our home. Like many couples in the 1980’s we had three children quite close together, which we’ve since learned tends to increase the likelihood of sibling competition.

Fast-forward two decades it’s pleasing to see that the three siblings enjoy close relationships, often turning to each other rather than their parents when problems and issues arise.

Like world peace, family harmony is an admirable concept worthy of aspiration but well nigh impossible to attain. It seems that kids in families are programmed to fight with each other, but parents also have the power to facilitate learning.

When parents take an active approach to helping their children resolve their fights, they are teaching them a valuable life skill as well as reducing the incidence of fighting over the long term. Here are some ideas;

1. **MODEL good conflict resolution skills**
   Kids wear L plates when it comes to solving disputes. Some kids will yell, get abusive or even get physical when they are settling disputes. Show them better ways of sorting out problems by talking things through with your partner, compromising and apologising when you’ve said something upsetting to your partner or your children.

2. **Help kids MANAGE their emotions**
   “Yep, it would make me mad too if someone said that to me.” Usually someone’s feelings get hurt when siblings argue so make sure you recognise their emotions without taking sides. This focus on feelings helps kids develop emotional literacy and promotes empathy in siblings as well.

3. **MONITOR sibling relationships**
   Keep your antenna up for the signs of discord within sibling relationships. Some disputes kids can sort out themselves, but you need to be ready to intervene and assist kids in the peace-brokering, or at least to act as a safety net when one child continually appears on the wrong end of a power imbalance.

4. **MENTOR them to sort out disputes**
   Kids need the chance to sort their conflict out themselves, but sometimes they need a little coaching. Don’t waste time trying to sort out who started an argument. Instead make some suggestions such as taking turns, giving way, bargaining and swapping.

5. **Encourage them to MAKE-UP**
   Kids often get over disputes far quicker than adults. They can be squabbling one minute and cuddling up the next, so it gets tricky intervening sometimes. However there are times when you need to encourage a child to mend bridges with an aggrieved sibling. This can mean kids have to swallow their pride, admit that they may be wrong, make an apology or make some sort of restitution such as doing a special favour. This type of restoration means kids must take responsibility for their behaviours and is a sign of growing maturity.

The sibling relationship will last longer than the parent-child relationship and is just as influential on children’s development as the parent-child relationship. It’s important for parents to foster sibling closeness so that the sibling bonds will stay for life.

**HEALTHY SIBLING RELATIONSHIPS**

Kids learn so much through sibling relationships. It’s from siblings they learn to solve conflict and how to maintain friendships, just as they learn about gender from their brothers and sisters.

**“KIDS WEAR L PLATES WHEN IT COMES TO SOLVING DISPUTES.”**
ONLY CHILDREN ARE SMART AND SOCIAL

Only children have a great deal going for them, including the fact that they are...well.....on their own.

Only children have an image problem.

It seems they or, at least, their parents always have to explain singleness or give a reason.

This is a throwback to the days when families by default were large, and small often meant there were medical, social or personal problems.

Not any more. Sometimes small or only is a choice. Often it’s due to leaving the fertility run a little too late. Other times, we can have one when in the past we may not have been able to have any.

One thing is certain. If you used school achievement and self-esteem as a measure of a well-adjusted child most parents would stop at one. They repeatedly do well on those measures.

Presumably, it’s the hothouse effect where only children are more likely to be exposed to adult language and concepts in the critical early years than children in a larger brood.

The similar effect happens with first borns who are generally fully exposed to their parents’ language, thoughts (and hang-ups) for the first few years of life. A middle child by comparison probably hears more sibling language than parent language in the early years. It’s all in the math!

In my book *Why first borns rule the world and last borns want to change it* I wrote that only children never experience the ignominy of dethronement so they get 100% of parent attention and expectations. They get equal measures of pampering and pressure!

Single children don’t have to wait in line to use the bathroom, pass the peas to a sibling at the kitchen table or duck and weave when a bored or irritated sibling wants a shot at them.

It’s thought that siblings who spend a great deal of time alone aren’t socially able. But the research doesn’t stack up. While some only children are flummoxed by teasing at school, others are so confident and vocab-rich that other children wouldn’t dare bait them.

It may be that only children have a big advantage over other children – they spend more time alone so they feel comfortable in their own skins.

This self-containment and ability to go deeper into their imaginations is quite a plus for many only children. It may also be why most only children wouldn’t change a thing about their lives.

Also it seems that parents of only children are very aware of any deficits that may come with being an only child so they compensate by making sure they have sleep overs; that they become socially active by joining sports and interests groups and they create situations where they learn that the world doesn’t revolve around them.

Maybe, only children get this concept more easily than other children due to the maturity that comes from their onlyness.

I suspect the notion of being comfortable (in their own skins) and having parents and teachers who compensate (for any deficits) lies at the heart of successfully raising kids without siblings.

Michael Grose, Parentingideas

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BY SECRET GIRLS’ BUSINESS

BOYS HAVE PUBERTY BLUES TOO!

Puberty is an awkward time for boys. Here are some great ideas to help your boys through this transition phase.

It is generally recognised that at puberty girls may have sudden mood changes and fragile self-esteem.

However, it is a surprise for many parents when their son sometimes becomes secretive, moody, defensive, touchy, argumentative and may even burst into tears on occasions.

Moody times

At puberty, hormones not only change the way our bodies look and work, they also change the way we think and feel.

Parents need to be aware that boys may be emotional, short-tempered, over-sensitive and angry at times. Their behaviour can appear to be uncooperative, ill-mannered or disrespectful.

Avoid confrontation as you may exacerbate the situation. Deal with any issues later, when things have calmed down.

Boy’s feelings may change quickly. This is confusing for them and their parents. Boys might find themselves:

- feeling misunderstood
- feeling angry or even ‘out of control’
- feeling lonely
- feeling sad, or crying
- arguing with family, teachers or friends
- wanting to spend time alone.

This is not much fun for the boy or his parents! But at other times, boys might be:

- having a fabulous time with their friends
- developing a great sense of humour
- learning lots of new things at school and developing academic skills
- enjoying team sports and being very energetic
- becoming more thoughtful and supportive of others.
- growing increasingly independent
- being responsible and trusted to make choices.

Talking about feelings

Boys should know that it is OK to talk about their feelings and show their emotions. Parents can model appropriate emotional reactions and assist their son to develop a broad ‘feelings vocabulary’ by talking about their own feelings and reactions to events. This enables young people to identify and discuss their own emotions more accurately.

Listen carefully to your son when he is talking about his worries. Acknowledge and validate his feelings. Don’t feel that you have to take responsibility for solving his problems. It is more helpful to coach him to problem-solve, discussing possible courses of action and the probable outcomes.

Coping with moods: things which might help

If your son is feeling grumpy, aggro or fed up, these activities might help lighten his mood:

Burn off some energy

- Shoot some hoops
- Walk the dog
- Ride a bike
- Attack the punch bag
- Pound the drums

Have some ‘time out’

- Listen to music
- Play an electronic game
- Spend some time in their room
- Strum a guitar
- Watch TV

It is also helpful to spend time with family or friends. Plan to do something that you all really enjoy.

Healthy Bodies

Having a growth spurt is exhausting! Tired, hungry pubescent boys can be very cranky. Be aware that the hour before dinner is a risky time to raise issues. Blood sugar and frustration tolerance are possibly at the lowest point for the day. Both of you are hungry and worn out.
Parents can assist by:

- preparing healthy meals at regular times
- providing a range of nutritious snacks
- encouraging drinking of water instead of sugary drinks
- promoting exercise as a regular part of the daily routine
- establishing a sleep routine, ensuring adequate sleep each night
- modelling healthy living, eating and exercising.

Positive Thinking

You may be able to coach your son to think more helpful thoughts and change from negative thinking to positive thinking. For example, “Everyone is making me angry” can be rephrased as, “I am angry, but I can do lots of things to help me calm down”.

Explain to your son that mood changes are associated with changes in hormone levels and are a normal part of puberty. Encourage him to be proactive about coping with moods.

Parents can model self-control and appropriate anger management strategies. Talk to your son when you are feeling angry and discuss the strategies that help you calm down.

Maintaining Self-esteem

Puberty changes can have a negative impact on self-esteem. It is a massive challenge for young men to cope with changing body shape, roller-coaster emotions, voice changes, hair growing on their face, zits and body odour all at the same time!

It is helpful for boys to:

- know it is OK for males to show their emotions
- be able to identify their feelings and have the vocabulary to describe them accurately
- have a range of strategies to help them cope with moody times.

This will assist boys to develop self-confidence and feelings of self worth.

It is normal for boys to feel sad or angry at times, but if these feelings don’t improve, your son may find it helpful to have an in depth talk to a family member, a teacher, a counsellor or a doctor.

“Yesterday, at a social function, a mum mentioned she was having trouble trying to understand her son’s mood swings, which had come from nowhere. This got all the mums in on the conversation and I was happy to share what my child and I had got out of the wonderful book, Secret Boys’ Business.”

“Mother of Moody Mr aged 10 ¾”;

Secret Girls’ Business

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An honest person will likely admit that at some time in their childhood, they were given this rule. In fact, many parents will admit they continue to pass this rule onto their own children. Yet, in the same breath, we might encourage our children to talk to the supermarket cashier, the salesperson or the long lost relative. All of these people fit the definition of a stranger, but for some unknown reason it is okay for the child to talk to them. At best, this rule sends mixed messages to our kids.

There is a strong shift away from the old rule of “never talk to strangers” to “never go anywhere with anyone without asking permission first”. A child who has been taught to never talk to strangers may feel they have nowhere to go if they find themselves lost in a shopping centre or other public place.

As parents we need to emphasise who is a “stranger”. Your definition and your child’s may be quite different. Engage with your children to help them understand that a stranger is simply someone whom they do not know. We do not know if someone is good or bad just by looking at them. Rather, we need to teach our children about “strangeness”.

Five ways to enforce the new rule:

1. Never go anywhere with anyone without asking permission first
This is the new fundamental rule to keeping kids safe. This rule must NEVER be broken. Regardless of if it is a school, public or family function, work with your children to ensure they always ask an adult for permission before going off with ANYONE.

Classic “what if” scenarios are worth their weight in gold. “You are at school and walking back to class after snack when a man comes up to you and says he is looking for his son’s class. He asks you to go with him to show him where it is. Do you go?”

Use tempting scenarios that are relevant to your child, such as puppies or toys, and discuss safe options and strategies in each case.
2. Your personal alarm
Children have an innate sensitive personal alarm, which we can teach them to use. This is their natural defence system. Work with them to identify and recognise the physical and environmental signals that cause their alarm to sound. Knowing that a rush of adrenalin will cause physiological changes in our bodies and activate our personal alarm is a good start. A child’s personal alarm will present the same physical and emotional cues that an adult’s will.

3. Trust your instincts
Have you ever gotten “the creeps”? Maybe it’s the idea of snakes, mice or heights that does it for your child. Encourage them to draw on how it feels when they get the creeps. Instincts are those feelings you get when something or someone makes you feel uncomfortable. Instincts are the physiological changes that happen to our body when our personal alarm goes off. Physiological changes include noticing that you feel scared or nervous, your tummy feels upset and your heart is racing. And you know what? Our personal alarm is right 100% of the time.

4. Personal space vs. safety zone
Most kids understand the concept of personal space. How many times have we heard, “Stop invading my personal space!” Most people feel comfortable within an arm’s length of others. However, do your kids recognise their safety zone? Teach your child to be aware of their surroundings. If a “strange” person is too close, suggest they back away and maintain their safety zone. A safety zone is much bigger than your personal space – at least three giant steps bigger.

5. Safe places, safe people
There are times when a child must ask for help quickly and instinctively. We already know that not all strangers are bad, that most strangers will help a child who is lost or upset. It is situations that are safe, not places. Talk with your child and reinforce that he or she must ALWAYS use his or her skills with ALL people, including those presumed safe. Encourage your child to tell an adult they trust when someone or something has frightened them.

As parents we need to empower our children with self-confidence and trust in their ability to sense when something is just not right. It doesn’t matter if they can articulate it; they just have to feel it.

Catherine Gerhardt, Kidproof Melbourne

Kidproof provides proactive and preventative child and family education programs. We work with schools, community groups and other child centric organisations. We provide peace of mind for parents and create safer communities for everyone.

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There’s no doubt that guiding children towards lifelong healthy eating habits is one of the greatest gifts you can give. And when you consider that school-age children eat around 25% of their food at school, and that child obesity is a rapidly growing problem, we begin to appreciate the importance of ensuring their lunch box food is both healthy and balanced.

But for many children, including young children in child care or kindergarten, mealtime does nothing other than interfere with the main focus of their day, which is quite rightly their learning, social interaction and, for the younger ones, play. It’s also important to appreciate that other kid’s lunches are often far more interesting than their own! Hence persuading children to eat healthily at school can be quite a game.

So there’s a need to provide foods that are not only extra-healthy, but extra-interesting too. In an ideal world parents introduce their children to healthy eating with their very first mouthful, which definitely makes life easier, but it’s never too late to make changes to the diet.

Providing variety, not just in type of food but also in taste, texture and colour is the best way to ensure balance and health, as well as maintain their interest. It’s best to pack small portions of different foods from all of the food groups. The changing seasons are an opportunity to add variety too – fruits and veggies in season offer good economic, as well as nutritional value.

In the busy school environment heavy demands are placed on young bodies, so children need foods that release energy at a steady rate to assist them through the ups and downs of school life and to provide the emotional as well as physical stability they need. This will help when they’re required to settle, focus and concentrate, and sustain them when they’re active, as in play. By including unprocessed foods such as whole grains, nuts and seeds, as well as raw fruit and veggies, whilst avoiding sugary, refined, packaged and processed foods, we can support our children’s healthy development.

In particular avoid juices and soft drinks – fresh water is the very best drink of all – it costs nothing (usually), doesn’t damage their teeth and, as a bonus, it doesn’t leave a sticky mess if it spills!

These days we have the knowledge to actively support cognitive function and therefore the learning of our children – an exciting opportunity for parents! We can help children fulfil their potential by including foods rich in Omega 3, such as eggs and salmon, and Antioxidants such as blueberries and even dark chocolate (that’ll please them!), as well as whole and raw foods.

It’s important to select foods that can be packed to survive the journey from home to school and still look tempting. Look for a sturdy lunch box container, which can be easily cleaned, has compartments that suit the food, a cover to control temperature and a size and shape that fits comfortably into their school bag.
Now, when we realise that the job of preparing these healthy, tasty, enticing and balanced lunches needs to be repeated five times a week, it becomes obvious that some sort of system, pre-planning and preparation is needed for busy school mornings, especially if parents are working full-time, which is often the case. The system and recipes I offer in my book (detailed below) are designed with all this in mind. I’m confident this will save you time, money and stress.

Here’s a recipe that can be prepared ahead and frozen, so there’s very little to do on busy school mornings. It’s perfect for kids who refuse “greens” because the meatballs are packed with spinach, one of the healthiest of leafy greens. Now my son hates greens, but he loves these. Some children won’t even notice the spinach, it’s so well hidden!

**Beef & Spinach Meatballs**
Makes seven serves @ 4 four meatballs each

- 500g lean minced beef
- 200g frozen chopped leaf spinach
- 1 teaspoon minced garlic (about two cloves)
- 3 cups (250g) grated Cheddar Cheese

Pre-heat the oven to moderate (180 degrees). Mix all of the ingredients together. Roll about two tablespoons of mixture into balls and place onto prepared baking trays. This should only take a few minutes. Cook for 20 to 30 minutes until nicely browned. Cool completely before freezing in a sealed container between layers of non-stick paper.

These are delicious served cold, perfect for hot weather. However, if you do want to serve them hot, wrap in foil and place in a moderate oven for 20 minutes then put straight into the lunch box. If you use an insulated container, and pre-heat it with boiled water, they should stay hot until lunchtime.

Serve with pita bread or rice, a mixed salad and some organic egg mayonnaise.

'A carefully prepared lunchbox is far more than just a healthy lunch – it’s a parcel of love that stays with the child when they’re away, a reminder of their family. This is not insignificant and I believe it can sow the seeds of emotional resilience. No packaged food or canteen meal can achieve the same.'

The book is available in print from hazel@lunchideasschool.com and as an interactive eBook at http://lunchideasschool.com
"Mind if I play with you guys?"

"No worries," I say, shaking hands with the man in the sunglasses. "My name's Bill and this is my son Jack."

"I'm Andrew."

We are on the first tee of a brilliant little nine-hole course nestled into the foreshore of Apollo Bay, our annual summer holiday spot. One of the beaut things about golf – total strangers can walk up and ask, "Can I join up with you?" I like it that my 15-year-old has played the game enough to know that this is part of the etiquette.

So we all hit off and so does our conversation – no small talk on the first hole!

"What do you do for a crust, Bill?"

I explain the Time & Space programs.

"Right – have you come across any situations where kids have suicided?"

"Oh, the parent-child programs aren't necessarily for kids who are in trouble. It's for any young person really and their parents," I reply.

Andrew explains, "It's just that the boy who was captain of our primary school a few years ago... just took his life. Real shock to our staff."

"That's awful," I say, fairly amazed at how deep the topic of conversation is for a couple of blokes who have just met. "So you're a teacher Andrew?"

"Yep. Love it – the classroom for the first eighteen years. PE specialist for the last twelve."

Andrew is a really good fella ... I can tell. "Gee Andrew - any reason, the boy ... why he took his life?"

"No clue whatsoever," Andrew says. "It's a complete mystery. We were reeling as a staff at the end of the year when it happened. Such a great kid."

I'm conscious as we talk, my son is quietly taking all of this in.

Sometimes the best communication happens when you least expect it.
We tee off on the second.

"Have you got kids Andrew?" I ask.

"Daughter’s the oldest and two sons... 23, 22 and 19." Andrew pauses. "Yep, they’re all doing their thing." There’s a satisfied tone indicating they’re all going well.

Third hole and Andrew asks Jack if he plays sport.

"Yeah soccer," offers the young bloke. "I’m a goalkeeper."

There was genuine interest on Andrew’s part.

We are covering a breadth of topics on every hole. Andrew explains about his oldest two who are heading overseas together. He’s really proud of their get up and go.

“They’re not really sure what they want to do career-wise but they’ve worked hard, saved to make this trip happen.”

We talk and enjoy our golf. We all have a few good hits. Andrew actually chips in for birdie on the eighth.

As Jack chips to the green, I think back to what Andrew said before.

"I liked how you said that all your kids are each doing their thing.”

"Yeah, great kids. The youngest one has had his challenges. My nineteen-year-old, Brett,” Andrew pauses, takes off his sunglasses, "is gay.”

Even though we’ve only known each other for eight holes of golf, the chats we’ve had seemed to allow the space for such a personal detail to be shared. What a privilege to be trusted.

"Wow... when did you find out?” I ask.

"He came out when he was sixteen," answered Andrew. "I’ll admit it, I cried for about twenty-four hours but came good after that. The way I see it, my son showed great courage.”

Jack has putted, joins us and he picks up the thread of Andrew’s story.

Andrew continues. “I asked my son, I said, ‘I’ve only got one question ... did you become gay or were you born gay?’”

“He told me, ‘I always thought I was gay, dad.’”

It’s clear Andrew admires and supports his son. He learnt that a lot of dads “go crook” and even worse, sometimes physically abuse their sons if they come out ... kick them out of home and never want to see them again.

We are on the last tee now and Andrew remarks, “How do those dads come back from that?” He is perplexed. "I mean, someone you love has just come out ... that is showing the utmost courage. I said to Brett, who’s highly respected by his peers, ‘mate you’ve just shown the way and made stuff so much easier for other kids.’”

Jack then pipes up... 'Yeah, one of the kids at my school came out ... on YouTube* actually ... you know what was really good about it? No-one gave him any crap.”

"I'm pleased to hear it," said Andrew.

We finish our round, shake hands and say goodbye. The three of us have had a pretty extraordinary conversation.

Later in the day, Jack says, “Dad, that Andrew, he’s a good bloke.”

I agree.

That same day I had received the theme for this edition of Parenting Ideas Magazine. “Making 2012 a great parenting year.” A few hours later I met Andrew. I felt that he had given me a master class in how to be a great parent – I was struck by his focus on his son’s courage and his unconditional love.

* I looked up the clip when writing this article and discovered it was part of a global campaign by many people called ‘It gets better’. It includes (and you can click the link) to a video contribution from the US President Barack Obama.

And importantly if for any reason you need to talk to someone – you can call ...

Lifeline: 13 11 14 Kids Helpline (for young people aged 5 to 25 years): 1800 551 800 Mensline Australia: 1300 789 978 SANE Helpline (mental illness, support and referral):

1800 18 SANE (7263) Reach Out: www.reachout.com

Bill Jennings, Time & Space

Bill Jennings is Australia’s leading parent-child program facilitator. As director of Time & Space, Bill offers your community exactly that... ‘time & space’ for young people and their parents to share important memories and, in doing that, create a new one.

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