



12 Secrets YOUR Kids Want YOU to Know

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& Lexi Colan**

Foreword by Tom Ziglar

Please LISTENUP Parents

12 Secrets YOUR Kids Want YOU to Know

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DEDICATION

*For our parents,
and parents everywhere.*





*Our children are
our only hope
for the future,
but we are their
only hope for the present
and their futures.*

- ZIG ZIGLAR



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foreword

Over the course of my dad's career, he spoke to hundreds of thousands of business leaders. As much as he shared strategies for

business success, he always came back to taking care of our home front first. Being a leader on the home front starts with us being positive role models for our children.

So, I was honored to be invited to write the foreword to *Please Listen Up, Parents!* Lee Colan and I have been friends for some time, and we have shared parenting and life principles at many a meal together. I know his home to be a place of refuge, and his children to be go-getters – and this book is proof!

How refreshing to read a “how to” book from children to their parents! These young authors are very transparent and honest in their advice and suggestions, never accusatory or critical. This book is a delightful expression of positive, upbeat insights and illustrations that will help any family grow stronger and closer.

I believe this book has great value to parents, grandparents, and all others who contribute to young lives.

Tom Ziglar

President/CEO, Ziglar, Inc. and proud son of Zig Ziglar

The first duty of love is to listen.

– PAUL TILLICH

Introduction

Parents, we love you, and we know that you love us. We know that you work hard at being a parent. We kids don't come with an instruction manual,

and each one of us is different, which means we each need special care and handling. Maybe that's why there are so many books and blogs out there about parenting.

We think something is missing in all the talk about parenting: our perspective. As kids, we think we have something to contribute to the conversation. We have different perspectives than you about a lot of things that affect our family, but we don't always have the chance to share them with you.

We know we're supposed to listen to you, and we try our best ... even if we don't always succeed. But we have some secrets to share from our point of view that you might find helpful. So for just a few minutes, please listen to us.

We've heard you tell us to be part of the solution, not the problem. (See, sometimes we are listening even if it might not seem like it!) So, after each secret (chapter) we've included some Ideas for Action that we hope will help you and your family grow and succeed.

You know the saying, "From the mouths of babes often comes truth and wisdom"? Do you believe it's true? We're asking you to open your hearts and minds and **please listen up!**

I've learned that you can tell a lot about a person by the way he or she handles these three things: a rainy day, lost luggage, and tangled Christmas tree lights.

– MAYA ANGELOU

1 Keep Things in Perspective

Parents, does this sound like something you or your friends might say about kids today?

Our youth now love luxury. They have bad manners, contempt for authority; they show disrespect for their elders

and love chatter instead of exercise; they no longer rise when elders enter the room; they contradict their parents; gobble up their food and tyrannize their teachers.

Believe it or not, this is what adults thought about kids in the ancient world, over 2,000 years ago, according to Cambridge scholar Kenneth John Freeman. You see, over the ages, not much has changed in how adults view younger generations. So, we're asking you, as our parents, to keep things in perspective.

Think back to the things you did as a kid. We appreciate that you don't want us to make the same mistakes you made and that you want us to benefit from your life experiences. Even though sharing your experiences can be helpful, the best way for us to learn is from our experiences and mistakes. So, keep in mind that we are still figuring things out.



*Good judgment comes from
experience, and a lot of that
comes from bad judgment.*

- WILL ROGERS



Even we kids realize that life is more like a marathon than a sprint, so we have to pace ourselves. With all the competitiveness in school and sports, it can feel like we are in a race to nowhere. Earning that “A” in math class, winning a gold medal in the science competition, getting the solo in the recital or winning that game might seem really important in the moment, but we depend on you to help us keep life in perspective.

Our grandmother Rose Colan often said, “This too shall pass.” It helped her keep perspective during challenging times. This wisdom appears in the works of Persian poets and in Jewish folklore from King Solomon – quite a few

years before we heard our grandmother say it! It comes from a fable in which a powerful king asks wise men to create a ring that would help him both in good times and in bad. After much thought, the sages handed him a ring etched with the simple words, “This too shall pass.” Apparently it worked!

In good times and in bad, we need you to remember – and help us remember – **this too shall pass**. Our successes and accomplishments don’t automatically catapult us to the top of the world, and our mistakes and failures are not the end of the world, either. Even when we lose or don’t achieve a goal, we usually still enjoy the experience and learn about life and about ourselves.

Our relationship with you will go through peaks and valleys. When our relationship is great, enjoy it. When things get difficult, remember that no situation is permanent. Taking these words to heart will help you keep a positive outlook when we do the things that kids do.

All of life is peaks and valleys. Don't let the peaks get too high and the valleys too low.

– JOHN WOODEN

Being a family is a team sport, and we each have an important role. As our coaches, you have laid the foundation for us, and we’re building on it. But we’re still trying to figure out who we are and where

we're going. That means we're going to make good plays and bad plays. Sometimes we'll have good seasons and, sometimes, bad ones. Like any good team, each player has to learn from his or her mistakes and keep moving forward. We both need to keep things in perspective so we can encourage each other to improve and become a better team each day.

reminders

- ▶ The way adults view kids has not really changed in the last 2,000 years.
- ▶ In difficult times, remember: This too shall pass.
- ▶ We learn important things about ourselves when we succeed and particularly when we fail.
- ▶ Keeping things in perspective helps you enjoy the moment.

*Don't promise when you're happy,
don't reply when you're angry,
and don't decide when you're sad.*

– ZIAD K. ABDELNOUR

Keep Things in Perspective

- ❑ After a big success or a big disappointment, ask your kids to write down three things they learned about each situation, as well as what, if anything, they would do differently in the future.
- ❑ During times of adversity, help your kids create an action plan to move through the adversity and take control of any aspects of the situation they can.
- ❑ Write the phrase, “This too shall pass” on a piece of paper and post it someplace where you will see it every day (like your bathroom mirror). Seeing those words is a powerful reminder to keep life in perspective.

To be fully seen by somebody, then, and be loved anyhow – this is a human offering that can border on miraculous.

– ELIZABETH GILBERT

2 Accept Us

We don't expect you to be perfect, so let's start by taking that pressure off. Please don't expect us to be perfect, either, because we're still learning, growing and trying to find out who we are. Give us grace and time to get there.

Let us be us. That means appreciating what makes us different from you, our siblings and our friends. Sure, you are part of us. We get that (let's not get into the details). In some ways, we're a lot like you. But that doesn't mean we're *exactly* like you. It also doesn't mean that we're some kind of blend of our parents, either. We know God only made one of us – we are a one-in-seven-billion miracle. It might be hard to remember this when we're slamming doors in your face, but here's a secret: **You are our hero.** We love you with our whole heart. But that doesn't

mean we want to be *you*. The world already has one of you, and, honestly, we don't think the planet is ready for more. That would be way too much embarrassing dancing.

It's not about how big our differences are but the attitude you take toward our differences. If we're not zebras, don't try to paint stripes on our backs. Listen and watch for what makes us unique – what motivates us, how we learn, and how we express our feelings. Our grandmother used to say, “You can have 10 children, and they are like the fingers on your hands: Each one is different.” We agree, and we like being different. Each of us is good at certain things but struggles with others. We just want to know that you love and accept everything about us.

We love you unconditionally even though we might not say or show it like we should. Showing us unconditional love and support in real ways – by your actions and words – is all we want and all it takes for us to listen (most of the time). Let us know, regardless of our circumstances or accomplishments, that you can't love us any more or less. In other words, **love us for who we are and not only for what we accomplish.**

Don't get us wrong. We want you to smile, wave, stand up, cheer and scream (but not all at the same time!) when we break the curve, land the dismount, nail all the lines, play all the right notes, score the deciding point, or win

the race. We want you to be proud of our accomplishments when it counts, but more importantly we want you to be proud of us when it doesn't count.

Remember your wedding vows? Part of it went something like, "for better or for worse, in sickness and in health, in good times and bad, and in joy as well as in sorrow." That's what we mean – accept us and love us for who we are, for better or for worse, in good times and in bad.



*There is one thing we can
do better than anyone else:
we can be ourselves.*

– ARTHUR WARD



reminders

- ▶ We don't expect you to be perfect. Please don't expect us to be perfect, either.
- ▶ Appreciate what makes us different from you, our siblings and our friends.
- ▶ Love us for who we are and not just for what we accomplish.
- ▶ We want you to be proud of us just for being us.

The delicate balance of mentoring someone is not creating them in your own image, but giving them the opportunity to create themselves.

– STEVEN SPIELBERG

Accept Us

- ❑ Divide a sheet of paper in half. On one side, make a list of five ways that your kids are (each) the same as you. On the other half, list five ways that your kids are different from you. Talk about why it's OK that you're different, and why it's even great!
- ❑ Write a card or letter to your children about a time when you were proud of them, not for a specific accomplishment but for who they are (someone who is reliable, honest, proactive, a loyal friend, serving of others, hard-working, etc.).

*It takes courage to grow up
and become who you really are.*

– e.e. cummings

3

Be Real

We need you to be a person, not just a parent. Seeing the real person behind the parent is one of the ways we learn from you. Admit your imperfections and vulnerabilities. Facing new obstacles in life can worry or scare everyone.

You might be older than we are, but you still have to keep learning and changing, too. If you don't, we might outgrow you. Showing us that adults can make mistakes and be vulnerable helps us understand that it's part of being human. And it assures us that we're not alone in feeling that way.

It's OK to tell us, "I was wrong, and I'm sorry."

We usually need to apologize for our actions more than you do, but it sets a positive example for us when you acknowledge times that you've been wrong. The best way for anyone, kid or adult, to apologize is to:

1. Apologize for your actions or errors in judgment (not for getting caught or another person's reaction or feelings);
2. Ask what you can do to make it right;
3. Take action as soon as you can, no matter how uncomfortable you feel;
4. Then move on.



*Adults are just
outdated children.*

- DR. SEUSS



Tell us your stories, but not just the ones we've heard before about when you won the game, cured cancer or saved the world. We look up to you, so of course we love those stories, but the ones that stick with us are about your mistakes and failures and what you learned from them. Like the day you stole a pack of gum from the convenience store. Your mom found out and made you go back, pay for it, and apologize to the storekeeper. Or the

time you were a wallflower at the school dance and lost the chance to dance with the prettiest girl in school. Your stories may keep us from making the same mistakes (but no guarantees).

Sometimes, **laughter is the shortest distance between two people**. We love to laugh with you – and, yes, sometimes even at you! Humor brings heart to our relationship. It helps when you can laugh at yourself; it makes you real. It unites us, especially when we laugh together. Most of what happens in our normal, daily lives isn't overwhelmingly sad or happy. But we all say or do goofy things once in a while, so why not take those opportunities to laugh?

Laughter is also healing – it can reduce anger and lower stress. Finding humor in difficult or frustrating situations is the best medicine. Being able to laugh at a situation or ourselves helps us remember to keep everything in perspective and reminds us that we're all human.

*Always laugh
when you can.
It is cheap
medicine.*

– LORD BYRON

As we learn, change, and laugh with each other, we grow closer together, and that's what kids want from their parents.



For some real-time humor, here are a few of Lexi's original one-liners:

- What is a science teacher's favorite part of the body?

Her pupils.

- How do cheerleaders like their sushi?

Ra Ra Ra.

- Why are volleyball players good at hosting parties?

They are good at setting up.

- What does a baker need when he is sick?

Tender loaves and care.



reminders

- ▶ Keep learning and changing with us.
- ▶ Say, “I’m sorry,” when you’re wrong.
- ▶ Tell us your stories to help us learn.
- ▶ Laugh with us ... and laugh at yourself.

*I can be a better me
than anyone can.*

- DIANA ROSS

Be Real

- ❑ Tell your kids a story about one of your mistakes or failures when you were their age and what you learned from it.
- ❑ Share with your children something that you regret not doing when you were younger and why you didn't do it.
- ❑ Have everyone in the family write down his/her favorite jokes and put them in a special box or container. When you hear or read a new one worth saving, add it to the box. When someone needs a lift, pull a random joke from the box and read it out loud.

*The art of conversation
is the art of hearing
as well as of being heard.*

- WILLIAM HAZLITT

4 Talk with Us

When we were younger and trying to figure out how the world works, we asked you a thousand questions a day (and sometimes still do). Our favorites were always, “Why...?” and “How...?” and the occasional “What...?” We needed

you to explain how everything works. *Why am I right-handed? Why do dogs bark? Why is the moon so bright? Why do we have to wait in line? How does gravity work? How do light bulbs light up? How does the microwave cook food so fast? Where does God live?*

You asked us questions, too, as you tried to help us make sense of the world and express ourselves. Along the way, you got used to telling us the way things are. Without you, we wouldn't know a phone from a microwave! But as

we get older and develop personalities of our own, we need you to talk with us, not to us. Lectures masquerading as conversations don't count. Sometimes we just need to talk to you about what's going on in our lives.

It may seem like talking with you is the last thing on Earth we want to do, but don't let us fool you. Having conversations with you is important to us. Boys like to have conversations differently than girls, just like dads communicate differently than moms. Girls talk more than boys – studies show almost three times more! Girls enjoy a conversation across the table during an after-school snack, but boys will probably feel like it's an inquisition. Boys are more comfortable talking side by side, like while driving in the car or shooting baskets, watching a football game or taking a hike.

When we talk, listen to us ... *really* listen.

Listen with your eyes – not just your ears – we don't always say with our words what we're feeling or thinking. Reserve snap judgments so we can open up more and you can get the full picture. Don't jump in and try to solve the problem for us. If you always try to fix our troubles or give us advice, it makes us a lot less likely to come to you for help in the future. Ask us if we want your opinions or suggestions. We'll let you know if we do.



*If we were meant to talk more
than we listen, we would have
two mouths and one ear.*

– MARK TWAIN



If we do get upset or frustrated about something, let us express ourselves. Sometimes we just need to blow off steam. We learned in science class that, at 211 degrees Fahrenheit, water is just hot. But at 212 degrees – just *one* degree more – water hits its boiling point. That one little degree can turn water into steam. Talking with us is a great way to prevent us from hitting our boiling point. Our mom says that unexpressed emotions don't go away but end up coming out in uglier ways. Expressing our feelings helps us keep our emotional steam at a manageable level. Our conversations won't always be calm and sweet, as you know, but they give us a safe way to express ourselves and keep us from carrying around too much frustration, fear, or anxiety.

Ask us questions, but pick your timing carefully and be intentional about it. If someone asks you after a long, rough

day at work, “How was your day?” all of the frustrations, misunderstandings, and challenges – as well as the positive things – come flooding back. It’s hard to know where to start. That’s pretty much how we feel all the time. So, be specific and show us that you know what’s going on in our lives. Start with the easy, everyday stuff like what the school assembly was about and what we thought about it. Ask whether we liked the book we just read for English class. Or use our mom’s favorite after-school question, “Who did you sit by at lunch today?”

Better yet, **focus on what we really enjoy doing.** We love to talk about what’s interesting to us and what drives us (even if it’s not so interesting to you). Learn about what we like: art, building things, dancing, movies, music, reading, science, sports, whatever it is. When our dad was in college, our grandpa Pete mailed him a cassette tape (yeah, our dad is pretty old!) of the latest Bruce Springsteen album because he knew that our dad liked his music but didn’t have that recording. Grandpa Pete was listening.

When you talk with us and listen and learn about us, we tend to return the favor – we listen and learn from you.

reminders

-  Talk with us, not to us.
-  Talk with girls face to face. Talk with boys side by side or during an activity.
-  Listen to us ... really listen.
-  Ask specific questions - start with easy ones first.
-  Learn about our interests and activities.

*Showing an active interest
in what a child is doing is sometimes
the best compliment of all.*

- FRED ROGERS

Talk with Us

- ❑ Identify two things that each of your kids really enjoy (at the moment!): a favorite artist, author, movie, music group, or sports team or player. Ask them what they like about those things. Make an effort to experience those things with them - surprise them with tickets to a concert, local sports team game or museum exhibition, or with their favorite book.
- ❑ Make a list of three specific questions to ask your children in order to encourage conversation. Ask these questions one at a time at opportune moments that allow enough time for conversation - in the car on a long drive, waiting in line at the store or over dinner.
- ❑ The next time your kids share something upsetting with you, make a point to ask whether they want you to offer your advice on how to deal with it.
- ❑ Take a moment to think about a recent confrontation you've had with one of your kids. What was the real cause of that confrontation? What could you have done or said differently to keep from hitting the boiling point?

*We are all connected in
the great Circle of Life.*

– KING MUFASA, *THE LION KING*



Create Connections

Even though our technology helps us stay connected, it doesn't mean we are really connecting. A family is made up of real connections: connections between individuals, connections to values, and connections to a bigger purpose.

Show us how to make connections with other people. Remember, we learn by example. Let us see you talking to other adults at the playground, park, or museum. Nudge us to interact with other kids when we're feeling shy. Show us that it's OK to say "hello" and strike up a conversation. Offer to host backyard cookouts and sleepovers with our friends. Encourage us to go on group outings and field trips with our friends and their friends.

It's a great big world out there, and the more connected we feel, the better lives we'll lead.

We also need to feel connected to our family's values. We're navigating an endless stream of confusing messages from advertisers, coaches, friends, movies, teachers, TV, the Internet and more. Having clear family values keeps us grounded. Gen. Colin Powell once said, "The greatest gifts my parents gave to me were their unconditional love and a set of values. Values that they lived and didn't just lecture about. Values that included an understanding of the simple differences between right and wrong, a belief in God, the importance of hard work, and education, and self-respect." Our maternal grandfather and "family general" Ron Davis always says, "Family comes first, and they will always be there for you." This phrase is more than just words for us. It helps to remind us of and reinforce our family's values.



*In every conceivable manner,
the family is the link to our past
and bridge to our future.*

- ALEX HALEY





In addition to trying to live his values, our dad also wrote them down for us to make sure we knew them and had them in writing for safekeeping. Here's a short excerpt:

1. Everything starts and ends with our relationships - with God first, then family.
2. Respect the three P's: people, property and perspectives. Leave people, places, and situations in a better condition than when you arrived.
3. Do more than expected before it's asked of you. Anticipate others' needs, and take initiative. Think of others more than yourself.
4. Give more grace to others than you think is necessary because, at some point, you will need more grace than you think.
5. Perseverance and hard work beat natural talent every day. Our trials are God's way of molding us into who He wants us to be.



When we're not sure about what to do or how to feel in a new situation, sometimes we think about our family values to see if they can help. The values might not cover everything, but they usually do a good job of pointing us in the right direction.

It helps to discuss family values so we can each interpret what they mean to us. Also, keep them visible (usually in the kitchen) so the whole family can see them, refer to them and remember them, and hopefully, live by them.



*It's not hard to make
decisions when you know
what your values are.*

– ROY DISNEY



We also need your help to begin to figure out how our gifts – artistic, athletic, comedic, intellectual, mathematical, musical, scientific, social, or anything else – can make the world a better place. We're just kids, but understanding how and where we fit in the world is still really important to us.

Our dad once explained to us that sports equipment like golf clubs, tennis racquets and baseball bats all have a certain spot that, when a ball hits it, gives the best result. Hitting this sweet spot creates a long drive down the fairway, a swift crosscourt return, or a powerful homerun. When the ball hits that sweet spot, you barely feel it. The ball goes where you want it to go, even farther and faster than normal.

We need your help connecting to our sweet spot in life. When we were little, you asked us, “What do you want to be when you grow up?” Now it’s time for the next step, which is, “What do you want to *do* when you grow up?” Start by helping us answer two simple questions:

1. What am I passionate about?
2. Which tasks are easy and natural for me to perform?

You probably remember when you connected to your sweet spot in life. You knew you were “in the zone” and other people acknowledged your skills and abilities. Maybe you connected to it when you were young, but it was probably a long process of self-discovery that lasted into young adulthood at least. So please don’t rush us. Watch for the right times to ask us these questions

because those are the conversations that will help you understand us and really help us understand ourselves.

The two most important days in life are the day you were born and the day you discover the reason why.

– MARK TWAIN

Help us explore new challenges and opportunities so we can

discover gradually what we love to do and what we do very well. Maybe we didn't have the right hand/eye coordination to connect with the ball. Maybe practicing an instrument for that long made our fingers hurt. Some of us

stuck with it, got better, and excelled, while others realized that activity wasn't for us. Maybe baseball wasn't the right sport; maybe we're better at soccer. Maybe the piano wasn't the right instrument; maybe the bass guitar is a better choice. These are sports and music examples, but there are sweet spots in all areas of life, such as academics, service and leadership. Help us find our gifts and learn how to use them to make a positive difference in the world.

We might always want the latest technology to stay connected to the latest cool trends, music and events, but we want you to connect us to the things that really matter.

reminders

- ▶ Participate in our lives. Create new experiences for us to do together.
- ▶ Show us how to make connections outside the family as well.
- ▶ Create connections to our family values.
- ▶ Help us connect to our sweet spot in life.

*Alone, hearts are one of life's
most fragile things,
but together their passion
can accomplish the impossible.*

- BYRD BAGGETT

Create Connections

- Periodically host a get-together at your house for your children's friends.
- Let your kids assist with adult or business gatherings at your house to give them an opportunity to socialize and interact with adults.
- Schedule a family meeting (maybe over pizza) to discuss your family values. Agree to three or four values and discuss what they mean to each of you as individuals and for your family.
- Tell your kids how you figured out what your sweet spot in life is. Were there other things you tried that didn't work as well? What do you want them to try and why?

*Be sure you put your feet in the right place,
then stand firm.*

– ABRAHAM LINCOLN

6

Be Consistent

As kids, we're constantly seeking new experiences, investigating new places, looking for new trends and listening to new music.

But here's another secret: As much as we seek out what's new and different, we need consistency.

Consistency helps make our world feel more predictable and secure. Remember how, when we were little, we watched the same movies and shows or listened to the same songs over and over and over again? That was one form of consistency in action.

We're figuring out how to be adults, and we're just beginning to understand that it might take a long time to get it right. To you, it probably looks like we are all over the place. One day, we might lash out and challenge you. The next day, we might show deep compassion for someone

less fortunate. It's all part of growing up and finding out who we are. But while we're figuring all of this out – and looking a little crazy in the process – we need to know that some things never change. We need to know you will always love us.

We also need a solid foundation. Part of that means **we need to know that you'll provide consistent boundaries** to help guide us and show us what it means to be a good person. We need those limits to help define and refine us. We don't push the limits just to be difficult. We push against them because that's what we have to do to figure out where the boundaries are, how strong they are and what they mean. A fence that falls over when the wind blows isn't much of a fence, is it?

It's your job to set limits for us, it's our job to test them, and it's your job to enforce them – in that order. We don't like to be disciplined, but those punishments, however big or small, help us understand the boundaries you set for us, and the consequences of our actions. In today's chaotic, always busy world, **the consistency you provide makes us feel safe and secure**, even though we might resist.

We need you to be consistent even when you don't want to be. Like when you're tired and don't want to deal with our shenanigans. OK, we admit it: We try to force you to be

inconsistent. We ask you the same question in different ways or at different times, like when you're not really paying attention. Or we pit one parent against the other. It's kind of a sport for us, so you'd better be on your game.

If you let those boundaries slip even one time, we guarantee that we'll notice. The pattern will be broken, and we'll know that boundary isn't firm, it's a "sometimes" boundary. And you know what that means ... we're going to test it every time.



Trust is built with consistency.

– ROY DISNEY



A great way to provide consistency is to **create family traditions**. In our family, we pray before meals and at bedtime, go berry and peach picking at local farms one day each summer, attend the circus every year, get "napkin notes" in every packed lunch, and receive special "Letters from Dad" each Christmas and birthday and on other special occasions. We also have what we call "pretzel

moments,” when our mom puts a bag of pretzels on the table as a hint that she has a special surprise to share with us. Other fun traditions could include Friday night pizza night, regular family community service days, “Peaks and Pits,” a conversation game (usually around the dinner table) where each person shares the best and worst parts of his or her day. The repetition of these activities creates positive consistency in our lives. They also help us feel connected as a family, connected to our values, and special as your child.

Remember: **You are our anchor.** In rough seas or windy weather, an anchor lets a boat drift a little before the rope gets tight and guides the boat back toward center. When we seem to be drifting away, know that we’ll find our way back to that center: you. The more consistency you provide, the easier it is for us to stay close to center.

reminders

- ▶ Be consistent with our boundaries.
- ▶ Stand firm even when we try to make you be inconsistent.
- ▶ Create family traditions for a feeling of consistency.

*Our children are counting on us
to provide two things:
consistency and structure.
Children need parents who say
what they mean, mean what they say,
and do what they say they are going to do.*

– BARBARA COLOROSO

Be Consistent

- ❑ Tell your kids about some family traditions that you had when you were young that you now miss. What did you like about them?
- ❑ Do you have any family activities that you can turn into traditions? For example, you could turn your occasional family game nights or trips to get frozen yogurt into set, once-a-month traditions.
- ❑ Sit down with your children and make a list together of traditions you can start. Feel free to use some Colan family traditions, but make sure to come up with new ones that have particular meaning to your family.



Live boldly.

Love deeply.

Laugh often.



*When we seek to discover the best in others,
we somehow bring out the best in ourselves.*

– WILLIAM ARTHUR WARD

7 Expect the Best

If we were to tell you not to think of pink elephants, what's the first thing that comes to mind? Pink elephants! Expectations work the same way. **You get what you expect.** For example, if you think we're going to jump on the bed in the hotel room

and say, "Don't jump on the bed," what's the first thing we're going to think about doing? Instead, tell us to respect the hotel room property like it's our own. If you anticipate the terrible twos or trying teens, you will almost guarantee they happen. Expectations put ideas into our heads, so why not put the best ones in there?

In order to expect the best from us, it helps to **assume the best intentions.** Please don't jump to negative conclusions. If you learn that we got into a fight at school,

let us tell you why rather than assuming you know. Maybe we were protecting a younger sibling or another student from a bully. If you come home and a dish is broken, don't point fingers right away. Maybe we microwaved something, the plate got too hot to hold and we accidentally dropped it. Maybe we put leftovers on the table and the dog really did knock the dish off trying to get at the food. If no one's hurt, ask us calmly what happened. Give us the chance to tell you before you assume that we're going to make up an excuse or lie. Assuming that we have the best intentions is the best way to make sure that we will be open and honest with you.



*Your assumptions are your
windows on the world.*

– ISAAC ASIMOV



Expecting the best from us isn't the same as having unrealistic expectations. We're going to make some mistakes. No one's perfect, and we're still trying to grow up. We don't yet fully understand the long-term

consequences, good or bad, of our actions. **Let us make some mistakes** while we are still at home, and you can coach us through them. That's the best way to teach us to avoid making the same mistakes in the future.

It's also important to understand that with increasing expectations comes increasing freedom. Until we move out on our own, our whole lives take place under your wing. Give us more control as we grow up. Let us know what you expect of us – getting all of our chores and homework done before dinner on Sunday night, for example – and give us the freedom to determine how we do it. It's OK to do a “fly over” to check on us, but don't hover like a helicopter. Giving us more control helps us gain confidence in our own abilities. And if we meet your expectations in a different way than you anticipated, let us show you how we did it. The best way to learn is to teach, and teaching you, our parents, new ways of doing things is rewarding for us.

Expecting the best is another way of showing your trust in us. Giving us a little freedom teaches us to take responsibility for our actions and their consequences. Help us learn that we have choices, but we cannot choose the consequences of our choices. Then let us make a choice on our own. You have to trust that we're going to do the right thing. If we don't, help us understand why what we did wasn't a good choice. This shows that you

want the best *from* us – that you want us to behave properly – but that you also want the best *for* us.

Let us learn on our own. Part of that means letting us struggle once in a while. Here's a story that illustrates the importance of struggle:

One day a man found a butterfly cocoon. He sat and watched as the butterfly struggled to force its body through a tiny opening in the cocoon. After some time, it appeared as if the butterfly had gotten as far as it could go, but it was still not free. So the man decided to help. With a pair of scissors he gently snipped off the remaining bit of the cocoon. The butterfly emerged easily, but its body was swollen and its wings small and shriveled.

The man continued to watch, expecting the butterfly to take flight at any moment. Yet with a swollen body and shriveled wings, it could only crawl around on the ground. It never was able to fly.

What the man, in his kindness and haste, didn't understand was that the struggle required for the butterfly to get through the small hole was nature's way of forcing fluid from its body into its wings, making them strong enough to support the butterfly in flight.

Kids are like that butterfly. Sometimes we need to struggle in our lives. When you, out of love, try to keep us from experiencing challenges and obstacles, it can damage us. We won't be as strong as we could have been. As much as we hate to admit it, when we struggle, we gain insights about ourselves and build new skills. We need to struggle so we can learn how to fly.

If there is no struggle, there is no progress.

– FREDERICK DOUGLASS

reminders

- ▶ Expect the best; assume the best.
- ▶ Let us learn and make mistakes on our own while we're living at home.
- ▶ Give us the freedom to grow.
- ▶ It's OK to let us struggle a bit.

A life filled with positive expectations is also filled with positive impact.

– LEE J. COLAN

Expect the Best

- ❑ Write a reminder to yourself to tell your kids the positive things you expect them to do instead of the “bad” things they shouldn’t do. Maybe put a weekly “to do” on your calendar, a sticky note next to your toothbrush, a small card in your wallet or purse or anyplace you will see it on a regular basis.
- ❑ Can you think of a time when your kids did not assume the best of you? What happened? Why do you think they had that expectation?
- ❑ Share with your kids how you’re giving them more freedom and control as they get older and what that means to you. Then ask what it means to them.

Encouragement is oxygen to the soul.

– GEORGE M. ADAMS

8 Encourage Us

Parents, we want to grow to become the best people we can be. We know we have strengths and weaknesses. We need you to help us learn about ourselves so we can develop our natural strengths and manage our weaknesses ... and your

encouragement is a key part of that. It's easy to fall into a habit of focusing on what we need to do better. We get that. But rather than trying to put into us what God left out, encourage us to draw out what God put in.

Our mom is the encouragement queen. She's a human exclamation point! She encourages us every day, practically every hour, and she does the same for everyone else, even complimenting strangers on the street about how nice they look. It's totally embarrassing for us, but we can see

immediately how her comment uplifts that other person, and we know how that feels because she does the same for us all the time.

Encouragement can take many different forms: reassurance, support, praise, a simple hug, even a loving nudge. You've been around the block a few times, but everything is still pretty new to us. New situations and challenges can scare us or make us uneasy, unsure and nervous. That's exactly when we need you to step in and give us that boost we need. Let us know that it's OK to participate in the spelling bee even if we're not the best speller. Reassure us that it's OK to try out for a new sport. Remind us that it's OK to apologize and reconnect with a good friend after a bad argument. Urge us to get back on the bike or the horse after we fall off (as long as we're not hurt!).

Sometimes we need your encouragement to help us make tough decisions. We might want to quit an activity that we don't like or excel at. We need your guidance in deciding whether that's really the best thing to do. Maybe if we stick it out a little longer – try harder, practice more – it'll get easier. But it might not. Reassure us that no matter what we decide, no matter what happens, we will learn from it and be better for it.



*The way to develop the best that is in a man
is by appreciation and encouragement.*

– CHARLES SCHWAB



Now here's the hard part. **We need encouragement even when you think we don't deserve it.**

Encouragement is easy when we do well – when we make the goal, win the debate tournament, get accepted into the honor society. Encouragement is harder when we don't live up to your – or our – expectations. But your encouragement is so important when we're down on ourselves and feel like no one notices or cares. Remember to encourage us when we most need it and least expect it. Be proud of us for trying even when we fail. Encourage us for the right reasons, not for success in and of itself, but for steadfast efforts in sports, recitals, class work, and in helping others. It tells us that you have confidence in us and love us even through the tough times. That means the world to us.

Hug us. Especially when we're in trouble. And, yes, even in front of our friends. Tell us you love us, too, even if we roll our eyes. We want to say it back, even though we

sometimes won't. Our silence doesn't always mean apathy, boredom, or dislike. It does sometimes, sure, but remember this: **When we don't know what to say, we say nothing.** We'll talk when we're ready to talk. In the meantime, keep hugging us and telling us you love us. It makes all the difference. You can count on that.

reminders

- ▶ Help us develop our natural strengths and manage our weaknesses.
- ▶ Sometimes the best encouragement is a gentle, loving push.
- ▶ Help us make tough decisions and reassure us we'll be OK, no matter what happens.
- ▶ Encourage us even when you think we don't deserve it.

*Instruction does much,
but encouragement everything.*

– JOHANN WOLFGANG VON GOETHE

Encourage Us

- ❑ Talk with your kids about their natural gifts. Help them find activities so they can explore and develop these strengths.
- ❑ Catch your kids doing something good rather than focusing on their mistakes.
- ❑ The next time your children try hard but fail at a task, avoid expressing disappointment. Instead, praise their efforts and help them learn so they can succeed the next time.
- ❑ What are two ways you can encourage your children?

*It's not having what you want.
It's wanting what you've got.*

– SHERYL CROW



9 Spread Gratitude

We know we are blessed. But sometimes we get wrapped up in our lives, take our blessings for granted and forget how fortunate we are. When that happens in our family, our parents remind us of how much we all have to be grateful for:

- If you have food in your refrigerator, clothes on your back, a roof over your head and a place to sleep, you are richer than 75 percent of the people on Earth.
- If you have never experienced the danger of battle, the loneliness of imprisonment, the agony of torture or the pangs of starvation, you are ahead of 20 million people around the world.

- If you can read this book, you are more literate than over two billion people in the world who cannot read anything at all.

There are always people who have less than us. We see them every day at school, at the store, at the park, on the Internet, everywhere. Even though it might not be completely comfortable for us, we know it's good to directly serve those who are less fortunate than we are. Through our service experiences, we have seen that those in need are not all that different from us.

Serving others also helps us appreciate what we have. In many cases, those who have the least are grateful for whatever they have versus wanting what they don't have. For example, Grace took a mission trip to Honduras where she served local orphans. These children had next to nothing yet seemed content. She realized that **possessions give us temporary happiness, but an attitude of gratitude brings lasting joy.** A grateful attitude does not change our reality, but it does change how we view it.

Never let the things you want make you forget the things you have.

- UNKNOWN

We need you to **take the lead in teaching us how to express gratitude and serve others.** Donating your hard-earned money to a favorite charity is great because you are sharing one of the three T's: treasure, time and talent. However, to us kids, sharing your time and talents with others is more powerful. When you take a meal to a sick friend or clean up an elderly neighbor's yard after a storm, these acts set a positive example for us. They show us your gratitude for your blessings and your willingness to extend yourself to others. We know that serving others is rarely convenient with your busy schedules, so it makes an even bigger impression on us when you put others' needs before your own, just like you do for us every day.

Which brings us to another key point about gratitude: not taking anything for granted, including each other. Yeah, we know we can be really bad about that. We often take for granted what you do for us each day, much of which we never even see. Personally, we know our parents appreciate it when we thank them for each meal we eat and each experience they afford us. Think about how you feel when we remember to show our gratitude for you doing our laundry, buying us that "must have" video game or purse, or running that late-night errand to get the thing we just now remembered we need for school tomorrow morning.

Even though you are supposed to do some of those things because you are parents, it still feels good when we say “thank you,” right? **Being grateful for the little things makes a big difference.** Here’s another secret: The same is true for us. All of those household chores we’re responsible for? We really like it when you express your thanks for us completing them. Even when it’s something you expect us to do like clean up our rooms, clear the dinner table, take out the trash, or put away our clothes, it feels good to know you notice and appreciate our efforts. In fact, we want to do more for those who appreciate us – our coaches, teachers, and particularly, our parents!



Feeling gratitude and not expressing it is like wrapping a present and not giving it.

– WILLIAM ARTHUR WARD



The bonus is that your gratitude toward us is contagious and encourages us to express the same to you and others in our lives. Yes, sometimes you might still have to force us to show gratitude toward others. For example, our mom requires that we write handwritten thank-you notes to anyone who does anything nice for us or gives us a gift ...

for any reason during any season. We might not initiate this on our own yet, but we know it's the right thing to do and it builds a lifelong habit and an attitude of gratitude ... at least our parents hope so!

There is no better way to wrap up this chapter than by saying THANK YOU, parents, for all that you do!

reminders

- Give your family the opportunity to directly serve those in need. Share your three T's: treasure, time and talents.
- Help your family build a habit and attitude of gratitude.
- Set an example by turning grateful thoughts into grateful words and actions, even for the little things others do.

*Expressing gratitude is like
carrying a candle into a dark room.
It brings light and benefits everyone
in the room – the giver and the receiver.*

– JULIE DAVIS-COLAN

Spread Gratitude

- ❑ As a family, select a cause to serve to help you focus on others and appreciate what you have.
- ❑ Put a “blessing bottle” in the kitchen. Anytime a family member experiences a blessing, they write it down, fold it up and place it in the bottle. Watching how fast the bottle fills up is a great visual reminder of how grateful your family should be. Once in a while over dinner, empty the bottle and discuss the blessings.
- ❑ Every night at dinner, have each family member share one thing they are grateful for that day.
- ❑ Make handwritten thank-you notes a regular practice for anyone who gives you or your kids something or simply does something nice for you.

*He who has health, has hope;
and he who has hope, has everything.*

– THOMAS CARLYLE

10 Take Care of Yourself

OK, we admit it. We didn't come up with "take care of yourself" on our own. (Our parents suggested we might want to include it.) Not because we don't care about you – because we do, very much – but because we are just so focused on growing up.

But we can tell you that we definitely notice when you're tired, stressed, overworked, unhappy, unfulfilled or unhealthy, and it does have an impact on us. You might be short-tempered or less understanding. But more importantly, we worry about you. You are our rock, and we need you to be steady and strong.

We love that you take such good care of us, but we also want you to take care of yourself. You know the safety speech that flight attendants make before a plane takes

off? Part of it goes something like this: “In the event of a loss of cabin pressure, an oxygen mask will drop from above. If you are traveling with a child, put your mask on first and then help your child.”

That part of the safety speech makes sense to us kids but not always to you parents. Since you always put our safety needs first (and we thank you for that!), it might not seem natural to put on your own mask first. But you can't help us if you don't help yourself first. A parent passed out due to a lack of oxygen isn't going to be much help!

The same idea is true in other aspects of our lives. **You have to take care of yourself so you can take better care of us.** You might think that putting your needs before ours is being selfish, but it's not. Caring for yourself is an act of love for us. How you care for yourself sets a strong example for how we will ultimately take care of ourselves ... and someday our children.

When we were babies, everyone told you how important it was to have some time to yourself. You got a baby sitter or called in a favor from our grandparents so you could have a date night or a relaxing weekend away. Just because we get older doesn't mean that you don't still need to make time for yourself. All of your own needs are still there, and taking care of them is just as important as ever. When was the last time you had some good down time?

If it's been a while, you need to make some time for yourself. You put all of our activities on your calendar; why not schedule something for yourself?

“Put on your oxygen mask first” means taking care of your physical, intellectual, emotional, social and spiritual needs. If you're running low on any of those, you can't be at your personal best or your parental best. Remember when we were born and you had to wake up every few hours to feed and change us? We're sure it was exhausting (at least that is what you've told us). You probably stubbed your toe on the bed and couldn't remember where you put the diaper bag. Nothing terrible happened, but not getting enough sleep affected your ability to function. Our dad told us about a time after a loooong night trying to pacify Cameron. The next day he fell asleep in an important meeting ... that he was leading!

We want you to take care of yourself – exercise, get plenty of rest, eat well. Connect with each other, with friends and other adults. Do things with other couples or go on a girls' or guys' weekend. Also, set aside regular time daily for prayer or meditation to develop your faith and spiritual strength. Even explore new

Find what makes your heart sing and create your own music.

– MAC
ANDERSON

hobbies or interests. For years, our mom wanted to learn how to fuse glass. She finally took a class and made a really cool piece of glass art for our home.

It's not easy trying to balance your lives with ours, we know. So, the next time you feel like you need a breather, take a lesson from your friendly flight attendant and put on your mask first. We need you at your best!

reminders

- Take care of yourself first, so you can take better care of us.
- Set a positive example for us by practicing healthy habits.
- Stay fueled in all aspects of your life – physical, intellectual, emotional, social and spiritual.

*A person too busy to take care
of his health is like a mechanic
too busy to take care of his tools.*

– SPANISH PROVERB

Take Care of Yourself

- ❑ Schedule time on your calendar for yourself. Start small if you have to. Just 30 minutes once a week can make a big difference.
- ❑ Think of some ways that your family can help you take better care of yourself and then ask for their help. Maybe it's letting you sleep in on Saturday morning or going with you on a long walk once a week to relieve stress.
- ❑ Think of one healthy habit you can develop as a family and then do it together.

*To be in your children's memories tomorrow,
you have to be in their lives today.*

– BARBARA JOHNSON

11 Be Present

Although we may not always show it, we appreciate the house, the car, the money, the clothes, the smartphones, the cool games and the many other things you give us. But none of those compare with how precious your time is to us. It's more

valuable than diamonds or gold. Once our time together is gone, you can't get it back, even with all the money in the world. That's why the best way to show us your love is to **be present with us**.

You may be thinking, "We are with you all the time!" But there's a big difference between being *with* us and being *present*. Watching us do something or being in the same room is great, but it isn't enough. **Love is an action verb**. We want you to participate in our lives. It shows that

you care, that you want to genuinely spend time with us.



Children will not remember you for the material things you provided but for the feeling that you cherished them.

– RICHARD L. EVANS



A great way to be present with us is to do activities together. Ride bikes, garden, swim, make things, play games or sports, fix things, go to festivals, or even explore our hometown with us. Find activities that everyone enjoys ... even if no one's very good at them. The point isn't to win; it's to spend meaningful time together. It can be as simple as a short game of cards or Ping-Pong or asking us to help with a new recipe you've been meaning to try. Or it could be something planned like a family community service day or weekend daytrip with a hike and picnic. Whatever it is, get us involved in the planning, too. We really get into things we help plan.

Shared experiences are the most meaningful way to share your time with us. For example, our mom gave Cameron a gift of sky diving for the two of them on his 18th birthday.

They took their first sky dive together and have relived the memories many times since then. Doing activities together creates fun memories and enduring bonds. It gives us a chance to talk and be together while having fun. Playing and learning are not separate activities. When we play, we learn – about how to play, about ourselves and about you.

Life. Be in it!

– JULIE DAVIS-COLAN

You might think that the biggest obstacle to us spending quality time together is our über busy lives. That's part of it, of

course. We are growing up in a more/better/faster world. Just to keep up, it feels like we have to do more activities and do them better and faster than ever before. We can start to feel like humans doing instead of human beings.

But the bigger problem is technology. We aren't really present and connecting with each other when we all have our noses buried in our devices during dinner or family movie night. Sure, technology allows us to do lots of things, but it also consumes our attention. It saves time *and* wastes time. We admit it! It's really hard for us to resist using the technology we have at our fingertips. If we're not texting with friends, we're telling everyone over social media what we're doing. It's ironic that sometimes

we don't fully enjoy the moment because we're too busy sharing it with others. We hate to say this, but you probably need to **help us tame our technology**.

Parents, here is the tough part: We think you might need to tame your technology, too. We know we are guilty of wanting to constantly be connected, and we kinda think you are, too. We appreciate you trying to stay hip and “speak our language” by using the same technologies as us, but you also seem to fall into the same digital traps we do. It seems like you are constantly checking your work email, even during family time. If someone texts you, you're just as anxious to read it as we are. And we're not the only ones playing games on our devices or scrolling social media sites!

As much as we all love to be connected with all of our devices, we think that being so connected to our technology keeps us from really connecting with each other. Our parents call technology “a digital thief of the present moment.” We end up using technology to communicate with people who aren't with us instead of connecting with the people who are right in front of us. So, this is one area where we need to help each other out. If we each trade some of our virtual interactions for real interactions, it will be a present for all of us.

reminders

- ▶ The best present you can give us is your presence.
- ▶ Actively participate in our lives by finding activities we can do together.
- ▶ Together, let's tame our technological devices.

*Wherever you are, be there.
If you can be fully present now,
you'll know what it means to live.*

– STEVE GOODIER

Be Present

- ❑ Identify one thing that distracts you from giving your full attention to others and commit to doing something to change it.
- ❑ Make a list of seasonal activities to do together as a family. Breaking it up into seasons will make the list feel more manageable and limit activity overload.
- ❑ Discuss and agree on family rules for technology use. Maybe start by finding a “parking lot” for all devices during dinners and family activities. If you set that expectation with your kids in advance, they’ll obey more easily than if you ask on the spur of the moment. Remember, the “parking lot” should apply to the whole family, you included, since the purpose is to really be with each other.

*Don't worry that children never listen to you;
worry that they are always watching you.*

– ROBERT FULGHUM

12
Live What You
Teach

When you were our age, you probably remember your parents saying, “Do as I say, not as I do.” You probably also remember thinking that was a pretty silly thing to say, and you probably paid more attention to what your parents did than what

they said. Kids today are no different: We might not be listening to you, but we are always watching you.

You parent in a fish bowl. We see everything you do, and we tend to do the same, for better or for worse. We see the activities you participate in – or don't; the work you put in – or don't; the respect you show – or don't; the truth you tell – or don't; the manners you use – or don't; the apology you give – or don't; the emotions you control – or don't; the love you express – or don't. We see it all, and we learn from your

actions. It might not show up in our own actions right away, but it all sinks in ... the same way that we learned language from you when we were little (including any bad words that you didn't think we heard!).

While we will not always follow your words, we will naturally and predictably walk in your path. If you do what you want us to do, then you won't have to tell us what you want us to do as often. St. Francis of Assisi said, "Preach the gospel always. If necessary, use words." Your challenge as parents is to model the behaviors you expect from us. We need to see you do it first so we can see the effect it has – like being kind to someone even if they were mean to us.

A poster with this poem by Frank Outlaw hangs in Cameron's closet. It applies to everyone, but particularly to you, our parents, who are lifelong role models to us:

Watch your thoughts, they become words;

 Watch your words, they become actions;

Watch your actions, they become habits;

 Watch your habits, they become character;

Watch your character, for it becomes your destiny!



*It's not our footprints on the sands of time
that will be remembered, but our imprints
on the hearts of those we love.*

- BYRD BAGGETT



Your thoughts, words, actions and habits become the blueprint for building our own lives. We trust you to give us a meaningful and authentic blueprint because that is the kind of life we want to live. Parents, sometimes you leave an inheritance to us, but you always leave your legacy in us. You can leave us things, but they will eventually fade away or get lost. However, the lessons you live and teach are indelibly ingrained in our hearts and minds forever. So, the life you live today directly affects the generations to come, starting with us.



Our grandmother, Grace Davis, left us a legacy of faith and love. Here are 10 lessons she taught our mom, who then shared with us and many others:

1. Always know how very special you are - God only made one of you.
2. Believe in yourself.
3. Make connections and touch lives - everyone is important.
4. Behave in accordance with your values and beliefs each day.
5. Reach for the stars - all things are possible.
6. Look for the gifts and treasures in each day.
7. Express your love straight from the heart - always let others know how you feel.
8. Babies are miracles - gifts from God. Treasure each day. Above all else, be a great Mom (or Dad).
9. Believe in miracles.
10. Love is the greatest gift of all.



reminders

- ▶ We see everything you do, and we tend to do the same, for better or for worse.
- ▶ Model the thoughts, words and actions you want us to use in our lives.
- ▶ Leave us a legacy greater than any monetary treasure. Leave us your positive example to follow.

*Live life in such a way
that when your children think
of fairness and integrity,
they think of you.*

- H. JACKSON BROWN, JR.

ideas for action

Live What You Teach

- ❑ Discuss three behaviors you want to ensure your kids pass on to their kids.
- ❑ Tell your kids about a time when your parents told you, “Do as I say, not as I do.” Can you remember a time when you said that to your kids? Why was that a bad idea?
- ❑ When you are gone, how do you want to be remembered? Make sure you write it down and put it someplace where you will see it often so you can remind yourself and think of ways to make it happen.



*Don't worry about
leaving your legacy;
instead,
focus on living it.*

- LEE J. COLAN



*There are only two lasting bequests
we can hope to give our children.
One of these is roots; the other, wings.*

– HODDING CARTER

Thank You for Listening

If you think about it, the “secrets” that we’ve shared with you weren’t really secrets. We probably didn’t tell you anything that you didn’t already know.

Perhaps what you didn’t know (or have forgotten)

is how we see things from our perspective. Hopefully, we gave you some helpful ideas that hadn’t occurred to you.

Our parents often remind us, “Nothing happens until you take action.” We hope the Ideas for Action will help you take the first step toward helping your family connect and grow together. Start with the simple stuff, and go from there. You don’t have to do it all at once or even all in one year. But if you just get started, you’ll be an even better parent tomorrow than you are today.

We know we can take you on a real-life rollercoaster ride. From the exhilarating anticipation of the big climb

upward, to the fist-clenching grip of taking fast turns, to the great views at the top of the track, to the gut-wrenching, high-speed drops, to the slow glide into the exit ramp, and finally, to the memories of reliving it all. Wherever you are on your ride at the moment, we thank you for all you do ... and thank you for listening!





*One of the greatest titles
in the world is parent,
and one of the biggest
blessings in the world
is to have parents
to call mom and dad.*

- JIM DEMINT



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