The 7 Hats of Confident Parents

Like elite sports coaches we need to take a flexible approach to raising kids dependent on their temperament, ages and situations. Some parents get stuck in one or two modes and just can't change.

The main task of parenting - i.e. the task of raising independent, resilient, caring children - requires us to wear seven different hats. Sometimes we wear more than one hat but generally we can keep it simple and just wear one hat at a time.

1. Listening hat: This is the watchful observant hat. We were born with two eyes, two ears and one mouth and we need to use them in that order. We need to use our eyes and ears so we know what is going on in our children's lives and also to listen to their problems and concerns.

*When is this hat needed?* This hat is used when we help children deal with some of the physical, social or intellectual difficulties they may face. It means being aware of what children may be thinking, feeling and dealing with away from you. It is also required when children need to have a voice about what is happening in their family.

2. Teaching hat: This is the hat that we wear constantly from a child's early age. As parents we teach children skills and knowledge to gain independence as well as deal with a whole range of issues and challenges. It requires parents to be both patient and pro-active as they teach children a whole range of skills from how to set a meal table to educating them about sexuality.

*When is this hat needed?* This hat is worn when we are helping children develop the social, physical or self-help skills to become independent as well as more sticky topics such as sexuality and drug education and other real life issues.

3. Protective hat: This is the nurturing, caring hat that is difficult to take off. Children need to be cared for and given parental protection and reassurance from a young age. They need to be shielded from problems that they are not equipped to handle.

*When is this hat needed?* This hat is worn when children experience difficulties that they cannot handle, when their physical, psychological or emotional safety is under threat or when children are unable to care for themselves adequately.

4. Supportive hat: This is the hat that parents wear when their children experience some of life's difficulties and frustrations. This is the hat parents wear when they need to stand back and let children learn from the consequences of their actions and experience life's difficulties.

*When is this hat needed?* There are times when children have challenges that they alone must meet such as dealing with new school situations or overcoming their own self-doubts. Children need to feel emotionally supported and know that someone cares for them and are ready to assist them if needed.
5. **Encouraging hat:** This is the hat that we wear when we want children to believe in themselves and develop the confidence to learn, improve and grow. Parents wear this hat when they challenge children and give them the confidence to improve. Parents need to be optimistic and have faith in children's abilities to improve if they are to wear this hat.

*When is this hat needed?* Parents wear this hat when their children are faced with new challenges and they need someone who can help them develop the courage and confidence to have a go.

6. **Firm Parent hat:**
This is the hat parents wear when their children need assistance to regulate their behaviour. At some stages and for some children it seems that this is the only hat that some parents wear. It is hard work with some kids!

*When is this hat needed?* This hat is needed at different times with different children. Research suggests that parents need this hat when children are toddlers and again when moving in to adolescence as these are challenging stages for many parents. This hat is generally required to help set the behavioural limits that children need to assist them to act in accordance with social conventions and to be safe.

7. **Playful/Fun hat:** This is the hat that parents wear to build relationships with their children and ensure that time spent together has an enjoyable element for both.

*When is this hat needed?* As often as is practical and at the right time!

The challenge for parents is to make sure we wear the right hat in the appropriate situation. Sometimes we can wear our protective hat when we need to put on our teaching hat and give kids skills to cope. Or we put our Firm Parent hat on to discipline our children when we are tired or grumpy, when a Playful Parent hat would have been the most suitable in easing the tension. We intuitively know how we should react with children but often moods or indecision gets in the way. Next time you interact with your children step back and look at which hat you are wearing and think which of the seven hats the situation really requires.